

AGATHA CHRISTIE

# Witness for the Prosecution

A Play in Three Acts

Annotated by

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and

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THE SIGN OF



A GOOD BOOK

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## ま え が き

『検察側の証人』(1953)がアガサ・クリスティ(1890-1976)の劇の「最高傑作」(‘the best play’)であることは、作者も自認し、批評家も同意するところである。また『評決』(1958)を唯一の例外として、作者の最も好きな劇でもある(『自伝』[フォンタナ版]532-33, 538頁)。この名作が初めて日本に紹介されたのは、昭和33年に『情婦』という邦題で封切られた、ピリー・ワイルダー監督による見事な映画化(1957)によってであった。

この映画が非常な成功を収めた大きな原因は、確かに、チャールズ・ロートン、マレーネ・ディートリッヒ、タイロン・パワーといった顔ぶれによる、見事にはまった配役の楽しさにあったことも事実である。持病に苦しむ芝居がかった勅選弁護士に扮するチャールズ・ロートンと、実生活における彼の夫人で、口やかましくこの病人の世話をやく看護婦(舞台版には出てこない)の役を好演したエルザ・ランチェスターは大いに観客を楽しませ、また、タイロン・パワーは持ち味をいかして、子供のまま大きくなった無邪気そのものに見える青年被告人を、そしてディートリッヒはこの被告の、謎を秘めたドイツ人妻を抑えた演技で、それぞれ演じて、見事であった。更にワイルダー一流のきめの細かい演出と、ラッセル・ハーランの素晴らしい撮影(黒白)も、その成功に大きく寄与したと言えるであろう。

しかしながら、この映画が作られてから20余年にもなるというのに、いまだに上映の度に観客が思わず拍手をするほどの成功を収めている最大の原因は、幕切れに加えられた二つの捻り——どんでん返し——である。そして、自らの「有罪」を申し立てる「情婦」ローメイン(ディートリッヒ)の毅然たる態度と、その彼女にこれまで好敵手として敬意と同時に敵意を

抱いていた勅選弁護士（ロートン）が、改めてこの女の弁護を買って出る感動的な、厳粛な中に何とも言えない人間味を湛えた幕切れは、強烈な印象を残したものであった。

もっとも、この最後の締め括りは、映画で付け加えられた見事な仕上げのタッチで、舞台においては、本書にある通り、女主人公が自らの有罪を申し立てる所で終るのだが、しかしこの劇的な結末が、最初、皆の大反対に遭ったというのだから、意外という他はない。しかし、めったに我を通さないクリスティが、この時ばかりは反対を押し切って自分の結末をあくまで主張したという事実は、作者の優れた演劇的感觉を如実に示すものであろう。この辺の事情を、クリスティは、その『自伝』で次のように語っている――

‘... I had also to fight desperately for my chosen end to the play. Nobody liked it, nobody wanted it, everyone said it would spoil the whole thing. Everyone said: ‘You can’t get away with that,’ and wanted a different end—preferably one used in the original short story I had written years ago. But a short story is not a play. The short story had no court scene in it, no trial for murder. It was a mere sketch of an accused person and an enigmatic witness. I stuck out over the end. I don’t often stick out for things, I don’t always have sufficient conviction, but I had here. I wanted that end. I wanted it so much that I wouldn’t agree to have the play put on without it.

I got my end, and it was successful. Some people said it was a double cross, or dragged in, but I knew it wasn’t; it was logical. It was what could have happened, what might have happened, and in my view probably would have happened—possibly with a little less violence, but the psychology would have been right, and the one little fact that lay beneath it had been implicit all through the play’ (pp. 533-34).

一般に、幕切れでの意外な謎解きを身上とするミステリーは、舞台では当たらないと言われたりする。終り近くになると、観客の多くはそわそわし出して、犯人の正体よりも帰りの終電の方を気にし始めるからである。しかし、マイケル・ギルバートの証言によれば、『検察側の証人』の最後の数分の舞台効果の素晴らしさは、最も落ち着きのない観客をも、座席に釘付けにした、という。そして更に次のように付け加えるのである——「ウィンター・ガーデン劇場での初日には、作者への賛辞が、台本にないユニークな形で捧げられた。出演者全員が舞台の前に並び、作者のいるさじきにお辞儀をしたのだ」（『アガサ・クリスティー読本』37頁）。

しかし、この時すでに、クリスティーは、彼らの素晴らしい演技に満足し、観客の熱烈な拍手に一層気をよくして、幕が「私の結末」の上に降りた時、例によってこっそりさじきを抜け出していた（『自伝』534頁）。(もっとも、この劇を製作したピーター・ソーンドーズによれば、クリスティーは、あまりの喝采に当惑して、席を立つ時照れ隠しに、「ちょっと面白い芝居でしょ？」と彼に囁いたという〔『読本』218-19頁〕)しかし待たせてあった車を探している間に、好意的な人の群——ごく普通の観客の群——がクリスティーを取り囲み、口々に褒めそやし、激励してくれたと、彼女はその時の喜びを殆ど手放しに『自伝』（535頁）に記している。クリスティー自身認めているように、初日というものは一体にみじめなもの、殆ど耐え難いまでに不安なものなのだが、しかし、このようにして、「私が楽しんだ唯一の初日」——彼女の記憶に特に際立つ劇場での一夜——とクリスティーの言う『検察側の証人』の初日の幕が下りたのである——

... My self-consciousness and nervousness, just for once, were not with me. Yes, it was a memorable evening. I am proud of it still. And every now and then I dig into the memory chest, bring it out, take a look at

it, and say 'That was the night, that was!' (*An Autobiography*, p. 535).

