

Clue

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A novel by Michael McDowell

Based on the screenplay by Jonathan Lynn

A delightful whodunit based
upon the famous board game!



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A Paramount Pictures Presentation

Clue[®]

A Novel

by Michael McDowell

**Based upon the Parker Brothers'
board game Clue[®]**

**Screenplay by Jonathan Lynn
Story by John Landis
and Jonathan Lynn**

FAWCETT GOLD MEDAL • NEW YORK

*This book is dedicated to
Those Who Got Away With It*

A Fawcett Gold Medal Book
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**Your favorite game is now a
terrific movie—and a book:**

Clue[®]

Chapter One

It was the kind of house you always see from the road, never up close. Seen through vast gates, at the end of a winding gravel driveway, half-hidden by the foliage of trees planted more than a half century ago. You slow down as you pass it, trying to catch glimpses over the vine-covered brick walls that surround it, of its peaked gables and its dark windows and curious porches. It is silent and secret.

You use your imagination and try to think who might live there: a rich woman, the flickering ember of a family the world thought had died out decades before 1954. A reclusive millionaire with a passion for diet soft drinks and some silent film star long since passed. A gangster, ensconced with cronies over cribbage, and a bored, peroxidized doxy who knocks about from room to room in the silent, empty house.

But even as you make these romantic conjectures, you

know that you're wrong, and the truth—whatever it might be—of the house and what transpires within is much stranger than anything you can imagine. The brick wall turns, but the road you're traveling on curves in another direction. You drive on, and perhaps in the rear-view mirror you catch a glimpse of a finger of chimney above the massive trees that surround the house, and that is all.

Houses like that keep their secrets from people like you and me.

Route 41 had never been a well-traveled road. But since the war, when a new highway had been constructed from the quarries to the city, this small winding highway had been nearly forgotten. A few big old houses behind crumbling walls mouldered in disuse, their tennis courts overgrown with coarse grass, their elegant ponds choked with weeds and scum. There had been a few farms along Route 41 as well; bright, spanking places with picturesque black and white cows and an air of cleanliness and hard work to them, but the farmers had moved into the city or died off, and their sons had gone away to fight Germany and Japan, and forest was now closing over the old fields and pastures.

The few who drove along Route 41 in the day were oppressed with its gloom, for all along its length, massive trees crossed branches over the narrow blacktop. Those who drove along it at night thought themselves to be in a desolation of forest, in a gloom that two wavering headlights could make no headway against. And Hill House, the largest of the big old houses that could be glimpsed from this highway, did not appear a welcoming outpost of a comforting civilization. It seemed to partake of the desolation of the forest itself.

Hill House was appropriately if dully named, for it had been built on the highest piece of land around. Perhaps

it had wonderful views, but because no one ever went up there, no one was quite sure what might be seen from that eminence. No one seemed to know who owned it; the taxes on the place were paid for by an old firm of lawyers in Baltimore. No one could remember when it had been last inhabited, but the nearest neighbor—an old woman living about half a mile distant—said she had seen forty gardeners working the place in the summer of 1946. But this old woman was known to be crazy, and no one paid any attention to her.

Hill House kept its secrets, even better than most other such places.

The night was dark.

The branches that crossed over Route 41 thrashed in the wind. Above the trees, scudding clouds swept across the gibbous moon, but down below, all was black. The air reeked of a storm to come within an hour, two hours at the most. The watery beams of two headlights, one much weaker than the other, pushed along the uneven surface of Route 41. The automobile was in character with the road it traveled on, being out-of-date and not entirely dependable.

The automobile stopped before the high iron gates of Hill House in such a way that the stronger of the two headlights shone on the ornate lock.

The driver leaned out of the car window. He glanced up at the sky, as if judging how long the storm would hold off. He lowered his gaze to Hill House itself, and his head nodded once, twice, thrice, as if—perhaps—he were counting the three lighted windows there. With an air of duty and correctness, he went up to the gates and pushed open the right-hand side. It swung back with a metallic squeal, only slightly dampened by the moistness in the air.

Wadsworth, for that was the name of the dutiful and correct driver of the 1948 black Chevrolet Fleetline, climbed back into his vehicle. He drove it through the gate and up the gravel drive to Hill House. He went neither quickly nor slowly, but in an orderly, correct manner. As if expecting others to follow him, he did not close the gate behind him, and when he parked, he did so well off to the side—leaving room for any vehicles that might follow.

A rumble of thunder asserted itself over the trailing cough of Wadsworth's automobile, and when that had passed, the barking of hounds echoed in the hollow. There was a viciousness to the dogs' noise, as if they'd been starved for the past three days, or kicked in the past five minutes.

Wadsworth got out of the car, locked it carefully, and approached the entrance to Hill House. Over the door burned one of the three lights he'd counted from the gate.

A German shepherd hurtled at Wadsworth from out of the darkness, like a hound of hell greeting a hapless new inhabitant. Wadsworth flinched back several steps, but a chain attached to the dog's collar protected him.

A second shepherd, also barking, rose from a squat just before the front door of Hill House.

Wadsworth thrust his hand into the pocket of his overcoat, and drew out a two-pound chunk of raw beef. He tossed it on the ground between the two dogs, and waited till they had fallen hungrily onto the meat before he cautiously mounted the steps to the impressive entrance to the mansion.

It was as substantial as the rest of Hill House, with massive peaked double doors set in a framework of stone. From another pocket of his overcoat, Wadsworth drew out a large key, and stepped forward—into a neatly turned pile of dog shit.

Wadsworth grimaced and glanced over his shoulder

with a look of disgusted reproach at the German shepherds.

It was wasted. The dogs were interested only in the meat.

Wadsworth opened the front door and stepped inside. His first action was to hang up his coat, and his second was to examine the bottom of his shoe, as if in meager hope that he had stepped in something that had the *squish* and the *stink* of German shepherd excreta but that was something else entirely.

No, Wadsworth's first guess had been correct. It was dog shit. He scraped it off on the mahogany door sill.

Wadsworth closed the front door quietly, and stood still a moment in the hallway, as if listening. Wadsworth wore a black jacket and a white tie beneath a stiff collar. His trousers were gray and pin-striped.

The entrance hall of Hill House was high and vast, all stone and carved wood and marble paving. A staircase wound up into the darkness of the upper floors. Moonlight struggled through windows of stained glass high above, and was broken against the dusty glass of two chandeliers. The wind was a dull moan outside. In a house so old, with so many rooms filled with so much furniture, there was a small but incessant racket of creaks and groans—but dully, as if from behind thick walls, Wadsworth heard the rise and fall of a single angry voice, though the quality of that voice suggested mechanical amplification. It was a voice on the radio, or the television, somewhere in Hill House.

He moved a few steps forward—just enough so that he could glance through the open doors of the dining room. The room was dark, illuminated only by what little light spilled in from the hall. A massive table was laid, as for dinner, but the agglomeration of plate and crystal and china looked dusty and forlorn and uninviting—like a display in a department store.

Wadsworth listened again, then without hesitation he crossed the hall, opened one of the doors there, and disappeared inside.

If Hill House was the paradigm of secretive mansions, and Wadsworth was the ultimate in cautious and careful butlers, then Yvette was the *nec plus ultra* of downstairs maids.

She was young. She was astonishingly beautiful. She had better curves than a major league pitcher. She was dusting the books in the library with a feather duster that wasn't half as soft as the waves of her lustrous hair. Yvette was not only a French maid; she was a fetishist's dream of a French maid, and she had an outfit to match: a glossy black dress, cut high on the thigh and low in the bosom, so tight it *whined* when she walked. A starched white cap was perched absurdly atop her head, and a starched white apron was slung low across her waist, like a remembrance of chastity. Her stockings were at once black and sheer, and the seam that ran along the back of her calf was a draftman's ecstasy of curve. Her shoes were high in the heel and tight in the toe, completing a figure that was—all in all—at once startling, grotesque, and divine.

"Is everything ready?" Wadsworth asked.

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" Yvette replied, turning around shyly. The feather duster was pressed against the bosom, like a sere bouquet from some fondly remembered admirer.

Yvette's accent was on a level with her costume. It was the expected carried to the extreme. Beyond parody, it was a thing unto itself.

"You have your instructions," said Wadsworth.

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" Yvette replied, with a crinkling of her nose and a wrinkling of her brow—a set of gestures which, in a bad French farce, would have indicated that she smelled something distinctly unpleasant.

But it wasn't till Wadsworth, that paradigm of butlers, had left that room that Yvette crossed one leg stork-wise, and daintily checked the bottom of her shoe.

The kitchen of Hill House was vast and old-fashioned, having been equipped in a time when the only real labor-saving device was a full complement of servants. It was white and gleaming and filled with enough appliances, sufficient pots and pans, ample pantries and cabinets and drawers and larders to accommodate the gustatory demands of two dozen Hill House guests, each under a different physiological regimen.

But tonight, only a portion of the kitchen was in use. Pots bubbled on only three of the burners of the vast range. One small section of counter was littered with the remains of a few pounds of vegetables. Nearby was a small, neat heap of discarded fat, fish scales and innards, and cleaver-scarred bones.

A console television set had been placed on one of the empty counters and was turned to the live proceedings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

A full-bodied Chinese woman stood directly in front of the television set, sharpening a carving knife against a long steel. She was somehow managing to perform this action in time with the rhythm of Senator McCarthy's speech. But whether she agreed with the gentleman from Wisconsin or thought him a hypocritical scoundrel was a matter of debate. The thunder of the oncoming storm rumbled outside the windows of the kitchen, and the expression of the face of Mrs. Ho was entirely inscrutable.

The swinging door swung inward from the hallway. Mrs. Ho did not turn. Senator McCarthy had irrefutable evidence of the operation of communist agents in the Army.

"Everything all right, Mrs. Ho?" asked Wadsworth.

The blade of Mrs. Ho's knife sparked against the steel.

Clang.

In a turret somewhere high atop the house, a bell jarred and clamored. It hadn't been cast right, and had never rung properly, but it had never been replaced. The bell produced a cracked reverberation so unpleasant and tingling it would have wakened Lazarus from his sleep.

"Dinner will be ready at nine-thirty," said Mrs. Ho, as Wadsworth went to answer the front door.

Butler, maid, and cook in Hill House.

The first of the evening's guests was at the door.

A bolt of lightning split open the sky and luridly illumined the cavernous hallway of Hill House. Wadsworth paused only a moment in his echoing progress across the hall, counting till he should hear the thunder.

One, two, three—

The storm was drawing nearer.

Wadsworth put his hand on the door and drew it open.

Chapter Two

The man at the door was forty-five years old, perhaps fifty if he'd been taking care of himself, and it looked as if he had been. He was smartly turned-out in a suit of quietly expensive cut, material, and fit, and out in the darkness behind him, the mustard yellow 1954 Cadillac convertible he'd driven up in was new and rather more obviously expensive than his clothes. In his own element he was probably hale and hearty, and if he had a wife, then the poor woman was probably trampled on, psychologically speaking. But just now, the man at the door looked rather uncertain, and he also looked unhappy at finding himself in that condition.

"Good evening," Wadsworth said, with easy politeness. He stepped aside to offer the gentleman entrance into the house.

"Good evening," the man said, hesitantly. "I don't know if..."

He faltered, but Wadsworth came to the rescue.

"Yes indeed, Colonel. You *are* expected."

The title seemed to reassure the man. He stepped inside the house, and Wadsworth smoothly closed the door behind him, as if to discourage second thoughts.

"May I take your coat?" Wadsworth asked, holding out his hand for the garment. "It is Colonel Mustard, isn't it?" he asked with a tone that was half diffidence, half instruction.

But the man looked up, surprised. "No, that's not my name. I'm Colonel—"

Wadsworth raised his hand sharply for silence. The gesture was neither polite nor diffident. It was wholly instructive. "Forgive me," he said, "but tonight you may well feel obliged to my employer for the use of a pseudonym."

"Beg your pardon?" questioned Colonel Mustard, as if he had got the drift but not the precise meaning of Wadsworth's instruction.

As Wadsworth carefully hung the Colonel's coat on a hook beside the door, Mustard sniffed the air and surreptitiously checked the soles of his shoes.

"Who are you?" Mustard demanded when Wadsworth turned back to him. Command sounded a much more natural tone for the Colonel.

"I am Wadsworth, sir. The butler."

In the library, Yvette stood at the drinks table—an ornate affair—and was pouring champagne. She turned with a glass as Wadsworth entered with Colonel Mustard.

"Yvette," the butler said, "would you attend to the Colonel and give him anything he requires." The glance between Colonel Mustard and Yvette—one of particular interest—was evidently not lost on Wadsworth, for he added dryly, "Anything within reason, that is."

Clang.

With a small smile, Yvette poured another glass of champagne—a second of the evening's guests had evidently arrived.

Colonel Mustard sipped his champagne and glanced around the room. The butler was no longer there. "Wadsworth?" he said tentatively, then nearly dropped his champagne glass in surprise. The door by which he'd entered the library was missing as well. One wall was windows, the other three showed only unbroken shelves of books.

He turned blankly to Yvette. "There was a door, wasn't there? Because I came through it."

"There still is a door, monsieur," replied Yvette, with a smile that showed interest in matters other than architectural, "but it, too, is covered with the books. There is a handle to the door, it is somewhere or other."

For a moment, Colonel Mustard stood stock still, contemplating Yvette's accent with astonishment. Then he began to search for the handle of the library door.

"Do come in, Madam, you are expected."

Even without the dark splendors of Hill House, the woman standing framed in the entranceway would have been a figure of drama. In fact, she would probably had looked every bit as tragic if you had come across her standing before a shooting gallery on Coney Island—she had that much presence. She was beautiful as Desdemona on the night that lady was murdered, pale as Isabella the day she learned her lover was dead, and her hair was as black as Judith's the morning she struck off the head of Holofernes. Her eyes were lustrous, her lips as red as if they'd been pricked and bled. She was dressed head to heel in black. She held a shiny black pocketbook before her, and a tiny corner of stiff, white paper peeked through the top.

"Do you know who I am?" asked the lady. Her low-

pitched voice was the match of her appearance: startling but splendid.

"I know that you are to be known as . . . Mrs. White."

"It said so in the letter," the lady replied, poking the corner of the envelope so that it slipped back into her pocketbook. Perhaps she'd thought she'd be required to produce proof of her invitation to Hill House. "But why?"

Wadsworth didn't reply. He helped Mrs. White off with her coat. The lady kept her pocketbook, and pressed it against her knee for balance as she checked the soles of her shining leather shoes. Then, de-crinkling her nose, Mrs. White followed Wadsworth to the door of the library.

The butler preceded her into the room, then stood aside.

"Ah," he said, "may I introduce you—Mrs. White, this is—"

Wadsworth looked about a moment, but only the maid was there. Yvette turned with a glass of champagne, and a smile for the new guest.

But when Yvette's eyes met those of Mrs. White, both women flinched. Mrs. White was more subtle than Yvette, but the involuntary exchange wasn't lost on Wadsworth. "Mrs. White, this is Yvette, the maid. But then I see you know each other." Though perhaps they didn't know one another by those names. "Where is Colonel Mustard?" asked the butler.

"He was looking for the door to the room," Yvette said, pointing behind Mrs. White.

The book-panelled door swung slowly to, and Colonel Mustard, a little crumpled and flattened, stepped uncertainly from behind it.

A 1952 wood-paneled Pontiac station wagon, not as old as Wadsworth's and not as new as Colonel Mustard's, drove slowly along Route 41. It proceeded cautiously through the blackness, as if unsure of the road, the des-

tionation, perhaps even the purpose of the journey itself. A man was driving, hunched over the steering wheel, peering out into the blackness. The strong headlights kept him on the road, and now and then scraped against the black trunks of the trees that lined the highway, but the lamps' narrow focus only made the automobile seem more isolated against the night. Lightning broke briefly in the sky overhead, and the overhanging branches threw a cracked web of lurid light over the automobile. On the crackling radio, Senator McCarthy warned the American people—each and every one of them—against the pernicious and widespread influence of communists across America.

Nothing but the black road, broken and holed. Nothing but black trees to the side, and black branches overhead. Now and then a flash of lightning somewhere above the trees, and a moment later the rumble of thunder, like a warning to *look out* that comes after the blow is struck. Nothing but the voice on the radio, ranting, as if broadcast from an asylum. Nothing but a curve, beyond that a stretch of straight road, then another curve, and—

A ravishingly beautiful woman dressed in emerald green.

She was waving her arms in a way that suggested she was trying hard not to appear frantic.

The driver slowed, but then he drove on past.

He glanced at her in the rear view mirror, her figure dim, nearly black, in the pale red glow of his taillights.

He slowed, stopped, backed up. As he did so, he reached across and rolled down the passenger window.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"It's my car," she replied. Even in the lurid headlight glare, her face looked terrific. It was even better up close.

"Want a lift?" he asked.

She hesitated.

"If you didn't want a lift, why did you flag me down?"

He leered, pushing open the door. "It's perfectly safe."

"Yes, please," she said finally, and with sudden conviction, as she slipped into the front seat. "I'm late for a dinner date."

"Me, too," he said. The car was still in neutral. "Where are you going?"

She equivocated: "Do you know this road?"

"I've never even been in this part of the country."

"Me neither." She reached into her purse and drew out an envelope. The back flap had been torn open. She reached inside and partially drew out a sheet of thickly woven paper. "I'm going to Hill House, off Route Forty-one."

"Wait a minute," he said. "Let me look at that." He reached for the letter, but she drew it away from him. He'd still managed to see the heading of the folded page.

He turned the key in the ignition. "That's where I'm going. I got a letter just like that."

The lady in green glanced at the driver with a mixture of interest and suspicion. He returned it. Senator McCarthy was a rising and falling drone on the radio. Heavy drops of rain splashed on the windshield. The driver turned on the wipers, and they drove on, towards Hill House.

A young man, tall, dapper, slim, and splendidly turned-out, stood nervously at the entrance way of Hill House. He pressed himself right against the door to avoid being pelted with the heavy drops of water that were now falling from the rain-laden sky. Behind him the two chained dogs—finished with their morsels of meat—barked and strained at their leashes.

Clang. Clang.

Before the dapper young man had even stopped reverberating from the shrill clamor of the bell, the door was pulled open with a jerk.

The butler stood just inside, silent, almost accusatory.

"Is this the right address to meet Mr. Boddy?" asked the dapper young man, already leaning inside. The rain was falling more heavily at his back.

"You must be Mr. Green," the butler said slowly.

The young man hesitated for a moment, thought, then nodded anxiously. He pushed his way inside out of the rain.

"Sit!" commanded the butler.

The nervous young man instantly sat on a small tufted chair just inside the front door, and awaited further instructions.

The butler carefully shut the door against the rain and the baying hounds and the howl of the wind.

"I was speaking to the dogs, sir," the butler said with a blandness that might have disguised any amount of contempt.

"And this is Mrs. Peacock," Wadsworth said, completing the round of introductions in the library.

Mrs. Peacock smiled a tiny smile of acknowledgment at Mr. Green, with an instinct and a judgment that he deserved no more. Mrs. Peacock was a handsome matron with more than her share of jewels and bosom. She wore one of those dresses that is expensive and tasteful without being in the least fashionable or flattering, and over it a fox stole with several of the creatures' heads resting on her bosom, and their claws digging at her ample waist.

Mr. Green smiled a little dismayed smile of unworthiness back at Mrs. Peacock, as if he were inclined to share her unfavorable judgment, and then he shook hands with Colonel Mustard.

"How do you do?" Colonel Mustard said, with the air of saying *What kept you out of the army?*

"Hello," said Mrs. White, with unfathomable meaning.

Clang.

Wadsworth smiled faintly. "Another of our guests," he said. "Yvette, would you please go and check that dinner will be ready just as soon as all the guests have arrived?" The butler reached unhesitatingly for the concealed handle of the library door, and drew it open for the maid.

Mrs. Peacock watched Yvette's retreating figure with some incredulity, for, if possible, her shape was even more pronounced from the rear than from the front. A moment later, when Wadsworth passed by her on his way out of the room, Mrs. Peacock delicately checked the bottom of her right shoe. She smiled a little smile of relief, and then fixed a cold and accusatory eye upon Mr. Green.

The rain beat down upon the lone automobile on Route 41, and the wipers, even on high, were insufficient to wash away the water. The rain seemed to quash the headlights so that they illuminated only a few feet ahead of the car. The lady in green tried to read a map by the feeble green light of the radio dial.

"It should be right along here," she said. "Or else we've passed it."

The driver slowed to a crawl, so as not to miss any turnoff. The lady in green switched off the distracting voice of Senator McCarthy. The rain was like incessant thunder against the metal roof of the car. The two peered out of the side windows.

"I can't see any—" she began to complain.

Lightning flashed.

The gables and turrets and strange porches of Hill House were momentarily outlined against the black sky. The bold blue light shone on the silicate pebbles of the driveway. The driver instinctively turned the car sharply to the right, and before the thunder rumbled all around them, they were through the gate and on the inclined drive that led

straight up to their destination. And all around them was blackness again. The few lights of Hill House were yellow smudges through the rain-drenched windshield.

"Professor Plum and Miss Scarlet?" the butler asked.

The man's arm was around the waist of the lady in green. His other hand held up his coat above their heads. It did no good. They were already wet through from the short walk from the car to the entrance of Hill House.

"I didn't realize you were acquainted," the butler said as he stood aside for them to enter Hill House.

"We weren't," said Miss Scarlet.

"Now we are," said Professor Plum.

"May I present..." Wadsworth announced, and then paused for the attention of those in the library.

They didn't seem a happy group. Colonel Mustard, Mrs. White, Mr. Green, and Mrs. Peacock stood apart from one another, champagne glasses absently held unsipped before them. Not talking or appearing to regard one another much, they stared at the leather-bound volumes on the bookcases that rose to the ceiling, examined the intricate carving of the fireplace mantel, glanced uneasily through the black panes of the mullioned windows at the storm outside, or attempted to see deeply into the mystery that was Yvette's bosom.

"May I present Professor Plum and Miss Scarlet," said Wadsworth.

Nods, murmurs, inarticulate greetings, and a general shuffling of uneasy feet greeted the arrivals. The butler took a salver from Yvette and offered them champagne. Mr. Green took another glass directly from Yvette. Colonel Mustard crushed out a glowing ember that spat from the crackling fire onto an antique oriental runner.

There was a general sense of *completion* to the group now, and in an unspoken toast, each of the guests raised glass to lip.

"Of course," said Wadsworth, "since you have each been addressed by a pseudonym, you will have realized that nobody here is being addressed with his or her real name."

Perhaps not everyone *had* realized this, for the gathered guests glanced at one another with renewed suspicion.

Crash!

A noise louder than the cracked bell in the tower at the top of the house, louder than thunder which follows a bolt of lightning striking within yards, louder than anything any of these frightened guests had heard in a great while reverberated through the house.

Mr. Green's champagne flew out of his glass and spread itself effervescently over Mrs. Peacock's ample bosom. The glass eyes of the dead foxes around her neck glinted drunkenly.

"Ah," said Wadsworth. "Dinner is served."

Chapter Three

"I'm sorry," Mr. Green said, apologizing to Mrs. Peacock's back as she walked across the hallway toward the dining room, "but I'm a little accident prone."

"You will find your names beside your places," Wadsworth said to the guests as they entered the dining room. "Please be seated."

The mahogany table in the center of the ornately papered room was long and bright with cutlery, glass, and china. The six guests looked at the table, looked at one another, looked at Wadsworth, and then searched out their pseudonyms on the place cards, executed in careful calligraphy.

They found themselves three on a side. The lower end of the table was lacking a chair, but the upper end was conspicuously empty, with a massive, carved mahogany chair in the Chippendale style.

"Is that place for you?" Colonel Mustard asked the butler as the six guests seated themselves with as much

suspicion directed toward their chairs as toward one another.

"Indeed no, sir. I am merely a humble butler." In such a tone did Jehovah announce to Adam, *I am merely the Lord of All Creation.*"

"Hmmm! So what exactly do you do?" the Colonel pursued.

"I buttle, sir," replied Wadsworth with perfect equanimity.

"Which means what?" Colonel Mustard persisted, not letting Wadsworth off the hook.

"The butler is head of the kitchen and dining room. I keep everything . . . tidy, that's all."

"I see," said Mustard, for the moment defeated. There was nothing to be gotten out of Wadsworth. *I buttle*, after all, was a *very* old joke.

"Well, what's this about, Wadsworth?" demanded Mrs. Peacock. Mrs. Peacock was one of those women who conveyed a great deal in a very little. By the way she spoke his name, Wadsworth, she seemed to say: I don't usually trouble myself to remember the names of servants, but you seem a good fellow, and I've decided to make an exception, so would you kindly help along through this difficulty? On the other hand, Mrs. Peacock was also the sort of woman who, when she spoke at length, managed to say very little at all. "What's this about—this dinner party?"

"Ours not to reason why; Ours but to do and die . . ." quoted Wadsworth smoothly.

"Die'?" echoed Professor Plum, with an anxiety that he looked ashamed of betraying immediately afterward.

"I was merely quoting, sir, from Alfred, Lord Tennyson."

"I prefer Kipling myself," said Colonel Mustard, who appeared to take it upon himself to lead the conversation, even if in no particular direction. "The female of the

species is more deadly than the male.'"

The ladies at the table eyed him coldly. If he noticed, he quelled any blush of embarrassment, but it was with some alacrity that he picked up a plate of hors d'oeuvres and held them out before Miss Scarlet, his neighbor to the right.

"Do you like Kipling, Miss Scarlet?"

"Sure," that lady replied, picking up one that looked less wilted and sweaty than the others, "I'll eat anything."

The Colonel blinked, then turned smoothly to the left with the plate. "Do *you* like Kipling, Mrs. White?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. White coldly, eyeing the proffered platter with distaste, "I've never kippled."

"Shark's fin soup, madam?" Yvette asked of Mrs. Peacock.

Mrs. Peacock smiled the smile she reserved for servants, and Yvette placed the small bowl before her. She then continued round the table, each guest nodding a silent yes to the offer of soup.

"So, is this for our host?" asked Colonel Mustard, indicating the empty chair at the head of the table.

"No, sir," replied Wadsworth over his shoulder. He stood at the sideboard, readying the first wine. "That's for the seventh guest. Mr. Boddy."

The six guests present exchanged surprised glances.

"I thought Mr. Boddy was our host," said Mrs. White after a moment.

"So did I!" said Mr. Green, and the others echoed him with vigorous nodding.

"So who *is* our host, Wadsworth?"

If Wadsworth heard the question, he didn't reply. He filled Mrs. Peacock's glass with a wine that was thick and nearly yellow, and then crossed behind Professor Plum to Mrs. White.

"Well, I'm going to start, while it's still hot," said Professor Plum, his spoon poised above his soup.

"Should we wait for the other guest?" asked Mrs. Peacock.

From her station beside the sideboard, Yvette said, "I will keep something warm for him."

"What did you have in mind, dear?" Miss Scarlet asked acidly.

That remark hung in the air for a few moments, and then the guests began to eat. Each guest interested himself in the first course, perhaps out of hunger, but more likely out of a desire to avoid speech, which might prove embarrassing, or even in some obscure way, dangerous.

They watched one another over spoons and the rims of the bowls. Wadsworth and Yvette had disappeared into the kitchen. Mrs. Peacock was the first to break.

"Well..." she began.

There was silence. Spoons stopped in mid-air. Every head turned to look at her. Mrs. White, Miss Scarlet, Colonel Mustard, Mr. Green, and Professor Plum watched Mrs. Peacock and listened for her next words.

"Well, somebody's got to break the ice, so it might as well be me. I mean, I'm used to being a hostess, it goes with my husband's work, and it's *always* difficult when a group of new friends—I suppose I may call us friends—when a group of new friends meet together for the first time to get acquainted with one another, so I'm perfectly prepared to start the ball rolling, so to speak, though of course I have absolutely no idea what we're doing here, or at any rate what *I'm* doing here or what this place is about, but I'm determined to enjoy myself because I might as well, and I'm very intrigued and I imagine the rest of you are as well, and oh, my, this soup really is quite *delicious*, isn't it?"

There was a pause, for this speech was probably less digestable than the soup.

Mrs. White spoke: "You say you are used to being a

hostess as part of your husband's work?"

"Yes," Mrs. Peacock replied without hesitation. "It's an integral part of your life when you're the wife of a—" She left off abruptly, and looked about the table. Each of the guests was staring at her. "But then, I forgot," she went on, "we are not supposed to say who we *really* are, are we, though heavens to Betsy I don't know why."

"Don't you?" asked Colonel Mustard insinuatingly.

Mrs. Peacock looked down at her soup. Then she looked up again and found Mr. Green's eyes steadily upon her.

"I know who you are," he said quietly.

Mrs. Peacock regarded him with apparently genuine surprise.

"Aren't you gonna tell us?" Miss Scarlet smirked mischievously.

Mr. Green shrugged as if to say: It's not up to me. But Mrs. Peacock, as if she felt that she were being singled out at the table for exposure, wouldn't let it alone. "How do you know who I am?" she demanded of thin, dapper Mr. Green.

Mr. Green paused a moment, and then replied, "I work in Washington, too."

"Washington?" echoed Professor Plum. He looked at Mrs. Peacock. "So you're the wife of a politician?"

"Yes, I am," replied Mrs. Peacock, evidently determined to brazen it out, thought it *was* rather unfair that they knew more about her than she about them.

