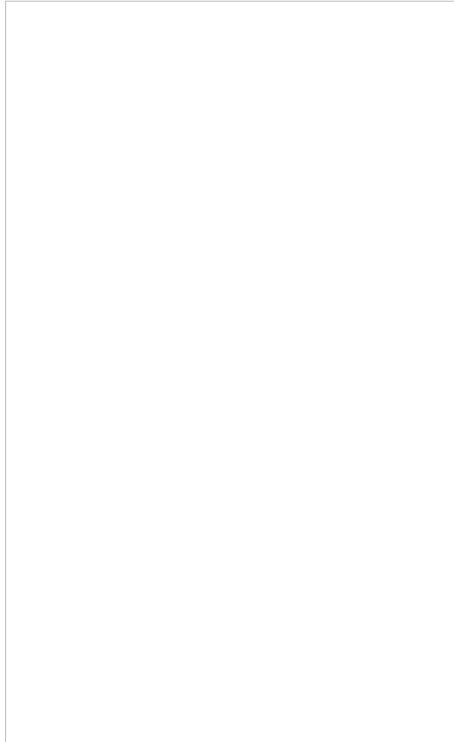


COVER HER FACE

The beautiful maid with the shadowy past was dead, strangled in her bed. Everyone in the elegant Maxie household from Stephen Maxie, son and heir, to Martha, the respectable housekeeper, had a reason to hate her. Detective Chief-Inspector Adam Dalgleish, Scotland Yard's super sleuth, needed all his considerable skills to unmask the cunning killer.



COVER HER FACE

P. D. James

CHIVERS PRESS

BATH

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Chapter One

Exactly three months before the killing at Martingale Mrs. Maxie gave a dinner party. Years later, when the trial was a half-forgotten scandal and the headlines were yellowing on the newspaper lining of cupboard drawers, Eleanor Maxie looked back on that spring evening as the opening scene of tragedy. Memory, selective and perverse, invested what had been a perfectly ordinary dinner party with an aura of foreboding and unease. It became, in retrospect, a ritual gathering under one roof of victim and suspects, a staged preliminary to murder. In fact not all the suspects had been present. Felix Heame, for one, was not at Martingale that week-end. Yet, in her memory, he too sat at Mrs. Maxie's table, watching with amused, sardonic eyes the opening antics of the players.

At the time, of course, the party was both ordinary and rather dull. Three of the guests. Dr. Epps, the vicar and Miss Liddell, Warden of St. Mary's Refuge for Girls, had dined together too often to expect either novelty or stimulation from each other's company. Catherine Bowers was unusually silent and Stephen Maxie and his sister, Deborah Riscoe, were obviously concealing with difficulty their irritation that Stephen's first free weekend from the hospital for over a month should have coincided with a dinner party.

Mrs. Maxie had just employed one of Miss Liddell's unmarried mothers as house-parlourmaid and the girl was waiting at table for the first time. But the air of constraint which burdened the meal could hardly have been caused by the occasional presence of Sally Jupp who placed the dishes in front of Mrs. Maxie and removed the plates with a dexterous efficiency which Miss Liddell noted with complacent approval.

It is probable that at least one of the guests was wholly happy. Bernard Hinks, the vicar of Chadfleet, was a bachelor, and any change from the nourishing but unpalatable meals produced by his housekeeping sister - who was never herself tempted away from the vicarage to dine - was a relief which left small room for the niceties of social intercourse. He was a gentle, sweet-faced man who looked older than his fifty-four years and who had a reputation for vagueness and timidity except on points of doctrine.

Theology was his main, almost his sole, intellectual interest and if his parishioners could not always understand his sermons they were happy enough to accept this as sure evidence of their vicar's erudition. It was, however, accepted in the village that you could get both advice and help from the vicarage and that, if the former were sometimes a little muddled, the latter could generally be relied upon.

To Dr. Epps the dinner meant a first-class meal, a couple of charming women to talk to and a restful interlude from the trivialities of a country practice.