しかし始めは、クリスティにも不安がない訳ではなかった。この時も「いつものおののきを胸に、出かけて行っただと思う〔「思う」——‘I suppose’——と、後になって言っているところが面白い〕。しかし一たび幕が上がるや、私の楽しみが始まった。これまで私が創作した劇作品の中で、これが、配役において、私が思い描いていたものに最も近かったからである」(『自伝』534頁)。そして、更に続けてクリスティは、この劇で最も困難な役、この劇の成功の鍵とも言うべきローメインの役を演じたパトリシア・ジェシルに、最高の賛辞を捧げるのである——

‘... The part was a difficult one, especially in the first act, where the lines cannot help. They are hesitant, reserved, and the whole force of the acting has to be in the eyes, the reticence, the feeling of something malign held back. She suggested this perfectly—a taut, enigmatic personality. I still think her acting of the part of Romaine Helder [*sic*] was one of the best performances I have seen on the stage’ (*ibid.*, p. 534).

こうして1953年10月28日、ロンドンで初日の幕を開けた『検察側の証人』は、468回のロングランを記録、翌54年にはニューヨークのブロードウェイに進出して、ロンドンを凌ぐ646回の上演を重ね、1955年5月16日にニューヨーク劇評家協会より最優秀外国演劇賞を受けることになるのである。(因に、この年の最優秀国内演劇賞を受けたのは、テネシー・ウィリアムズの『やけたトタン屋根の上の猫』であった。)

ピーター・ソーンドーズの執拗な勧めによって書かれたこの劇は、法廷劇としての性質上、登場人物<sup>30</sup>人、セット2ハイという大掛りなもので、

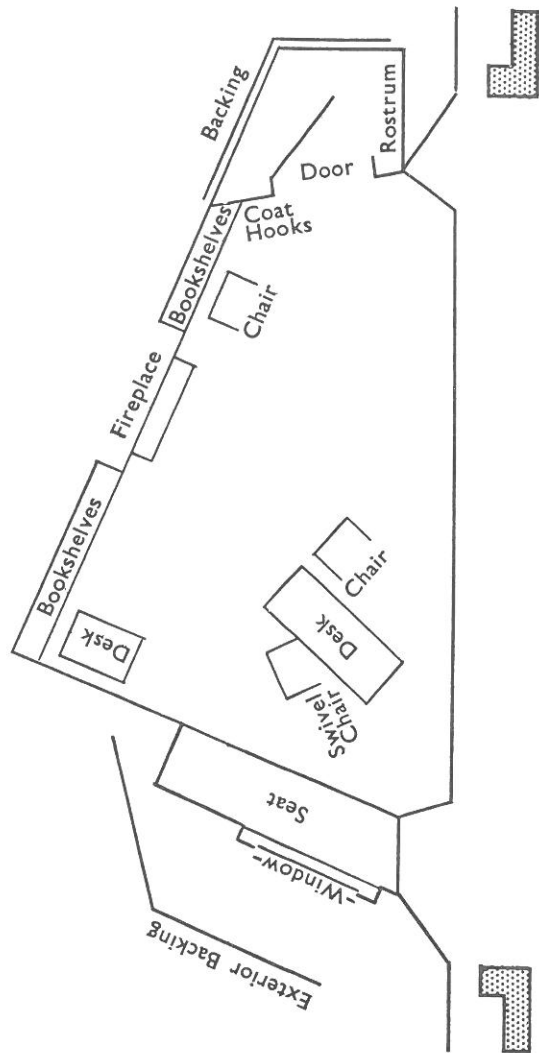
たとえば登場人物10人，セット2ハイの『ねずみとり』（1952）の初稿を不都合だとみると，登場人物8人，セット1パイの現行版に一日で書き換えたクリスティにしては，例外的と言ってよい．それが気になるのか，彼女は素人ないしレパートリ劇団のために，登場人物を男10人，女5人に減らす案を出版された脚本に付け加えている．同時に登場しない役柄は一人で二役を演じてよし，Alderman, Court Stenographer, Judge's Clerk は削ってもよし，6人のBarristersも2人にし，Three Members of the Jury も削って，舞台の袖からの声だけにしてもよい．ただし，Greta と幕切れに駆け込むストローベリ・ブロンドの‘The Other Woman’は，同じ女優が演じてはいけない，観客がそれを仕組まれたトリックと思うといけなから，とか，法廷の場は，台詞を喋らぬ人物が多いから，土地の素人俳優を用いてもよいが，観客に舞台へ上がって貰うのもよいだろう（むしろ，その方が，俳優不足で貧弱な舞台になるよりはるかによい），とかいう提案は，芝居というものに対するクリスティの考え方をよく示していると言ってよい．そしてレパートリ劇団に向けられた次の結びの言葉は，いかにも思いやりのある，クリスティのやさしい人柄を偲ばせるが，それを本書の読者にも贈りたいと思う――

The play has given me enormous enjoyment in writing, and I do hope that the repertory companies who do it will derive the same pleasure from it. Good luck.