"Come on then," Colonel Mustard said with bluster, "who's your husband?"

Mrs. Peacock's mouth opened, but at that moment the door to the kitchen swung wide. Mrs. Peacock's mouth shut suddenly. If she had been momentarily tempted to reveal her identity, she'd now reconsidered. The butler's eye was fastened upon her. The guests sat in complete silence as Yvette came in and collected the soup bowls.

A few moments later she disappeared into the kitchen again, Wadsworth followed her, and the door shut with a *swish*.

The conversation resumed immediately with Mrs. Peacock on the offense. "And what does *your* husband do?" she asked Mrs. White suddenly.

"Nothing."

"Nothing at *all*?"

"Well," said Mrs. White, "he just lies around on his back all day."

"Nice work if you can get it," said Miss Scarlet dryly.

"Some of us can, dear," returned Mrs. White like a desert.

A panel shot up in the wall with such suddenness that Mr. Green's spoon dropped into his bowl, and a little of the essence of shark's fin splashed over the silk sleeve of Miss Scarlet's plunging dress.

"*Excuse moi*," Yvette said from the kitchen, pushing through a serving dish onto the shelf of the hatch that had just been revealed.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Green, reaching ineffectually toward Miss Scarlet with a corner of his napkin that he'd dipped in his wine, rather than his water, glass, "but I'm a little accident prone."

Miss Scarlet declined his assistance with a tight smile.

A few moments later, after pushing more platters through, Yvette came into the dining room to serve the main course. She began with Mrs. Peacock, and continued around the table.

The guests eyed the food askance. The dishes steamed, and the odors were an amalgam of unfamiliar spices. The colors were various shades of yellow, brown, and tan, a short, dull spectrum. Bits of broken vegetables and shredded, unidentifiable meats were saturated in dark, viscous sauces and lain over beds of gelatinous, burned rice and limp noodles.

Either she was hungry, or the smells tempted her too greatly, or perhaps she forgot her breeding; whatever the reason, Mrs. Peacock began to eat before everyone was quite served.

"Mmm. Delicious," she said. "This is one of my favorite recipes." She glanced toward the hatch into the kitchen with a smile for the invisible cook, but Wadsworth—perhaps deliberately, but perhaps only reaching for the decanter—blocked Mrs. Peacock's view of the pass-through.

"I know it is, madam," he said.

Mrs. Peacock's smile faded. She looked at Wadsworth curiously as he topped off Colonel Mustard's and Miss Scarlet's glasses.

"So what do *you* do in Washington, D.C., Mr. Green?" Mrs. Peacock asked.

Mr. Green smiled slightly and shook his head.

"How are we to get acquainted if we don't say anything about ourselves?" Mrs. Peacock persisted.

Mr. Green smiled a wintry smile.

"Perhaps he doesn't want to get acquainted with you," Miss Scarlet suggested.

"Well I don't know, I'm sure," Mrs. Peacock said huffily. "All I know is, is that if I weren't trying to keep the conversation going, we'd all be sitting here in a very embarrassed silence."

There followed an embarrassed silence.

Wadsworth stood behind the chair of the missing guest, holding the decanter before him, eyes fixed in space.

Mrs. Peacock looked most uncomfortable of all, but her determination not to speak was evident.

"Are you frightened of silence, Mrs. Peacock?" asked Professor Plum suddenly.

"No," replied Mrs. Peacock, with fright very much apparent in her voice. "Why? Why do you ask that?"

"It just seems to me that you are. You seem to suffer

from what we call 'pressure of speech.'"

"We?" said Miss Scarlet. "Who's 'we'?"

Professor Plum hesitated.

"Are you a shrink?" Miss Scarlet asked.

"Ah... I do know a little about psychological medicine, yes."

"You're a doctor?" Mrs. White asked.

"I am, but I don't practice," Professor Plum replied evasively.

"But practice makes perfect," Miss Scarlet remarked, rather inconsequentially. "In fact," she added suggestively, "I think most men need a little practice. Don't you, Mrs. Peacock?"

Mrs. Peacock stared as if she had no idea what Miss Scarlet was talking about, and had no intention of finding out.

"So what do you do, Professor?" said Mrs. White.

"I work for U.N.O." he said reluctantly, then glanced at Wadsworth, as if half expecting a protest at his revealing this piece of information. "The United Nations Organization," he explained with a degree of pride, as he looked down again and saw the look of incomprehension on the face of Miss Scarlet.

"Another politician?" exclaimed Colonel Mustard in disgust. "Jesus."

"I'm not a politician. I work for a branch of U.N.O. W.H.O. The World Health Organization."

"What's your area of special concern?" asked Mrs. Peacock, in the same tone she probably employed at the parties she hosted for her husband, the unidentified politician.

"Family planning," replied Professor Plum.

"So," said Miss Scarlet, "if we ever want to find out about you-know-what, we could go to UNO WHO?"

Mr. Green smiled a smile that wasn't quite as wintry

as the one before. The guests ate in silence and—except for Mrs. Peacock—in some trepidation. Even after several mouthfuls, the contents of the dishes they'd been served weren't entirely identifiable.

"So what about you, Colonel Mustard?" asked Professor Plum. "Are you a real colonel?"

"I am, sir," replied Colonel Mustard with dignity, and immediately resumed eating, as if that were all that was necessary to say on *that* subject.

"You're not going to mention the coincidence that you also live in Washington, D.C.?" asked Miss Scarlet with apparent innocence.

Everyone else at the table stopped eating and looked at Miss Scarlet. Then they looked at Colonel Mustard. He flushed.

"How did you know that? Have we met before, ma'am?"

"I've certainly seen you before—though you may not have noticed me."

"Miss Scarlet," asked Mr. Green, "does that mean you live there, too?"

"I sure do," said Miss Scarlett.

"Does anyone here *not* live in Washington, D.C.?" Mr. Green asked cannily.

There was a moment of silence, then Professor Plum, with a satisfied smile, said, "I don't."

No one else spoke up, which meant either that everyone else lived in Washington, D.C., or saw fit to let everyone else believe that he did. Mr. Green was thinking hard. He turned back to Professor Plum. "You may not live in Washington, but you work for U.N.O. That's a government job. And the rest of us all live in a government town. Is there anyone here who doesn't earn his living from the government in one way or another?"

No one spoke.

Colonel Mustard pushed away his plate, and stood up from the table. "Wadsworth, where is our host, and why have we been brought here?"

Wadsworth's smile was enigmatical.

Clang.

Hosts don't ring their own doorbells, so that must have been the seventh guest.

Chapter Four

Wadsworth drew open the door slowly, but with a kind of confidence, as if he already knew who was on the other side, and was glad of his arrival.

The man stood hunched against the storm of wind and rain at his back. He was not as self-possessed or assertive as Colonel Mustard, not as dapper or careful as Mr. Green, not as intelligent and apparently sharp as Professor Plum. Just an ordinary man you wouldn't pick out in a crowd, and a man who looked as if he resented that fact about himself. He wasn't tall and good-looking, he wasn't well-dressed, and there wasn't anything about him that would engage the sympathy or the curiosity of a stranger. In fact he was, if anything, rather an unpleasant sort, in appearance and expression. He carried a small suitcase of alligator leather.

Behind him lightning struck near Route 41, and there was a distant echoing crash as some great limb smashed

to the ground. The man in the door turned sharply and glanced over his shoulder, as if he thought the blow might have been meant for him.

"Ah, Mr. Boddy," Wadsworth said with an odd pleasure in his voice, as if he were actually glad to see this man, who appeared little calculated to bring pleasure to anyone. "You are eagerly awaited."

"I find that hard to believe," said Mr. Boddy, or the man who saw fit to answer to that name. His voice was a match to his appearance and the expression on his face was harsh, with ill-concealed hostility. "This is not your place, I take it?" he asked with sarcasm.

"No, sir. It is on loan."

Wadsworth stepped aside to allow Mr. Boddy to enter the house. As he was taking off his coat, he looked the butler up and down, adding a sneer to distort further his already unpleasant features. "And what are you supposed to be?"

A howling wind blew suddenly against the entrance, splattering the marble floor with rain. With difficulty, Wadsworth pressed the front door closed.

"I'm supposed to be polite," Wadsworth said evenly. "Though when talking to you, I find that the task is almost beyond me."

Yet it was with utmost politeness and butlerial propriety that Wadsworth took Mr. Boddy's coat, hat, and umbrella and carefully hung them up on the rack that held the belongings of the other guests.

"Just one thing—'Wadsworth.'" Mr. Boddy added a sneer to his voice as well. "Remember, I know who you really are. And don't you forget it."

Wadsworth turned with a bland smile. "Shall I take your bag?"

"No. I'll leave it here. Till I need it."

"As you wish," said Wadsworth. Then, as if he couldn't

keep from asking, he added, "It contains evidence, I presume."

"Surprises, my friend!" Mr. Boddy grinned. Mr. Boddy's mirth was actually more unpleasant than his sarcasm. "That's what it contains—surprises!"

Mr. Boddy knelt down and slipped the suitcase under the coat rack. Wadsworth watched him out of the corner of his eye as he locked the front door.

"May I see that key?" said Mr. Boddy harshly as he rose.

"Over my dead body, sir," Wadsworth replied as he slipped the key into his pocket.

Mr. Boddy smiled again, as if a particularly pleasant thought had shone down some dark alley of his brain. He followed Wadsworth across the vast marble hall in the direction of the dining room.

"Have you just arrived from Washington, sir?" Wadsworth asked.

"Yes, it's a long haul."

Wadsworth glanced upward, and acceded, "Yes, it is a long hall. But then it's a very large house."

"Think you're pretty smart, don't you?" Mr. Boddy grumbled.

In the dining room, there had been no pretence among the assembled guests of not trying to overhear the conversation in the hallway between Wadsworth and the seventh and final guest of the evening. The men's voices had been loud, and by some trick of acoustics, entirely audible. Even Yvette had stopped, holding her serving tray, and cocked an ear. An expanse of blue cotton was visible close against the pass-through to the kitchen, and evidently even the cook was listening as well.

Every pair of eyes in the room was riveted to the door-

way as Mr. Boddy appeared behind Wadsworth.

The guests appeared disappointed. They glanced at one another, as if to gauge whether anyone found Mr. Boddy familiar. Apparently no one did.

On the other hand, Mr. Boddy seemed quite unpleasantly surprised. He stopped dead in the doorway. He took a faltering step back. He looked at each guest in turn, and his expression of unpleasant astonishment intensified.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Wadsworth, "may I present—Mr. Boddy."

No one spoke or greeted him. Perhaps it was something in his face that discouraged even murmured civilities. Perhaps each of the guests was too nervous to bother with these little hypocricies any more. The evening was already strange, and perhaps everyone feared that it was only going to get stranger.

"What are they all doing here?" Mr. Boddy demanded in no pleasant tone of voice.

"Eating dinner," Wadsworth replied smoothly. "Do sit down, Mr. Boddy," he added politely, indicating the place at the head of the table.

Distractedly, he took the proffered seat. Yvette nervously placed a bowl of the shark's fin soup before him.

"Take it away," he said brusquely.

He stared at the guests, and the guests stared back at him. Suddenly Mr. Boddy smiled a confident and nasty smile, but maybe it was just bravado.

"Look," snapped Mrs. Peacock, "I demand to know—what's *going on* here? Why have we been dragged down here to this horrible place?"

No one answered. Wadsworth coughed, drawing their attention to him. Then he slowly pulled an envelope from his pocket. "Well, I believe we have all received a letter."

He turned the envelope around, lifted the torn flap, and drew out a folded page. His hand shook slightly, and he made an effort to control his nervousness before he

began. "My letter says, *It will be to your advantage to be present tonight because a Mr. Boddy will bring to an end a certain long-standing confidential and painful financial liability.* And it is signed, *A friend.*"

He folded the page and returned it to the envelope. He slipped the envelope back deep inside the pocket in the lining of his coat.

The guests looked at one another around the table. No one seemed willing to speak.

Eventually, Mr. Green cleared his throat, and admitted, "I got a similar letter. . . ."

"So did we," said Miss Scarlet immediately thereafter, and turning to Professor Plum, added, "Didn't we?"

Professor Plum nodded.

"I also received a letter," said Mr. Boddy. He waved away the plate that Yvette placed in front of him. "No thanks, Yvette, I'm not hungry."

Mr. Green looked hard at them both. "How did you know her name?" he demanded.

Mr. Boddy smiled at Yvette, and with a repellant playfulness, placed his hand on the back of her thigh, and began to slide it up underneath her tight skirt. Yvette edged away with disgust.

"We know each other, don't we, dear?" said Mr. Boddy.

Yvette nodded, almost imperceptibly. Fear had replaced disgust on her face.

"Forgive my curiosity, Mr. Boddy," said Wadsworth, "but did your letter say the same thing?"

"No," Mr. Boddy replied brusquely.

"I see," said Wadsworth, as if that were an end to the matter, and told him all he needed to know. "Can I interest any of you in fruit or dessert?"

All the guests shook their heads. They pushed away their plates, and much of what had been served them of the main course remained there, cold and even less appetizing than before.

"In that case," said Wadsworth, "may I suggest that we adjourn to the study for coffee and brandy, at which point I believe our unknown host will reveal his intentions."

All seven guests rose, eager to have this business explained and done with.

"Ladies first," said Colonel Mustard with a gallantry which, considering their apparent nervousness in regard of what lay before them, might actually have been construed as cowardice. In any case, the gentlemen stood aside, and the ladies preceded them out into the great hall.

Wadsworth remained behind just long enough to give Yvette the signal to begin clearing the dishes.

"If he's in the study," Colonel Mustard said to Miss Scarlet as they were crossing the hall, "why didn't he join us for dinner?"

"Well," replied Miss Scarlet, not really answering the question, "I'm certainly looking forward to meeting him."

Mrs. White was the first to enter. The study was a large but essentially comfortable room, with oak paneling, and vast, comfortable furniture covered in chintz. The furniture looked soft and deep, and was probably easier to go to sleep in than to stay awake in. The parquet floors had been covered with thick Persian rugs. Here, as in the dining room, thick draperies had been drawn across the windows to keep out the howl of the storm. An oak fire blazed in the hearth, but a log of cedar had been thrown on as well, and its scent was strong and old-fashioned.

All the guests entered, with Wadsworth behind. They looked about the room. Mr. Green pointed out the obvious: "There's no one here."

"Mind if I smoke?" asked Miss Scarlet, in a tone of

voice that indicated that she wasn't a *bit* surprised to find the room empty. It was on a par with the rest of the evening. She offered cigarettes around, but only Colonel Mustard took one. He lighted both.

"Please help yourselves to coffee and brandy," said Wadsworth, indicating a long refectory table with a silver urn and crystal decanters. "And then, if you would, be seated."

Mr. Green poured coffee for Mrs. Peacock and himself. Mrs. White accepted brandy from Colonel Mustard, who then poured rather a more generous glass for himself. Mr. Boddy sat apart from the others, on a high-backed chair near the door of the room. Wadsworth went to the secretary near the windows, and picked up a large brown envelope. On it were the simple directions:

TO WADSWORTH
PLEASE OPEN AFTER DINNER

All the guests were seated and attentive. Wadsworth stood before them. With a letter opener—long and silver with a heavy handle and a sharp, delicately chased poniard—he slit open the manila envelope. He peered inside and drew out a short letter. He glanced at it, looked around at the assembled guests, then placed the letter and the envelope aside.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Wadsworth began, "I am instructed to explain to you what you all have in common with one another." He paused and glanced at the gentleman slouched in the corner of the sofa. "Unless you would care to do the honors, Mr. Boddy."

"Why me? Do they know who I am?"

"I don't think so," replied Wadsworth. "You have never identified yourself to them, I believe."

"Why?" demanded Mrs. White, standing from her chair. "Who *are* you?"

Mr. Boddy stood up, as if taking the floor from Mrs. White.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said quietly, "you all have one thing in common. You are all being blackmailed." Mrs. White sat down. Mr. Boddy addressed the group. "We have all been dragged here for nothing."

They stared at him. Mr. Boddy glanced at Wadsworth, and with a little desperation in his voice, added, "It's a hoax. I suggest we all leave."

"I'm sorry, sir, but you cannot leave this house," said Wadsworth smoothly.

"No?" said Mr. Boddy, and stalked out of the room.

"You *can't* leave!" cried Wadsworth, hastily following Mr. Boddy down the hall toward the front door.

"Who's going to stop me?" snarled Mr. Boddy, already with his hand on the knob.

"All the windows are barred," said Wadsworth quietly. "All the doors are locked."

The knob would not even turn in Mr. Boddy's hand.

Behind them, the other guests were crushed in the doorway of the study, watching with anxiety.

Mr. Boddy looked at them, took a step aside, and cried loudly to Wadsworth, "This is an outrage. How dare you hold us all prisoner!"

A chorus of seconding voices sounded from the doorway, prominent among which was Mrs. White's nearly hysterical, "Let us out!"; Mrs. Peacock's tiny scream of accumulated nervousness; and Colonel Mustard's *har-rumphing* "Hear, hear!"

Wadsworth, who had suddenly been cast in the role of jailer, tried to calm them down. "Ladies and gentlemen—please. *Please*," he repeated, and the chorus dwindled down, except for Mr. Green's exclamation of pain when

someone's elbow jabbed him in the ribs.

"Please return to the study and all will be explained.

"You, too, Mr. Boddy."

With some difficulty, the six guests untangled themselves and retreated into the study, Wadsworth following them inside. Mr. Boddy, on the other hand, sneaked behind Wadsworth's back, and hurried toward a pair of glass doors on the farther side of the hall, down past the doors leading to the dining room and the kitchen.

"This way, Mr. Boddy!" Wadsworth called from the study.

Mr. Boddy didn't even turn. He reached the glass doors, pulled them open, and stepped inside the conservatory.

The sensation was a little like being transported from King Arthur's hall to the depths of a rain forest. The conservatory was constructed on one corner of the house, nearly entirely of glass. The rain beat furiously down upon the glass roof, and intermittent lightning shone luridly through the streaming panes. Below was an oppressive forest of greenery. Full-leaved trees in rotting buckets tangled their branches overhead. Vines and creepers snaked across the flagstone paths like trip-wires. Low-growing shrubs had shed a carpet of dead leaves and flowers. The air was warm, sultry, and humid, and a cricket had gotten in somewhere and was lonesomely chirping in a dark corner.

Mr. Boddy ran down the paths, stumbling across vines and barking his shins against dark pots. At the far end of the conservatory was a double-tiered ledge holding flower pots with dead chrysanthemums, lilies that should have been divided five years ago, and bromeliads that could survive any amount of neglect. He climbed up onto the ledge, and raised one of these pots high above his head,

preparatory to smashing it through the window.

"You can't get out that way," Wadsworth said calmly from behind him.

"Why not?" Mr. Boddy snarled over his shoulder. "It's just glass."

"Look," said Wadsworth.

A Doberman pinscher leaped out of the darkness outside, and pressed his snarling muzzle against the glass, leaving a train of dark saliva. Lightning broke overhead, thunder came a moment later, and when that was gone, Mr. Boddy and Wadsworth could hear the baying of several hounds just outside.

Mr. Boddy handed the pot of dead chrysanthemums to Wadsworth, and climbed down from the ledge.

In the study, all seven guests were seated as before. Yvette had refilled coffee cups, and Colonel Mustard had replenished his glass of brandy.

Wadsworth stood before the fire, examining unhurriedly and without expression, the contents of the envelope that bore his name. After a moment, he looked up.

Chapter Five

The guests all looked nervously at one another. A mysterious house, pseudonyms, unidentifiable Chinese food, and a revelation of blackmail. Already they could tell that it wasn't going to be your usual Friday evening get-together.

"For some considerable time," Wadsworth went on, "all of you have been paying what you can afford—and, in some cases, more than you can afford—to someone who threatens to expose you. And none of you know who's been blackmailing you, do you?"

There was another silence, uncomfortable and somehow menacing.

Mrs. Peacock, who resorted to speech in times of distress—and at many other times, too—maintained: "I've never heard anything so ridiculous!" She looked around—evidently no one else in the room had found Wadsworth's assertions wholly unbelievable. "Nobody could blackmail me," said Mrs. Peacock, in an experimental sort of way.

But that statement didn't elicit any more credence than the previous one. "My life's an open book." Mr. Green smiled with polite condescension at Mrs. Peacock, and got her back for her former slights to him. Near hysteria, the lady concluded, "I've never done *anything* wrong!"

No one bothered to contradict so ridiculous a statement as that. In fact, Mrs. Peacock's denials had the single effect of convincing everyone in the room that indeed, she *was* being blackmailed, and probably for something that she most definitely had done.

"Anybody else wish to deny it?" Wadsworth asked.

No one replied. No one spoke at all. They sipped their coffee, swallowed their brandy, stabbed out their cigarettes, and looked at one another out of the corners of their eyes.

So that was that. Everyone in the room was being blackmailed—or at least was content to let the others believe so.

"Very well," said Wadsworth. "As everyone here is in the same boat, there is no harm in my revealing some details. And my instructions are to do so."

He glanced through a sheaf of typewritten pages that he had taken from the manila envelope. Over the top of them, he nodded to Yvette. She put down her tray, and slipped out of the room as discreetly as her outfit would permit.

The door closed quietly behind her.

"Don't you think that you might spare us this humiliation?" Mrs. White said suddenly.

"I'm sorry," Wadsworth said, as if the matter were quite beyond his help. "Professor Plum—" he began, consulting the second page of notes. "You were once a professor of psychiatry. Specializing in helping paranoid and homicidal lunatics suffering from delusions of grandeur."

"Yes," conceded Professor Plum, "but now I work at the United Nations."

"So your work has not changed. But you don't practice medicine at the UN. Your license to practice has been lifted. Is this not correct?"

Professor Plum was silent. But Miss Scarlet leaned forward and glanced at the Professor, seated on the other end of the sofa. Then she turned to Wadsworth. "Why? What did he do?"

"You know what doctors aren't allowed to do with their lady patients?"

Miss Scarlet evidently had a pretty good idea. "Yes."

"Well," said Wadsworth, "he did."

Mrs. Peacock, seated between Miss Scarlet and the Professor on the sofa, drew away from the accused with a pursed mouth. "How disgusting!"

"Would you like to change places?" asked Miss Scarlet. In another moment, Mrs. Peacock had moved down to the end of the sofa, and Miss Scarlet taken her place next to the Professor. She smiled warmly at her new neighbor.

He returned it.

"Really," Mrs. Peacock fumed, flushed.

"Are you making moral judgments, Mrs. Peacock?" asked Wadsworth. "How then do you justify taking bribes in return for delivering your husband's—'Senator Peacock's'—votes to certain lobbyists?"

Mrs. Peacock's eyes widened, but her answer was ready: "My husband's a paid consultant. There's nothing wrong with that."

"Not if it's publicly declared. But if the payment is delivered by slipping used greenbacks in plain envelopes under the door of the men's room outside the Senate Chamber, how would you describe that transaction?"

"I'd say it stinks," said Miss Scarlet.

"How would you know?" Mrs. Peacock returned scathingly. "When were you in that men's room?"

"So it's true," Professor Plum said complacently.

"No," said Mrs. Peacock, "it's a vicious lie."

Colonel Mustard, Mr. Green, and Mrs. White were listening with undisguised interest and barely concealed pleasure to these charges and counter-charges. Mr. Boddy seemed to be sinking lower in his chair.

"I'm sure we are all happy to hear that the accusations against you and your husband are false, Mrs. Peacock," said Wadsworth. "But however that may be, the fact is that you've been paying blackmail for over a year now to keep this story out of the papers."

"I believe you," said Mrs. White to Mrs. Peacock. The lady in black leaned forward from her chair with a look of ineffable sympathy and solicitude on her face. "You see," she explained with a sigh, "I'm also being blackmailed for something I didn't do."

Mr. Green coughed a little cough of diffidence. "Me, too."

"And me," admitted Colonel Mustard with gruff hastiness—it wouldn't do for the military to be last in even such a matter as this.

"But not me!" Miss Scarlet cried cheerily.

Wadsworth was evidently surprised. "You're not being blackmailed?"

"Oh, I'm being blackmailed all right. But I did what I'm being blackmailed for."

The others in the room stared at her, apparently stunned by this open admission of guilt.

"What did you do?" asked Professor Plum, with polite curiosity, as he might have said: Oh, and what part of Pennsylvania are you from, Miss Scarlet?

"Well," said Miss Scarlet, "to be perfectly frank—"

"Yes," said Mrs. White, "do be frank..."

"I run a 'specialized' hotel—and a telephone service which provides gentlemen with the company of a young lady for a short while."

From the pocket of his jacket, Professor Plum took a notepad and pencil. "The number?" he asked.

"Men!" exclaimed Mrs. Peacock, appalled. She leaned forward in order to shoot both Professor Plum and Miss Scarlet a look of moral outrage.

Mr. Green, however, was doing a little simple arithmetic—putting two and two together. To Miss Scarlet he said, "So how did you know that Colonel Mustard worked in Washington? Is he one of your clients?"

"Certainly not!" cried Colonel Mustard, his affronted dignity lifting him up out of his chair and carrying him across the room to the window. There he jerked aside the curtain. The storm outside was like a savage creature seeking entrance into the house. It howled at Colonel Mustard in the lighted embrasure, and flung pails of water against the gleaming windows in frustration.

"I was asking Miss Scarlet," said Mr. Green quietly.

Colonel Mustard turned on Miss Scarlet. "Tell them it's not true."

"It's not true."

"Is *that* true?" asked Professor Plum.

"No," said Miss Scarlet.

"Aha! Then *it is* true."

"What?" demanded Mrs. White. "What's true?"

"The double negative," said Wadsworth.

"Oh, God," cried Colonel Mustard, horrified. "You mean you have—photographs?"

Miss Scarlet nodded.

Colonel Mustard closed his eyes and sank against the sill of the windows. He pressed his back against the cold, sweating glass panes, as if he hoped the storm outside would break through and drag him out by the shoulders.

"That sounds like a confession to me," said Wadsworth. "In point of fact, the double negative has led to the proof positive. I'm afraid you gave yourself away, sir," he said quietly to Colonel Mustard.

"Are you trying to make me look stupid in front of the other guests?" he demanded.

"You don't need any help from me, Colonel Mustard," returned Wadsworth smoothly.

"But seriously," said Professor Plum, who'd evidently been thinking for a few moments, "I don't see what's so terrible about Colonel Mustard visiting a house of ill-fame. *Most* soldiers do, don't they?" he asked Miss Scarlet, at the same time—as if by accident—dropping his hand upon her knee.

Miss Scarlet quietly removed Professor Plum's hand. With an admonitory finger, she directed the Professor's attention to Wadsworth, who was studying yet another page of the typewritten notes.

"The nature and the frequency of Colonel Mustard's pleasures are probably of more interest to Miss Scarlet than they are to the blackmailer," Wadsworth said after a moment. "But you see, the Colonel holds a sensitive security post in the Pentagon. And for someone subsisting on the pay of a colonel, Colonel Mustard drives a very expensive car. A car which is replaced every year with the newer model, I might add. And I don't suppose that Miss Scarlet's . . . referral services . . . come very cheap."

"I should say not," said Miss Scarlet, preening a little.

"I came into money," said the Colonel. "During the war. When I lost my parents."

"That was careless," remarked Wadsworth dryly. "Did you report the loss to the police?"

"No," returned the Colonel hotly. "Dying is perfectly legal. At any rate, it was during the war. And I presume it is still legal today."

"Sometimes," Wadsworth qualified. Then, as if that suggested a new avenue of investigation, Wadsworth turned toward the other side of the room. "Mrs. White, you have been paying our friend the blackmailer ever since your husband died under . . . shall we say . . . mysterious circumstances."

Miss Scarlet laughed, not a cruel laugh, but merely a mirthful one.

"What's so funny?" Mrs. White demanded.

"I see now! That's why your husband spends all his time lying on his back. He's in his *coffin*!"

"I didn't kill him," Mrs. White remarked.

"Then why are you paying the blackmailer?" demanded Colonel Mustard quickly, evidently happy now to return with interest the unpleasant attention that had just been paid to him.

"I didn't want a scandal," replied Mrs. White, with utmost simplicity. "We'd had a fight. He was crazy. He hated me. He had threatened to kill me in public."

"Why would he want to kill you in public?" Miss Scarlet wanted to know.

"I think," Wadsworth said carefully, "Mrs. White meant that her husband had threatened, in public, to kill her."

"Unless," said Mr. Green, "he had threatened, in public, to kill her, in public. Of course, that wouldn't make sense, but murder rarely does."

"But that was his final word on the matter?" Miss Scarlet asked.

"Being murdered in public is pretty final, wouldn't you say?" returned Mrs. White.

"And yet, he was the one who died," Wadsworth pointed out. "Not you, Mrs. White, not you."

Mrs. White remained silent and impassive, as if the matter concerned someone else entirely. Miss Scarlet's curiosity was, however, unsatisfied. "What did he do for a living?" she asked.

"He was a scientist. Nuclear physics."

"What was he like?"

Mrs. White considered this for a moment, with the air of one who is recalling something she had not thought about in a great while. "He was always a stupidly opti-

mistic man," she said thoughtfully. "I'm afraid it came as a great shock to him when he died. He was found dead, in our home. His head had been cut off. So had his—" She looked around, and seemed to realize suddenly that she was in mixed company "*—his you know,*" she concluded, with a fairly specific gesture in the direction of Mr. Boddy's nether parts.

