

SIR ROWLAND. Of course we'll help you, Clarissa, but what's it all about?

HUGO. What is this?

JEREMY. (*Unimpressed.*) You're up to something, Clarissa. What is it? Found a body?

CLARISSA. That's just it. I have – found a body.

HUGO. What do you mean – found a body?

CLARISSA. It's just as Jeremy said. I came in here, and I found a body.

(*HUGO looks around.*)

HUGO. Don't know what you're talking about.

CLARISSA. I'm serious. It is there. Go and look. Behind the sofa.

(*JEREMY looks behind the sofa and whistles.*)

JEREMY. She's right.

(*HUGO and SIR ROWLAND bend down and look at the body.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Why, it's Oliver Costello.

(*JEREMY quickly draws the curtains.*)

CLARISSA. Yes.

SIR ROWLAND. What was he doing here?

CLARISSA. He came this evening to talk about Pippa – just after you'd gone to the club.

SIR ROWLAND. What did he want with Pippa?

CLARISSA. They were threatening to take her away. But all that doesn't matter now. We've got to hurry. We've very little time.

SIR ROWLAND. Just a moment. We must have the facts clear. What happened then?

CLARISSA. I told him that he wasn't having her and he went away.

SIR ROWLAND. But he came back?

CLARISSA. Obviously.

SIR ROWLAND. How? When?

CLARISSA. I don't know. I just came into the room as I said and found him – like that.

(*SIR ROWLAND leans over the body.*)

SIR ROWLAND. I see. Well, he's dead all right. Been hit over the head with something heavy and sharp. Well, it isn't going to be a very pleasant business – but there's only one thing to be done.

(*He makes to the telephone and lifts the receiver.*)

We must ring up the police...

CLARISSA. No.

SIR ROWLAND. You ought to have done it at once, Clarissa. Still, they can't blame you much for that.

(*CLARISSA takes the receiver from SIR ROWLAND and replaces it.*)

CLARISSA. No, Roly, stop!

SIR ROWLAND. My dear child...

CLARISSA. I could have rung up the police myself if I'd wanted to. I knew perfectly well that it was the thing to do. I even started dialling. Then, instead, I rang you up. I asked you to come here, all three of you. You haven't even asked me why yet.

SIR ROWLAND. You can leave it all to us. We will...

CLARISSA. You haven't begun to understand. I want you to help me. You said you would if I was ever in trouble. Darlings, you've got to help me.

JEREMY. What do you want us to do, Clarissa?

CLARISSA. Get rid of the body.

SIR ROWLAND. My dear, don't talk nonsense. This is murder.

CLARISSA. That's the whole point. The body mustn't be found in this house.

HUGO. You don't know what you're talking about, my dear girl. You've been reading murder mysteries. In real life you can't go monkeying about moving dead bodies.

CLARISSA. I have moved it already. I turned it over to see if he were dead and then I started dragging it into that recess, and then I saw I'd got to have help, and so I rang you up, and whilst I was waiting for you I made a plan.

JEREMY. Including the bridge table?

(CLARISSA picks up the bridge marker.)

CLARISSA. Yes, that's going to be our alibi.

HUGO. What on earth...?

CLARISSA. Two and a half rubbers. I've imagined all the hands and put down the scores on this marker. You three must fill up the others in your own handwriting of course.

SIR ROWLAND. You're mad, Clarissa - quite mad.

CLARISSA. I've worked it out beautifully. The body has to be taken away from here. It will take two of you to do that. A dead body is terribly unmanageable - I've found that out already.

HUGO. Where the hell do you expect us to take it?

CLARISSA. The best place, I think, would be Marsden Wood. That's only two miles from here. You turn off to the left a few yards after you've left the front gate - it's a side road, hardly any traffic on it. Just leave the car by the side of the road when you get into the wood. Then you walk back here.

JEREMY. Do you mean dump the body in the wood?

CLARISSA. No, leave it in the car. It's *his* car, don't you see? He left it round by the stables. It's really all quite easy. If anybody does happen to see you walking back it's quite a dark night and they won't know who you are. And you've got an alibi. We have all four been playing bridge here.

*(She replaces the marker on the bridge table.
The others, stupefied, stare at CLARISSA.)*

HUGO. I - I...

(He waves his hands, unable to speak.)

CLARISSA. I put the sandwiches down there –

(She points.)

– then I began tidying up and I went to put a book back in the bookshelf and – then – and then I practically fell over it.

INSPECTOR. You fell over the body?

CLARISSA. Yes. It was here behind the sofa. And I looked to see if it – if he was dead, and he was. It was Oliver Costello and I didn't know what to do. In the end I rang up the golf club and I asked Sir Rowland, Mr. Birch and Jeremy Warrender to come over.

INSPECTOR. *(Coldly.)* It didn't occur to you to ring up the police?

CLARISSA. It occurred to me, yes, but then – well – *(She smiles.)* I didn't.

INSPECTOR. You didn't.

(He looks at the CONSTABLE and lifts his hands despairingly.)

Why not?