1980年初秋

編 注 者

GROUND PLAN  
WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION  
ACT I & ACT III SCENE 1





## Act One

SCENE: *The chambers of Sir Wilfrid Robarts, Q.C.*

*The scene is Sir Wilfrid's private office. It is a narrow room with the door L. and a window R. The window has a deep built-in window seat and overlooks a tall plain brick wall. There is a fireplace C. of the back wall, flanked by bookcases filled with heavy legal volumes. 5 There is a desk R.C. with a swivel chair R. of it and a leather-covered upright chair L. of it. A second upright chair stands against the bookcases L. of the fireplace. In the corner up R. is a tall reading desk, and in the corner up L. are some coat-hooks attached to the wall. At night the room is lit by electric candle-lamp wall-brackets R. and L. 10 of the fireplace and an angle-poise lamp on the desk. The light switch is below the door L. There is a bell push L. of the fireplace. The desk has a telephone on it and is littered with legal documents. There are the usual deed-boxes and there is a litter of documents on the window seat.*

15

*When the Curtain rises it is afternoon and there is sunshine streaming in through the window R. The office is empty. GRETA, Sir Wilfrid's typist, enters immediately. She is an adenoidal girl with a good opinion of herself. She crosses to the fireplace, doing a "square dance" step, and takes a paper from a box-file on the mantelpiece. CARTER, the 20 Chief Clerk, enters. He carries some letters. GRETA turns, sees CARTER, crosses and quietly exits. CARTER crosses to the desk and puts the letters on it. The TELEPHONE rings. CARTER lifts the receiver.*

CARTER. (*Into the telephone.*) Sir Wilfrid Robart's Chambers . . . Oh, it's you, Charles . . . No, Sir Wilfrid's in Court . . . Won't be back just yet . . . Yes, Shuttleworth Case . . . What—with Myers for the prosecution and Banter trying it? . . . He's been giving judgment  
 5 for close on two hours already . . . No, not an earthly this evening. We're full up. Can give you an appointment tomorrow . . . No, couldn't possibly. I'm expecting Mayhew, of Mayhew and Brin-skill you know, any minute now . . . Well, so long. (*He replaces the receiver and sorts the documents on the desk.*)

10 GRETA. (*Enters. She is painting her nails.*) Shall I make the tea, Mr. Carter?

CARTER. (*Looking at his watch*) It's hardly time yet, Greta.

GRETA. It is by my watch.

CARTER. Then your watch is wrong.

15 GRETA. (*Crossing to c.*) I put it right by the radio.

CARTER. Then the radio must be wrong.

GRETA. (*Shocked.*) Oh, not the radio, Mr. Carter. That *couldn't* be wrong.

CARTER. This watch was my father's. It never gains nor loses. They  
 20 don't make watches like that nowadays. (*He shakes his head, then suddenly changes his manner and picks up one of the typewritten papers.*) Really, your typing. Always mistakes. (*He crosses to R. of GRETA.*) You've left out a word.

GRETA. Oh, well—just one word. Anyone might do that.

25 CARTER. The word you have left out is the word *not*. The omission of it entirely alters the sense.

GRETA. Oh, does it? That's rather funny when you come to think of it. (*She giggles.*)

CARTER. It is not in the least funny. (*He tears the letter in half and  
 30 hands the pieces to her.*) Do it again. You may remember I told you last week about the celebrated case of Bryant and Horsfall. Case of

a will and a trust fund, and entirely owing to a piece of careless copying by a clerk . . .

GRETA. (*Interrupting*) The wrong wife got the money, I remember.

CARTER. A woman divorced fifteen years previously. Absolutely contrary to the intention of the testator, as his lordship himself admitted. But the wording had to stand. They couldn't do anything about it. (*He crosses above the desk to R. of it.*)

GRETA. I think *that's* rather funny, too. (*She giggles.*)

CARTER. Counsel's Chambers are no place to be funny in. The Law, Greta, is a serious business and should be treated accordingly. 10

GRETA. You wouldn't think so—to hear some of the jokes Judges make.

CARTER. That kind of joke is the prerogative of the Bench.

GRETA. And I'm always reading in the paper about "laughter in Court." 15

CARTER. If that's not caused by one of the Judge's remarks you'll find he'll soon threaten to have the Court cleared.

GRETA. (*Crossing to the door*) Mean old thing. (*She turns and crosses to L. of the desk.*) Do you know what I read the other day, Mr. Carter. (*Sententiously.*) "The Law's an Ass." I'm not being rude. It's a 20 quotation.

CARTER. (*Coldly.*) A quotation of a facetious nature. Not meant to be taken seriously. (*He looks at his watch.*) You can make the tea—(*He pauses, waiting for the exact second.*)—now, Greta.

GRETA. (*Gladly.*) Oh, thank you, Mr. Carter. (*She crosses quickly to 25 the door.*)

CARTER. Mr. Mayhew, of Mayhew and Brinskill, will be here shortly. A Mr. Leonard Vole is also expected. They may come together or separately.

GRETA. (*Excitedly.*) Leonard Vole? (*She crosses to the desk.*) Why, 30 that's the name—it was in the paper . . .

CARTER. (*Repressively.*) The tea, Greta.

GRETA. Asked to communicate with the police as he might be able to give them useful information.

CARTER. (*Raising his voice*) Tea!

5 GRETA. (*Crossing to the door and turning*) It was only last . . .

(CARTER *glowers at GRETA.*)

The tea, Mr. Carter. (GRETA, *abashed but unsatisfied, exits.*)

CARTER. (*Continues his arrangement of the papers, muttering to himself.*)

These girls. Sensational—inaccurate—I don't know what the

10 Temple's coming to. (*He examines a typewritten document, makes an angry sound, picks up a pen and makes a correction.*)

GRETA. (*Enters. Announcing*) Mr. Mayhew.