Colonel Mustard *harrumphed* uncomfortably, Mr. Green drew a deep breath, and Professor Plum crossed his legs protectively. Blanched, Mr. Boddy sank even further down into his chair.

"I'd been out all evening," Mrs. White continued. "At the movies."

"What did you see?" asked Miss Scarlet.

"*From Here to Eternity.*"

"Very appropriate," said Mr. Boddy, his voice a little strangled.

"Do you miss him?" Miss Scarlet relentlessly pursued.

"I consider the whole business to be a question of life after death."

"Beg your pardon?" said Mr. Green.

"He's dead," Mrs. White explained calmly. "Now I have a life."

"But he was your *second* husband," said Wadsworth, sounding a little like Ralph Edwards on *This is Your Life*. "Your first also disappeared."

"That was his job—he was an illusionist."

"But he never reappeared," Wadsworth pointed out.

"He wasn't a very good illusionist."

For a few moments, Mrs. White's glibness overpowered the other guests. Then Mr. Green coughed discreetly. Everyone looked at him expectantly. Wadsworth turned the sheaf of typewritten sheets, glanced at one in particular, and looked at Mr. Green over the top of it. It was evident that if Mr. Green didn't speak, Wadsworth would.

But Mr. Green stood up, licked his lips, wiped perspiration from his brow, and then said bravely, "I'm not going to wait for Wadsworth to unmask me. I work for the State Department, and I am a homosexual."

"*Tsk-tsk*," said Mrs. Peacock, and looked as if she'd like to find a place to sit that was very far away from *all* these moral degenerates.

"I feel no personal shame or guilt about this," Mr. Green went on, with an eye of steel for each of them in turn, "but I have to keep it quiet or I would lose my job on security grounds."

For a moment there was silence. Mr. Green sat down. The guests looked around, and it was apparent that each was noting down, on a mental tablet, the secrets that had made them susceptible to blackmail.

At just about the same moment, the six guests came to the same inescapable conclusion.

"Well," said Professor Plum, "that just leaves Mr. Boddy."

But all eyes in the room had been turned that way already.

Mr. Boddy said nothing, but held his arms crossed tightly across his chest.

"What's *your* little secret?" demanded Miss Scarlet.

"His secret?" said Wadsworth. "Oh, I thought you'd all realized. He's the one who's blackmailing you all..."

Chapter Six

"You bastard!" Colonel Mustard shouted, and strode across the room directly for Mr. Boddy.

Mr. Boddy casually stood from his chair near the door.

Wadsworth stepped forward between the two. "Colonel—please! Don't do anything rough."

Colonel Mustard pushed the butler aside. "Put 'em up!" he cried, throwing up his fists for an old-fashioned fight, stalwart adversary pitted against worthy foe.

Mr. Boddy didn't quite see things that way. He took one look at Colonel Mustard before him—fists raised, one leg bent and thrust forward, chin uplifted, eyes on fire—and then stamped as hard as he could on the Colonel's foot.

The Colonel stared at Mr. Boddy for a second in aggrieved surprise, then opened his mouth and cried out in pain. When he bent forward at the waist, reaching for his injured foot, Mr. Boddy pronged the first two fingers of his right hand and poked them expertly into the Colo-

nel's eyes. Then he stomped on the Colonel's other foot.

With a yell of pain, the Colonel collapsed, dropping to his knees with a thud.

Mr. Boddy then threw himself on the Colonel, raining blows upon his ears and shoulders with his fists, slamming his knees into the Colonel's ribs, and then throwing himself entirely onto the larger man, knocking him sideways to the floor. The Colonel's hand knocked smartly against the carpet, echoing with the wood of the floor beneath.

After a few moments consumed in astonishment at the violence of Mr. Boddy's attack, Mr. Green and Professor Plum stepped forward to Colonel Mustard's rescue. They hauled Mr. Boddy up off the struggling, huffing military man. This was no easy task, for Mr. Boddy merely turned his vigorous exertions against those two gentlemen, stamping on their feet, elbowing their ribs, and smashing his head up under their chins.

Finally this dirty fighter was brought to a standstill when Mr. Green and Professor Plum, working together, snapped Mr. Boddy's arms behind his back.

Mrs. White, who had watched this proceeding with interest, turned to Mrs. Peacock and Miss Scarlet. Receiving a nod of approbation, Mrs. White stepped forward, and kneed Mr. Boddy smartly in the nuts.

Mr. Boddy screamed and slipped out of the grasp of Mr. Green and Professor Plum. He rolled onto the floor, squeezing up into a ball with both hands caught between his legs. The three women together ran up and proceeded to kick the blackmailer as hard as their skirts and their heels and their undergarments would allow.

Wadsworth pulled away Mrs. Peacock, who was kicking hardest of all, and commanded, "Stop! Stop! Everyone stop! The police are coming!"

The altercation left off abruptly.

Mr. Boddy, bruised and panting, crawled behind the

sofa, probably hoping to be out of sight and out of mind until he could breathe again.

The other six guests stared at Wadsworth, and then in a babble of voices, they shouted:

"The police! Oh, God—"

"You must be crazy!"

"How can we tell the police anything?"

"I'd be ruined!"

"It's the end of my career!"

"Let's get out of here!"

"*Listen!*" Wadsworth shouted to the six guests, who had surrounded him, and were clawing at his sleeves. "Listen—blackmail depends on secrecy. You have all admitted how Mr. Boddy's been able to blackmail you. All you have to do is tell the police, then he'll be convicted, and your trouble will be over."

The faces of the six guests bore a single expression—horror.

Mr. Boddy's arms appeared over the back of the sofa, and a moment later, his lolling head rose, too. He gasped, "You see, Wadsworth, it's not so easy. They'll never tell the police."

"Then I will," said Wadsworth. "I have evidence in my possession...and this conversation is being tape recorded."

Next door to the study where the guests, their blackmailer, and the butler—a sort of master of the ceremonies—had gathered, was the billiard room of Hill House. It was papered in dark green and at the center of it was a massive billiard table, of intricately and heavily carved mahogany. Above it hung two massive stained glass lamps. Along the walls were racks with cues, and framed sporting prints. There was a cupboard, too, which once had held

liquors for the late-night players. But the liquors and the shelves had been removed. The cupboard now contained a massive reel-to-reel tape recorder.

Yvette stood before the open cupboard doors, her cap put aside on the billiard table. She wore a pair of ear-phones, and her pert face was slack and expressionless with attention.

Point of order, sir. That was Mr. Green. Tape recordings aren't admissible evidence.

I'll deny everything. Colonel Mustard? Or Professor Plum? Probably Colonel Mustard.

I've admitted nothing. Mrs. White.

Nor have I. Mrs. Peacock.

But then the denials came more frantically, and Yvette could no longer distinguish individual speakers. She peered at the counter on the recorder, and made a small notation on a pad of paper.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Wadsworth cried and held up both hands for silence. "The police have already been invited. They will be here in forty-five minutes. Tell them the truth and Mr. Boddy will be behind bars."

The guests stared at Wadsworth in panic.

Mr. Boddy dragged himself up from the floor, and walked—with a slight limp—toward the door.

"Where are you going this time?" Wadsworth asked.

"I think I can help them make up their minds. May I just get my little bag from the hall?"

Without waiting for permission, Mr. Boddy pulled open the door—massaging his bruised elbow at the same time. As he left, Wadsworth appeared puzzled and worried. The guests gradually backed away from Wadsworth as they would have backed away from a certified lunatic.

In their collective opinion, only a certified lunatic would

have suggested that they expose themselves to the police.

Miss Scarlet took out a small mirror and checked her face. When she was done, Mrs. White borrowed it, and Mrs. Peacock glanced into it over Mrs. White's shoulder. Colonel Mustard poured himself more brandy. Mr. Green tried to re-establish the crease in his right trousers leg. Professor Plum kicked at the back of the upholstered sofa in frustration. Mr. Boddy re-entered the room, leaving the door open behind him. He placed his alligator bag on the secretary and turned to face his victims.

"Can anybody guess what's in here?"

The guests looked at each other, nonplussed. Guessing games with a blackmailer?

"The evidence against us, no doubt," said Mrs. White.

Mr. Boddy smiled, shook his head, and opened the case. Inside were six parcels, each in a black box neatly tied with thick, dark yarn. Seemingly at random, he passed a parcel to each of the guests.

"We didn't know we were meeting you tonight. Did you know you were meeting us?" asked Miss Scarlet.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Boddy.

"What were you told precisely?" asked Mrs. White.

"Merely that you were all meeting to discuss our little . . . financial arrangements. And that if I did not appear, Wadsworth would be informing the police about it all. Naturally I could hardly resist putting in an appearance."

Despite a blackening bruise on his neck, a torn pocket flap on his jacket, two red nail scratches across the back of his left hand, and a ripped trouser cuff, Mr. Boddy managed to look supremely smug and complacent as he stood before them.

"Open them," said Mr. Boddy.

The guests looked down at the parcels in their hands. Mr. Boddy limped to the refectory table and poured himself a glass of brandy. He sniffed the bouquet, smiled a

little lopsided smile of approbation, and sipped it.

Miss Scarlet picked at the yarn bow. "Why not? I enjoy getting presents from strange men."

The others watched as she slowly lifted the lid. Her eyes widened, and she looked up at Mr. Boddy.

From the box, Miss Scarlet took a heavy brass candlestick. It was nearly a foot high, square-cut with a green felt base. It probably weighed five pounds.

"A candlestick? What's this for?"

Mr. Boddy looked around at the group. "Nobody else going to open up? Go on; pretend it's Christmas."

Mrs. White went next. In a square box she discovered she'd been given a ten-foot coil of hemp rope.

Colonel Mustard got a shiny steel wrench, sticky where the price tag had been peeled off.

Mr. Green found, in a long narrow box, a two-foot length of grimy lead pipe. "What is this? Some sort of scavenger hunt in reverse?"

Then Mrs. Peacock opened her box and took out an ornately cast dagger—antique and very sharply pointed.

"No," Miss Scarlet said suddenly. "Don't you see? They're all weapons. Professor Plum, what did you get?"

Professor Plum took the lid off his box. He grimaced, reached inside, and pulled out a revolver.

"Careful," said Mr. Boddy. "It's loaded."

Wadsworth, who'd watched all this with confusion and mounting disquiet, stepped forward. "Mr. Boddy, this is not—"

Mr. Boddy held up his hand imperatively, silencing the butler. He spoke to the group: "In your hands you each hold a lethal weapon. If you denounce me to the police, you will also be exposed and humiliated . . . I'll see to that in court," he promised, looking Mrs. Peacock directly in the eye. Mrs. Peacock quailed.

"*But*," Mr. Boddy went on, turning suddenly to face Professor Plum, gingerly holding the revolver, "if one of

you kills Wadsworth now, no one but the seven of us will ever know. . . ." Mr. Boddy threw a grim smile over his shoulder at the blanching butler.

Mrs. White glanced down at the rope in her hand, and began fiddling with one end of it, as if trying to remember—for instance—how to form a noose. Mr. Boddy stood before her. "He has the key to the front door, you see," he said almost conversationally, "which he told me would only be opened over his dead body." He smiled to Miss Scarlet. "I suggest we take him up on that offer."

Colonel Mustard and Mr. Green stood beside one another, holding wrench and lead pipe, looking like two over-dressed, bewildered workmen. Mr. Boddy nodded friendly to them as he passed them on the way to the door of the room. There he turned to face them all. "The only way to avoid finding yourselves on the front pages is for one of you to kill Wadsworth. *Now!*"

With that command, Mr. Boddy brought his hand down sharply on the light switch.

The room was plunged into absolute darkness.

There was a loud, satisfied *thud*.

Someone gasped, then one of the ladies screamed.

Crack. A gun fired once.

Simultaneously, some piece of glass, or china, was shattered in another part of the room.

There was a scuffle of feet against furniture, and something large toppled over onto the rug.

Someone groaned loudly.

Someone else screamed, but it wasn't one of the ladies.

The lights came back on as suddenly as they'd been turned off.

The guests stared at one another—every one of them was in a different place from before.

That included Mr. Boddy, lying face down on the floor in the exact center of the room.

Chapter Seven

For a few moments, the six guests and Wadsworth stared at the inanimate Mr. Boddy.

Then they all rushed forward, forming a tight circle around the blackmailer.

Mr. Boddy didn't move.

"Is he alive?" Mrs. White asked, her voice remaining soft and low-keyed as always.

"Is there a doctor in the—" Miss Scarlet began, but didn't even finish the question. "Oh, yes," she said, turning to Professor Plum.

Professor Plum seemed to remember his training and admitted identity at that same moment, for he threw his arms wide and commanded, "Stand back! Give this man air! Let me examine him!" Just the way doctors did it in the movies.

The other guests cautiously moved back. Professor Plum dropped down to his knees and gave Mr. Boddy a hasty examination, which seemed to consist mainly of

putting his ear to Mr. Boddy's right clavicle, and then poking a finger into Mr. Boddy's trousers pocket. He looked up somberly. "He's dead."

For a few moments, there was stunned silence.

Then Mrs. White asked, "Who had the gun?"

Professor Plum stood up, a little shakily, and replied, "I did." He seemed almost as surprised at this as he had at remembering that he once had been a licensed doctor. "And there it is."

He pointed at the revolver, lying on the floor a few feet away, nearly hidden by an end table.

"You shot him!" Mrs. Peacock screamed, with sudden hysteria.

"I didn't!"

"Well, you had the gun!" Mrs Peacock maintained, only a little less hysterically. "And if you didn't shoot him, then who did?"

"I didn't say he'd been shot," said Professor Plum. He reached down, grasped the tail of Mr. Boddy's coat, and flipped him over onto his back. "Look, there's no gunshot wound."

The guests looked at Mr. Boddy's body, but no one ventured closer. There was no bullet wound immediately apparent, in his flesh or in his clothing, and no blood to be seen, either.

"Somebody tried to grab the gun in the dark," explained Professor Plum. "And it went off." He looked about the room. "Look." He pointed again. "The bullet broke that vase on the mantel."

Colonel Mustard, who was nearest the fireplace, poked a finger into the shards of broken porcelain, and then peered at the dark wall behind. "He's right. And there's a bullet lodged in the panelling. Here! See?"

The guests and Wadsworth crowded around and peered at the bullet hole. It was, after all, a more pleasant thing to look at an injured wall up close than to perform the

same operation on a corpse in the middle of the floor.

"So how did he die?" asked Mr. Green.

Despite the fact that only one shot had been fired, and the bullet from that shot located, they all stared accusingly at Professor Plum.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm not a forensic expert."

"One of us must have killed him," Mrs. White said quietly.

The guests stopped, looked down at Mr. Boddy, and then at one another. Mrs. White was quite correct. There was a fatal connection between the dead blackmailer and one of his victims in this room. One of them had done it, and since no one was owning up to the deed, one of them was apparently trying to get away with it as well.

Mr. Green broke silence first. "I didn't do it!" he shouted nervously.

"I need a drink," Mrs. Peacock said faintly. She picked up the glass of brandy that Mr. Boddy had put aside just before he'd turned out the lights. Her hand shook so in raising it to her lips that she put down the dagger she found she'd been holding with white knuckles, and grasped the trembling glass in both hands. She only took a small sip—rather as if she feared Mr. Boddy would want his glass back—but it seemed to make her feel better.

Professor Plum had watched this, and it suggested an idea to him: "Maybe he was poisoned."

Spilling back over into hysteria, Mrs. Peacock screamed and dropped the glass. It shattered, splashing her shoes and ankles with the liquor. She continued to scream.

"I didn't mean—" Professor Plum began.

No one could hear him over Mrs. Peacock, who, having found a good scream—piercing, high-pitched, and of about two and a half seconds duration—was determined to practice it without ceasing.

Mr. Green stepped in front of her and slapped her face.

Mrs. Peacock abruptly left off her screaming.

Mr. Green wiped his hands together, both to signify a job well done, and also to dust off the scented powder with which Mrs. Peacock liberally sprinkled her cheeks.

But when he turned back, he found the others looking at him speculatively. A man capable of striking Mrs. Peacock might also be capable of murdering a blackmailer. . . .

"I had to stop her screaming," Mr. Green said defensively. It hadn't been hard to read the others' thoughts.

"Was the brandy poisoned, do you think?" asked Colonel Mustard.

Mrs. Peacock moaned and collapsed onto the sofa, deftly managing to avoid stepping on the corpse at her feet.

The others crowded about the broken goblet on the floor.

"Looks like we'll never know," said Miss Scarlet.

"Unless Mrs. Peacock dies, too," Mr. Green pointed out.

They turned their attention to that lady on the sofa.

"Are you dying?" Mrs. White asked politely. "Or just winded from all that screaming?"

"Just—"

"Eiiiiiiiiiiiiieeeeeiiiiiii!!"

Another scream, this one quite unlike the screams of Mrs. Peacock, sounded from another room. The guests and Wadsworth stared at one another in terror.

Then Mr. Green, standing near the door, screamed as well—a third kind of scream, quite different from the others. It was more of a ragged series of Aaaaaaaaaghs separated by gasping breaths.

Mr. Green's screams provided an unsettling, and definitely unpleasant counterpoint to the screams that came from elsewhere in the house.

"*Stop screaming, sir!*" commanded Colonel Mustard, marching up to him. He grabbed Mr. Green by the lapels

and shook him. Mr. Green continued to scream, only now the *Aaaaaaaaaaaghs* added a vibrato.

"Why are you screaming?"

"Because I'm frightened!" screamed Mr. Green.

"What of?"

"Screaming! Screaming frightens me! And there's someone screaming in the next room!"

Colonel Mustard slapped Mr. Green's face. The *Aaaaaaaaaaaghs* whimpered into silence.

But Mr. Green was quite right. The screaming was coming from the next room.

"The billiard room," cried Wadsworth.

Wadsworth and the guests rushed out into the hall. The screaming was most definitely coming from the billiard room.

Colonel Mustard, appearing very strong and military, tried the handle of the door. It wouldn't open.

He knocked stoutly on the door. No one would answer his summons.

He rattled the handle again. No one had unlocked it in the intervening ten seconds.

He pounded vigorously on the door, and called out, "Open up! Open the door! Unlock the door and then open it!"

"It must be the murderer in there," said Professor Plum.

"Why would *he* be screaming?" asked Mr. Green.

"He must have a victim in there," suggested Mrs. White. Then she cried out, "Oh, my God—*Yvette!*"

"Oh, my God!! *Yvette!*" echoed Mr. Green in horror.

"If he'd slap her," Miss Scarlet suggested, "maybe she'd shut up, too."

Colonel Mustard banged on the door again. The screaming left off abruptly.

"Hel-lo-o!" called Miss Scarlet, in the way that one standing on the edge of a deep canyon tries to provoke an echo. "Yoo-hoo! Open the do-or!"

Yvette, tearful, cap askew, opened the door.

They rushed into the billiard room, frantically searching for the murderer. The butler shut the door behind him, turning the key once more.

"You're alive!" cried Wadsworth with relief.

"I don't see him," said Professor Plum.

"What's that clicking?" asked Mr. Green. There was a quiet *click click click*, mechanical and rhythmic, somewhere in the room.

"I'm alive, all right," Yvette angrily said to the butler. "But no thanks to you."

"What do you mean?" asked Wadsworth.

"You locked me up with a murderer."

"So the murderer *is* in this room," said Mrs. White, peering speculatively at the billiard table, which appeared to be the only place possible in which to hide. Perhaps certain billiard tables, like coffins in magician's shows, had false bottoms.

"Yes," said Yvette, still fuming, "the murderer is in this room."

"But *where*?" cried Mr. Green. He drew away from Professor Plum, standing next to him.

"We are all looking at him," Yvette said portentously.

They all looked about themselves desperately, moving away from one another until they were severally as far apart as possible.

"Or her," Yvette went on. "It's what Mrs. White said in the study—one of you is the killer."

"How do you know Mrs. White said that?" asked Professor Plum.

Yvette flipped open the door of the cupboard, revealing the tape recorder. The reels still turned, but the recording tape had run off, and *click click clicked* against the empty

spool. "I was listening," Yvette said, picking up the headphones, and carefully miming the action of placing them over her ears—as if someone in the room might never had seen anything like them before.

"But if you were in here all by yourself," asked Mrs. White, "why were you screaming?"

"Because *I* was frightened! I, too, Yvette, the maid, was dreadfully frightened. I also drank the cognac, directly from the bottle. *Mon Dieu*." She wiped real tears from her eyes. "I cannot stay in this room by myself."

"Then come back to the study with us," said Miss Scarlet, reasonably enough.

"With all of you! But one of you is a murderer!"

"Ah, my dear," Colonel Mustard said soothingly, "there is safety in numbers."

Wadsworth switched off the tape recorder. Without the *click click click*, there was silence in the room.

One by one they filed out of the billiard room, and one by one they returned to the study. And when they were all there again, the murderer was with them.

Chapter Eight

Mrs. Peacock once again squeezed past the body on the floor to regain her place on the sofa. She avoided looking into Mr. Boddy's face, which was most inconveniently facing upwards, as if he were examining the cracks in the ceiling. No one else joined her there, but Mrs. Peacock was a Washington hostess, and perhaps was more accustomed to ignoring little embarrassments, like corpses.

The others returned, more or less to their former places, and tried to maintain an appearance of normality, despite the presence of the corpse in the middle of the room.

Still, it was a presence that was impossible to ignore, like a dwarf at a wedding.

"Is there *no* indication of how he died?" asked Mr. Green.

"No," Professor Plum replied shortly.

Wadsworth, seeing the body once more, had grown pale, as if the seriousness of the evening had at last

descended upon him. "This is terrible," he said quietly, and as if to himself. "This is absolutely terrible. This is not what I'd intended. Oh, my God. . . ." he groaned.

He collapsed into the nearest chair. This was the first time in the course of the evening that he had been seated in the presence of the guests. This sudden lapse was tantamount to giving up the charade of being a butler.

Mrs. White stared at him. "Not what *you* intended?"

Wadsworth blotted his brow with the back of his hand.

"So you're not the butler?" said Miss Scarlet.

"I'm not *the* butler, no. But I am a butler. In fact, I was *his* butler." He pointed at the dead man.

Professor Plum considered this for a moment, then asked, "So if he told you to invite us all to his house, why did he arrive late?"

"I invited you," Wadsworth confessed. "In fact, I wrote the letters. It was all my idea."

Mrs. White strode across the room, and stood before Wadsworth's chair. "Wait a minute! I don't understand. Why did *you* invite us all here to meet your late employer?" Were you assisting him to blackmail us?"

"Certainly not!"

"I think you'd better explain," Mrs. White said firmly.

Wadsworth looked around the room. He nodded. "Please sit down. Everyone."

Alacritously, each of the guests took a nearby seat. Unfortunately, since Wadsworth had taken one to himself, and Yvette slipped into the little side chair beside the refectory table, that left only five places for the remaining six guests. Mr. Green, having held back a moment out of politeness for Miss Scarlet who cut in front of him, found himself without a place in this extemporaneous game of musical chairs.

With a little apologetic clearing of his throat, he perched himself on the edge of a small table.

"All right," said Wadsworth at last. "When I. . ."

Mr. Green's table was just a little high for his legs. He slipped off it and crashed to the floor, bringing with him the table, a silver tray, the glasses and decanter of brandy that had been on it, and an antique lamp with a double globe and fringed shade.

"Ah . . . sorry . . ." said Mr. Green. "I'm a little accident prone."

"He's a little what?" asked Colonel Mustard, who hadn't quite heard.

"He's a little jerk," replied Miss Scarlet, lighting another cigarette.

Mr. Green flushed, and leaned against a little out-of-the-way stretch of wall where he wasn't likely to break anything, knock anything over, or splash anything over anyone's best clothes.

"When I said that I was Mr. Boddy's butler," said Wadsworth, "this was both true and misleading."

"*That's* as clear as ditchwater," remarked Miss Scarlet in a low voice.

"*I was* once his butler, but it was not his untimely death this evening which brought my employment with him to an end. Oh, no! That wasn't it at all."

"When *did* it come to an end?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"When my wife decided to . . . end her life. She too was being blackmailed by this odious man who now lies dead before us."

Wadsworth pointed quite needlessly. They were hardly likely to have forgot the presence of the corpse, or the fact that, in life, his profession had been one of odious blackmail.

"Mr. Boddy hated my wife for the same reason that he hated all of you."

"He hated me?" asked Mrs. Peacock in surprise. "Why on earth would he hate me? Everyone likes me. At least all my friends—my close friends at any rate—are quite fond of me. I didn't even know this man—why would he

hate me? Why would he hate *any* of us?" Mrs. Peacock seemed quite distressed by the possibility that she'd been disliked by a total stranger.

"Mr. Boddy believed that you were all thoroughly un-American."

The guests blinked. That bit had made *no* sense.

Wadsworth explained: "For some reason, Mr. Boddy felt it was inappropriate for the wife of a senator to accept bribes, for a doctor to seduce his patients, for a woman to emasculate her husband . . ."

Wadsworth spoke without apparent irony, but the eyes of Mrs. Peacock, Professor Plum, and Mrs. White widened in astonished anger. But before any of that trio could protest, and before Wadsworth could continue with his litany of offenses against American ideals, Mr. Green interrupted him: "But this is ridiculous. If he was such a patriotic American, why didn't he just report us all to the authorities?"

"He decided to turn his information to good use and make a little money out of it. What could be more American than that? Mr. Boddy was truly an apostle of free enterprise. He became a rich man, but money," Wadsworth reminded them darkly, "is the root of all evil."

"Actually," said Professor Plum, "it's the *love* of money that is the root of all evil, but let that pass. I'd like to know what your role was in all this."

"I was a victim, too," said Wadsworth. "At least my wife was. She had friends who were—" He took a deep breath, looked around the room, and then cast his eyes down to the floor.

"Friends who were what?" prompted Miss Scarlet.

'Friends who were . . . *Socialists*!'

The guests gasped in horror. So did Yvette, and even her gasp had a strong gallic lisp to it.

Wadsworth shook his head mournfully, and two thick tears spilled out of his eyes. Mrs. White handed him a

handkerchief that was ostentatiously bordered by half an inch of black.

"Well," he went on after he'd wiped away the tears that were welling in his eyes, "we all make mistakes. But Mr. Boddy threatened to give my wife's name to the House un-American Activities Committee unless she named them. She refused—and so he blackmailed her. We had no money—and the price of his silence was that we worked for him for nothing. We were slaves. Well, to make a long story short..."

"Too late," grumbled Colonel Mustard.

If Wadsworth heard, however, he made no apology. "The suicide of my wife preyed on my mind and created a sense of injustice in me. I resolved to put Mr. Boddy behind bars. It seemed to me that the best way to do it—and at the same time to free all of you from the burden of blackmail—was to get us all face to face, confront Mr. Boddy with his crimes, extract a confession, and then turn him over to the police."

Wadsworth stopped, and after a few moments, it was apparent that he had finished with his tale.

Professor Plum stood, and looked at the group. "So! Everything is explained at last."

Mrs. Peacock nodded in vigorous and relieved agreement.

Miss Scarlet shook her head. "Nothing's explained. We don't know who did it."

She pointed at the dead man lying on the carpet at Mrs. Peacock's feet.

Wadsworth nodded agreement. "And the point is, we must find out within the next forty minutes—before the police arrive."

"The police!" cried Mrs. Peacock, leaping to her feet. "Oh, my God! The scandal. I'm a senator's wife. I'll be ruined. My husband's career will be ruined. Even the friends I have who like me won't like me any more."

"But..." faltered Mr. Green, "how can we possibly find out which of you did it?"

They all stared at him.

"What do you mean—which of *you* did it?" demanded Professor Plum.

"Well, *I* didn't do it!" countered Mr. Green.

"One of us certainly did," Wadsworth said. "We all had the opportunity. We all had a motive."

"We'll *all* go to the chair," cried Miss Scarlet, and on her face was painted the horror with which she—and the others as well—contemplated a small room at the bottom of a prison somewhere; three guards; a Catholic priest, a Protestant chaplain, and a rabbi; and eight chairs outfitted with steel caps, welded straps, and dangling electrodes.

"Maybe it *wasn't* one of us!" Professor Plum cried suddenly.

"Who else could it have been?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"Well, who else is in the house?" asked Professor Plum.

Wadsworth and Yvette spoke together at the same instant: "Only the cook."

"*The cook!*" everyone cried, in unison.

They rushed out of the study *en masse*.

The senator from Minnesota pounded the mahogany table with his fist, and droned on. There were Communists everywhere, to hear him tell it, and it was the Friends of Communists who were protecting them, and it was Morally Flabby Americans who didn't care enough to smoke out the Friends of the Communists and turn them in for the traitors that they were. Or something like that.

Wadsworth turned down the volume on the set. The senator from Minnesota pounded the table in silence.

The guests spilled into the kitchen, and looked about. The dishes from dinner were stacked neatly beside the

sink. The cooking utensils had already been washed and put away. Water dripped from the faucet against the porcelain.

"She, the cook is not here," said Yvette.

"That *proves* she did it," Mrs. Peacock maintained.

"No it doesn't," said Mr. Green. "It doesn't prove anything at all, except that she isn't here. We can't possibly accuse—"

Mr. Green stopped with a shudder. He turned toward the noise of a metallic creaking beside him.

Just behind him, the door of a narrow cold cupboard slowly swung open. Two pinpoints of light were reflected in a pair of wide, staring eyes.

"Here she—" began Mr. Green.