CLARISSA. Well, I didn't think it would be nice for my husband. I don't know whether you know many people in the Foreign Office, Inspector, but they're frightfully unassuming. They like everything very quiet, not noticeable. You must admit that murders are noticeable.

INSPECTOR. Quite so.

CLARISSA. *(Warmly.)* I'm so glad you understand.

(Her story becomes more and more unconvincing as she feels that she is not making headway.)

I mean, he was quite dead because I felt his pulse, so we couldn't do anything for him. What I mean is, he might be just as well dead in Marsden Wood as in our drawing room.

INSPECTOR. Marsden Wood? Where's Marsden Wood come into it?

CLARISSA. That's where I was thinking of putting him.

INSPECTOR. *(Firmly.)* Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, have you never heard that a dead body, if there's any suggestion of foul play, should never be moved?

CLARISSA. Of course I know that, it says so in all the detective stories, but you see this is real life.

(The INSPECTOR lifts his hands in despair.)

I mean, real life's quite different.

INSPECTOR. Do you realise the seriousness of what you're saying?

CLARISSA. Of course I do, and I'm telling you the truth. So, you see, in the end I rang up the club and they all came over.

INSPECTOR. And you persuaded them to hide the body in that recess.

CLARISSA. No. That came later. My plan, as I told you, was that they should take Oliver's body away in his car and leave the car in Marsden Wood.

INSPECTOR. *(Unbelievably.)* And they agreed?

CLARISSA. They agreed.

(She smiles at him.)

INSPECTOR. *(Brusquely.)* Frankly, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, I don't believe a word of it. I don't believe that three reputable men would agree to obstruct the course of justice in such a manner for such a paltry cause.

CLARISSA. I knew you wouldn't believe me if I told you the truth. What do you believe then?

INSPECTOR. I can see only one reason why those three men should agree to lie.

CLARISSA. Oh, you mean...?

(She pauses.)

INSPECTOR. If they believed – or *knew* – that *you* had killed him.

CLARISSA. But I had no reason for killing him. Absolutely no reason. Oh, I knew you'd react like this. That's why...

(She breaks off.)

INSPECTOR. That's why what?

(CLARISSA thinks. Some moments pass, then her manner changes. From now on she is convincing.)

CLARISSA. All right, then. I'll tell you.

INSPECTOR. I think it would be wiser.

CLARISSA. Yes, I suppose I'd better tell you the truth.

INSPECTOR. *(Smiling.)* I can assure you that telling the police a pack of lies will do you very little good, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. You'd better tell me the real story.

CLARISSA. I will. Oh dear, I thought I was being so clever.

INSPECTOR. Much better not to try to be clever. Now then, what really did happen this evening?

CLARISSA. It all started as I explained. I said good bye to Oliver and he'd gone off with Miss Peake. I had no idea he would come back again and I still can't understand why he did. Then, my husband came home, explaining he would have to go out again immediately. He went off in the car and it was just after I shut the front door, and made sure it was latched and bolted, that I suddenly began to feel nervous.

INSPECTOR. Nervous? Why?

(CLARISSA acts her part with great feeling.)

CLARISSA. I'm not usually nervous, but it occurred to me that I'd never been alone in the house at night.

INSPECTOR. Well?

CLARISSA. Well, I told myself not to be so silly. I said to myself, "You've got the phone, haven't you? You can always ring for help." I said to myself, "Burglars don't come at this time of the evening. They come in the middle of the night." But I still kept thinking I heard a door shutting somewhere, footsteps up in my bedroom - so I thought I'd better do something.

INSPECTOR. Yes?

CLARISSA. I went into the kitchen and made the sandwiches for Henry and Mr. Jones to have when they got back. I got them all ready on a plate with a napkin round them to keep them soft, and I was just coming across the hall to put them in here when - *(Dramatically.)* I really heard something.

INSPECTOR. Where?

CLARISSA. In this room. I knew that this time I wasn't imagining it. I heard drawers being pulled open and shut, then I suddenly remembered the window in here wasn't locked. Somebody had come in that way.

INSPECTOR. Go on, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

CLARISSA. I didn't know what to do. I was petrified. Then I thought, "Suppose I'm just being a fool? Suppose it is Henry come back for something - or even Sir Rowland or one of the others. A nice fool you'll look if you go upstairs and ring the police on the extension." So then I thought of a plan.

INSPECTOR. Yes?

CLARISSA. I went to the hall stand and I took the heaviest stick I could find. I went into the library; I didn't turn the light on. I felt my way across the room to that recess. I opened it very gently and slipped inside. I thought I could ease the door into here and see who it was. Unless anyone knew about it you'd never dream there was a door just there.

INSPECTOR. No, you certainly wouldn't.

CLARISSA. I eased the catch open, then my fingers slipped, the door swung right open and hit against a chair. A man who was standing by the desk straightened up. I saw something bright and shining in his hand. I thought it was a revolver. I was terrified. I thought he was going to shoot me. I hit out at him with the stick with all my might and he fell.

(She collapses and leans on the table, her face in her hands.)