(MR. MAYHEW and LEONARD VOLE *enter*. MAYHEW is a typical middle-aged solicitor, shrewd and rather dry and precise in manner. LEONARD is a likeable, friendly young man, about twenty-seven. He is looking faintly worried. MAYHEW carries a brief-case.)

MAYHEW. (*Giving his hat to GRETA*) Sit down, Mr. Vole. (*He crosses and stands above the desk.*) Good afternoon, Carter. (*He puts his brief-case on the desk.*)

20 (GRETA *takes LEONARD's hat and hangs both on the pegs above the door. She then exits, staring at LEONARD over her shoulder.*)

CARTER. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayhew. Sir Wilfrid shouldn't be long, sir, although you never can tell with Mr. Justice Banter. I'll go straight over to the Robing Room and tell him that you're  
25 here—(*He hesitates.*) with . . . (*He crosses below the desk to R. of LEONARD.*)

MAYHEW. With Mr. Leonard Vole. Thank you, Carter. I'm afraid our appointment was at rather short notice. But in this case time is—er—rather urgent.

(CARTER crosses to the door.)

How's the lumbago?

CARTER. (*Turning*) I only feel it when the wind is in the East. Thank you for remembering, Mr. Mayhew. (CARTER exits hurriedly.)

(MAYHEW sits L. of the desk. LEONARD prowls uneasily.)

5

MAYHEW. Sit down, Mr. Vole.

LEONARD. Thanks—I'd rather walk about. I— this sort of thing makes you feel a bit jumpy. (*He crosses down L.*)

MAYHEW. Yes, yes, very probably . . .

GRETA. (*Enters. She speaks to MAYHEW, but stares with fascinated interest at LEONARD.*) Would you care for a cup of tea, Mr. Mayhew? I've just made it.

LEONARD. (*Appreciatively.*) Thanks, I don't mind if I . . .

MAYHEW. (*Interrupting; decisively.*) No, thank you.

(GRETA turns to exit.)

15

LEONARD. (*To GRETA.*) Sorry. (*He smiles at her.*)

(GRETA smiles at LEONARD and exits. There is a pause.)

(*He crosses up R. Abruptly and with a rather likeable air of bewilderment*) What I mean is, I can't believe it's *me* this is happening to.

I keep thinking—perhaps it's all a dream and I'll wake up presently.

MAYHEW. Yes, I suppose one might feel like that.

LEONARD. (*Moving to R. of the desk*) What I mean is—well, it seems so silly.

MAYHEW. (*Sharply.*) Silly, Mr. Vole?

25

LEONARD. Well, yes. I mean I've always been a friendly sort of chap—get on with people and all that. I mean, I'm not the sort of fellow that does—well, anything violent. (*He pauses.*) But I suppose it

will be—all right, won't it? I mean you don't get convicted for things you haven't done in this country, do you?

MAYHEW. Our English judicial system is, in my opinion, the finest in the world.

5 LEONARD. (*Is not much comforted. Crossing above the desk to L.*) Of course there was that case of—what was his name—Adolf Beck. I read about it only the other day. After he'd been in prison for years, they found out it was another chap called Smith. They gave him a free pardon then. That's a thing that seems odd to me  
10 —giving you a "pardon" for something you haven't done.

MAYHEW. It is the necessary legal term.

LEONARD. (*Bringing the chair from L. of the fireplace and setting it c.*) Well, it doesn't seem right to me.

MAYHEW. The important thing was that Beck was set at liberty.

15 LEONARD. Yes, it was all right for him. But if it had been murder now —(*He sits astride the chair c.*) if it had been murder it would have been too late. He would have been hanged.

MAYHEW. (*Dry but kindly.*) Now, Mr. Vole, there is really no need to take a—er—morbid point of view.

20 LEONARD. (*Rather pathetically.*) I'm sorry, sir. But you see, in a way, I'm rather getting the wind up.

MAYHEW. Well, try and keep calm. Sir Wilfrid Robarts will be here presently and I want you to tell your story to him exactly as you told it to me.

25 LEONARD. Yes, sir.

MAYHEW. But meantime perhaps we might fill out a little more of the detail—er—background. You are at present, I understand, out of a job?

LEONARD. (*Embarrassed.*) Yes, but I've got a few pounds put by.

30 It's not much, but if you can see your way . . .

MAYHEW. (*Upset.*) Oh, I'm not thinking of—er—legal fees. It's just

the—er—pictures I'm trying to get clear. Your surroundings and—er—circumstances. How long have you been unemployed?

LEONARD. (*Answers everything readily, with an engaging friendliness.*)

About a couple of months.

MAYHEW. What were you doing before that? 5

LEONARD. I was in a motor servicing firm—kind of mechanic, that's what I was.

MAYHEW. How long had you worked there?

LEONARD. Oh, about three months.

MAYHEW. (*Sharply.*) Were you discharged? 10

LEONARD. No, I quit. Had words with the foreman. Proper old b— (*He breaks off.*) That is, he was a mean sort of chap, always picking on you.

MAYHEW. Hm! And before that?

LEONARD. I worked in a petrol station, but things got a bit awkward 15 and I left.

MAYHEW. Awkward? In what way?