Mrs. Ho, the cook, fell face first out of the stone-walled cupboard into Mr. Green's arms. She was nearly as large as he was, and he swung around under her sudden weight.

That was when the others saw the dagger protruding from Mrs. Ho's back, and the red circular stain that surrounded it.

Chapter Nine

Miss Scarlet screamed, and threw her well-manicured hands over her face, as if to blot out the sight. She backed away into the comforting arms of Mrs. White.

All the others stared at Mr. Green, holding up the corpse of the Chinese cook.

Mr. Green was very close to tears. "*I didn't do it!*" he cried.

They all considered this statement for a few moments, as the dead woman began to slip in Mr. Green's sweating grasp.

"Well, *help* me, somebody," he pleaded.

Mrs. White, Colonel Mustard, and—after a moment of hesitation—Miss Scarlet came forward and helped Mr. Green lower the body of the cook to the floor. They set her sideways, and Mrs. White reached for the dagger embedded in her back.

"Don't touch it!" cried Colonel Mustard.

Mrs. White's fingers paused less than an inch away

from the chased hilt. She looked enquiringly up at the Colonel.

"It's evidence," he said.

Mrs. White nodded, then pushed Mrs. Ho over on her face, preserving the knife free of fingerprints, and maintaining its original angle of entry through the cloth and flesh.

"But it's not evidence for us," Wadsworth countered. "We have to find out who did this—and *we* don't have any way to take fingerprints."

Colonel Mustard placed himself squarely before the butler. "I think you'd better explain yourself, Wadsworth," he said, with an apparent attempt to add a threatening tone to his voice.

"Me? Why me?"

"Who would want to kill the cook?" Mr. Green asked.

"The dinner wasn't *that* bad," said Miss Scarlet.

Colonel Mustard gave Miss Scarlet a look that said quite clearly that this was not the time for jokes, be they robust or—as in her case—irredeemably feeble.

Wadsworth looked at the body on the floor. Gravely, he opined, "I'm afraid she has reaped the fruits of her evil and received her just deserts."

"If this was dessert," Miss Scarlet went on irrepressibly, "I'm glad I said no."

Colonel Mustard turned on her savagely. "How can you make *jokes* at a time like this?"

"It's my defense mechanism," she returned quickly and with apparent honesty.

"Some defense," snorted the Colonel. "If I were the killer, I'd kill you next."

Mrs. White and Mr. Green, standing on either side of the Colonel, slowly drew away from him. Their faces were deliberately set and expressionless, as if they were trying to contain their fear and their horror.

"I said 'if,'" protested Colonel Mustard. "'If.' That's all. After all, there's only one admitted killer here, and that's not me. It's her." He tapped Mrs. White on the shoulder, and she shrank from the contact.

"I admitted nothing," she said.

"You paid the blackmail," Colonel Mustard argued, then pursued: "How many husbands have you had?"

"Mine or other women's?"

Mrs. Peacock, who stood braced against a counter out of sight of the dead woman on the floor, looked away from Mrs. White, scandalized by this frank and casual admission of infidelity.

"Yours," said the Colonel.

"Five," replied Mrs. White, surreptitiously counting the accumulated rings on her right hand.

"Five?" repeated Colonel Mustard in astonishment.

"Yes, just the five. Husbands should be like Kleenex—strong, soft, and disposable."

"Their slogan is 'Soft, Strong, and Pops Up, Too,'" Miss Scarlet amended.

"So you don't believe in marriage?" asked the Colonel.

"I certainly do. Perhaps it's because I was educated in a convent, but I'm in the habit."

"You lure men to their death like a spider with flies," said the Colonel, with a solemn shaking of his head.

"You're quite right. Flies are where men are most vulnerable."

Uncomfortably, Colonel Mustard hitched up his trousers.

"Besides," said Mrs. White, "I don't know why I should be subjected to this military tribunal, Colonel Mustard. After all, Mr. Boddy didn't give *me* the dagger."

As one, they turned to Mrs. Peacock, inching along the counter toward the doorway back to the hall.

Her eyes were wide, and she pressed her lips together

anxiously. "Yes, I did have the dagger. I can't deny that. You all saw me with it. But I put it down."

"Where?" asked Professor Plum, blocking the door into the hall.

"In the study."

"When?" asked Professor Plum.

"I don't know. Before I fainted. After I fainted. Who knows? But any of you could have picked it up."

The others considered this for a moment. If Mrs. Peacock had, in fact, put the dagger down, then any of them might, in fact, have picked it up.

"Look," said Wadsworth, "I suggest that we move the cook's body into the study."

"Why?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"Because I like to keep the kitchen tidy," returned Wadsworth, irritated. "And having two dead bodies in the house, it just seems . . . neater, somehow, if we have them both in the same place."

This made sense.

Wadsworth and Professor Plum took an arm apiece, Colonel Mustard and Mr. Green each hefted a leg. Mrs. Ho, who had not been a delicate flower when it came to anatomical construction, sagged perceptibly in the middle.

Mrs. White held open the kitchen door, and the four men struggled out with their burden, rather wishing that like some pianos, Mrs. Ho had come with casters.

"Careful," said Wadsworth, "don't drip." They crossed the hall towards the study.

When they'd attained the door, Wadsworth reached behind him and turned the knob. He pushed the door open, and he and Professor Plum pulled Mrs. Ho arms first into the room.

"Just beside Mr. Boddy, I think," said Wadsworth.

"All right, we—" began Professor Plum, glancing over

his shoulder in order to guide them. But then he stopped and cried in a terrified voice, "Look!" He dropped Mrs. Ho's right arm, and the cook's knuckles rapped soundly against the floor.

"What?" cried the others.

Wadsworth turned as well. "Oh, my God," he cried, and in his astonishment, dropped Mrs. Ho's left arm. Mrs. Ho's left hand, her head, and her shoulders cracked soundly against the floor.

Mr. Green and Colonel Mustard, their view obstructed by the other two men, were in an agony of suspense. "*What is it?*" they demanded.

"It's nothing," said Professor Plum in a quiet voice.

"*Nothing?*"

"Nothing at all," repeated Professor Plum. "Mr. Boddy's body's gone."

Mrs. Ho's body lay face down on the floor of the study, nearly blocking the doorway. Arms and legs were thrown wide, as if she were attempting to butterfly across the carpet. None of the four men who had so unceremoniously dropped her there had moved farther into the study. The quartet stared at the place where, a few minutes before, the evening's first corpse had lain.

"What are you all staring at?" demanded Mrs. Peacock, stalled in the hallway with Mrs. White, Miss Scarlet, and Yvette.

"Nothing," Mr. Green called back.

"Well—who's there?" asked Mrs. Peacock.

"Nobody," replied Colonel Mustard.

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Peacock cried, exasperated.

"Nobody," cried a panic-stricken Wadsworth. "No body. That's what we mean. Mr. Boddy's body. It's gone."

The four women fought to get through the doorway. Colonel Mustard and Mr. Green, however, wouldn't budge. They were immobile with surprise.

"Maybe he wasn't dead," suggested Mrs. White, inadvertently kicking the sole of Mrs. Ho's right shoe, causing a shudder to ripple up through the dead woman's leg—almost as if she, too, might not be dead.

"He was!" Professor Plum maintained.

"We should have made sure," said Mrs. White.

"How?" demanded Mrs. Peacock querulously. "By cutting his head off, I suppose."

"That wasn't called for," said Mrs. White, turning coldly on her neighbor.

"Well, dead or not, where *is* he?" asked Miss Scarlet.

"We'd better look for him," said Wadsworth.

The eight of them cautiously side-stepped the unfortunate cook and fanned out into the room. In eerie silence they opened cupboards, looked under the sofas, crept beneath the desk and tables, peered behind the curtains, even patted the panelling as if in search of a secret spring. But the room, except for the daunting presence of Mrs. Ho, remained straightforwardly cheerful and open. There was nowhere to hide a corpse.

An inescapable conclusion had to be drawn. Mr. Green drew it. "He couldn't have been dead, that's all."

"But he was!" cried Professor Plum, mystified. "At least, I thought he was. But... what difference does it make now?"

"It makes quite a difference to him, I should imagine," said Miss Scarlet dryly. "Maybe there *is* a life after death," she remarked to Mrs. White.

"Life after death is as unlikely as sex after marriage," that lady returned.

"Well, we've got to find out. The police will be here in—" Wadsworth took his watch from the pocket of his

vest, and consulted it. "—in thirty five minutes, and we have another corpse on our hands."

Mr. Green had a sudden inspiration that looked to be a way out of all their difficulties: "Maybe Mr. Boddy killed the cook."

"Yes," said Miss Scarlet.

"Of course," said Mrs. Peacock, who would have grasped at any straw.

"How?" asked Wadsworth.

"Maybe he . . ." began the Colonel, but trailed off. He couldn't work it out, and neither could any of the others.

They were silent.

"Well," said Mrs. Peacock at last, "if you'll excuse me, I have to—ah—have to . . ." She turned to Yvette, and said in a low voice, "Is there a little girls' room in the hall?"

"Oui, oui, madame."

"No," said Mrs. Peacock, pained with embarrassment, "I just want to powder my nose."

"The small door directly under the staircase, madam," said Wadsworth politely, and took her arm as she stepped over the corpse of the cook. He had just closed the hall door behind Mrs. Peacock when Miss Scarlet said, "What's this, Wadsworth?"

He turned. Miss Scarlet had picked up the envelope that was addressed to him, poured out the contents on the table, and picked up a half-dozen three-inch-square photographic negatives. She was holding one of them up to the lamplight.

"I'm afraid those are the negatives to which Colonel Mustard referred earlier," said Wadsworth, stepping forward to reclaim them.

"Oh, my God . . ." said Colonel Mustard. He lurched toward Miss Scarlet and the incriminating evidence.

"Were *you* planning to blackmail him, Wadsworth?"

Miss Scarlet asked coyly, casually moving around the table out of the men's reach.

Wadsworth was visibly appalled at the idea. "Certainly not. I had obtained them for the Colonel, and I was going to give them back when Mr. Boddy was unmasked."

"Very pretty," Miss Scarlet said, scrutinizing a second negative. "Would you like to see these, Yvette? They might shock you."

"No, thank you very much, mademoiselle," replied Yvette with a prim half cursty. "I am a lady."

"Then how do you know what sort of pictures they are?" Miss Scarlet returned.

"What sort of pictures *are* they?" Professor Plum asked, coming around the other side of the table toward Miss Scarlet.

Miss Scarlet started to hand them to the Professor, but Colonel Mustard intervened. "How dare you, madam! Give them to me at once!"

"No," replied Miss Scarlet, palming them smoothly. "I think there's something in them that concerns me, too."

Colonel Mustard reached roughly behind Miss Scarlet to snatch them from her. She spun her arm out of his reach—but right into that of Professor Plum, who took hold of her hand, and quickly pried her fingers from the negatives.

"Let *me* see," he said, holding them up to the light. Colonel Mustard would have moved around the table and snatched them from Professor Plum, but Miss Scarlet smilingly blocked his path.

Mr. Green and Mrs. White peered over Professor Plum's shoulder as he held up the negatives each in turn.

They regarded the first with widened eyes.

Their eyes grew yet wider on the second, and Mr. Green whistled low.

On the third, Mrs. White exclaimed, "Nobody can get into that position."

"Sure they can," said Professor Plum. He spun smoothly around. In one fluid motion, he handed the negatives to Mr. Green, pushed Mrs. White down onto the sofa, swung one leg over the back, slid his left arm down into the crevice between the cushions, and pressed his shoulder against Mrs. White's—

"Get off me!" she shouted.

"Just demonstrating," Professor Plum said amiably, and backed off.

Mrs. Peacock walked slowly down the hall. She could hear the storm beating against the massive staircase window. Up above, the chandeliers were only dimly glowing, and the ceiling of the massive hall was lost in shadows. She looked behind her, before her, and on every side. She glanced into the darkened dining room. It was spectrally lighted with a feeble glow that must have been light from the kitchen spilling through the open serving hatch. She found the small door beneath the staircase without difficulty, but she also found that it was stuck. Or it was locked.

She backed away from the door, and stood for a moment at the foot of the stairs, as if wondering if she shouldn't ascend into the darkness of the upper reaches of Hill House. Certainly there would be bathrooms up there. But it was *very* dark at the top of the stairs, and Mrs. Peacock returned to the little door of the bathroom at the darkest end of the hall.

She put her ear to the door. Nothing was to be heard. She tried the door again. It wouldn't open. She planted her feet firmly, and jerked on the knob.

The door opened.

Mr. Boddy stood there, mouth agape, blood dripping from his chin.

"Oh—"

Mr. Boddy fell forward like a board. His chin snagged on Mrs. Peacock's shoulder, and his heavy arms flung round her back.

Mrs. Peacock screamed and screamed.

Chapter Ten

"It's Mrs. Peacock!" cried Wadsworth after a moment in which everyone in the study stood stock still listening to the screams from the hall.

Everyone rushed for the door. In the crush, the butler grabbed the photographic negatives from Miss Scarlet and threw them onto the table, out of harm's way.

In the hallway, Mrs. Peacock was futilely fighting off Mr. Boddy, who appeared to be hugging her in a sloppy, drunken embrace.

Blood smeared Mrs. Peacock's face and bosom.

"Oh, God, it's Mr. Boddy," exclaimed Professor Plum.

"He's attacking her!" cried Mr. Green.

Wadsworth grabbed one of Mr. Boddy's arms, and Mr. Green the other. They dragged the blackmailer off Mrs. Peacock. Like Mrs. Ho, he sagged towards the ground. When his head slumped forward, it was apparent that the right side of his head had been bashed in. Blood was caked

in his hair, dried around his torn ear, and soaked into the shoulder of his jacket.

"He wasn't attacking her," said Mrs. White, peering at him. "He couldn't have. He's dead."

"Mr. Boddy?" inquired Wadsworth, with Mr. Green carefully laying the man down on an Oriental runner. "Are you dead? Again?"

Mr. Boddy wasn't making any denials, and if, before, he had looked beyond help on the floor of the study, he was looking a great deal worse now.

"Oh, my God," Mrs. Peacock whispered faintly, perhaps with the realization that she had been defending her honor against the provocations of a corpse. She began a slow spiral to the marble floor.

"She's going to faint!" cried Wadsworth.

"Catch her," advised Professor Plum.

"I'll catch you, Mrs. Peacock," said Wadsworth. "Fall into my arms."

He held out his arms, and for a moment Mrs. Peacock tottered backward almost into his grasp. Then, fearing her balance, she staggered forward a step and nearly fell onto the corpse. With a tiny gasp of fright, she dropped straight to the floor in a heap, unconscious.

"Sorry," said Wadsworth.

In sympathy with Wadsworth's attempt to catch Mrs. Peacock, Mr. Green had held out his hands as well. Now he was staring with horror at his upraised, open palms.

"You've got blood on your hands," remarked Mrs. White.

"I didn't do it!!"

Wadsworth knelt on the floor, grasped Mr. Boddy's chin, and turned his head toward the light. "He's got new injuries. He's certainly dead now."

He stood up, pulled down on the points of his vest, and went into the toilet beneath the stairs. Turning around

in the doorway, he announced, "I'm going to look for clues." Then he shut the door firmly.

"Why would anyone want to kill him *twice*?" asked Mr. Green.

"It seems so . . . unnecessary," said Miss Scarlet.

Colonel Mustard, who stood out of the way behind Mr. Green as if the sight of bloody corpses did not agree with his digestion, said, quite reasonably, "It's what we call overkill."

"It's what *we* call psychotic," said Professor Plum.

"Unless he wasn't dead before," insisted Mr. Green.

Professor Plum looked as if he wanted to tear his hair, and tear Mr. Green's hair, too. "*What's the difference?*"

Wadsworth flung open the bathroom door. There was a noise of swirling water behind him. "*That's what we're trying to find out!* We are trying to find out *who* killed him, and *where*, and with *what*!"

"*There's no need to shout!*" shouted Professor Plum.

"All right," said Wadsworth, clearly on edge. "I am though. I'm shouting! I'm shouting! *I'm shouting!*"

In fact, he was shouting so loud that a bloody brass candlestick that had been precariously lodged atop the frame of the bathroom door toppled over and hit him square on the head.

The candlestick fell to the floor with a metallic, reverberating ring.

A moment later, Wadsworth, too, jolted to the floor.

Outside, the storm continued. Twice it had slackened off, only to return with renewed violence. Along the roadside, grass was beaten out of the earth in tufts, and then the earth was washed away. Above Route 41, the trees swayed and thrashed, and old dying limbs that had clung to the trees for seasons crashed to the ground. Small furry

animals dug holes and cowered in them and forgot that they had ever been warm and dry. The moon was directly overhead but hadn't been seen through the clouds for hours.

A lone automobile sped along the highway. The driver was a man, tense and worried. He avoided the sheets of water that had accumulated along either side of the road, fearful of ditches but not at all worried about meeting oncoming cars. He'd encountered none in the past half hour.

Watching out for a particular sign, a particular gate, a particular portion of the landscape that would serve for his directions, he realized that he was going too fast. He gingerly applied his brakes. The car skidded through a film of water before the tires caught. He eased up on the brake, went more slowly as he peered out to the right-hand side of the road.

All was dark.

Except for a tiny spot of white.

An enormous white cat crouched on the side of the road ahead, its eyes gleaming red in the headlights.

The cat bounded out into the highway directly in the path of the car. The stupidity, dangerousness, and pointlessness of this action should have been apparent, even to a wet cat.

The driver slammed on the brakes.

The car skidded, spinning down the road like an ungainly carnival ride.

The cat's head turned, following the progress of the automobile as it circled gracefully around him, and headed off the road toward the trunk of a great black tree.

Mr. Boddy's body lay propped against the jamb of the study door. Professor Plum and Mr. Green had dragged him there, Mr. Green volunteering to take the dead man's

injured side because his hands were already bloody.

They would have brought him all the way in, but Mrs. Ho's body created something of an impasse.

"All right," Colonel Mustard said, loudly from the hall, "I'm in command now. Move the cook."

Mrs. White, Miss Scarlet, and Yvette clambered over Mr. Boddy's legs, and took hold of Mrs. Ho's arms. They dragged her away from the door.

"I want both corpses on the sofa," said Colonel Mustard.

Professor Plum and Mr. Green, dazed by events of recent minutes, did not seem to hear. Colonel Mustard nodded in approbation at their inactivity, however, and pointed to Mrs. Ho: "That's right. Ladies first."

Suddenly jumping to order, Mr. Green and Professor Plum took hold of Mrs. Ho's dragging legs. In a few minutes more, they had Mrs. Ho more or less on the sofa. As Yvette leaned forward and tried to arrange the cook's left arm in an artistic and natural manner in her lap, Professor Plum became mesmerized by his clear and close view of the upper portion of Yvette's torso. So close was his attention, in fact, that he might have been counting the stitches in her bustline hem, though probably he was counting something else entirely.

"Careful," Wadsworth said groggily from the doorway. He rubbed his head where the candlestick had beamed him. "Don't get blood on the sofa. Look what you're doing, Professor!"

"I'm looking, I'm looking!"

"How is this to be done?" asked Yvette. "If we lean her against the cushion of the sofa, the dagger she will go deeper into the back of the cook."

Colonel Mustard considered this a moment, then instructed: "Tip her forward, over the arm of the sofa."

Yvette and Mrs. White arranged this, and then looked to Colonel Mustard, who nodded his satisfaction. Miss

Scarlet spread out the hem of Mrs. Ho's skirt, to cover a little drop of blood that had spilled on a white chintz rose.

"Now Mr. Boddy," said Colonel Mustard.

The process was repeated, but this time with more dispatch as they were now practiced at the transportation and arrangement of corpses.

They all stood back, looked at the little tableau, and then turned to Colonel Mustard, as if to say, *what next?*

Colonel Mustard was in his best mode—that of command. "Now—who had access to the candlestick?"

Miss Scarlet spoke up swiftly. "All of us."

"You were given it," Mrs. White reminded her.

"Yes, but I dropped it when the lights went out. Anyone could have picked it up. You—him—"

"Look," said Wadsworth, "there are still all these weapons—" He pointed them out in the room, where they had been laid aside on tables, dropped beside chairs, or kicked beneath the desk. "The rope, the wrench, the lead pipe, and the gun. The candlestick is still out in the hall," he said, rubbing his head ruefully. "And the dagger is in Mrs. Ho's back. So what I would suggest is that we put them in this cupboard and lock it. I don't need to remind you all that there's a homicidal maniac about."

This seemed like a good idea, and the guests looked at one another and nodded approval of the plan. The weapons were gathered up, and Wadsworth placed all the items in the closed cupboard of the secretary. Then he shut the doors, turned the key in the lock, and slipped the key into his pocket.

"Why are you putting that key into your pocket?" Mr. Green asked suspiciously.

"To keep it safe, obviously."

"But that means you can open the cupboard whenever you want," Mrs. Peacock protested. She'd staggered in a few minutes before, wan and pale, but recovered from

her fainting spell. It was with some disapproval that she'd regarded the two corpses half sprawled together on the sofa.

"It also means that *you* can't," he returned pointedly.

"But what if you're the murderer?" Mrs. Peacock persisted.

"I'm not," Wadsworth replied simply.

"But what if you are?" said Colonel Mustard.

"The key has to be put *somewhere*. And if I've got it, I know I'm safe."

"But we don't know *we* are," said Mrs. White, with quiet emphasis.

"So where *do* we leave it?" asked Mr. White.

"In the lock?" suggested Yvette.

"Oh, brilliant," said Wadsworth, and rolled his eyes.

"Wait, I've an idea—we'll throw the key away."

Without waiting for a seconding opinion, he rushed out of the study. The others followed him hastily into the hall.

"Unlock the door," Wadsworth said, handing Mr. Green the key for the deadbolt lock. Mr. Green fumbled for a few moments while Wadsworth held his hand upraised, ready to hurl the key into the storm.

Mr. Green at last succeeded in releasing the bolt. He turned the knob and flung the door open wide.

Wadsworth's arm froze in mid-hurl.

"No!" cried the stranger who stood open-mouthed in surprise on the doorstep. He cowered beneath Wadsworth's upraised fist. "Please don't hit me!"

Chapter Eleven

"Oh, sorry," said Wadsworth, clearing his throat uncomfortably. "Sorry. Ah . . . can we help?"

The stranger in the doorway stared at the eight persons, equally divided between the sexes, who crowded the doorway, staring at him with varying mixtures of fear, suspicion, and hysteria.

"I'm sorry . . ." he said faintly, echoing Wadsworth. "I didn't mean to disturb the whole household . . . but my car broke down out here, and I was wondering if I could use your phone."

"Just a moment, please," Wadsworth said, resuming the manner of the butler.

The eight persons in the doorway fell into a whispered colloquium on the merits of this request, with some arguing for, just as many against, several undecided, and a few more changing their opinions in mid-course. It finally came down to the point that to refuse the stranger use of the phone would be suspicious.

The group did not consider that their behavior might already appear a little out-of-the-ordinary to the wide-eyed motorist cowering in the doorway, with the storm beating at his back.

Wadsworth turned, and with as much dignity as he could muster under the circumstances, said, "Very well, sir. Would you like to come in?"

The motorist quickly stepped inside, as if fearful that if he did not move fast enough they would change their minds and slam the door in his face. "Well," he asked, "where is it?"

Wadsworth's dignity fled. "What?" he stammered. "The body?"

Mr. Green gasped, and Mrs. Peacock emitted a tight little scream.

The motorist stared. "The phone," he said. "What body?"

"There's no body," said Wadsworth. "Nobody, I mean. There's *nobody* in the *study*."

He pointed to the study door.

The motorist went straight for it, evidently thinking the telephone inside.

Miss Scarlet's arms flew out in an attempt to grab the motorist, but he was already beyond her grasp.

"No!" cried Wadsworth. The motorist hesitated. "That phone's been disconnected, but I think there's one in the—" Wadsworth glanced at Yvette. She whispered something to him behind her hand. "—in the lounge," said Wadsworth.

"Thank you," said the motorist. "Where is the lounge?"

Wadsworth closed his eyes in relief. "Walk this way."

The six guests and Yvette stared at the motorist in mingled hope and fear. The motorist, perhaps misinterpreting this attention, was very careful to follow Wadsworth, imitating, as much as possible, the butler's idiosyncratically dignified gait.

* * *

The lounge was a room smaller than either the library or the study. It was also less formal than either, and had perhaps been used by those former inmates of Hill House who wanted a couch where they could put up their feet, or a little corner to pursue a conversation that wasn't going to be overheard, or read a lurid mystery novel without fear of interruption.

Wadsworth pointed out the telephone on a small table between two deeply upholstered chairs.

"When you've made your call, perhaps you would be good enough to wait here?" Wadsworth asked.

"Certainly," replied the motorist, and a moment later, as Wadsworth closed the door softly behind him, found himself alone. Without moving from the spot, he looked all about the room. Then he went cautiously to the telephone and picked up the receiver. He poked one well-manicured finger into the 0 on the dial, but stopped—

He stared at the door to the hall, listening to the small, distinct noise of the key being turned in the lock.

The motorist put down the receiver quietly. He crossed to the door, put his ear to the panel and listened. He looked at the knob as if he meant to try it—but he did not. He started back to the telephone.

Lightning struck to the east, and for a few moments a cold blue light suffused the room—brighter than the lamp that the butler had turned on—and shadowed the lines of anxiety in the motorist's brow.

"Now," said Colonel Mustard, "where's that key?"

Wadsworth silently pointed to the door of the lounge. "Still in the lock," he whispered.

"Not *that* key," said Professor Plum. "The key to the cupboard. With the weapons."

"You still wish me to throw it away?"

"Yes," cried everyone.

"Very well."

Wadsworth stepped quickly to the other end of the hall. Mr. Green scurried ahead, and once again pulled open the front door, which had remained unlocked since the entrance of the motorist.

No one was waiting on the stoop this time. Rain pelted the gravel drive and drummed against the guests' automobiles. The wind thrashed the limbs of the ancient, massive trees on the grounds of Hill House. Everything was wet, and chill, and black. Wadsworth drew the key from his pocket and flung it into the densest part of a nearby shrubbery.

They didn't even hear it land.

Mr. Green pushed the door shut.

"What now?" Wadsworth asked of the assembled guests and Yvette.

"What now?" echoed Mrs. White. "'What now' is I'm leaving." She reached for the handle of the door.

"No," said Wadsworth, blocking her path.

"Why not?"

"We've *got* to find out who did it," replied Wadsworth.

"It's not longer just *it*," Professor Plum pointed out. "There have been two murders."

"We're all in this together now," said Wadsworth.

"If you leave," said Mrs. Peacock primly to Mrs. White, "I'll say you killed them both."

That seemed like a good idea, and Mrs. Peacock was seconded by all the others.

"Wadsworth," said Mrs. White with a smile that was more than a little unpleasant and suggestive, "one day when we're alone together, I'll make you very sorry you ever started all this."

"Mrs. White, no man in his right mind would ever be alone with you. Now listen—" The butler checked his

watch "—we've got twenty-five minutes left till the police get here."

"Yes," agreed Colonel Mustard, "but first things first. I need a drink."

There was a general chorus of agreement from the guests, and Colonel Mustard was already in the lead for the library. As he passed the door of the study, he quietly pushed it open and peered inside.

Mr. Boddy and Mrs. Ho were still sprawled on the sofa.

"Just checking," he remarked to the others.

"Everything all right?" asked Mrs. Peacock anxiously.

"Oh, yes. Two corpses. Everything's just fine."

Bringing up the rear, Wadsworth glanced at the study door, and murmured to himself, "Two corpses. Two corpses. Everything's *fine*?"

The library had two very distinct advantages over the study. The first was that it had two full decanters of whiskey. The second was that it had no corpses at all.

Colonel Mustard poured himself a stiff drink in a crystal tumbler. "Anybody else want a whiskey?"

Miss Scarlet, Mr. Green, and Professor Plum stepped forward, and Professor Plum poured out three more stiff dollops of the liquor.

"Right," Colonel Mustard said approvingly. "Pay attention, everyone." By his tone, he was still in charge, and he intended to get to the bottom of all this. "Wadsworth, am I right in thinking that there is nobody else in this house?"

"No."

Colonel Mustard eyed him anxiously over the rim of the tumbler. "You mean, there *is* someone else?"

"No. Sorry. I said no meaning yes."

"No meaning yes?" asked Colonel Mustard, confused

at the very outset of his examination. "Look, I want a straight answer. Is there someone else here or isn't there? Yes or no?"

Wadsworth considered the question carefully. "Ah... no."

Colonel Mustard considered the answer carefully. "No there is or no there isn't?"

"Yes," Wadsworth replied immediately.

If Colonel Mustard had not been holding a tumbler, and if he had been a few yards nearer Wadsworth, and if he perhaps hadn't feared retaliation, he would probably have struck the butler.

Wadsworth said nothing else. His mouth had clamped shut decisively, as if he were himself upset at having every answer questioned.

"Please," said Mrs. White. "Shouldn't we get that man—that motorist—out of the house before he finds out what's been going on here?"

"Yeah," agreed Miss Scarlet.

"How can we put him outside in this weather?" demanded Professor Plum.

"If we let him stay in the house, he may get suspicious," argued Miss Scarlet.

"If we throw him out, he may get even more suspicious," retorted Professor Plum.

"If I were him, I'd be suspicious already," said Colonel Mustard.

