

Mollie & Christopher

GILES. That's what servants with forged references do. Some of these people may be criminals hiding from the police. *(He moves up to the sign board and picks it up.)*

MOLLIE. I don't care what they are so long as they pay us seven guineas every week.

GILES. You're such a wonderful woman of business, Mollie.

(GILES exits through the arch up right, carrying the sign board. MOLLIE switches on the radio.)

VOICE ON THE RADIO. And according to Scotland Yard, the crime took place at twenty-four Culver Street, Paddington. The murdered woman was a Mrs. Maureen Lyon. In connection with the murder, the police -

(MOLLIE rises and crosses to the armchair centre.)

- are anxious to interview a man seen in the vicinity, wearing a dark overcoat -

(MOLLIE picks up GILES' overcoat.)

- light scarf -

(MOLLIE picks up his scarf.)

- and a soft felt hat.

(MOLLIE picks up his hat and exits through the arch up right.)

Motorists are warned against ice-bound roads.

(The door bell rings.)

The heavy snow is expected to continue, and throughout the country...

(MOLLIE enters, crosses to the desk, switches off the radio and hurries off through the arch up right.)

MOLLIE. *(off)* How do you do?

CHRISTOPHER. *(off)* Thanks so much.

(CHRISTOPHER WREN enters through the arch up right with a suitcase which he places right of the refectory table. He is a rather wild-looking nervous young man.)

His hair is long and untidy and he wears a worn artistic wig. He has a confident, almost childlike manner.)

(MOLLIE enters and moves up centre.)

Weather is simply awful. My taxi gave up at your gate. *(He crosses and places his hat on the sofa table.)* Wouldn't attempt the drive to sporting instinct. *(moving up to MOLLIE)* Are you Mrs. Ralsston? How delightful! My name's Wren.

MOLLIE. How do you do, Mr. Wren?

CHRISTOPHER. You know you're not at all as I'd pictured you. I've been thinking of you as a retired general's widow, Indian Army. I thought you'd be terrifically grim and Memabishish, and that the whole place would be simply crammed with Benares brass. Instead, it's heavenly *(crossing below the sofa to left of the sofa table)* - quite heavenly. Lovely proportions. *(pointing at the desk)* That's a fake! *(pointing at the sofa table)* Ah, but this table's genuine. I'm simply going to love this place. *(He moves below the armchair centre.)* Have you got any wax flowers or birds of Paradise?

MOLLIE. I'm afraid not.

CHRISTOPHER. What a pity! Well, what about a sideboard? A purple plummy mahogany sideboard with great solid carved fruits on it?

MOLLIE. Yes, we have - in the dining-room. *(She glances at the door down right.)*

CHRISTOPHER. *(following her glance)* In here? *(He moves down right and opens the door.)* I must see it.

(CHRISTOPHER exits into the dining-room and MOLLIE follows him. GILES enters through the archway up right. He looks round and examines the suitcase. Hearing voices from the dining-room, GILES exits up right.)

MOLLIE. *(off)* Do come and warm yourself.

(MOLLIE enters from the dining-room, followed by CHRISTOPHER. MOLLIE moves centre.)

CHRISTOPHER. (as he enters) Absolutely perfect. Real bedrock respectability. But why do away with a century mahogany table? (looking off right) Little tables just spoil the effect.

(GILES enters up right and stands left of the large armchair right.)

MOLLIE. We thought guests would prefer them – this is my husband.

CHRISTOPHER. (moving up to GILES and shaking hands with him) How do you do? Terrible weather, isn't it? Takes one back to Dickens and Scrooge and that irritating Tiny Tim. So bogus. (He hurrs towards the fire.) Of course, Mrs. Ralston, you're absolutely right about the little tables. I was being carried away by my feeling for period. If you had a mahogany dining-table, you'd have to have the right family round it. (He turns to GILES.) Stern handsome father with a beard, prolific, faded mother, eleven children of assorted ages, a grim governess, and somebody called "poor Harriet," the poor relation who acts as general dogbody and is very, very grateful for being given a good home!

GILES. (distiling him) I'll take your suitcase upstairs for you. (He picks up the suitcase. To MOLLIE) Oak Room, did you say?

MOLLIE. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. I do hope that it's got a fourposter with little chintz roses?

GILES. It hasn't.

(GILES exits left up the stairs with the suitcase.)

CHRISTOPHER. I don't believe your husband is going to like me. (Moving few paces towards MOLLIE.) How long have you been married? Are you very much in love?

MOLLIE. (caldly) We've been married just a year. (moving towards the stairs left) Perhaps you'd like to go up and see your room?

CHRISTOPHER. Ticked off! (He moves above the sofa table.) But I do so like knowing all about people. I mean, I think people are so madly interesting. Don't you?

MOLLIE. Well, I suppose some are and (turning to CHRISTOPHER) some are not.

CHRISTOPHER. No, I don't agree. They're all interesting, because you never really know what anyone's like – or what they are really thinking. For instance, you don't know what I'm thinking about now, do you? (He smiles as at some secret joke.)

MOLLIE. Not in the least. (She moves down to the sofa table and takes a cigarette from the box.) Cigarettes?

CHRISTOPHER. No, thank you. (moving to right of MOLLIE) You see? The only people who really know what other people are like are artists – and they don't know why they know it! But if they're portrait painters (He moves centre.) it comes out – (He sits on the right arm of the sofa.) on the canvas.

MOLLIE. Are you a painter? (She lights her cigarette.)

CHRISTOPHER. No, I'm an architect. My parents, you know, baptized me Christopher, in the hope that I would be an architect. Christopher Wren! (He laughs.) As good as halfway home. Actually, of course, everyone laughs about it and makes jokes about St Paul's. However – who knows? – I may yet have the last laugh.

(GILES enters from the archway up left and crosses to the arch up right.)

Chris Wren's Prefab Nests may yet go down in history! (to GILES) I'm going to like it here. I find your wife most sympathetic.

GILES. (caldly) Indeed.

CHRISTOPHER. (turning to look at MOLLIE) And really very beautiful.

MOLLIE. Oh, don't be absurd.

(GILES leans on the back of the large armchair.)