LEONARD. (*Embarrassed.*) Well—the boss's daughter—she was only a kid, but she took a—well, a sort of fancy to me—and there was nothing there shouldn't have been between us, but the old man 20 got a bit fed up and said I'd better go. He was quite nice about it and gave me a good chit. (*He rises and suddenly grins.*) Before that, I was selling egg beaters on commission. (*He replaces the chair L. of the fireplace.*)

MAYHEW. Indeed. 25

LEONARD. (*Crossing and standing above the desk; boyishly.*) And a rotten job they were, too. I could have invented a better egg beater myself. (*Catching MAYHEW's mood*) You're thinking I'm a bit of a drifter, sir. It's true in a way—but I'm not really like that. Doing my army service unsettled me a bit—that and being abroad. I was 30 in Germany. It was fine there. That's where I met my wife. She's

an actress. Since I've come back to this country I can't seem somehow to settle down properly. I don't know really just what I want to do—I like working on cars best and thinking out new gadgets for them. That's interesting, that is. And you see . . .

5 (SIR WILFRID ROBERTS, Q.C., *enters*. *He is followed on by CARTER*. SIR WILFRID *is wearing his Q.C.'s jacket and bands and carries his wig and gown*. CARTER *carries SIR WILFRID'S ordinary jacket and bow tie*.)

SIR WILFRID. Hullo, John.

MAYHEW. (*Rising*) Ah, Wilfrid.

10 SIR WILFRID. (*Handing the wig and gown to CARTER*) Carter told you I was in Court? Banter really surpassed himself. (*He looks at LEONARD*.) And this is Mr.—er—Vole? (*He crosses to L. of LEONARD*.)

MAYHEW. This is Leonard Vole.

LEONARD. How do you do, sir?

15 (MAYHEW *moves to the fireplace*.)

SIR WILFRID. How do you do, Vole? Won't you sit down?

(LEONARD *sits L. of the desk*.)

How's the family, John? (*He crosses to CARTER*.)

(CARTER *assists SIR WILFRID to change his jacket and remove his bands*.)

20 MAYHEW. Molly's got a touch of this twenty-four hour flu.

SIR WILFRID. Too bad!

MAYHEW. Yes, damnable. Did you win your case, Wilfrid?

SIR WILFRID. Yes, I'm glad to say.

MAYHEW. It always gives you satisfaction to beat Myers, doesn't it?

25 SIR WILFRID. It gives me satisfaction to beat anyone.

MAYHEW. But especially Myers.

SIR WILFRID. (*Taking the bow tie from CARTER*) Especially Myers. (*He crosses to the mirror R.*) He's an irritating—gentleman. (*He puts on his bow tie*.) He always seems to bring out the worst in me.



MAYHEW. That would appear to be mutual. You irritate him because you hardly ever let him finish a sentence.

(CARTER exits, taking the wig, gown, jacket and bands with him.)

SIR WILFRID. He irritates me because of that mannerism of his. (*He turns and stands R. of the desk.*) It's this—(*He clears his throat and 5 adjusts an imaginary wig.*) that drives me to distraction, and he will call me Ro-barts—Ro-barts. But he's a very able advocate, if only he'd remember not to ask leading questions when he knows damn well he shouldn't. But let's get down to business.

MAYHEW. (*Moving above the desk*) Yes. I brought Vole here, because 10 I am anxious for you to hear his story exactly as he told it to me. (*He takes some typewritten papers from his brief-case.*) There is some urgency in the matter, it seems. (*He hands the papers to SIR WILFRID.*)

SIR WILFRID. Oh?

15

LEONARD. My wife thinks I'm going to be arrested. (*He looks embarrassed.*) She's much cleverer than I am—so she may be right.

SIR WILFRID. Arrested for what?

LEONARD. (*Still more embarrassed.*) Well—for murder.

(SIR WILFRID perches himself on the down R. corner of the desk.) 20

MAYHEW. (*Crossing to c.*) It's the case of Miss Emily French. You've probably seen the reports in the Press?

(SIR WILFRID nods.)

She was a maiden lady, living alone but for an elderly housekeeper, in a house at Hampstead. On the night of October the fourteenth 25 her housekeeper returned at eleven o'clock to find that apparently the place had been broken into, and that her mistress had been coshed on the back of the head and killed. (*To LEONARD.*) That is right?

LEONARD. That's right. It's quite an ordinary sort of thing to happen nowadays. And then, the other day, the papers said that the police were anxious to interview a Mr. Leonard Vole, who had visited Miss French earlier on the evening in question, as they thought he  
 5 might be able to give them useful information. So of course I went along to the police station and they asked me a lot of questions.

SIR WILFRID. (*Sharply.*) Did they caution you?

LEONARD. (*Vaguely.*) I don't quite know. I mean they said would I  
 10 like to make a statement and they'd write it down, and it might be used in Court. Is that cautioning me?

(SIR WILFRID *exchanges a glance with* MAYHEW, *and speaks more to him than to* LEONARD.)

SIR WILFRID. (*Rising*) Oh well, can't be helped now. (*He crosses above*  
 15 *the desk to L.*)

LEONARD. Anyway, it sounded damned silly to me. I told them all I could and they were very polite and seemed quite satisfied and all that. When I got home and told Romaine about it—my wife that is—well, she got the wind up. She seemed to think that they—  
 20 well—that they'd got hold of the idea that *I* might have done it.