"Look, that man *doesn't matter!*" cried Mrs. Peacock. "Let him stay locked up for another half an hour. *Who cares?* The police will be here by then, and there are *two dead bodies in the study!*"

"Shhhhhhhh!" the others cried in agony of warning.

"Well, *what do you suggest we do?*" Mr. Green hissed in a low emphatic whisper. Mrs. Peacock turned away huffily.

Colonel Mustard took a long swig of his drink. He

looked around the room. He wiped his mouth. He blinked his eyes hard several times, as if he were having trouble focusing them. He shook his head vigorously, as if he were having the same trouble focusing his brain and thoughts as well. "There seems to be some confusion about whether or not we are the only people in this house."

"I told you there wasn't," Wadsworth cried angrily.

"You mean there isn't any confusion or there isn't anybody else?" returned the Colonel, beginning a new round of irritation with a leg up.

"Either," said Wadsworth, looking a little confused now himself. "Or both."

"Then give me a clear answer."

"Certainly," replied the butler. He looked at the Colonel. "What was the question?"

"Is there anyone else in the house?"

Wadsworth opened his mouth to reply, but the others, infuriated by this tedious exchange, shouted, as one, "No!"

Colonel Mustard was still unsure, evidently, for he laid a steely eye on Wadsworth. "That's what he says," the Colonel said darkly. "But does he *know*? And even if he *knows*, is he telling the *truth*? I suggest we handle this in a proper military fashion. Split up and search the house. Top to bottom. Inside and out."

"We can't get outside," Miss Scarlet pointed out.

"Top to bottom," said Colonel Mustard. "Front to back and side to side. How's that?"

"I don't like the part about splitting up," said Mrs. Peacock.

Colonel Mustard pointedly consulted his watch. "We don't have much time, so we're going to have to split up into pairs."

"*Pairs?*" said Plum.

"Yes," replied Mustard.

"Wait a minute," said Professor Plum, looking around at the others with considerable misgiving. "Suppose one

of us *is* the murderer. If we split up into pairs, whichever one of us is left alone with the killer might be killed!"

Colonel Mustard nodded his head triumphantly. "Then we would have discovered who the murderer was."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peacock, "but the other half of the pair would be *dead*!"

Colonel Mustard shrugged philosophically. "This is war. Casualties are inevitable. You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. Every cook will tell you that."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peacock, "but look what happened to the cook."

There was a moment in which each of the guests silently contemplated the fate of Mrs. Ho.

"Are you willing to take that chance?" Mr. Green asked Colonel Mustard.

"What choice have we?" returned the Colonel.

He looked from one face to another, evidently in expectation of a loud and fervent chorus of *none*, but none was forthcoming. After a bit, though, there was a ragged murmuring of *I suppose sos* and *I guess it'll have to be that ways*.

"*Bon d'accord*," Yvette said carefully, though she still made the French phrase sound like an exotic Swiss choc-of the dark." She crossed her arms across her bosom—a bit of a stretch—and shook herself as if with shivers of fear. Other parts of her body shook, too. She looked up plaintively. "Who will go with me, *s'il vous plaît*?"

"*I will*," cried Professor Plum.

And Colonel Mustard.

And Wadsworth.

With one emphatic voice.

Chapter Twelve

Yvette put her hands to her cheek, as if to hide a blush—or as if to hide the fact that she wasn't blushing at all. The other ladies glowered. Colonel Mustard, Professor Plum, and Wadsworth looked sheepishly at one another.

"I suggest we draw lots for partners," said Wadsworth with recovered dignity.

From the mantelpiece he took a box of eight-inch matches, and walked out of the room, gesturing for the others to follow.

The group came quietly out into the hall, and saw Wadsworth enter the kitchen. Silently they followed, casting curious glances toward the door of the lounge, as if wondering that the motorist had not yet tried to escape from the locked room.

They quietly pushed open the door of the kitchen, and went inside. Wadsworth stood at the center table with his back to them, in the act of shutting a drawer.

Mrs. Peacock went straight up to him, "Wadsworth, I still don't think—"

He turned on Mrs. Peacock with a carving knife.

It was black-handled, steel-bladed, and sharp. It glinted in the light, as if Mrs. Ho's last act on earth had been to polish it to exemplary brightness.

Mrs. Peacock gasped and fell back.

"Ready?" asked Wadsworth.

The others stared. "Ready for what?" Professor Plum asked at last. "Are we ready to die?"

"No," said Wadsworth, "are we ready to choose straws?"

He turned back to the counter and began to cut eight matches from the box into pairs of varying lengths. Then he arranged the matches in his hand so that it was impossible to tell which were long and which were short.

Wadsworth thought for a minute, then decided, "Each of us will take a match and find its partner. Agreed? And let's say the two shortest search the cellar, and so on up."

No one stepped forward. Wadsworth casually plucked out one of the matches. It appeared to be a longish one. "Mrs. Peacock?" he asked politely.

Mrs. Peacock hesitantly stepped forward and drew a match from Wadsworth's fist. She had chosen what appeared to be one of the very shortest. She trembled, and fell back.

Then the rest of the ladies came forward: Mrs. White, Miss Scarlet, and Yvette. Then the gentlemen: Mr. Green, Professor Plum, and Colonel Mustard.

Comparing lengths, Professor Plum looked out for his partner. He grinned smarmily and elbowed Mrs. Peacock in the ribs. "It's you and me, honey."

"Yuck!" cried Mrs. Peacock. The expression wasn't one she cultivated, but it sprang instantly to her lips nevertheless. "Why don't we all search the house together?" she suggested, with a hint of desperation in her voice.

"We haven't the time," said Wadsworth. "Find your partners, and let's go."

All eight—effective prisoners in Hill House till they discovered who had murdered Mr. Boddy and Mrs. Ho—came out into the hall again. Standing away from the lounge door, they divided themselves into proper pairs.

Wadsworth directed Professor Plum and Mrs. Peacock to a dark door in a darker corner. "The cellar stairs are just beyond," he said. Mrs. Peacock groaned a little groan that spoke volumes on the subject of her willingness to descend into the nether regions of Hill House in the company of Professor Plum.

Wadsworth, Mrs. White, Mr. Green, and Yvette started up the main stairs towards the upper floors. Lightning flashed outside, illuminating in bluish-white light their set, frightened faces on the stairway.

Colonel Mustard and Miss Scarlet remained in the first floor hall.

"Well..." said Colonel Mustard, some of his bluster drained away. It was lonely and disconcerting being two, after having been eight for so long. "We know what's in the study. We've just come from the library. There was nothing to be seen in the kitchen just now. The motorist is locked in the lounge. So?..."

"Let's look at the billiard room again," suggested Miss Scarlet.

Perhaps she suggested it because it was the nearest door, or perhaps because it seemed improbable that the murderer would secrete himself in a room that contained nothing more than a billiard table and a couple of shallow cupboards.

The room appeared to be exactly as they'd left it earlier. Nothing they could see was altered in any way. Without a word to one another, Miss Scarlet and Colonel

Mustard again searched the room, looking under the table, in the cupboards, behind the draperies.

Quite evidently, and to their manifest relief, they were alone in the room.

The quartet that had mounted the stairs separated on the second floor landing. Mr. Green and Yvette continued upward, towards the servants' quarters and the attic.

Wadsworth and Mrs. White turned down a wide corridor. It was wide and windowless, darkly papered and carpeted, and only dimly illuminated by infrequent electric sconces.

At the first two doors, on the same side of the hallway, they paused and looked at one another. They shrugged, turned the knobs, and pushed open the doors.

"Mine's dark inside," Mrs. White said uncertainly, peering into a chamber that wasn't dark so much as *black*.

"Mine, too," said Wadsworth. "Are you going in there?"

"Yes," said Mrs. White, not very convincingly. "Are you?"

"Yes."

Neither moved. They looked at one another suspiciously.

"Right," Wadsworth said decisively with one foot on the threshold.

"Right," echoed Mrs. White, imitating the foot upon the threshold.

That was as far as they got for a few moments.

"I—ah—I can't see any light switch," said Wadsworth finally.

"Neither can I. But in these old houses, they put the switches by the beds."

There was another pause.

"I can't see the bed," said Wadsworth.

"Neither can I," said Mrs. White.

"Perhaps I should come in there with you," Wadsworth suggested.

"No!" cried Mrs. White, but then she added, "I mean . . . no, thank you."

Wadsworth lifted his leg and put his left foot past his right foot into the room itself.

Mrs. White imitated.

Both were swallowed up into blackness.

A moment later, two heads appeared in the corridor again. Mrs. White and Wadsworth exchanged tight little smiles.

"Find the light switch yet?" Mrs. White asked innocently.

"Not yet," said Wadsworth, with gentle insouciance. "You?"

"Not yet."

Once again, they were swallowed up into blackness.

Mr. Green and Yvette stood at the foot of the narrow staircase that led up to the attic. Rain beat at the glass of the skylight directly overhead. A dim yellow bulb in a dusty yellow casing burned dismally at their side, and served only to show how dark and black it was everywhere else.

"Do you want to go in front of me?" Mr. Green asked politely.

"*Non*," returned Yvette.

"I'm sure there's no one up there."

"Then *you* go in front," said Yvette.

"All right," said Mr. Green. He didn't move. After a few moments, he took out his handkerchief and wiped a little dust from the yellow casing of the dim yellow bulb.

"I hate dust," he told Yvette.

Beyond the dark door in the downstairs hallway was a short panelled passage. Its ending, if it had one, was lost in obscurity. The panelling soon gave out to exposed brick. A flight of wide flagstone steps descended into darkness and the unknown. It probably felt damper here than it did outside.

"Well," said Professor Plum, "ladies first."

"Ah, no," said Mrs. Peacock, "we're all friends here. You go first."

"I do insist," said Professor Plum.

"No, no. *I* insist."

"What are you frightened of, Mrs. Peacock, a fate worse than death?"

"No," returned Mrs. Peacock, "just death. Isn't that enough?" She maneuvered herself decisively *behind* Professor Plum, and gave him a little nudge. Mrs. Peacock's diamond solitaire sliced through the fabric of his jacket like a razor through waxed paper.

Professor Plum said with a grimace, "I won't go ahead of you, and you won't go ahead of me. So I deduce that we will go together."

"There's no way around it," Mrs. Peacock sighed.

The flagstone steps were not only cold and wet, they were slippery. Their descent was in blackness and ignorance.

"What do you suppose is behind those doors?" asked Colonel Mustard, pointing to two massive double doors at the far end of the hall, past the lounge and past the conservatory.

"I don't know," said Miss Scarlet. "I don't think anyone's been down here all evening."

Cautiously, they approached the doors, which were every bit as large as the entrance doors of Hill House.

Colonel Mustard turned the handle and gently pushed the doors wide.

A vast cavern of blackness opened beyond.

"What room's this?" Colonel Mustard asked again.

"Search me." Miss Scarlet shrugged.

"Okay," Colonel Mustard said quickly, as if he'd just been waiting for her to say the magic words. He clapped two heavy, sweating paws against her sides, and began to run them over her scantily clothed flesh.

"I didn't mean that literally!" she cried, pushing him into the darkness of the room beyond. "So get your mitts off me!"

Mr. Green and Yvette still lingered at the bottom of the attic stairs. Neither had moved a foot, though the yellow casing of the dim yellow bulb was sparkling clean.

"Go on," said Yvette impatiently. "I'll be right behind you."

Mr. Green lowered his voice and eyes. "That's why I'm nervous."

"Then we go together," said Yvette, who evidently had no wish to mount the stairs ahead of Mr. Green, leaving her back very nearly as exposed as her front.

Together, their inside elbows jammed against each other and their thighs pressed against the walls, Yvette and Mr. Green proceeded slowly and awkwardly up the narrow stairs.

"If there's anybody in here," Wadsworth intoned weakly, sounding as confident as if he were, for the first time, stepping up to an AA podium, "just look out!"

He groped for a switch, a lamp, any familiar piece of furniture.

He found the bed when he knocked his shin against

the footboard and fell face forward onto the mattress.

He crawled up the mattress, reaching out to the left, hoping to come into contact with a bedside table. Nothing.

He tried the other side.

His hand brushed a lamp and knocked it over.

He caught it before it broke, righted it, and found the switch.

He turned on the lamp.

He sat up on the bed, resting his head against the wall, and looked about the room.

It was plainly but comfortably furnished. Every corner was visible to him. There was no closet, and a standing wardrobe stood leeringly empty. No one was hiding in this bedroom, at any rate.

Unless they were under the bed, of course.

In the next room, Mrs. White blundered blindly.

"Are you hiding? Whoever *you* are. If you *are* hiding, I'm coming. And you'd better look out!"

A pallid rectangle of light suddenly appeared in the wall, outlining a door to the adjoining bedroom. Wadsworth had evidently switched on a light in there.

When Mrs. White turned again, two glinting eyes stared at her from the corner of the room.

"Who are you? Who is it? Who are you?" she demanded feverishly, retreating with hasty steps.

Something jutting into her back told her she'd backed into the wall switch. She whirled around and flicked it on, then turned slowly back.

She was in the nursery of Hill House. A child's room, with a child's bed, and a child's dream of toys—an army of dolls, a menagerie of stuffed animals, a corral of hobby horses, a Chicago of model trains, and in the corner, a mama doll, as big as Mrs. White herself, with wide staring eyes.

* * *

Professor Plum and Mrs. Peacock, holding one another's sweating hands, at last reached the bottom of the wide flagstone steps that led to the cellar.

"I suppose I expected a wine cellar with cobwebs," said Professor Plum.

"I expected a vast furnace, water heaters, that sort of thing," said Mrs. Peacock.

What they found was merely another set of narrow, black corridors, and dark, fathomless rooms opening off them. Perhaps the rooms contained water heaters, and furnaces, and racks with old bottles of wine with cobwebs obscuring the labels—but that was impossible to tell without further investigation.

They ventured a few feet down the corridor directly before them. Then Mrs. Peacock, with a wary eye on Professor Plum, backed into the room on her left, and Professor Plum, with an even warier eye on Mrs. Peacock, backed into the room on the right.

Colonel Mustard crept along the wall to the left-hand side of the double doors. Miss Scarlet went opposite, along the right-hand side. This was Miss Scarlet's idea.

Miss Scarlet found the light switch first.

Three enormous crystal and brass chandeliers flamed on in an explosion of light.

The room was massive—about thirty feet wide, and twice that in length. The floor was parquet, the walls were cut velvet. Along one long wall were tall French windows, covered with silk draperies. The only furnishings were about a dozen painted and upholstered chairs set around the walls, and a massive, painted grand piano that languished in a far corner.

"It's the ballroom," concluded Miss Scarlet.

"Nobody here," said Colonel Mustard, pleased and anxious to leave. Perhaps he had no wish to encounter the murderer stalking Hill House. Perhaps he only wished to explore some more confining space in the company of Miss Scarlet.

"Nobody here," Miss Scarlet repeated nervously, "unless they're hiding in those cupboards down at the other end, or behind those curtains."

Colonel Mustard cleared his throat. "You look, Miss Scarlet, I'll search the kitchen."

He was already gone before Miss Scarlet had the opportunity—if she had wished—to object to this change in their plans. Taking courage, Miss Scarlet walked to the far end of the ballroom, heels clacking with an echo against the parquet. One by one, she pulled open the cupboard doors. Just empty space for the hanging of coats and the storage of musical paraphernalia. Nothing but an assortment of music stands and coat hangers.

She turned with relief from the last cupboard.

That was when she saw one of the curtains shimmer furtively.

She stared.

A moment later it moved again.

Miss Scarlet moved slowly and fearfully towards the curtain.

She stood before it.

No more movement.

She reached out, her hand inches away.

Suddenly the curtain billowed out toward her. She grabbed the material and jerked it aside.

A sharp gust of rain-sodden wind blew through a broken pane in the French doors.

The clouds that had produced lightning and thunder had passed over Hill House, and were now frightening people in another part of the country.

But the rain and wind continued unabated, a steady drumming against the earth and everything that walked upon it.

On Route 41, the motorist's car was plunged nose-first into a ditch, almost as if it were trying to dig down to a place that was warm and dry.

Beside the car, in a black and yellow slicker, stood a policeman, eyeing the vehicle suspiciously.

With the side of his hand, he wiped away the moisture on the driver's window, and peered into the darkness within. He tried the handle of the door, but it was locked.

He moved down behind the car and looked at the license plate. He looked up the hill behind the gates, to the yellow lights shimmering in the windows of Hill House.

Mrs. Ho and Mr. Boddy remained sprawled on the sofa in the study. They looked as if they had found themselves at a very dull party and were having every difficulty in the world keeping their eyes open.

Their eyes were open, in point of fact, but they did not blink, and they did not follow the movements of the third party in the room.

On the desk lay scattered the contents of the envelope that bore Wadsworth's name. Besides the negatives that had so interested Colonel Mustard and Miss Scarlet, there were several letters in their original envelopes, a couple of dossiers, some transcripts with official documentation attached, and a spool of recording tape. And besides all this, there were four photographs, five inches by eight inches, in black and white, which had been placed in a neat square, as if for study and comparison.

The top two photographs were of the two bored and disinterested spectators—Mr. Boddy and Mrs. Ho, the cook. The third photograph was of Mr. Green, smiling—

his arm about a male companion whose face had been cropped by the photographer.

The fourth photograph was of an army driver, sitting at the wheel of a Jeep, deftly—and mockingly—saluting into the camera. This army driver bore a striking resemblance—with the difference of a few years in age—to the motorist, who had been locked in the lounge.

Mrs. Ho and Mr. Boddy watched—but did not strictly see—as these photographs, and the rest of the material, were gathered together, thrown back into the envelope, and the envelope tossed onto the burning logs in the fireplace.

The envelope caught fire immediately. The contents spilled out over the pyramid of logs, and began to burn.

Mr. Boddy and Mrs. Ho seemed mesmerized, and did not turn their gaze from the destruction of Mr. Boddy's blackmail evidence.

Behind them, however, was the noise of a key being inserted into a lock. A small cupboard door creaked open with an uncoiled whine, and there was a trifle more noise as one of Mr. Boddy's weapons was drawn from its hiding place.

"I'm a little nervous," said the motorist quietly. And even at that he held his hand cupped over the receiver. "I'm in this big house, and I've been locked into the lounge." He listened a moment to the party on the other end of the line. "Yes, I know," he went on after a moment, "and the funny thing is, there's a whole group of people having some sort of strange party and one of them is my old boss from—"

That was as far as the motorist got in his call.

There was a muffled *thump*, and then the receiver was swinging in a graceful arc at the end of its cord. A tinny,

frantic voice sounded on the other end. A moment later, the receiver was quietly replaced on the set and the tinny, frantic voice was heard no more.

Mr. Boddy's new wrench, now blood-stained, was dropped on the gay lounge carpet directly beside the corpse of the motorist.

Chapter Thirteen

"Colonel Mustard?" Miss Scarlet called hesitantly in the hallway. She closed the doors of the ballroom behind her, then called his name again. "Colonel Mustard?"

He appeared at her side a moment later, around the corner from the nook beneath the stairs.

"There's no one in the kitchen," he said. "And just as well, I might add."

"Shall we try the conservatory?" Miss Scarlet asked, pointing hesitantly at the glass-paned door at the back corner of the hallway.

Colonel Mustard nodded unenthusiastically, and the pair went inside. They stopped in the vestibule, contemplating the pair of low, wide stairs that led up into the octagonal room at the back of the house. The conservatory was dark, and the overgrown plants—trees, woody vines, and flowers long gone to seed—cast strange, ambiguous shadows.

"It's a jungle in here," Miss Scarlet said nervously.

Colonel Mustard was running his hands up and down the wall, and at last came into contact with the light switch.

Lights came on, but they didn't do much. The jungle in dead of night became a jungle at twilight, hardly less ominous and threatening than before. Miss Scarlet made a few tentative steps into the foliage, holding her hands protectively before her.

"Look!" cried Colonel Mustard, pointing just to their left.

In the dark wall, a vertical panel was ajar.

He motioned Miss Scarlet over, and the two of them cautiously approached the disturbed panel. They stood still and listened. Hearing nothing, Colonel Mustard pulled the disguised door wider open.

Steps were visible, leading down.

Beyond, all was darkness.

"Looks like a secret passage to me," said Miss Scarlet, exchanging a nervous glance with the Colonel. "Shall we see where it leads?" she asked, as she might have asked: Shall we pull the pin on this hand grenade and see if it explodes?

Colonel Mustard looked about as if he hoped someone would answer this question for him in a decided negative, but he and Miss Scarlet were apparently alone in the conservatory.

In fact, on a small table near the secret passage stood a powerful flashlight—as if someone *wanted* them to explore the passage. (Another good reason *not* to, of course.) Colonel Mustard picked up the flashlight, and pressed his thumb against the switch. A powerful beam of white light spun down into the blackness of the passageway.

"What the hell!" he said resignedly. "I'll go first. I've had a good life."

There were twelve steps down. At the bottom they paused.

"We're in the cellar," said Miss Scarlet. The words echoed.

Colonel Mustard played the light upon the walls of the passage. They were of stone, regular, and featureless. They neither widened nor contracted nor turned.

They went forward, forty feet or so.

"More steps," said Colonel Mustard. He waited till Miss Scarlet had caught up to him. She fumbled for his hand. Miss Scarlet's attitude towards physical intimacy with Colonel Mustard was evidently quite different in a narrow, dark tunnel than it was in a wide, open, lighted ballroom.

They climbed the steps—twelve more. They were evidently on the first floor again. At the top they encountered a wall—not of stone, but of wood. "Is there another panel?" Miss Scarlet asked.

Colonel Mustard pushed his hand against one corner of the terminating wall. Nothing moved.

"Try the other side," Miss Scarlet suggested nervously. He did so.

The panel swung wide, and they could see that they had emerged into another room of the house, but which room they could not tell. Moonlight struggled through a crack in the shutters—evidently the storm was over outside.

"Why is it dark in here?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"Because there's no light," returned Miss Scarlet, stepping boldly through.

Colonel Mustard remained on the threshold of the secret passageway, panning his flashlight over the room. It played over random bits of upholstery, wood, and glass, but it still wasn't apparent exactly what room they had entered.

"Have you figured out—" he began, but just then Miss Scarlet gave out an *ooofff*, and after she'd recovered her breath, expended it again in a startled yelp. Colonel Mustard heard her stumble and fall to the floor.

"Miss Scarlet!" he cried, stepping out of the panel, but just then someone pushed him from behind, and he stumbled forward, dropping the flashlight.

The light went out.

"What's that? What happened?" he cried, then barked his shins on the corner of a low table.

"Did you push me?" demanded Miss Scarlet.

"No. Did you push me?"

"No. I fell over."

"Did you hurt yourself?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"No," she said. "Fortunately, I landed on something soft."

Miss Scarlet, on her hands and knees, felt about for the something soft that she had tripped over.

After a moment she found it. What she had tripped over was vaguely round, and about the size of a honeydew melon. It had soft spots, hard spots, hairy spots, and wet, sticky spots. And at the bottom it was attached to something else. Miss Scarlet came to an unpleasant conclusion. "It's a body," she cried.

"Whose?" cried Colonel Mustard, from several feet away.

"I don't—" Miss Scarlet broke off. She was silent for a moment, and then in a low, dreadful voice she said, "There's somebody else in this room, Colonel Mustard."

The flashlight beam was suddenly switched on. It shone briefly and blindingly in Miss Scarlet's face, and then in Colonel Mustard's.

Colonel Mustard swung out his arm. There was a smack of boned flesh against material, and the flashlight flew through the air. It knocked against some piece of furniture and dropped to the floor. For one brief ghastly moment it shone into the rictal face of the dead motorist on the carpet.

Then the flashlight was kicked and slid spinning across the floor underneath a table. The light winked out as the

batteries were jarred away in the casing.

"The murderer's in here!" cried Colonel Mustard.

"I'm in here with a murderer!" screamed Miss Scarlet.

Colonel Mustard leaped forward toward Miss Scarlet's voice, tripped over something that was wide and soft and very probably a dead man. He toppled over onto Miss Scarlet, who screamed again.

"Eeeeeiiiiieeeeeyyyyyyy!"

Colonel Mustard shook her. She screamed again, the identical scream, only a good deal louder. When she was done with that, she beat against the Colonel's shoulders with her fists. "Leave me alone!" she yelled frantically.

"It's me. Colonel Mustard."

"So it's *you*!"

"Of course it's me!"

Just the attic of Hill House was as vast as some people's houses, but it seemed cramped and small because the roof was steeply pitched, and every available inch was crammed with chests and trunks, suitcases, broken furniture, crates and boxes and bundles, grandfather clocks that no longer kept the time, stacks of portraits of the dead and forgotten, and dust and cobwebs sufficient to cover everything and make a thorough investigation very nasty for someone as fastidious as Mr. Green.

At least, however, Yvette had found a light switch, and half a dozen dim bulbs in rusting cages shone pallidly down on this forgotten lumber room.

The two poked about miserably, waiting for something to happen.

What happened was the noise of a muffled screaming from the lower part of the house, filtering up two stairways and through the open attic door. It was definitely a woman's scream, once repeated and then still.

Mr. Green and Yvette looked at one another for one

moment and then rushed out and down the stairs, thigh to thigh, crushing elbows once more. At the landing they nearly collided with Wadsworth and Mrs. White, and then the four together ran down the main stairs into the hallway. At the same moment, Mrs. Peacock and Professor Plum flung open the cellar door, astonishment evident on their faces. The three pairs of searchers stared at one another, figuring, by process of elimination, who was missing.

There was another scream.

"Eeeeeiiiiieeeeeyyyyyyy!"

"Who is it?" cried Mrs. White.

"Where's it coming from?" asked Mr. Green.

"The lounge!" yelled Wadsworth.

They sprinted down the hall to the door of the lounge. Mr. Green, getting there first with a little slide across the marble floor, tried the handle of the door.

"The door's locked!" cried Professor Plum.

"I know!" said Mr. Green, pumping at the handle.

"Well, *unlock it!*"

"The *key's gone!*"

"Never mind about the key," Professor Plum cried wildly, "just unlock the door!"

In his frustration, Mr. Green jumped up and down on the marble floor, pumped the handle of the door with one hand, ran his other hand through his disordered hair, and stared at Professor Plum with rage in his bloodshot eyes. *"I can't unlock the door without the key!"* He gave up on the handle, and banged frantically against the panels. *"Let us in! Let us in!"*

From the other side came two muffled voices in unison, and an echoing pounding on the door. *"Let us out! Let us out!"*

"It's no good," said Wadsworth, firmly pushing Mr. Green aside. "There's no alternative. I'll have to break it down."

The others backed away. Wadsworth eyed the door manfully, and turned to it sideways. "Back off in there!" he called.

From about ten feet away, he ran at the lounge door full tilt, shoulder first.

The door handle didn't even rattle, so sturdy was the door in its jamb.

"Aaaaaagggghh!" yelled Wadsworth, recoiling from the door in a tight spin, clutching his injured shoulder, and throwing himself onto the floor as if balm from pain were to be found there.

"I know!" Yvette cried suddenly. "I have it!"

She ran into the study, lightly skipping over Wadsworth, who was turning circles in his agony.

The noise from within the lounge had not abated. Still Miss Scarlet and Colonel Mustard yelled for release.

"Will you please *shut up* in there!" cried Mrs. Peacock angrily. "We're doing our best!"

Yvette ran out of the study waving a gun at the group.

They all screamed and backed away from the door. Even Wadsworth, still writhing on the floor, tried to roll out of her way—but Yvette did not see the butler, and tripped over his flailing legs.

She fell sprawling forwards, windmilling both arms for balance.

The entire party dived for cover, but since there was none in the hallway, ended up merely throwing themselves to the floor.

The butt of the revolver struck the marble flooring. The firing mechanism was jarred. The bullet in the uppermost chamber was struck by the hammer, a fair amount of gunpowder exploded with the impact, and the madly spinning bullet shot out along the polished barrel until it had reached open air.

The bullet traveled upwards, and spat neatly through the gilt rope that held up the chandelier directly above

them, leaving a precise, singed hole in the thickly braided support. Slightly deflected, the bullet knocked the ear off a grimacing gargoyle that had been invisible all evening and had guarded the hall of Hill House unmolested for eighty years. Ricocheting madly, the bullet turned right back around and bull's-eyed the center panel of the lounge door, splintering it.

From behind the lounge door came an anguished cry, then Colonel Mustard's no less anguished voice: "I've been shot! They're shooting at us! *They're shooting at us!*"

"No, we're not!" cried Yvette, scrambling up from the floor, and firing the gun twice more at the lock of the lounge door.

From inside the lounge came the screams of Colonel Mustard and Miss Scarlet, but more muffled now, as if they'd already taken refuge behind the largest and best upholstered pieces of furniture they could find.

When the echo of the shots died away, there was silence in the hall—except for a slight noise, from somewhere overhead, as of ripping or tearing fabric.

"Come out," said Yvette. "The door she is open."

There was a pause. The others—even Wadsworth—drew slowly to their feet.

Elsewhere in the hall, it sounded as if someone was tearing fabric faster than before.

The door of the lounge was thrown open. A moment later, Colonel Mustard and Miss Scarlet appeared out of the shadows. They were shaken.

Colonel Mustard looked at the revolver in Yvette's hand. He plucked out the elbow of his jacket, and showed where the first, ricocheting bullet had punctured the cloth, evidently just missing his arm. "Why were you shooting that thing at us?"

"To get you out."

"You might have killed us," said Colonel Mustard, moving well out of the lounge into the hall. He stood directly beneath the lighted chandelier, as if hoping its light would dispel some of the fear he'd experienced in the darkened lounge.

That ripping, tearing sound had grown louder, and Wadsworth looked about for its source. It was difficult in a space as high and long and wide as the hall to pinpoint the origin of one particular noise, but he *thought* it might be coming from somewhere above.

"Why were you screaming in there?" Mrs. White asked.

Wadsworth looked up. Yes, the noise *was* coming from up above—from somewhere near the chandelier. He took a step backward, hoping to see more clearly.

What he saw then—*very* clearly—was that the brass and crystal chandelier was suspended directly over Colonel Mustard's head, by only a single strand of rope.

"We were frightened," said the Colonel. "That's why we were screaming in there."

"Colonel—" said Wadsworth.

"And if you want to know why we were frightened—"

He took a step toward the lounge door again—perhaps preparatory to turning on the light inside.

At that moment the last braid of rope gave way, and the chandelier came crashing to the floor not a foot behind Colonel Mustard.

Colonel Mustard turned slowly around and gazed at the thousand-pound chandelier, in a rubble of glass and crystal and twisted brass, on the spot where he'd stood a moment before. He looked round at the other guests of Hill House, as if asking silently which of them had engineered *this* little additional scare—but they, too, were attempting to recover from their near heart attacks.

"But look!" cried Miss Scarlet, as if she were suddenly

remembering something very important. She took a single step into the lounge, reached her hand along the wall, and turned on the light.

The motorist sprawled dead on the floor. The injury to his head was readily apparent, as was its source. The bloody wrench lay directly beside the corpse.

"He needed that hole in the head like a hole in the head," remarked Mrs. White.

"Which of you did it?" asked Mrs. Peacock quietly of Colonel Mustard and Miss Scarlet.

"We found him," said Colonel Mustard, outraged and still unnerved by the bullet that head grazed his sleeve and the chandelier that had fanned his back. "Together."

"There's a secret passage from the conservatory," said Miss Scarlet excitedly. "See?"

They all crowded into the lounge and stared at the open panel and the steps that led down into blackness.

Miss Scarlet skirted around the dead man, and sank onto the sofa, exhausted by her portion of the ordeal.

"Thank God you were able to get us out, Yvette."

Yvette, who had somewhat lost her accent and her manner in all the excitement, regained it with a polite half curtsy. The politeness of the gesture was somewhat modified, however, by the revolver still clutched in her right hand.

"Is that the gun Mr. Boddy gave us before?" asked Professor Plum.

"From the cupboard?" asked Mrs. Peacock.

"But the cupboard was locked," said Professor Plum.

"Non," said Yvette. "It was unlocked."

"Unlocked!" they all cried.

"*Mais oui*, but yes, but yes. See for yourself."

A few moments later they'd all tripped into the study, where there were two corpses sprawled instead of just one.

And, as Yvette had indicated, the cupboard door was

open. The key was in the lock. They stared at it.

"How did you *know* it was unlocked?" Mrs. Peacock demanded of Yvette. "How did you know you could get at the gun?"

"I didn't," said Yvette, a tone of defensiveness creeping into her voice. "I think: I break it open—but it was open already."

"A very likely story," Mrs. Peacock said primly to the others.

Clang. Clang.

That was the doorbell.

The group stood frozen in terror. Colonel Mustard and Wadsworth nervously checked their watches.

"Is it the police?" asked Professor Plum.

"If it is, they're early," replied Wadsworth.

No one else moved.

"Maybe they'll go away," Miss Scarlet whispered.

They waited.

After about a minute or so, Mrs. White breathed a sigh of relief. "They—"

Clang. Clang.

"I'm going to open it," said Mr. Green, starting for the hall.

"*Why?*" everyone demanded.

"I've nothing to hide," he replied. "I didn't do it."

He rushed out, and the guests—perhaps not knowing what else to do, and not wishing any of the others to think they *did* have something to hide—followed.

They were only a few steps behind when Mr. Green took the key from a reluctant Wadsworth, and opened the front door.

"Good evening, sir," said the policeman.

Chapter Fourteen

Mr. Green slammed the front door shut.

He turned and looked at the others. He was sweating. They glared at him. He turned back, bit his lower lip, and opened the door again.

The expression on the cop's face was puzzled.

"Yes?" Mr. Green asked politely.

"I found an abandoned car near the gates of this house. Did the driver come here for help, by any chance?"

The eight persons crowding the doorway tried their level best to assuage whatever suspicions the policeman might have. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no . . ." they all said, with a few "Absolutely not"'s and "Dear me no"'s and "Whatever made you think that"'s thrown in for good measure.

They all looked at the policeman, as if to see what effect this series of denials had on him. He was looking at them strangely. "No?" the policeman echoed, with furrowed brow.

"Well, actually," said Mr. Green, "yes."

"No!" screamed the group, *en masse*.

"There seems to be some disagreement," remarked the policeman.

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no..." they all began again, except for Mr. Green, who concluded, "Yes..."

"May I come inside and use the phone?" asked the policeman.

Wadsworth elbowed his way forward, pulling on his vest points, and by manly force, drawing composure back into his face. "*Of course*, you may, sir, you may use the one in the..." He vaguely indicated the lounge, as it was nearest the front door, but such a look of horror was immediately apparent on the faces of Professor Plum and Miss Scarlet that he saw his mistake. "—Ah—no, you can use the one in the stu—No! Ah—Would you be kind enough to wait in the ah—" He looked around at the guests.

"The library!" cried Mrs. Peacock in an excited whisper.

"Yes!" said Wadsworth, full of confidence. "Would you be kind enough to wait in the *library*!"

"Sure," said the cop, stepping into the hall. As he did so, Miss Scarlet slipped into the lounge, and slammed the door with a decided bang. A moment later, Professor Plum just as forcefully shut himself into the study. Wadsworth smiled a weak, polite smile. "The library's just beyond," he said, and led the policeman that way.

The cop didn't immediately follow. He stared for a moment at Yvette, who had been standing at the back of the little group in the doorway. "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

Yvette returned him a little Gallic shrug, which might have been interpreted as almost anything.

"All you people seem very anxious about something," the policeman mused.

"It's because that chandelier fell down," Wadsworth said immediately—as if he'd had that answer prepared in his mind. "It could have killed us."

Wadsworth opened the door of the library and waited for the policeman to enter. The policeman, however, stood in the hallway looking at the butler, looking at the five other frightened persons in the hall, looking at the two doors that had been slammed in his face, and looking at the pile of rubble that was once a chandelier. Evidently, however, these various clues added up to no satisfactory conclusion. They didn't even really suggest what the mystery was.

The policeman went into the library.

"Please," said Wadsworth, "help yourself to a drink, if you like."

The policeman picked up the decanter of cognac on the study table, and started to pour a glass.

"But not the cognac," said Wadsworth quickly, "just in case."

"Just in case what?"

Wadsworth didn't answer. He pulled the door shut with a bang, and turned the key in the lock. He hurried back down the hall where the guests and Yvette were gathered anxiously.

"What now?" Wadsworth asked in a hoarse whisper.

"We should've told him," Mr. Green maintained.

"It's all very well to say that *now* . . ." said Mrs. Peacock.

"I said it *then*!" retorted Mr. Green indignantly.

"Oh, *shut up*!" they all cried, and Mr. Green, though perhaps in the right, quailed before their uprighteous anger.

Down the hall was the noise of the door handle being jiggled. The policeman had evidently discovered that he'd been locked in the library, and now was determined to get out again.

They all stared, as if wondering if he'd succeed. Then the telephone rang.

The policeman in the library looked around. There was the telephone, ringing quite stridently. No one came to the door to unlock it, no one picked up the telephone on an extension.

He went over to the table, and lifted the receiver.

"Hello?"

He listened for a moment, then replied, "And who shall I say is calling?"

Then he blinked, and made a little startled sound in his throat. Then sarcastically, he replied, "Oh, yes? And I'm President Eisenhower."

A torrent of angry abuse was shouted at him from the other end. As he held the receiver away from his ear and stared at it, the policeman's face became ashen, and he trembled when he spoke again, "Okay, okay, sir, I'll try, sir. I apologize, but I'm locked in a room here. . . ."

He put down the receiver—softly—on the table, and tried the handle of the library door once more. It still was locked. He called out through the panels, "Let me out of here! You've no right to shut me in. I'll book you all for false arrest, wrongful imprisonment, obstructing an officer in the course of his duty, and murder!"

The door swung wide.

The six guests, the maid and the butler stood in the doorway. Very frightened.

"What do you mean, murder?" asked the butler, with mustered bravado.

The cop grinned. "I just said that to make you open the door. But what's going on here? Why did you lock me in? And why are you receiving phone calls from J. Edgar Hoover?"

"J. Edgar Hoover?" repeated the butler.

"That's right. The head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"*The Federal Bureau of Investigation!*" they all cried, and Mrs. Peacock made a little swoon.

"Why is J. Edgar Hoover on your line?" demanded the tall man with the military bearing.

"I don't know!" cried the butler, irritated. "But he's on everybody else's. Why shouldn't he be on mine?"

He pushed the cop out into the hall and started for the telephone. He was about to shut the door behind him, when he paused and prudently removed the key from the lock.

Then he shut the door, and the others, left in the hallway, heard the unintelligible inflections of his voice as he began to converse with Mr. Hoover.

"What's going on here?" the cop demanded.

The guests looked at each other.

"We're having a party!" cried Miss Scarlet at last, gaily.

"Mind if I look around?"

"Sure," said Miss Scarlet. "You show him around, Mr. Green."

"Me?" shrilled Mr. Green.

"Yes," replied Miss Scarlet with brisk meaning. "Why don't you show him the dining room? Or the kitchen? Or the ballroom?"

Mr. Green pulled in a very deep breath. "Fine," he said in a low, measured voice. "Come with me, officer, and I'll show you the dining room. Or the kitchen. Or the ballroom."

With the others watching nervously, Mr. Green led the reluctant policeman to the doors of the dining room. He pulled them open, and pushed the cop through. He closed the doors behind him, whistled a moment in the darkness, and then flicked on the light.

"This is the dining room," said Mr. Green.

"No kidding," said the cop.

"We had dinner here earlier," said Mr. Green. The table had been cleared, and the room set to rights. Everything looked somehow forlorn, as if the place had been put to rights for another eighty years, and a second gathering of blackmail victims.

"What's going on in those other two rooms?" asked the cop suddenly, after Mr. Green had made no motion to continue the Cook's Tour of Hill House.

"What two rooms?" screeched Mr. Green, in an extremity of terror.

The policeman pulled open the dining room doors and stepped out into the hall again. It was empty. The other guests had disappeared. The cop pointed at the doors of the study and the lounge. "*Those* two rooms."

"Oh, *those* two rooms," echoed Mr. Green, hysteria tinging his voice.

"Yes." The policeman strode across the hall toward the study, crushing a few shards of crystal beneath his determined tread. Mr. Green hurried after him, and grabbed him by the arm. "Officer, I don't think you should go in there," he said desperately.

"Why not?"

"Ah—" Mr. Green thought for a moment, but evidently nothing reasonable came to him. With a kind of wild vagueness, he warned the policeman, "Well, because . . . because . . . oh, because it's all too entirely shocking!"

The cop shrugged, shook free of Mr. Green's convulsive grasp, and flung open the door of the study.

The phonograph was playing softly in the darkened room. It was an old electric Victrola with a heavy steel needle, wearing a deeper groove into an old 78 disc called "I Ain't Got No Body."

The policeman switched on a table lamp.

Mrs. White sat on Mr. Boddy's knee, kissing that gentleman full on the mouth. His arms were wrapped tightly about her waist, and she even struggled a bit, in an apparent effort to get free of him. But the more she twisted, the more tightly his arms were wrapped about her.

Mrs. White cast a smiling glance over her shoulder to the policeman and Mr. Green. "What you two must think of me!" she exclaimed, and then—as if she didn't really care *what* they thought, she threw her arms about Mr. Boddy's neck, and pressed her lips against his, with a groan of amorous satisfaction.

In the far corner of the room, Colonel Mustard had brought Mrs. Ho to bay. His arms were around that lady, and his cheek was pressed hard against hers. He panted with the fervor of his embrace, and Mrs. Ho's breath was just as quick and uneven. The Chinese lady's hands swept up through the Colonel's hair, and her fingers tugged playfully at his ears.

"It's not all that shocking," the policeman remarked to Mr. Green. "Folks are just having a good time. You will all pardon the intrusion, I hope," he added as he left the room.

Mr. Green lagged a moment behind, staring open-mouthed. Mrs. White breathed a sigh of relief and pushed Mr. Boddy back against the sofa—though she did not yet rise from his knee, which was not an uncomfortable perch, if rather a stiff one.

But in the corner, Mrs. Peacock squeezed out from behind the dead cook. She looked quite demented.

"Oh, thank God, Mrs. Peacock," whispered Mr. Green, "those were *your* hands in the Colonel's hair. I thought for a minute..." That point resolved, he hurried out after the policeman.

"How could you kiss that... thing?" Mrs. Peacock

asked, staring at Mrs. White, still on Mr. Boddy's knee.

"It's like kissing my second husband," Mrs. White shrugged.

"Before or after you cut off his head?"

Again, the policeman preceded Mr. Green into the room. In fact, Mr. Green entered the room in a sidewise, creeping motion, even squinting his eyes as if fearful of what he might see.

Miss Scarlet was caught in the violent embrace of Professor Plum. They broke apart with startled exclamations on the entry of the policeman.

The motorist sat slouched in a chair, one arm dangling over the side, his fingers curled around the neck of an empty bottle of brandy. The cop leaned down and sniffed the motorist's breath.

"He's drunk," said the cop.

"Dead right," said Miss Scarlet.

The cop took the motorist by the shoulder, and shook him gently. The motorist responded not at all. The bottle slipped out of his fingers and thudded to the floor.

The cop gave the motorist a whispered warning, "I hope you're not going to drive home, sir."

"He won't be driving home, officer," said Professor Plum. "I can promise you that."

"Someone will give him a lift?"

"Yes," said Miss Scarlet, "we'll get a car for him—a long black car."

"A limousine," Professor Plum said hastily.

The policeman nodded. He turned with a nod of satisfaction to Mr. Green, whose face still bore a look of open-mouthed astonishment.

"Officer..." Wadsworth said, emerging from the library.

"You're too late," said the policeman. "I've seen everything."

Wadsworth looked stunned. He stammered. "Y-you have?" In despair, he sighed, "I can explain everything."

"You don't have to."

"I don't?"

"Don't worry. There's nothing illegal about any of this."

"Are you sure?"

"No. This is America."

"I see."

"It's a free country, didn't you know?"

"I didn't know it was *that* free!"

The cop looked up and down the hall. "May I use the phone now?"

"Certainly," said Wadsworth, and, with relief evident on his face, showed the policeman into the library again. And once the policeman was inside, Wadsworth turned the key in the lock.

Chapter Fifteen

"Why did you lock him in there again?" asked Mr. Green.

"We haven't finished searching the house," Wadsworth explained.

Professor Plum looked at his watch. "But we're running out of time. Only fifteen minutes till the police come."

"The police came already," Mr. Green pointed out.

"*Shut up!*" cried everyone at once in well-practiced unison.

"Come on," Yvette said, grabbing Mr. Green's hand, and dragging him toward the stairs. "We shall go back to the attic."

Wadsworth and Mrs. White looked at one another. "Shall we?" Wadsworth asked. Mrs. White nodded, and they, too, mounted the stairs toward the second floor.

More reluctantly, Mrs. Peacock and Professor Plum returned to the cellar.

Colonel Mustard and Miss Scarlet were left alone in

the hall. "The kitchen," Colonel Mustard suggested.

"We've already looked there," Miss Scarlet said, "and you didn't find anything."

Colonel Mustard raised his brows, as if to say that to find nothing again might not be such a bad idea. Certainly it was preferable to coming across another corpse. Miss Scarlet appeared to agree, for she made no more argument against a reexamination of the kitchen.

Miss Scarlet began to open cabinet doors and drawers in a systematic fashion, beginning at the doorway and working left. Colonel Mustard worked toward the right. Nothing to be found but dishes, pots and pans, silverware, serving platters, canned goods, stacks of napery, and miscellaneous utensils. Colonel Mustard came to a narrow upright door that he couldn't open. He tugged at the handle, tugged again, and then jerked at it with a loud *har-rumph*.

"A corpse fell out the last time someone opened that door," Miss Scarlet reminded him.

"Oh, yes," said the Colonel, suddenly remembering. He stepped back.

Slowly the door of the cold cupboard swung open.

No one fell out, dead or quick.

But there was an eerie whine as the back of the cupboard swung slowly open.

"I don't believe it," cried Miss Scarlet. "Another secret passage. Where does *this* one go?"

"I suppose we have to find out, don't we?" said Colonel Mustard.

Without the flashlight, which had never been retrieved from the floor of the lounge, they anticipated some difficulty in maneuvering the passage. But using a heavy copper pan with a long handle, they managed to prop open both the secret panel and the outside cupboard door at once. This provided a little light into the passage.

It was twelve steps down, a small turning to left, another

passage of thirty yards or so, and then twelve steps up. The way had grown quite dark halfway through, but there was a rectangle of light at the top of the stairs.

The Colonel pushed open the panel, but they found their way blocked by a corpse.

"Thank God," said Miss Scarlet, "it's just the cook."

They were in the study again. Mrs. Ho had been propped up against the wall, and Mr. Boddy, growing stiffer by the minute, sat starchy on the sofa.

Colonel Mustard and Miss Scarlet looked at one another. "Let's try the ballroom again," the Colonel suggested.

They went out into the hall, and started down toward the study.

"What was that?" hissed Colonel Mustard, halting abruptly.

"What was what?" asked Miss Scarlet, stopping as well.

"That sound."

"What sound?"

"I don't know." They listened for a moment. The house seemed silent, even though they knew there were seven more persons around, somewhere or other. "Probably it was nothing," the Colonel said, unconvincingly.

A moment later, every light in the house winked out.

The moon cast its waxing pallor over Hill House.

In the basement, Professor Plum had found the wine cellar. A window low to the ground admitted a little shaft of light that played off the dusty necks of half a dozen bottles.

He heard a scurrying, then a slap.

It might have been a rat being noisy, or it might have been a human being quiet.

"Is anyone there?" he cried.

* * *

"Don't you touch me!" Mrs. Peacock cried warningly.

Her silent interlocutor was big and round, and stood at the center of the unlighted, windowless room. Mrs. Peacock moved around the edge of its black shadow.

The thing gurgled and hissed quietly. At the heart of the boiler was a dull red glow of flame.

"Who's that? Is anyone there?" Miss Scarlet cried timidly to the grand piano in the ballroom. It was a great looming shadow before her.

No response was forthcoming.

Miss Scarlet reached out and touched the painted surface of the upraised lid.

"Who was it?" called Colonel Mustard from the opposite end of the ballroom. "Was anyone there?"

Mrs. White made her way quietly around the nursery, rubbing her hands over the manes of wooden horses, and inadvertently kicking small stuffed animals in the head. Moonlight filtered through the unshuttered window, and was reflected in the eyes of the dolls that were lined up along the baseboard.

The wind blew through the open window, rattling the panes and rustling the curtains.

"Is anyone there?"

"Is anyone there?" called Wadsworth, blundering into the dressing room that was attached to the second bedroom.

There *was* someone there—a tall ugly fellow whose

shape and features were only dimly illumined by the moonlight.

"Aaaaaagh!" Wadsworth shouted, backing away, spilling over the dressing table stool. He fell onto the dressing table, which collapsed under his weight.

The same little accident happened to the tall ugly fellow in the mirror as well, and at the end of it, both Wadsworths—the original and the reflected image—sat morosely in the wreckage of the furniture. He listened to the screams of Mrs. White.

In the next room, Mrs. White had been frightened by the clamor of Wadsworth's accident. She began to scream.

"Hello . . . hello . . ." said the policeman in the library, nervously tapping the telephone, trying to raise the operator.

A woman's screams sounded from upstairs.

Number please.

"Three," said the cop. "Three screams."

"Leave me alone," cried Mr. Green in terror, as he held on convulsively to Yvette at the top of the attic stairs.

"Get away from me!" she cried, and together they spilled down the stairs toward the second floor landing. Yvette got the better of that descent, for most of the time Mr. Green was on bottom and acted as cushion.

He lay crumpled on the second floor landing. Yvette peered at him for a moment, and then hurried down the main stairs to the hall. Moonlight through the great stained glass window guided her along the banister.

Reaching the hallway, she peered to the front of the house, and then to the back. No one was about. She crossed the hall silently and opened the door of the billiard room.

* * *

"Hello? . . . hello? . . . Are you here?"

No trace remained of Yvette's accent.

Yes. I'm here.

The whisper was disguised, characterless. It would have been impossible to know whether it belonged to a man or woman.

"What's going on?"

Come in. Shut the door.

Yvette looked up and down the hallway once more, and then entered the billiard room.

Did the cop recognize your face?

"He must have. And not just my face. He knows every inch of my body. Like you. And like—"

She broke off. Something supple and scratchy had just been thrown over her neck from behind.

The rope.

She turned. "It's you!" Her eyes widened in terror.

The rope closed across her windpipe.

"There's something funny going on here," the policeman said hurriedly into the telephone. "I don't know what it is. . . . No, I'm not on duty, but I have a feeling that I'm in danger. . . . You know that big ugly house on top of—"

He had heard screams, furtive footsteps, whispered conversations outside the locked door.

And now he heard a sullen thud—and felt it, too—as the lead pipe slammed down on the side of his head, just above the left ear.

The telephone receiver swung in a graceful arc at the end of its cord.

* * *

Outside of Hill House, the storm had passed. The moon, already starting to set, was bright in a nearly cloudless sky. Rain water accumulating on leaves dropped heavily to the ground. Night birds called, and small animals scurried along the sodden ground. Hill House stood dark and unlighted at the end of the drive.

A little beat-up purple Pontiac chugged through the gates and up the hill. It pulled up alongside Professor Plum's automobile and rattled for a few moments even after the ignition had been turned off.

The driver's door opened, and out of the beat-up purple Pontiac stepped a young, bright, attractive young woman. Her thick, wavy blond hair was tucked beneath a smart cap. She wore delightfully inappropriate shoes for tramping along a puddled driveway of gravel, and the way she looked in her Western Union uniform is the way that most women wish they could look in Dior.

The young woman looked up at the darkened house, puzzled. Then she shrugged a pert little shrug and trotted up the steps to the front door, pausing a moment to pet the German shepherds who guarded the entrance.

The two dogs groveled at her feet, and presented their bellies to be scratched with her joyously painted nails.

The young woman laughed her gay laugh—she didn't have any other kind—and rang the bell of Hill House.

Clang.

Clang.

She waited. The dogs lolled on their backs, the tongues hanging from their mouths, and she went back to scratch them for a moment.

The front door creaked open with a tiny whine.

The young woman snapped to attention, planted herself before the slowly opening door, and exultantly began to sing. "*I . . . am . . . your singing telegram . . .*"

Crack.

That was a single gunshot.

The young woman dropped dead on the doorstep of Hill House.

The front door slammed shut with a bang.

Chapter Sixteen

Mr. Green heard the gunshot from below. He turned toward the attic door, but it was actually only the upper portion of his body that revolved. His feet were wedged between two heavy, sealed boxes, without labels or markings of any sort. He pushed one of them away, and got the left leg free. He tugged and pushed at the other crate, and at last got *that* leg free. He lurched through the darkness toward the attic door, opened it, and hurtled through.

It wasn't the attic door at all, but merely an attic cupboard, filled with cobwebs, and bits of gritty detritus on the floor, and a kind of slime on the walls, and it was—on the whole—just as well that Mr. Green couldn't see what was brushing across his face, adhering to the bottom of his shoes, and making his hands feel so sticky.

Colonel Mustard was in the dining room when he heard the shot. He turned toward the hallway and made several steps in that direction—not quite realizing that the dining

room table stood between him and his goal.

He struck the edge of the table mid-pelvis, and sent it jarring forward a foot or so. A stack of plates—the plates whose bottom markings had considerably impressed Miss Scarlet and Mrs. Peacock—tumbled to the floor with an anarchistic crash.

With a shout of pain, Colonel Mustard himself pitched to the floor, knocking a couple of chairs over onto himself. It was better to have a chair fall on your head than a chandelier, but the sensation was still far from pleasant.

Hearing all the commotion, Miss Scarlet turned away from the ballroom windows, and walked cautiously toward the double doors that opened onto the hall.

The moon had inconveniently slipped down behind a protruding gable of the house, and the nursery was nearly dark again. Mrs. White blundered toward the door into the corridor, intending to find out what all the noise was downstairs.

She tripped over some sort of box in the middle of the floor, heard a *click*, then a *whirr*, and then an enormous painted head sprang out of the box and waggled grinning in Mrs. White's face.

Even though she knew it was only a jack-in-the-box, Mrs. White's nerves were frayed to the extent that she was unable to keep from screaming, "Help! Help!"

She punched the head in the head, and continued to scream.

"Coming! Coming! I'm just trying to find the door," Wadsworth called out, hunting for the door that connected the bedroom to the nursery.

"Found it!" he called again, turning the handle. He stepped through, calling "Mrs. White!" But instead of Mrs. White, what Wadsworth found was just another door.

Beyond, Mrs. White continued to scream.

"Coming!" cried Wadsworth, turning the handle. He went through the second door, expecting to run up against Mrs. White's frantic embrace.

What he ran up against was a wall.

"Another handle?"

He turned it.

Frigid water poured down on him from the shower head.

Mrs. White continued to scream in the adjoining room.

A dripping specter in the fractured moonlight through the stained glass, Wadsworth ran pell-mell down the stairs, swung around to the back of the house and into the kitchen. Just inside the door, he found what he was obviously looking for—a big red lever labelled POWER.

The lever was in the down position, and Wadsworth moved it into the up position.

All the lights in the house came back on.

Through the open door of the study came a low garbled voice, intoning the dire message, *I ain't got no body...*

But soon the phonograph reached its proper speed, and Mrs. Ho and Mr. Boddy listened raptly to the remainder of the song.

They gathered in the hallway again. Mr. Green came down the stairs, rubbing his various bruised joints and appendages. Mrs. White descended with more dignity than most women can assume after having been frightened out of their wits by a jack-in-the-box. Mrs. Peacock and Professor Plum, blinking, came up from the cellar. Colonel

Mustard limped in from the wreckage in the dining room, and Miss Scarlet appeared ravishingly from the ballroom.

The police were expected any minute.

"We must keep looking for the murderer," Wadsworth insisted.

"Together this time," said Mrs. White, and no one said her nay.

"Of course, we've already been over these rooms a dozen times," said Professor Plum, idly opening the door of the billiard room.

Yvette lay across the billiard table, the noose that had strangled her still tight about her neck.

The seven who remained alive crowded the doorway and stared, but no one ventured inside. Dazed, they backed away. And before they'd had any opportunity to recover, even minutely, from the shock, Mrs. Peacock screamed and pointed through the open library-door.

The policeman lay on the parquet floor, the bloody lead pipe beside his head.

"Two murders!" cried Mr. Green.

"Neither of them shot," said Professor Plum. "I thought I heard a gun."

"So did I," said Mrs. White.

"I certainly did," said Mrs. Peacock.

"The front door slammed," said Miss Scarlet. "I heard that."

"Oh, God," said Colonel Mustard. "The murderer must have run out."

"Let's see," said Wadsworth urgently.

In another moment they'd all crowded at the front door. Wadsworth fumbled at the lock—the key having been left in the dead bolt—and in another moment threw open the front door.

A young woman in uniform lay spread-eagled on her back, halfway down the steps. The German shepherds lay with their heads on their crossed paws, whimpering. There

was a bullet hole in the young woman's forehead.

"*Three* murders!" cried Wadsworth.

"Six altogether," Mr. Green pointed out.

There was a pause. Wadsworth's tone, when he spoke, was solemn. "This is getting serious."

He slammed shut the front door.

He walked to the door of the lounge. "Look," he said, "no gun. Yvette dropped it here. Remember? Now it's gone."

The six guests looked at one another—and at Wadsworth—with deep suspicion.

After a few moments of intense concentration, Wadsworth spoke. "Very well," he said quietly, "I know who did it."

"*You do?*"

That was everyone, astonished.

"And furthermore, I'm going to tell you all how it was all done."

Chapter Seventeen

"Follow me," said Wadsworth, leading them all into the library.

The guests were nervous. They'd been reduced to just the original six players and Wadsworth. Everyone else who had been in Hill House when they arrived was dead. Everyone who had come to Hill House since they had gathered had been murdered. Wadsworth was now prepared to tell them how it was done, and who had done it.

Among the six, of course, the murderer was somewhat more nervous than the others. But it didn't show.

They arranged themselves uncomfortably about the library, avoiding as much as possible the body of the dead policeman on the floor.

It was, in point of fact, growing increasingly difficult to avoid corpses in Hill House that evening.

They waited for Wadsworth to speak. He seemed to

be gathering his thoughts. He looked at his watch. He took a deep breath and then he spoke: "In order to help you understand what happened I shall need to take you through the events of the evening, step by step. At the start of the evening Yvette was *here*, by herself."

To the guests' astonishment, Wadsworth threw himself behind the table where they'd first seen Yvette, put on a simpering expression that was just like the maid's, threw a delicious half curtsy, and mimed pouring champagne out of a bottle.