(SIR WILFRID *moves the chair from L. of the fireplace to C. for* MAYHEW, *who sits.*)

So I thought perhaps I ought to get hold of a solicitor—(*To* MAYHEW.) so I came along to you. I thought you'd be able to tell me  
 25 what I ought to do about it. (*He looks anxiously from one to the other.*)

SIR WILFRID. (*Moving down L.*) You knew Miss French well?

(LEONARD *rises, but* SIR WILFRID *motions him to sit.*)

LEONARD. Oh yes, she'd been frightfully kind to me. (*He resumes his*

*seat.*) Actually it was a bit of a bore sometimes—she positively fussed over me, but she meant it very well, and when I saw in the paper that she'd been killed I was awfully upset, because, you see, I'd really got fond of her.

MAYHEW. Tell Sir Wilfrid, just as you told me, how it was you came 5 to make Miss French's acquaintance.

LEONARD. (*Turning obediently to SIR WILFRID*) Well, it was one day in Oxford Street. I saw an old lady crossing the road carrying a lot of parcels and in the middle of the street she dropped them, tried to get hold of them again and found a bus was almost on top of 10 her.

(*SIR WILFRID crosses slowly below the others to R. of desk.*)

Just managed to get to the curb safely. Well, I recovered her parcels from the street, wiped some of the mud off them as best I could, tied up one again that had burst open with string and gen- 15 erally soothed the old dear down. You know the sort of thing.

SIR WILFRID. And she was grateful?

LEONARD. Oh yes, she seemed very grateful. Thanked me a lot and all that. Anyone would think I'd saved her life instead of her parcels. 20

SIR WILFRID. There was actually no question of your having saved her life? (*He takes a packet of cigarettes from the desk drawer.*)

LEONARD. Oh, no. Nothing heroic. I never expected to see her again.

SIR WILFRID. Cigarette?

LEONARD. No, thanks, sir, never do. But by an extraordinary coin- 25 cidence, two days later I happened to be sitting behind her in the theatre. She looked round and recognized me and we began to talk, and in the end she asked me to come and see her.

SIR WILFRID. And you went?

LEONARD. Yes. She'd urged me to name a day specially and it seemed 30

rather churlish to refuse. So I said I'd go on the following Saturday.

SIR WILFRID. And you went to her house at . . . (*He looks at one of the papers.*)

5 MAYHEW. Hampstead.

LEONARD. Yes.

SIR WILFRID. What did you know about her when you first went to the house? (*He perches himself on the down R. corner of the desk.*)

LEONARD. Well, nothing really but what she'd told me, that she lived  
10 alone and hadn't very many friends. Something of that kind.

SIR WILFRID. She lived with only a housekeeper?

LEONARD. That's right. She had eight cats, though. Eight of them.  
The house was beautifully furnished and all that, but it smelt a  
bit of cat.

15 SIR WILFRID. (*Rising and moving above the desk*) Had you reason to believe she was well off?

LEONARD. Well, she talked as though she was.

SIR WILFRID. And you yourself? (*He crosses and stands up L. of*  
LEONARD.)

20 LEONARD (*Cheerfully.*) Oh, I'm practically stony broke and have been for a long time.

SIR WILFRID. Unfortunate.

LEONARD. Yes, it is rather. Oh, you mean people will say I was sucking up to her for her money?

25 SIR WILFRID. (*Disarmed.*) I shouldn't have put it quite like that, but in essence, yes, that is possibly what people might say.

LEONARD. It isn't really true, you know. As a matter of fact, I was sorry for her. I thought she was lonely. I was brought up by an old aunt, my Aunt Betsy, and I like old ladies.

30 SIR WILFRID. You say old ladies. Do you know what age Miss French was?

LEONARD. Well, I didn't know, but I read it in the paper after she was murdered. She was fifty-six.

SIR WILFRID. Fifty-six. You consider that old, Mr. Vole, but I should doubt if Miss Emily French considered herself old.

LEONARD. But you can't call it a chicken, can you? 5

SIR WILFRID. (*Crossing above the desk and sitting R. of it*) Well, let us get on. You went to see Miss French fairly frequently?

LEONARD. Yes, I should say once, twice a week perhaps.

SIR WILFRID. Did you take your wife with you?

LEONARD. (*Slightly embarrassed.*) No, no, I didn't. 10

SIR WILFRID. Why didn't you?

LEONARD. Well—well, frankly, I don't think it would have gone down very well if I had.

SIR WILFRID. Do you mean with your wife or with Miss French?

LEONARD. Oh, with Miss French. (*He hesitates.*) 15

MAYHEW. Go on, go on.

LEONARD. You see, she got rather fond of me.

SIR WILFRID. You mean, she fell in love with you?

LEONARD. (*Horried.*) Oh, good Lord, no, nothing of that kind. Just sort of pampered me and spoiled me, that sort of thing. 20

SIR WILFRID. (*After a short pause.*) You see, Mr. Vole, I have no doubt part of the police case against you, if there *is* a case against you which as yet we have no definite reason to suppose, will be why did you, young, good-looking, married, devote so much of your time to an elderly woman with whom you could hardly have 25 very much in common?

LEONARD. (*Gloomily.*) Yes, I know they'll say I was after her for her money. And in a way perhaps that's true. But only in a way.

SIR WILFRID. (*Slightly disarmed.*) Well, at least you're frank, Mr. Vole. Can you explain a little more clearly? 30

LEONARD. (*Rising and moving to the fireplace*) Well, she made no

secret of the fact that she was rolling in money. As I told you, Romaine and I—that's my wife—are pretty hard up. (*He moves and stands above his chair.*) I'll admit that I did hope that if I was really in a tight place she'd lend me some money. I'm being

5 honest about it.

SIR WILFRID. Did you ask her for a loan?

LEONARD. No, I didn't. I mean, things weren't desperate. (*He becomes suddenly rather more serious as though he realized the gravity of that.*) Of course I can see—it does look rather bad for me. (*He resumes his seat.*)

10 SIR WILFRID. Miss French knew you were a married man?

LEONARD. Oh, yes.

SIR WILFRID. But she didn't suggest that you should bring your wife to see her?

15 LEONARD. (*Slightly embarrassed.*) No. She—well, she seemed to take it for granted my wife and I didn't get on.

SIR WILFRID. Did you deliberately give her that impression?

LEONARD. No, I didn't. Indeed I didn't. But she seemed to—well, assume it, and I thought perhaps if I kept dragging Romaine  
20 into it she'd, well, lose interest in me. I didn't want exactly to cadge money from her, but I'd invented a gadget for a car—a really good idea it is—and if I could have persuaded her to finance that, well, I mean it would have been *her* money, and it might have brought her in a lot. Oh, it's very difficult to explain—but I wasn't sponging  
25 on her. Sir Wilfrid, really I wasn't.

SIR WILFRID. What sums of money did you obtain at any time from Miss French?

LEONARD. None. None at all.

SIR WILFRID. Tell me something about the housekeeper.

30 LEONARD. Janet MacKenzie? She was a regular old tyrant, you know, Janet was. Fairly bullied poor Miss French. Looked after her very

well and all that, but the poor old dear couldn't call her soul her own when Janet was about. (*Thoughtfully.*) Janet didn't like me at all.

SIR WILFRID. Why didn't she like you?

LEONARD. Oh, jealous, I expect. I don't think she liked my helping 5 Miss French with her business affairs.

SIR WILFRID. Oh, so you helped Miss French with her business affairs?

LEONARD. Yes. She was worried about some of her investments and things, and she found it a bit difficult to fill up forms and all that 10 sort of thing. Yes, I helped her with a lot of things like that.

SIR WILFRID. Now, Mr. Vole, I'm going to ask you a very serious question. And it's one to which it's vital I should have a truthful answer. You were in low water financially, you had the handling of this lady's affairs. Now did you at any time convert to your own 15 use the securities that you handled?

(LEONARD *is about to repudiate this hotly.*)

Now, wait a minute, Mr. Vole, before you answer. Because, you see, there are two points of view. Either we can make a feature of your probity and honesty or, if you swindled the woman in any 20 way, then we must take the line that you had no motive for murder, since you had already a profitable source of income. You can see that there are advantages in either point of view. What I want is the truth. Take your time if you like before you reply.

LEONARD. I assure you, Sir Wilfrid, that I played dead straight and 25 you won't find anything to the contrary. Dead straight.

SIR WILFRID. Thank you, Mr. Vole. You relieve my mind very much. I pay you the compliment of believing that you are far too intelligent to lie over such a vital matter. And we now come to October the . . . (*He hesitates.*)

MAYHEW. The fourteenth.

SIR WILFRID. Fourteenth. (*He rises.*) Did Miss French ask you to go and see her that night?

LEONARD. No, she didn't, as a matter of fact. But I'd come across a  
 5 new kind of gadget and I thought she'd like it. So I slipped up there that evening and got there about a quarter to eight. It was Janet MacKenzie's night out and I knew she'd be alone and might be rather lonely.

SIR WILFRID. It was Janet MacKenzie's night out and you knew that  
 10 fact.

LEONARD. (*Cheerfully.*) Oh yes, I knew Janet always went out on a Friday.

SIR WILFRID. That's not quite so good.

LEONARD. Why not? It seems very natural that I should choose that  
 15 evening to go and see her.

SIR WILFRID. Please go on, Mr. Vole.

LEONARD. Well, I got there at a quarter to eight. She'd finished her supper but I had a cup of coffee with her and we played a game of Double Demon. Then at nine o'clock I said good night to her  
 20 and went home.

(SIR WILFRID *crosses below the OTHERS to L.*)

MAYHEW. You told me the housekeeper said she came home that evening earlier than usual.

LEONARD. Yes, the police told me she came back for something she'd  
 25 forgotten and she heard—or she says she heard—somebody talking with Miss French. Well, whoever it was, it wasn't me.

SIR WILFRID. Can you prove that, Mr. Vole?

LEONARD. Yes, of course I can prove it. I was at home again with my wife by then. That's what the police kept asking me. Where I was  
 30 at nine-thirty. Well, I mean some days one wouldn't know where



one was. As it happens I can remember quite well that I'd gone straight home to Romaine and we hadn't gone out again.

SIR WILFRID. (*Crossing up c.*) You live in a flat?

LEONARD. Yes. We've got a tiny maisonette over a shop behind Euston Station. 5

SIR WILFRID. (*Standing up L. of LEONARD*) Did anybody see you returning to the flat?

LEONARD. I don't suppose so. Why should they?

SIR WILFRID. It might be an advantage if they had.

LEONARD. But surely you don't think—I mean if she were really 10 killed at half past nine my wife's evidence is all I need, isn't it?

(SIR WILFRID and MAYHEW look at each other. SIR WILFRID crosses and stands L.)

MAYHEW. And your wife will say definitely that you were at home at that time? 15

LEONARD. Of course she will.