"She was waiting to offer you all a glass of champagne."

He ran out into the hall, and called back, "I was in the hall." Then he shut the library door, as if to demonstrate that he and Yvette had had no communication at that point.

The guests stared at one another in perplexity. Wadsworth flung open the door. "I know I was in the hall because I was there," he explained. "But then I hurried across to the kitchen."

Wadsworth ran to the kitchen.

There was nothing for the guests to do but to run after him. The sextet of blackmail victims scurried down the hall, around the bend beneath the stairs, and straight into the kitchen. Wadsworth was waiting for them, holding up at least half a dozen knives. The cook was in here quite alive sharpening the knives preparing dinner and then . . ."

He spoke so quickly it was hard to capture each of his words, and impossible to tell where one thought-sentence began and the previous one ended, but his pantomiming actions bridged the gaps of comprehensibility.

He flung down the knives and raced out of the kitchen again. The guests followed him to the front door.

"*Clang clang*," Wadsworth shouted in imitation of the bell at the top of the house. "The doorbell rang. It was you," he said, pointing at Colonel Mustard.

"Yes," said Colonel Mustard. "I suppose it was."

"...and I asked you for your coat I recognized you as Colonel Mustard and prevented you from telling me your real name as I didn't want any of you to be addressed by any name other than your pseudonym and I introduced myself to you as the butler I led you across the hall to the library..."

He ran back to the library, and threw himself behind the table again. He continued with the narration even as the guests were scudding into the room once more. "...and Yvette met you and smiled—" he smiled very Yvette-like—"and poured you a drink..." he sloshed champagne into a glass, swallowed half of it himself, stampeded through the knot of guests at the door, and rushed back down the hall.

"...and the doorbell rang again and it was Mrs. White looking pale and tragic and I told her she was expected and took her coat and hung it up and..."

He was on his way back to the library. Mrs. Peacock groaned.

He threw himself into the library, and miming the actions variously of himself, Mrs. White, Colonel Mustard, and Yvette, said, "...I introduced Mrs. White to Colonel Mustard who shook hands politely and then introduced Mrs. White to Yvette and I noticed that Mrs. White and Yvette *flinched!*"

Mrs. White flinched in the doorway.

Professor Plum eyed her harshly. "Then what?"

"And then we heard a rumble of thunder and a crash of lightning—" Wadsworth even imitated *that*—"and to cut a long story short one by one you all arrived Mrs. Peacock shook hands with Yvette and Colonel Mustard and Mr. Green was offered champagne by Yvette and Professor Plum and Miss Scarlet arrived together and were introduced to everybody else and then..."

He rushed out into the hall once more, skidding past

the gong beside the dining room door. As he did so, he managed to find the mallet, strike the gong sonorously, and replace the mallet. "...the gong was struck by the cook, still alive of course, and we all went into the dining room..."

Which is where he was now. By the time the others reached it, Wadsworth was seating himself in each of the chairs in turn, like a set of living place cards. "...and Mrs. Peacock sat here and Colonel Mustard was here and Mr. Green and Professor Plum and Miss Scarlet and Mrs. White and this chair was vacant and—"

"Get on with it," said Colonel Mustard in a low, slow, threatening voice.

"Yes," cried Mrs. White, *"please get on with it."*

"I'm telling it as fast as I can," returned Wadsworth, quite reasonably. "And anyway we all revealed that we'd received letters and you'd had a letter Professor Plum and you'd had a letter Miss Scarlet and you'd—"

"Get on with it!" they screamed.

"The point is," said Wadsworth, "blackmail."

"But this all came out in the study after dinner," said Mr. Green.

Wadsworth's eyes gleamed. "You're right!" He ran out of the dining room, across the hall, and flung open the door of the study. Mr. Boddy and Mrs. Ho looked more bored and uncomfortable than ever.

"Mr. Green sat here," said Wadsworth, sitting where Mr. Green had sat. "Mrs. Peacock here," he went on, hopping one step closer to Mr. Boddy on the sofa. "Miss Scarlet here and Professor Plum here and Colonel Mustard and Mrs. White and..."

"Get on with it!"

"I'm getting there, I'm getting there!" He took a deep breath. "Mr. Boddy came to get his surprise packages from the hall..."

Wadsworth ran out into the hall, down to the front

door, picked up an imaginary suitcase, and raced with it back to the study. The guests had waited for his return, winded.

"...and you opened your presents Miss Scarlet got a candlestick and Mrs. White got a rope and Colonel Mustard got a wrench and Mr. Green got a lead pipe and Mrs. Peacock got a dagger and Professor Plum got a gun then Mr. Boddy switched out the lights..."

Standing by the door, Wadsworth switched out the lights. Everyone, pitched to fever by the rapidity of Wadsworth's tediously detailed recapitulation of the evening, screamed. When Professor Plum threw on the lights again two moments later, Wadsworth lay stretched out on the floor.

"Good God! Now he's dead, too!" cried Colonel Mustard.

"Exactly," said Wadsworth, sitting up suddenly. "Mr. Boddy lay right here, apparently dead."

"He *was* dead," maintained Professor Plum. "I examined him."

Wadsworth jumped up from the floor. "Then why was Mr. Boddy bashed on the head with the candlestick a few minutes later, if he was dead already?"

"How should I now?" demanded Professor Plum.

Everyone looked at him accusingly. It would be a very pleasant thing if the murderer could be found out before they were all run to death through Hill House by Wadsworth.

"So you made a mistake," said Mrs. Peacock.

"I did not!"

"Why not admit it?" asked Wadsworth.

Miss Scarlet smiled a cold smile. "Doctors, like the Pope, never admit a professional mistake or a sexual indiscretion."

"If you didn't make a mistake, Professor Plum," said Wadsworth, "you were lying—which looks very bad for you."

Professor Plum stared at the ring of accusatory faces before him. He shrugged. "Okay, I made a mistake."

"Right," said Wadsworth. "But if so, why was Mr. Boddy *pretending* to be dead? It could only be because he realized that his scheme had misfired and that the gunshot was intended to kill him—not me. Look."

Wadsworth grabbed Mr. Boddy by the neck, pulled him forward, and then twisted his head to the side. He pulled back the top of Mr. Boddy's left ear, and showed a tiny red crease at the hairline.

"The bullet grazed his ear," said Wadsworth. "I noticed it earlier. Clearly his best hope of escaping death was to pretend to be dead already."

The butler budged the bruised body back beside the bolster. The dead man's head remained turned at a peculiar angle, as if he were trying to read a sign that had been posted sideways.

"So whoever grabbed the gun from me in the dark," reasoned Professor Plum, "was trying to kill him."

Wadsworth nodded. "But remember what happened next?"

The guests groaned, knowing in their hearts of hearts what was coming.

"Mrs. Peacock took a drink..."

Wadsworth flung a full glass of whiskey into his mouth and swallowed.

"...you said maybe it's poisoned she screamed..."

Wadsworth screamed, very like Mrs. Peacock.

"...and dropped the glass..."

Wadsworth flung the glass onto the floor, shattering it.

"...we took her to the sofa..."

Wadsworth shoved Mrs. Peacock onto the sofa so hard she rocked against Mr. Boddy, who was still trying to read that sign posted sideways on the wall.

"...she was still screaming and Mr. Green slapped her face..."

Mrs. Peacock was not screaming at this point, but she

still got her face slapped.

"... then we heard more screaming which was Yvette in the billiard room and then Mr. Green screamed..."

Wadsworth gave two screams, the higher pitched of which was attributable to Mr. Green.

"... and Colonel Mustard slapped him..."

Mr. Green tried to duck but he wasn't quick enough.

"... and we rushed out..."

Wadsworth was still at full steam, racing down the hill of the evening's events, by the time the others gathered around him at the door of the billiard room. "... and Yvette was still screaming and we tried the handle and it was locked and we knocked and she screamed and we rattled and pounded, then..." He pointed at Colonel Mustard and imitated the Colonel's voice and inflection to an astonishing degree: "... 'They won't open the door'..." He pointed at Miss Scarlet, and imitated her voice as well, "... 'Hello, oh, yoo-hoo!' and Yvette opened the door and we rushed in..."

He flung open the door of the billiard room, and they were all suddenly jarred back to the present. Yvette lay sprawled across the billiard table, the rope around her neck.

Wadsworth looked at her, and then turned back to the group crowding the doorway. When he spoke, he spoke slowly and with significance. "We rushed in—but one of us wasn't here!"

"No?" cried everyone. Even the one who hadn't been there.

"No," said Wadsworth. "And maybe one of us was murdering the cook at the time! *Who* wasn't here, with us?"

The six guests looked around, but no one made any guesses. It was a complicated process of elimination, and apparently no one was quite up it.

"Do you know?" asked Mr. Green.

"I do," said Wadsworth.

Chapter Eighteen

But he wasn't telling yet.

"If I simply told you," he said, "you might not believe me. I've got to *show* you how it was done."

The guests groaned. Wadsworth ran out into the hall again. "So while we remained in the billiard room trying to calm Yvette, one of you could have stayed in the study..."

He flung open the door of the study, and ran inside. "...picked up the knife..." he called, and ran back out into the hall.

"...run down the hall to the kitchen..."

The guests pantingly went down to the end of the hall just in time to see Wadsworth fling open the door. Inside, he made violent motions with his arm, upraising it and bringing it down hard. "...and stabbed the cook..."

The kitchen door swung shut, closing out the terrible scene from their sight.

The guests pushed open the door again and went inside. Wadsworth leaned calmly against a counter.

"But how could the murderer risk it?" asked Mrs. Peacock. "We might have seen him coming back."

"Not if he—and by 'he' I mean 'he' or 'she'—had used this secret passage," Wadsworth said, and flung open the cupboard door. The panel behind was already open.

All the guests except Miss Scarlet and Colonel Mustard gasped in surprise.

"And the murderer ran back down the secret passage to the study."

"Is that where it comes out?" asked Mrs. White.

"Yes. Watch!"

He flung himself through the secret panel and a moment later was lost to sight. The guests clotted out into the hall again. A moment later, Wadsworth appeared in the open door of the study and beckoned them forward.

They gathered in the study and looked at the panel which marked the other end of the secret passage.

"How did you know about it?" Colonel Mustard demanded.

Wadsworth paused only a moment before replying. "This house belongs to a friend of mine. I've known all along."

"Then you could be the murderer!" Mr. Green concluded.

Wadsworth laughed. "Don't be ridiculous. If I was the murderer, why would I reveal to you how I did it?"

No one had an answer for that, and on their little mental pads, they each placed a little notation beside Wadsworth's name, indicating *probably not the murderer*.

"All right," said Mr. Green, "so who else knew about this secret passage?"

"We found it," admitted Colonel Mustard. "Miss Scarlet and me."

"*You* found it," that lady amended. "You could have known about it all along."

"But I didn't!"

"Why should we believe you?" asked Mrs. Peacock.

"Because he was definitely with us all in the billiard room doorway while Yvette was screaming. Don't you remember?"

Mrs. Peacock nodded reluctantly, and Miss Scarlet confirmed, "That's true. He was next to me."

The group fell silent, staring at one another with unabated suspicion.

"But what I don't understand," said Mrs. Peacock in apparent frustration, "is *why* the cook was murdered. She had nothing to do with Mr. Boddy."

"Of course she did!" cried Wadsworth, as if himself exasperated by Mrs. Peacock's obtuseness. "I gathered you all here together because you were all implicated in Mr. Boddy's dastardly blackmail. Did none of you deduce that the others were involved, too?"

"What others?" asked Mrs. White.

"The cook," said Wadsworth. "And Yvette."

Amazement was apparent on everyone's face, though whether it was real or feigned is another matter.

"That's how he got *all* his information," explained Wadsworth. "Before he could blackmail anyone, Mr. Boddy had to find out their guilty secret. Mrs. Ho and Yvette were his accomplices."

"I see!" said Colonel Mustard, with an air of having figured it all out a great while ago, and having kept the matter to himself as a question of policy. "So whoever knew that the cook was involved, killed her."

"Yes," agreed Wadsworth. "I know—because I was Mr. Boddy's butler—that the cook had worked for one of you."

"Who?" cried everyone at once.

Wadsworth didn't answer, but left the question hanging in the air. A moment later he turned smoothly to Mrs. White. "You recognized Yvette, didn't you? Don't deny it."

"What do you mean, don't deny it? I'm not denying anything."

"That's *another* denial!" cried Wadsworth, in obscure triumph.

"All right!" cried Mrs. White, at the end of her rope. "It's true, I knew Yvette—my husband had an affair with her. But I didn't care. I wasn't jealous."

Wadsworth nodded, as if he had extracted the correct morsel of information from Mrs. White. He turned quickly on Miss Scarlett. "And *you* knew Yvette, too, didn't you?"

"Yes. She worked for me."

Mrs. Peacock's eyes opened very wide.

"And you *also* knew her, sir?" Wadsworth asked the Colonel.

Colonel Mustard cleared his throat nervously. "What are you suggesting?"

"We have already established that you were one of Miss Scarlett's clients. That was why you were so desperate to get those negatives. Photographs of you and Yvette in *flagrante delicto*, remember?"

"Mr. Boddy threatened to send the pictures to my dear old mother," said Colonel Mustard. "The shock would have killed her."

"A neat trick," remarked Mrs. White in an over-loud aside to Miss Scarlet, "considering he told us she was dead already." Colonel Mustard looked shiftily away, but made no denial. "So *he* had the motive," Mrs. White concluded, indicating the Colonel.

"You *all* had a motive," said Wadsworth. Once again, and this time without warning, the butler launched into his replay of the evening's fatal festivities: "So the cook was dead and we lugged her back to the study and Mrs. Peacock was screaming..."

Wadsworth screamed and ran out into the hall. Having rested a little in the study, the others followed, nearly keeping up with his mad pace. Wadsworth was already

at the end of the hall, with his hand on the door of the small toilet. He screamed again, still in imitation of Mrs. Peacock, and threw open the door. "... Mr. Boddy fell out into her arms and though he was dead Mrs. Peacock didn't know it and thought he was attacking her and we all ran out and that's when the bloody candlestick fell and struck me on the head..."

Once again Wadsworth pitched to the floor, as if something large and heavy and very like a candlestick had toppled from the doorjamb onto his head.

"But when and where was Mr. Boddy *killed*?" cried Colonel Mustard.

"Don't you see?" cried Wadsworth, hopping up and hurtling back to the study. The others followed, Professor Plum taking the arm of panting Mrs. Peacock.

Before he went on Wadsworth waited till they were all present. "Look. Remember when we came back to the study from the billiard room and Mr. Boddy was still on the floor..."

Unfortunately Mr. Green was standing nearest Wadsworth, and for this accident, was thrown down to the floor to enact the Mr. Boddy's supposed corpse.

"... but he was only playing dead and one of us knew he was actually still alive..."

Mr. Green scurried away on his hands and knees, out of Wadsworth's reach.

"... I explained that I was Mr. Boddy's butler and that I'd invited you here and we realized there was only one other person in the house..."

He pointed to the kitchen, and waited for the proper response.

He got it.

"*The cook!*" the guests all shouted, and ran to the kitchen.

Once there, they clustered around the cold cupboard door, which had been closed again.

Plucking up his courage, Mr. Green flung open the door of the cupboard. Wadsworth, enacting the cook's death, pitched out into Mr. Green's startled arms.

"Of course by now she was dead . . ." Wadsworth's feet were planted in the cupboard and his chin was caught on Mr. Green's sinking shoulder. "... we laid her down with our backs to the cupboard and *one of us* slipped through the same secret passage . . ."

"Again?" cried Mrs. Peacock in dismay.

Wadsworth nodded vigorously. "Back to the study!"

Like runners on the hundredth lap of a race that knew no ending, they staggered back to the study, where Wadsworth—who had raced ahead—awaited them impatiently. He pointed to the open panel in the wall. "The murderer was in the secret passage," he explained. "*Meanwhile*," he began, taking hold of Mr. Green by his collar and hurling him to the floor once more, "Mr. Boddy had been on the floor and now he jumped up . . ."

Mr. Green—impersonating Mr. Boddy—was jerked to his feet. "... and the murderer came out through the secret panel . . ."

Wadsworth jumped into the secret panel, and then out again immediately, "... picked up the candlestick and . . ."

Mr. Green, who had an idea of what was to follow, beat a hasty retreat into the hall, but Wadsworth was hot on his trail holding aloft the imaginary candlestick. "... Mr. Boddy followed us out of the study into the hall and was looking for an escape when the murderer crept up and killed him with the candlestick . . ." Mr. Green was caught in a tangle of other guests, and Wadsworth slapped him solidly on the side of the head with the imaginary candlestick—represented by the butler's cupped palm.

Mr. Green lurched forward, turned, and breathlessly screamed, "Will you *stop it!*"

But this warning went unheeded. "... then the murderer dragged him into the toilet . . ."

Wadsworth flung open the door of the toilet, shoved the gibbering Mr. Green inside and then slammed the door shut in his imbecilic face.

"...and then the murderer nonchalantly rejoined us beside the cook's body in the kitchen and the whole thing took less than half a minute..."

"So who wasn't with us the whole time in the kitchen?" said Colonel Mustard.

"Whoever it was," Wadsworth said meaningfully, "is the murderer."

Chapter Nineteen

"We put the weapons in the cupboard locked it and ran to the front door..."

They pulled back as he rushed past them, out of the study, and down the hall to the front door.

"...to throw away the key..."

He flung open the front door. He held up his arm as if to throw away the key, and a look of horror came over his face instantaneously—but it was not for the Western Union girl, still dead on the doorstep, it was for—

"The motorist!" I didn't throw the key away, instead I put it back in my pocket and somebody must have taken the key out of my pocket when I wasn't looking and *substituted another!*"

"We were all in a huddle right here," said Professor Plum. "Any of us could've done that."

"Precisely!" agreed Wadsworth, and slammed shut the front door.

"Wait a minute!" cried Mr. Green, who had been thinking overtime, evidently. "Colonel Mustard has a top secret Pentagon job, Mrs. White's husband was a nuclear physicist, and Yvette is a *link* between them."

They all stared at Colonel Mustard and Mrs. White. "What *is* your top secret job, Colonel?" asked Professor Plum.

Colonel Mustard was silent.

"I can tell you," said Wadsworth. "He is working on the secret of the next fusion bomb."

"How did you know that?" cried Colonel Mustard, staggered.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes."

"Well so can I!" said Wadsworth, and that was that.

"I begin to see how it was done," said Mrs. White, her pale cheeks suffusing with excited color.

"Was it a plot between them, Wadsworth," Mrs. Peacock asked, "or did Colonel Mustard do it alone?"

Colonel Mustard looked as if he wanted to throw himself bodily onto Mrs. Peacock and pound her into next week, for starters.

"We shall see," said Wadsworth. "Let's look at the other murders."

"Yes," said Professor Plum, "it was bad luck for the motorist that he arrived at that moment."

"It wasn't luck," said Wadsworth. "I invited him."

"You did?" cried just about everyone.

"Of course. It's obvious. Everyone here tonight was either Mr. Boddy's victim or accomplice. Everyone who has died gave him vital information about one of you. I got them here so that they'd give evidence against him and force him to confess."

"So who knew this guy who came to make the telephone call?" asked Miss Scarlet, looking around.

Wadsworth waited, and did not speak.

Colonel Mustard cleared his throat. "He was my driver during the war."

"And what was he holding over you?" asked Wadsworth. He waited a moment for Colonel Mustard's reply. It didn't come. "Or do I have to tell them?"

"He knew I was a war profiteer," said Colonel Mustard. "I stole essential air force radio spare parts and sold them on the black market. *That's* where I made all my money." Then, with the beginnings of tears welling in the corners of his eyes, he added emotionally, "But that doesn't make me a murderer."

"A lot of our airmen died because their radios didn't work," retorted Mrs. Peacock. "Was the policeman working for Mr. Boddy, too?"

"The cop was from Washington," Miss Scarlet said quietly. "He was in my pay. I bribed him once a week, so that I could carry on business. Mr. Boddy found out somehow."

"My God—" whispered Mrs. Peacock, appalled.

"And the singing telegram girl?" asked Mr. Green with horror that had mounted as the murders were enumerated.

They all looked at one another, waiting for someone to confess a connection.

At last, Professor Plum flung open the front door. He cast a regretful glance on the sprawled corpse over which the dogs were still whimpering. "She was my patient once. I had an affair with her. That's why I lost my license. Mr. Boddy found that out, too."

Wadsworth touched Professor Plum's arm. "Let's put her in the study with the others."

Colonel Mustard, Professor Plum, and Mr. Green stepped outside, looked quickly around, and gently lifted the young woman's corpse. They brought her inside; Mrs. White and Miss Scarlet peered down into her peaceful face with the bullet hole, top center. Mrs. Peacock shut

the front door against the baying dogs.

"All right," said Wadsworth, "let's got on with it! The police are due any minute, and we've still got six murders to solve!"

The three men rushed to the study, kicked open the door, and heaved thrice. The third time they let go the body, and the singing telegram girl sailed over chair and table and plopped onto the sofa with her head dropping neatly in Mr. Boddy's lap.

"So," said Wadsworth, drawing the door closed on this interesting tableau, "now you all know why they died. Whoever killed Mr. Boddy also wanted his accomplices dead."

"But how did the murderer know about them all?" asked Professor Plum. "I mean, I admit I guessed that this young singer had informed on me to Mr. Boddy—but I didn't know about any of you till this evening. I mean, I'd never even met Mr. Boddy."

The other guests variously agreed with Professor Plum's analysis. Even if Colonel Mustard had known the motorist, and Mr. White had known Yvette, or so on, none of them had known *all* of the accomplices.

"I'll get to that," said Wadsworth. "First, the murderer had to get the weapons. Easy—he'd stolen the key from my pocket, and we all followed Colonel Mustard's suggestion that we split up and search the house."

"That's right," said Mrs. Peacock. "It was *Colonel Mustard's* suggestion—"

"And after we split up," said Professor Plum, "there were four more murders."

Colonel Mustard made no reply. In dignified silence, he stared at each in turn, defying the accusation.

"And whose suggestion was it to lock the motorist in the lounge?" Wadsworth went on.

"Colonel Mustard's, wasn't it?" mused Mr. Green.

"Indeed it was," Wadsworth said grimly. "So then we

drew lots, we split up—and *one* of us got away from his or her partner—and hurried to the study.”

Which is what Wadsworth, and then the others, did.

Wadsworth stood behind the desk. “Here, on the desk, was the envelope from Mr. Boddy. It contained photographs and letters—the evidence of Mr. Boddy’s network of informants. That’s how the murderer knew who his victims were to be.”

“Where’s the envelope now?” Mrs. White asked conversationally, as if it were a matter of no moment to her.

“Gone,” said Wadsworth. “Destroyed. Perhaps in the fire—the only possible place.”

Wadsworth went to the fireplace, and with a pair of tongs retrieved a corner of a burnt envelope. He puffed on it, and drew out the black-edged fragments of several photographs.

Nothing and no one in them was recognizable.

Several sighed in satisfaction.

Wadsworth tossed the corner of envelope back into the fire, and then checked his watch. His eyes widened, and he suddenly picked up at his former speed. “Then having found out the whole story the murderer opened the cupboard with the key and took out the wrench...”

Miss Scarlet, now evidently in the spirit of the investigation, ran to the lounge. The others followed her, at least as far as the doorway. “Then Colonel Mustard found the secret passage from the conservatory to the lounge—where he found the motorist dead!”

The motorist of course was still very much in that same condition.

“And we couldn’t get in...” said Wadsworth, beating against the wall next to the open door of the lounge, “...so Yvette got the gun from the open cupboard and shot the door open *bang!* and then the front door bell rang again...”

The front door bell rang again.

All the guests looked at one another in stupefaction, then turned to Wadsworth.

"How did you do that?" asked Colonel Mustard, mystified.

"I didn't!"

"I don't believe this!" cried Miss Scarlet, leaping up and down in the lounge. "I just don't believe this is happening."

"Whoever it is," cried Mrs. Peacock, running hysterically to the front door, "they've got to go away or they'll be killed!"

She flung open the door over the protests of everyone else.

"Good evening," said the slight, elderly, earnest-looking gentleman who stood there. "Have you ever given any thought to the Kingdom of Heaven?"

"What?" Mrs. Peacock cried frantically. The others were grouped mesmerized behind her.

"Repent," said the elderly gentleman. "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

"You ain't just whistlin' Dixie," remarked Miss Scarlet.

"Armageddon is almost upon us," the old man returned earnestly.

"I've got news for you," said Professor Plum, "it's here already."

"Go away!" screeched Mrs. Peacock.

"But your souls are in danger!"

"Our *lives* are in danger," Mrs. Peacock screamed. "*Get lost!*" She slammed the door in his face. She turned and fell back panting against the door. Her eyes were wild and staring.

Wadsworth, as if nothing had happened, proceeded with his recapitulation, though he was, if anything, a little quicker in his retelling. Time flew.

"So the *cop* arrived next and we locked him in the library..."

The guests headed instantly for the library, but that was only a bluff. Wadsworth turned into the study instead. The guests abruptly changed direction.

Wadsworth pointed at the open cupboard. "... we forgot the cupboard with the weapons was now unlocked..."

He ran back out into the hall and raced toward the back of the house—the conservatory, ballroom, and kitchen. Over his shoulder he called back: "... we split up again..."

He looked at the doorways of each of those three rooms—but entered none of them. Instead he flung open the door that opened onto the cellar stairs.

Just inside the door was the main electrical switch for the house. The handle was pushed toward the top. "... and the murderer switched off the electricity..."

Wadsworth pushed the lever down.

All the lights in the house went out.

Everyone screamed.

Dear Reader:

Everyone knows that the best part of any whodunit is trying to figure out who committed the crime *before* the author tells all. You near the end of the book with delicious anticipation. . . . Were you right??? We have now reached that point in our story where we should reveal who perpetrated these dastardly deeds.

BUT . . .

. . . the charm of *Clue* is derived in part from the *many* possibilities that exist for a solution to the puzzle.

Was it Miss Scarlet?

Or Professor Plum?

Or Wadsworth?

Or any of the others?

SO we have decided to make this more interesting for you, dear Reader. What follows are *four completely different solutions* to the problem at hand.

WHICH ONE DID *YOU* EXPECT??!

Chapter Twenty (Version A)

Wadsworth switched the lights back on. The guests fell back against the various walls and surreptitiously counted their number to make certain no one else had been murdered in the two-second interval of darkness.

"... in the dark the murderer ran from here across the hall to the study got the rope and the lead pipe then ran to the billiard room and strangled Yvette..."

His hands reached out for Mr. Green's neck, but Mr. Green was prepared and ducked out of the way. The butler's grasp closed instead on Mrs. White, who he nearly throttled in his verisimilitudinous rendering of Yvette's death. Just when she was about to choke, he tossed her aside and ran to the library, and clobbered Colonel Mustard over the head. (Colonel Mustard was meant to stand in for the policeman.)

"... and hits the cop with the lead pipe then coming out of the library saw automobile lights coming up to the drive and so picked up the gun where Yvette left it here

beside the lounge door opened the front door recognized the singing telegram girl from her photograph and shot her dead! Then ran back to the *cellar!*"

He stopped, out of breath.

In the momentary pause, the significance of the last part of his rendition sank in.

"*The cellar?*" they all cried.

"Yes," said Wadsworth.

"But Colonel Mustard wasn't in the cellar," said Mrs. Peacock.

"No—but *you* were!" Wadsworth cried triumphantly.

There was a long silence.

"Me?" Mrs. Peacock said at last. "What's it got to do with me?"

"The finger of suspicion points at you," said Colonel Mustard.

"It's very rude to point," Mrs. Peacock returned coldly.

Wadsworth drew himself up to full dignity. "You murdered them all. You were the person who was missing when the cook and Mr. Boddy were murdered! And the cook used to be *your* cook—don't you remember your fatal mistake?—you told us all at dinner that we were eating one of your favorite recipes. And monkey's brains, though popular in Cantonese cuisine, are not often to be found in Washington, D.C."

"Is that what we *ate*?" cried Mr. Green, green.

"Are there any brains to be found in Washington, D.C.?" Miss Scarlet asked wryly.

"Why would I have murdered all the others?" Mrs. Peacock demanded huffily.

"Obviously," said Wadsworth, "in case Mr. Boddy had told them about you, too."

"So it all had nothing to do with the disappearing nuclear physicist and Colonel Mustard's work on the new fusion bomb," said Professor Plum.

"No," said Wadsworth. "Communism was just a red herring. Mrs. Peacock did it all."

"There's no proof," said Mrs. Peacock.

"Very well," said Wadsworth. "The gun is missing. Gentlemen, turn out your pockets. Ladies, empty your purses. Whoever has the gun is the murderer."

Mrs. Peacock didn't hesitate. She produced the gun from her purse. "Very well. What do you propose to do about it?"

The guests backed quietly away from Mrs. Peacock. Wadsworth stood his ground.

"Nothing," said Wadsworth.

"Nothing?" echoed Mrs. Peacock.

"Nothing at all," the butler blandly replied. "I don't approve of murder, but it seems to me that you have performed a public service, ridding the world of an appalling blackmailer and his disgusting informers."

Without making any sudden or threatening movements, Mr. Green checked his watch. "But the police will be here any minute now—then what happens?"

"Why should the police come?" asked Wadsworth. "Nobody's called them."

Everyone stared, astonished, and bluntly, relieved.

"You mean—" said Mrs. Peacock, her gun still trained on Wadsworth's heart.