MAYHEW. (*Rising and moving to the fireplace*) You are very fond of your wife and your wife is very fond of you?

LEONARD. (*His face softening*) Romaine is absolutely devoted to me. She's the most devoted wife any man could have. 20

MAYHEW. I see. You are happily married.

LEONARD. Couldn't be happier. Romaine's wonderful, absolutely wonderful. I'd like you to know her, Mr. Mayhew.

(*There is a KNOCK at the door.*)

SIR WILFRID. (*Calling*) Come in. 25

GRETA. (*Enters. She carries an evening paper.*) The evening paper, Sir Wilfrid. (*She points to a paragraph as she hands the paper to him.*)

SIR WILFRID. Thank you, Greta.

GRETA. Would you like a cup of tea, sir?

SIR WILFRID. No, thank you. Oh, would you like a cup, Vole? 30

LEONARD. No, thank you, sir.

SIR WILFRID. No, thank you, Greta. (*He crosses below the OTHERS to R. of the desk*)

(GRETA *exits.*)

5 MAYHEW. I think it would be advisable for us to have a meeting with your wife.

LEONARD. You mean have a regular round-table conference?

(SIR WILFRID *sits R. of the desk.*)

MAYHEW. I wonder, Mr. Vole, if you are taking this business quite  
10 seriously enough?

LEONARD. (*Nervously.*) I am. I am, really, but it seems—well, I mean it seems so much like a bad dream. I mean that it should be happening to me. Murder. It's a thing you read about in books or newspapers, but you can't believe it's a thing that could ever  
15 happen to you, or touch you in any way. I suppose that's why I keep trying to make a joke of it, but it isn't a joke, really.

MAYHEW. No, I'm afraid it's not a joke.

LEONARD. But I mean it's all right, isn't it? Because I mean if they think Miss French was killed at half past nine and I was at home  
20 with Romaine . . .

MAYHEW. How did you go home? By bus or underground?

LEONARD. I walked. It took me about twenty-five minutes, but it was a fine night—a bit windy.

MAYHEW. Did you see anyone you knew on the way?

25 LEONARD. No, but does it matter? I mean Romaine . . .

SIR WILFRID. The evidence of a devoted wife unsupported by any other evidence may not be completely convincing, Mr. Vole.

LEONARD. You mean, they'd think Romaine would tell a lie on my account?

30 SIR WILFRID. It has been known, Mr. Vole.

LEONARD. Oh, I'm sure she would, too, only in this case I mean she won't be telling a lie. I mean it really is so. You do believe me, don't you?

SIR WILFRID. Yes, I believe you, Mr. Vole, but it's not me you will have to convince. You are aware, are you not, that Miss French 5 left a will leaving you all her money?

LEONARD. (*Absolutely flabbergasted.*) Left all her money to me? You're joking!

(MAYHEW resumes his seat C.)

SIR WILFRID. I'm not joking. It's in tonight's evening paper. (*He 10 hands the paper across the desk.*)

LEONARD. (*Reads the paragraph.*) Well, I can hardly believe it.

SIR WILFRID. You knew nothing about it?

LEONARD. Absolutely nothing. She never said a word. (*He hands the 15 paper to MAYHEW.*)

MAYHEW. You're quite sure of that, Mr. Vole?

LEONARD. Absolutely sure. I'm very grateful to her—yet in a way I rather wish now that she hadn't. I mean it—it's a bit unfortunate as things are, isn't it, sir?

SIR WILFRID. It supplies you with a very adequate motive. That is, 20 if you knew about it, which you say you didn't. Miss French never talked to you about making a will?

LEONARD. She said to Janet once, "You're afraid I shall make my will again," but that was nothing to do with me. I mean, it was just a bit of a dust-up between them. (*His manner changes.*) Do 25 you really think they're going to arrest me?

SIR WILFRID. I think you must prepare yourself, Mr. Vole, for that eventuality.

LEONARD. (*Rising*) You—you will do the best you can for me, won't you, sir?

SIR WILFRID. (*With friendliness.*) You may rest assured, my dear Mr. Vole, that I will do everything in my power to help you. Don't worry. Leave everything in my hands.

LEONARD. You'll look after Romaine, won't you? I mean, she'll be  
5 in an awful state—it will be terrible for her.

SIR WILFRID. Don't worry, my boy. Don't worry.

LEONARD. (*Resuming his seat; to MAYHEW*) Then the money side, too. That worries me. I've got a few quid, but it's not much. Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked you to do anything for me.

10 MAYHEW. I think we shall be able to put up adequate defence. The Court provides for these cases, you know.

LEONARD. (*Rising and moving above the desk*) I can't believe it. I can't believe that I, Leonard Vole, may be standing in a dock saying "Not guilty." People staring at me. (*He shakes himself as though it*  
15 *were a bad dream then turns to MAYHEW.*) I can't see why they don't think it was a burglar. I mean, apparently the window was forced and smashed and a lot of things were strewn around, so the papers said. (*He resumes his seat.*) I mean, it seems much more probable.

20 MAYHEW. The police must have some good reason for not thinking that it was a burglary.

LEONARD. Well, it seems to me . . .

(CARTER enters.)

SIR WILFRID. Yes, Carter?

25 CARTER. (*Crossing above the desk*) Excuse me, sir, there are two gentlemen here asking to see Mr. Vole.

SIR WILFRID. The police?

CARTER. Yes, sir.

(MAYHEW rises.)