"That's right," smiled Wadsworth. "Now, I suggest we stack all the bodies in the cellar, lock it, leave quietly one at a time and forget that any of this ever happened."

He stepped toward the study, perhaps because that room contained the greatest number of corpses. But Mrs. Peacock blocked his path, poking the gun barrel at the butler's vest. "Good idea. But I'll leave first, if you don't mind."

"Be my guest. I think we all owe you a vote of thanks."

Gun leveled on the trembling group, Mrs. Peacock

backed slowly and carefully toward the front door.

In a pleasant low baritone, Wadsworth began to sing:

For she's a jolly good fellow,
For she's a jolly good fellow—

Slowly the other guests joined in, Miss Scarlet sarcastically, Mrs. White with a gusty soprano, Mr. Green with a kind of maniacal wildness, Professor Plum with a brazen dislocation of tune, and Colonel Mustard with martial vigor:

For she's a jolly good fellow—
And so say all of us,
And so say all of us,
And so say all of us,
For she's a jolly good fellow—

And by then the murderer was out the door.

"I *told* you I didn't do it," said Mr. Green, annoyed at them all.

"But what if the authorities find out what happened?" wondered Colonel Mustard.

"The FBI will take care of that," said Wadsworth.

"You mean—" said Colonel Mustard slowly.

"My phone call from Mr. Hoover. I work for him, of course. How else could I have known all about you all?"

"But—" said Colonel Mustard, "there's *one* thing I still don't understand."

"*One* thing?" exclaimed Mrs. White.

"Who was Mrs. Peacock taking bribes from?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"A foreign power," replied Wadsworth. "Her husband,

the senator, has influence over defense contracts."

"Is there going to be a cover-up?" asked Professor Plum.

"Isn't that in the public interest? What would be gained by exposure?"

Professor Plum impatiently persisted: "But does the FBI make a habit of cleaning up after multiple murder?"

"Yes—why do you think it's run by a man called Hoover?"

Though the door had closed with a bang of finality in her face, Mrs. Peacock still backed down the steps, with the gun trained on the handle, just in case it should be jerked open again.

"Mrs. Peacock," asked the mild voice behind her, "why are you holding a gun?"

She whirled around. The elderly evangelist gazed on her benignly, as if asking her to confess what manner of trouble she found herself in.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Peacock, looking down at the revolver in apparent surprise. "So I am. Well, it's dangerous out here, it's so isolated."

"Is that thing registered?" asked the evangelist.

"I don't know," Mrs. Peacock said, "it's not mine."

"You don't need that weapon," said the evangelist.

"No," said Mrs. Peacock, "I suppose I don't need it." She put it down gingerly on the stone balustrade leading up to the front door of Hill House, smiled a little smile of matronly confusion, and stepped quickly to her car.

"Oh, Mrs. Peacock!" called the evangelist, just as she was stepping inside.

"How did you know my name?" she asked, intrigued.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," said the evangelist. He picked up the revolver from the balustrade,

took steady aim, and said, "You're under arrest."

Bright blue lights switched on with a hum and a whirr and a crackle of electricity, lighting up the driveway and the facade of Hill House. Men in uniform and men in plain clothes erupted from the shrubbery. Mrs. Peacock was hustled into a car.

"Wadsworth!" called the evangelist. "All clear."

The front door was flung open. Wadsworth, Mr. Green, Miss Scarlet, Mrs. White, Professor Plum, and Colonel Mustard spilled out onto the porch.

"I got her," said the evangelist, who in all likelihood was not an evangelist at all.

"You see," said Wadsworth, turning to the guests who were not murderers, "like the Mounties, we always get our man."

Mr. Green's mouth fell open. "Mrs. Peacock was a *man*?"

"Oh, shut up!"

Chapter Twenty (Version B)

Wadsworth switched the lights back on. The guests fell back against the various walls and surreptitiously counted their number to make certain no one else had been murdered in the two-second interval of darkness.

"... in the dark the murderer ran from here across the hall to the study got the rope and the lead pipe then ran to the billiard room and strangled Yvette..."

He grabbed Mr. Green by the neck and began to throttle him. Mr. Green let out a strangled yell, and by main force broke away from the butler.

"I'm sorry," said Wadsworth, "I didn't want to frighten you."

"You're a bit late for that!"

Wadsworth shrugged. "And after that there were three more murders!"

"*So who did it?*" they all cried, in an extremity of exasperation.

"Let's consider each murder one by one." He turned

to Professor Plum. "Professor Plum, you *knew* that Mr. Boddy was alive. Even psychiatrists can tell the difference between patients who are alive or dead. You fired the gun at him in the dark and missed. So you *pretended* he was dead. That's how you were able to kill him later, unobserved."

"That's right," said Miss Scarlet, "he was the missing person in the kitchen, after we found the cook dead."

"But he was with us in the billiard room when we found Yvette screaming. If that's when the cook was killed, how did he do it?" demanded Mr. Green.

"I didn't," said Professor Plum simply.

"You don't expect us to believe that, do you?" said Mrs. Peacock.

Wadsworth turned to face her. "I expect *you* to believe it, Mrs. Peacock—you killed the cook. She used to be your cook—and she informed on you to Mr. Boddy. Mrs. Peacock made a fatal error. Don't you remember?"

Wadsworth was conveniently near the dining room doors. He turned on the light inside, and pointed to the place where Mrs. Peacock had sat. "Sitting here, at dinner. Mrs. Peacock told us all that she was eating one of her favorite recipes. And monkey's brains, though popular in Cantonese cuisine, are not often to be found in Washington, D.C."

"Is that what we *ate*?" asked Mr. Green, green.

"Are there any brains to be found in Washington, D.C.?" Miss Scarlet asked wryly.

Mrs. Peacock looked very discomfited, but as quickly as Wadsworth's attention had been turned towards her, it now turned away from her. The butler grabbed Colonel Mustard's collar, and dragged him pell-mell to the front door. "And when you saw the motorist at the front door *you* took the key to the weapons cupboard out of my pocket..."

Wadsworth engineered a sharp turn at the front door

and dragged the gaping Mustard first to the library—"then you suggested that we all split up"—and then to the study—"you separated from Miss Scarlet, crossed the hall, opened the cupboard took the wrench ran to the conservatory"—and finally into the lounge—"entered the lounge through the secret passage killed the motorist with a blow on the head..."

He dropped the panting Colonel on the carpet.

"This is incredible," said Mrs. White.

A wild gleam came into Wadsworth's eye. "Not so incredible as what happened next. When we all split up again I went upstairs with you. Yes, *you*, Mrs. White."

Her eyes went hard and narrow.

Wadsworth grabbed her by the elbow and dragged her into the hall. The others watched in stupefaction as he dragged her room to room. "And while I was in the master bedroom you hurried downstairs and turned off the electricity got the rope from the open cupboard and throttled Yvette..."

He stopped in the door of the billiard room, Mrs. White in front of him, forcing her to look at Yvette's face, purple and convulsed. "You *were* jealous that your husband was shtupping Yvette. That's why you killed him, too."

"Yes!" cried Mrs. White, slipping past Wadsworth and confronting the others in the hall. "I did it, I killed Yvette. I hated her!"

"Yes," said Wadsworth. "And while you were in the billiard room..." He suddenly grabbed Miss Scarlet by the shoulders and propelled her down the hall to the door of the library. "...*Miss Scarlet* seized the opportunity and under cover of darkness crossed over to the library and hit the cop whom she'd been bribing on the head with the lead pipe..."

The five accused guests and Mr. Green stared at Wadsworth dumbfounded.

"True or false?" the butler demanded.

"True," admitted Miss Scarlet, admiringly. "Who *are* you, Perry Mason?"

"So it must have been Mr. Green who shot the singing telegram girl," said Professor Plum.

"I didn't do it!"

"You're the only one left," Colonel Mustard pointed out.

"But I didn't do it! The gun is missing—whoever has the gun shot the girl."

Wadsworth instantly produced the gun from his pocket. "I shot her."

"*You?!*" the other murderers all cried, as they backed away from him and the weapon.

Mr. Green nodded solemnly. "So it *was* you. I was going to expose you."

"I know. So I choose to expose myself."

"Please," the Colonel said hastily, "there are ladies present!"

"You thought Mr. Boddy was dead," said Wadsworth to the group, a sly satisfaction creeping into his voice. "But why? None of you even met him till tonight."

"You're Mr. Boddy!!" cried Mr. Green, in sudden inspiration.

Gasping, guests gaped. Wadsworth smiled an evil smile.

Puzzled, Professor Plum pointed into the study. "So who did I kill?"

"My butler," replied Wadsworth.

"Oh, shucks!" cried Professor Plum, furious with himself.

"He was expendable. Like all of you. I'm grateful to you all for disposing of my network of spies and informers. You all saved me the trouble. Now there is no evidence against me."

Colonel Mustard dropped defeated down onto a small side chair in the hall. "So that's why you told me about the secret passage."

"And," mused Mrs. White, "this was all nothing to do with my disappearing nuclear physicist husband and Colonel Mustard's work with the new top secret fusion bomb."

"No," said Wadsworth, "communism was just a red herring."

Mr. Green looked at his watch. "The police will be here any minute. You'll never get away with this, any of you."

Wadsworth smiled his evil smile again. "Why should the police come? Nobody's called them."

Mrs. Peacock stared, probably remembering that it was Wadsworth who'd claimed to have sent for the authorities. "You mean—oh, my God, *of course!*"

"So why shouldn't we all get away with it?" Wadsworth asked, addressing Mr. Green. "We'll stack all the bodies in the cellar, lock it, leave quietly one at a time and forget that any of this ever happened."

"And then you'll carry on blackmailing us all?" cried Mr. Green desperately.

"Of course. Why not?"

"I'll tell you why not." Mr. Green produced a gun from an inside pocket of his jacket.

Wadsworth pulled the trigger of his weapon, but the gun misfired.

Mr. Green's did not. His aim, moreover, was practiced and sure.

Wadsworth keeled over, dead.

There were now seven corpses in Hill House, outnumbering the living.

Mr. Green scrambled to his feet, his gun trained on Wadsworth's prone form. It was clear after a moment that Wadsworth wasn't going to be doing any more shooting.

"Are you a cop?" asked Mrs. White.

"No. I'm a plant."

"A plant?" said Miss Scarlet. "I thought that men like you were usually called a fruit."

"Very funny," Mr. Green said grimly. From another pocket of his jacket, he pulled a small black wallet, flipped it open, and flashed his badge. "FBI. That phone call from J. Edgar Hoover was for me. *I told you I didn't do it!*"

A burst of gunfire sounded at the front of the house. The five murderers and Mr. Green all dropped to the floor alongside Wadsworth.

The front door was kicked open, and the elderly evangelist barrelled through, a gun in either hand. Behind him came a small army of agents in plain clothes and cops in snappy blue uniforms. The guests got slowly to their feet.

"Who done it?" the evangelist demanded.

"He did it," said Professor Plum, pointing at Colonel Mustard.

"She did it," said Colonel Mustard, pointing at Mrs. White.

"She did it," said Mrs. White, pointing at Miss Scarlet.

"She did it," said Miss Scarlet, pointing at Mrs. Peacock.

"He did it," said Mrs. Peacock, pointing at Professor Plum.

The cops waved their weapons at each of the suspects in turn, and ended up in confusion.

"They all did it," Mr. Green said quietly, but then puffing up his chest, he added proudly, "But if you want to know who killed Mr. Boddy—" He waved a hand theatrically toward the corpse on the floor. "*I did—in the hall, with the revolver. Okay, chief? Take 'em away. I'm going to go home and sleep with my wife.*"

Chapter Twenty (Version C)

Wadsworth switched the lights back on. The guests fell back against the various walls and surreptitiously counted their number to make certain no one else had been murdered in the two-second interval of darkness.

"...in the dark the murderer ran from here across the hall to the study got the rope and the lead pipe then ran to the billiard room and strangled Yvette..."

Mrs. White stood in, involuntarily, for Yvette, and was just about throttled in the process. The other guests were nearly trampled as Wadsworth ran from room to room, pointing and miming his breakneck recitation. It was so fast and full of fury that it was impossible to understand except on a mostly subconscious level.

"...ran across to the library and hit the cop with the lead pipe then coming out of the library saw automobile lights coming up the drive it was the singing telegram girl and the murderer picked up the gun where Yvette left it here beside the lounge door opened the front door rec-

ognized the singing telegram girl from her photograph and shot her! Then ran back to the *cellar*!”

Winded, Wadsworth wound down.

The significance of the last part of his speech sank in during his panting silence.

“*The cellar?*” they all cried.

“Yes,” gasped Wadsworth.

“But Colonel Mustard wasn’t in the cellar,” said Mrs. Peacock.

“No—but *you* were!”

“Me?” Mrs. Peacock said uneasily. “What’s it got to do with me?”

“You did it! You and Professor Plum together. You were in league with each other.”

Mrs. Peacock and Professor Plum avoided looking at one another. The others did enough of that sort of thing for them. In fact, Mr. Green, Miss Scarlet, Mrs. White, and Colonel Mustard fairly gaped.

“Think back!” said Wadsworth. “Mrs. Peacock was missing when the cook and Mr. Boddy were murdered! And the cook used to be *your* cook, Mrs. Peacock—don’t you remember your fatal mistake?”

With his wind back, Wadsworth sprinted to the dining room. The others followed, and by the time they’d got there, Wadsworth was seated in Mrs. Peacock’s place.

“Sitting here, you told us all at dinner that we were eating one of your favorite recipes.” Then he went on significantly: “But monkey’s brains, though popular in Cantonese cuisine, are not often to be found in Washington, D.C.”

“Is that what we *ate*?” said Mr. Green, green.

“Are there any brains to be found in Washington, D.C.?” Miss Scarlet asked wryly.

Mrs. Peacock trembled. “She *was* my cook. I don’t deny it. That doesn’t prove I murdered anyone.”

"And what's it got to do with me?" demanded Professor Plum.

Wadsworth hopped across to Professor Plum's place at the table. "*You* knew that Mr. Boddy was still alive. Even psychiatrists can tell the difference between patients who are alive or dead. You fired the gun at him in the dark, but *missed*—then you dropped the gun and pretended he was dead, so that you could kill him later, unobserved. *You* were missing in the kitchen when we found the cook dead—and that's when you did it. The other four murders were easy—luck was on your side, you drew lots to search the house together. So while we were all occupied searching the rest of the house you burned the evidence, killed the motorist, and switched off the electricity and killed the others."

The guests all stood about, trying to take this in.

"So," said Mr. Green at last, "it all had nothing to do with the disappearing nuclear physicist and Colonel Mustard's work on the new fusion bomb."

"No," said Wadsworth, "communism was just a red herring."

Mrs. White, however, remained puzzled. "But *why* did they kill all those people?"

"*We didn't*," cried the accused.

"There's no other possible explanation," said Wadsworth.

"I think there *is*," said Professor Plum, who looked to have been thinking fast.

Slowly, he walked the length of the dining room, through the swinging door, and into the kitchen.

The others followed curiously, and when they entered they found Professor Plum staring into the recess of the cupboard that contained the secret passage.

"Wadsworth," he said, "you knew about the secret passages, and when we drew lots *you* held the matchsticks

in *your* hand—you could have made sure Mrs. Peacock and I went to the cellar together.”

“It’s a frame-up!” Mr. Green called out excitedly.

“No, it isn’t,” snarled Wadsworth.

“I’ll tell you how we find out,” said Professor Plum, calmly smiling. “The gun’s missing, right? Everybody turn out their pockets and purses—whoever’s got the gun shot the singing telegram girl.”

Wadsworth didn’t hesitate. He instantly produced the gun from his pocket. “Very clever, Professor.”

The others drew back, aghast.

“You killed that girl?” asked Miss Scarlet, braver and somehow offended by this murder more than the others.

“He killed all of them,” Professor Plum said quietly.

“He *did*?” cried Mr. Green.

“Of course,” said the Professor. “Who knew every detail about us all? Who brought us all here, and Mr. Boddy and all the victims? Who had the key to the cupboard with the weapons?”

“*But*,” Colonel Mustard broke in suddenly, “he said the cook was murdered when we all were standing in the library doorway with Yvette. So it *couldn’t* have been Wadsworth—he was there beside me.”

“But I was lying,” Wadsworth said, smiling smoothly. “That’s *not* when she was murdered. I killed the cook earlier on, when Mr. Boddy was on the floor in the study, and you were all clustered around him. It took no time at all. You see, as Professor Plum realized, I knew about the secret passage from the study to the kitchen.”

“Well, the police’ll be here any minute,” said Mrs. White. “You’ll never get away with it.”

“Why should the police come?” Wadsworth asked. “Nobody’s called them.”

“Oh, my God, of course not!” cried Miss Scarlet, with sudden, terrible realization.

“Why did you do it?” asked Mrs. White.

"Would you believe me if I said it was to rid the world of an appalling blackmailer and his disgusting informers?"

"No," said Mr. Green.

"And you'd be quite right," Wadsworth returned cheerfully. "No—all my life has been spent in a struggle for perfection. I tried to be the perfect husband, but my wife killed herself. I strove to be the perfect butler, but I was driven to killing my employer. So I resolved that, in doing so, I would commit the perfect murder. But there is no pleasure in my triumph without an audience to admire it—and, as none of you had the brains to expose me, I decided I must expose myself."

"Good God, man," cried Colonel Mustard, "there are ladies present!"

"But you didn't commit the perfect murder," Professor Plum pointed out. "There are six witnesses to your confession."

"Not for long, Professor. When the police eventually get here they'll find twelve bodies—and no explanation."

"Twelve?" said Mrs. Peacock. "There are only six."

Wadsworth laughed the laugh of a maniac. A cheerful maniac, at that. "The champagne was poisoned! If you don't get an antidote in three hours, you'll die. All of you. And I'm leaving now—and locking you in."

He flung himself through the door into the hall. He ran its length, threw himself into the study, and ripped the telephone cord from the wall. "There's no escape!" he shouted.

His chortle echoing, he ran across the hall into the library, and ripped the telephone cord from the floor. "You're doomed!" he screamed. "The six of you will die terrible deaths!"

He flung himself into the study, jerked the phone from the table and tore the cord with his teeth. Then he flung both pieces at the horrified group standing in the doorway. He laughed a moonstruck laugh that made them all shiver.

Clang.

Wadsworth's laugh broke off abruptly at the sound of the doorbell.

"Don't move—any of you."

He hurried to the door, but they all blocked his path out to the hall.

"Get out of the way."

"You said don't move," Mrs. White reminded him.

He pushed through, and gun grasped behind his back, opened the front door.

The elderly evangelist smiled.

"I thought we told you to get lost," said Wadsworth.

"Yes . . . but—"

Wadsworth brought the gun around slowly. "Scram, you stupid old—"

The elderly evangelist lunged forward, grabbing Wadsworth's wrist. He twisted it expertly, but not before Wadsworth had squeezed off a shot.

The bullet went wild.

Half a dozen cops boiled up out of the shrubbery and overpowered Wadsworth.

The six guests ran out onto the porch, screaming variously that they'd been poisoned, that Wadsworth was the maniac who had done it, and that they'd all very much appreciate a lift to the nearest hospital.

"Hands up!" said the elderly evangelist. Using Wadsworth's gun as a prod, he nudged the sextet back into the house. "Check the rooms," he said to the cops, and immediately the policemen raced into all the rooms on the first floor. Two more held Wadsworth in vice-grips. The elderly evangelist looked at the six guests with a hard, cold eye.

Suddenly, and in unison, three cops burst from the library, the billiard room, and the library, crying "*There's a body in there!*"

They stopped and stared at one another. "*What?*"

Then more slowly, but still in unison, and each pointing behind him, said, "There's a body in there."

A fourth cop shot out of the study, his eyes wide with terror. "There's *three bodies in there!*"

"Three more?" cried the other cops.

"What do you mean, three *more?*"

"Who are you?" Wadsworth demanded of the elderly evangelist, perhaps deducing that was not his true or primary identity.

"FBI," said the evangelist, smoothly producing a badge from an inner pocket. "They sent me to clean up these murders."

"Is that why it's run by a man called Hoover?" asked Wadsworth with a sly grin.

"Who's responsible for these deaths?" asked the FBI evangelist.

"*He is!*" cried all six of the guests, pointing at Wadsworth.

"*All of them?*"

"It's true, it's true," admitted Wadsworth. "It was the perfect murder. Let me show you how I did it." With a gesture of proud insouciance, he begged release. The evangelist gave a high sign and the two cops holding Wadsworth released their grips. Wadsworth cleared a space, and took off at top speed. "At the start of the evening Yvette was in the library by herself waiting to pour champagne I was in the hall the cook was in the kitchen the doorbell rang clang clang..."

Wadsworth went to answer the front door, threw it open, but instead of miming his greeting to Colonel Mustard, he simply stepped out onto the porch and slammed the door shut behind him. Then he plucked a key from his pocket, inserted it into the lock, and turned it.

Hammer blows sounded on the door from inside. He heard screams and frantic yelling. Wadsworth smiled.

He jumped into the nearest black and white police car, started the engine, and pulled away down the drive. When he turned off the irritating static of the police radio, he heard a terrific shattering of glass, which he supposed must have been guests, agents, and policemen smashing through the windows of the conservatory. He waited for the noise of the Dobermans going after them, but when it came—

Grrrrrrr!

—it was entirely too close.

And so was the smell of wet fur. And the stink of something else that had to do with dogs.

When he looked in the rearview mirror, what Wadsworth saw was a double row of slathering teeth.

He turned and stared into the back seat.

There were three of them, poised to pounce.

And pounce they did.

Chapter Twenty (Version D)

Wadsworth switched the lights back on. The guests fell back against the various walls and surreptitiously counted their number to make certain no one else had been murdered in the two-second interval of darkness.

"... in the dark the murderer ran from here across the hall to the study got the rope and the lead pipe then ran to the billiard room and strangled Yvette..."

He grabbed Mr. Green by the neck and began to throttle him. Mr. Green let out a strangled yell, and by main force broke away from the butler.

"I'm sorry," said Wadsworth, "I didn't want to frighten you."

"You're a bit late for that!"

Wadsworth shrugged. "And after that there were three more murders!"

"So which of us killed them?" they all demanded.

"None of us killed Mr. Boddy or the cook," said Wadsworth.

"So who did?" That was everyone's question.

"The one person who wasn't with us—Yvette!"

"Yvette?"

"Yes, she was in the billiard room listening in to our conversation."

He smiled, and the guests, knowing what was to come, groaned. They girded their loins for another breakneck run through all the rooms of the first floor.

"And she heard the gunshot and thought Mr. Boddy was dead and while we all examined Mr. Boddy she crept into the study behind us and picked up the dagger..."

From the billiard room into the study and from there across the hall into the dining room—and there Wadsworth pushed open the swinging door into the kitchen. He looked sadly in. "...ran to the kitchen and stabbed the cook and we didn't hear the cook scream because Mrs. Peacock was screaming about the poisoned brandy then Yvette returned to the billiard room and started screaming and that's when we ran to her..."

"You said before that *that* was the time the cook was killed," Miss Scarlet reminded him.

"I have my methods," he returned, enigmatically.

"When did Yvette kill Mr. Boddy?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"When I said," said Wadsworth. "We all ran to the kitchen to see the cook, and Yvette stayed behind in the study for a moment to check that Mr. Boddy was really dead, and then he opened his eyes, so she hit him on the head with the candlestick and dragged him to the toilet..."

"Why?" asked Miss Scarlet, quite simply.

"To create confusion," said Wadsworth.

"Why did she do it?" asked Professor Plum.

"Because she was acting under orders," said Wadsworth darkly. "From the person who later killed her."

"Who?" everyone cried.

"Was it one of her clients?" Wadsworth asked, eyeing Colonel Mustard. "Or a jealous wife?" he went on, peering at Mrs. White. "Or an adulterous doctor?" turning swiftly on Professor Plum. "No," he concluded broadly, "it was her employer—*Miss Scarlet!*"

Miss Scarlet did not flinch. "It's a lie."

"Is it? You used her, the way you always used her. You killed the motorist when we split up to search the house."

"How could I have known about the secret passage?" demanded Miss Scarlet.

"Easy. Yvette told you. And then, when we split up again, you switched off the electricity. It was easy for you, here on the ground floor."

Miss Scarlet looked around at the other guests, but she said nothing.

A moment later, Wadsworth took off again—toward the study first, then across the hall to the billiard room, and finally to the front door. "Then in the dark you ran to the study got the rope and lead pipe strangled Yvette saw the automobile lights picked up the gun where Yvette dropped it opened the front door recognized the singing telegram girl from her photograph and shot her..."

There was an abrupt silence.

"You've no proof," said Miss Scarlet at last.

"The gun is missing. Gentlemen, turn out your pockets, ladies, your purses. Whoever has the gun is the murderer."

Miss Scarlet didn't hesitate. She produced the gun from her pocketbook instantly. "Brilliantly worked out, Wadsworth. I congratulate you."

"Hear, hear," cried Colonel Mustard, with an appropriateness that was, under the circumstances, quite inappropriate.

"Shut up!" snarled Miss Scarlet.

"But there's one thing I don't understand," said Mr. Green.

"One thing?" questioned Mrs. White.

"Yes—why did you do it, Miss Scarlet? Half of Washington knows what kind of business you run—you weren't in any real danger, the whole town would be implicated if you were exposed."

"I don't think they know my real business. My business is secrets. And Yvette found them out for me—the secrets of Senator Peacock's Defense Committee, of Colonel Mustard's fusion bomb, of Professor Plum's UN contracts, and of the work of Mrs. White's husband the nuclear physicist."

"So it *is* political," said Mr. Green. "You're a communist."

Miss Scarlet laughed merrily. "The State Department has always been so unsophisticated. No, Mr. Green, communism is just a red herring. Like all members of the oldest profession, I'm a capitalist. I shall sell my secrets—your secrets—to the highest bidder."

"And if we don't cooperate?" asked Colonel Mustard.

"Then just like Mr. Boddy, I shall expose you."

"But we can expose *you*," said Professor Plum. "Six murders, after all—"

"I hardly think it will enhance your reputation at the UN, Professor Plum, if it is revealed that you have been implicated not only in adultery with a patient but in her death *and* the deaths of five other people."

"You don't know the kind of people they have at the UN. I might go up in their estimation."

"It's no good blackmailing *me*, Madam," said Colonel Mustard, "I've no more money."

"Nor have I," chimed in all the others.

"I know, sweetie-pie." She smiled on the Colonel endearingly. "But you can pay me in government infor-

mation." She looked around the room. "All of you can." The smile faded abruptly. "Except you, Wadsworth, you—as a mere butler—have no access to government secrets. So I'm afraid your moment has come."

She turned the gun on him. The guests' eyes widened. Some of them turned away, and others watched with horror. This was to be the first murder of the evening to be performed, as it were, in public.

"Not so fast, Miss Scarlet. I do have a secret or two."

Miss Scarlet was evidently unimpressed. Her finger remained ready on the trigger. "Oh, yeah? Such as?"

"The game's up, Scarlet. There're no more bullets in that gun."

"You think I'll fall for that old trick?"

"It's not a trick. There was one shot at Mr. Boddy in the study, two shots that brought down the chandelier, two at the lounge door, and one for the singing telegram girl."

"That's not six," said Miss Scarlet.

"One plus two plus two plus one," said Wadsworth.

The other guests crept farther and farther away at the same time they counted furiously on their fingers.

"No," said Miss Scarlet, "there was only one shot that got the chandelier—that's one plus two plus one plus one."

"Even if you were right, that'd be one plus one plus two plus one, not one plus two plus one plus one."

"Okay," Miss Scarlet said briskly, "one plus two plus—The *point is*, there's one more bullet in here and guess who's gonna get it?"

Clang. Clang.

That was the front door bell, when, of all times in the course of this strange evening, they least expected it. Miss Scarlet turned automatically toward the door. Wadsworth, not missing the opportunity, leapt forward, smashed the gun out of her hand, and then took hold of her in a

vice-like grip. Mr. Green sidled around and gingerly opened the front door.

Agents in plain clothes and policemen in snappy blue uniforms rushed into the hall, guns in hand. Without a word spoken among them, the agents spread out into all the first floor rooms.

Almost immediately, three agents burst from the library, the billiard room, and the library, crying, "*There's a body in there!*"

They stopped and stared at one another. "*What?*"

Then more slowly, but still in unison, and each pointing behind him, said, "There's a body in there."

A fourth agent shot out of the study, his eyes wide with terror. "*There's three bodies in there!*"

"Three more?" cried the other agents.

"What do you mean, three *more*?"

"Where the chief?" Wadsworth asked calmly.

The elderly evangelist strolled in through the front door, gun in hand. "Ah, Wadsworth," he said, "Well done." He smiled at Miss Scarlet. "I did warn you, my dear. Mr. Hoover is an expert on armageddon."

"Wadsworth," said Miss Scarlet with a cold smile, "don't hate me for trying to shoot you."

"Frankly, Scarlet, I don't give a damn. As I was trying to tell you," he said, raising the revolver, "there were no bullets left. See?"

Bang!

Wadsworth looked more puzzled than shocked. He stared into the smoking barrel. "One plus two plus..."

There was a noise, somewhere in the hall, of ripping, tearing fabric. Mrs. White and Mr. Green each grabbed one of Colonel Mustard's arms and yanked him to safety as the second chandelier crashed to the marble floor exactly where he'd stood a moment before.

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