He was a widower who had lived in Chadfleet for thirty years and knew most of his patients well enough to predict with accuracy whether they would live or die.

He believed that there was little any doctor could do to influence the decision, that there was wisdom in knowing when to die with the least inconvenience to others and distress to oneself and that much medical progress only prolonged life for a few uncomfortable months to the greater glory of the patient's doctor. For all that, he had less stupidity and more skill than Stephen Maxie gave him credit for and a few of his patients faced the inevitable before their time. He had attended Mrs. Maxie at the births of both her children and was doctor and friend to her husband in so far as Simon Maxie's bemused brain could any longer know or appreciate friendship. Now he sat at the Maxie table and forked up chicken souffl  with the air of a man who has earned his dinner and has no intention of being infected by other people's moods.

"So you've taken Sally Jupp and her baby, Eleanor?" Dr. Epps was never inhibited from stating the obvious. "Nice young things both of them. Rather jolly for you to have a baby about the house again."

"Let us hope Martha agrees with you," said Mrs. Maxie dryly. "She needs help desperately, of course, but she's very conservative. She may feel the situation more than she says."

"She'll get over it. Moral scruples soon give way when it's a case of another pair of hands at the kitchen sink." Dr. Epps dismissed Martha Bultiff's conscience with a wave of his podgy arm. "She'll be eating out of the baby's hand before long, anyway. Jimmy's an appealing child whoever his father was."

At this point Miss Liddell felt that the voice of experience should be heard.

"I don't think, Doctor, that we should talk about the problem of these children too lightly. Naturally we must show Christian charity" - here Miss Liddell gave a half bow in the direction of the vicar as if acknowledging the presence of another expert and apologizing for the intrusion into his field - "but I can't help feeling that society as a whole is getting too soft with these girls. The moral standards of the country will continue to fall if these children are to receive more consideration than those born in wedlock."

And it's happening already! There's many a poor, respectable mother who doesn't get half the fussing and attention which is lavished on some of these girls." She looked around the table, flushed and began eating again vigorously. Well, what if they did all look surprised? It had needed saying. It was her place to say it.

She glanced at the vicar as if enlisting his support but Mr. Hinks, after his first puzzled glance at her, was concentrating on his dinner. Miss Liddell, baulked of an ally, thought irritably that the dear vicar really was just a little greedy over his food! Suddenly she heard Stephen Maxie speaking.

"These children are no different, surely, than any others except that we owe them more. I can't see that their mothers are so remarkable either. After all, how many people accept in practice the moral code which they despise, these girls for breaking?" "A great many, Dr. Maxie, I assure you." Miss Liddell, by nature of her job, was unaccustomed to opposition from the young. Stephen Maxie might be a rising young surgeon but that didn't make him an expert on delinquent girls. "I should be horrified if I thought that some of the behavior I have to hear about in my work was really representative of modern youth."

"Well, as a representative of modern youth, you can take it from me that it's not so rare that we can afford to despise the ones who've been found out. This girl we have seems perfectly normal and respectable to me."

"She has a quiet and refined manner."

She is quite well-educated too. A grammar-school girl! I should never have dreamed of recommending her to your mother if she weren't a most superior type of girl for St. Mary's. Actually, she's an orphan, brought up by an aunt. But I hope you won't let that play on your pity.

Sally's job is to work hard and make the most of this opportunity. The past is over and is best forgotten."

"It must be difficult to forget the past when one has such a tangible memento of it," said Deborah Riscoe.

Dr. Epps, irked by a conversation which was provoking bad temper and, probably, worse digestion, hastened to contribute his placebo. Unfortunately, the result was to prolong the dissension.

"She's a good mother and a pretty girl."

Probably she'll meet some chap and get married yet. Best thing too. I can't say I like this unmarried-mother-with-child relationship. They get too wrapped up in each other and sometimes end up in a mess psychologically. I sometimes think -terrible heresy I know, Miss Liddell -that the best thing would be to get these babies adopted into a good home from the start."

"The child is the mother's responsibility," pronounced Miss Liddell. "It is her duty to keep it and care for it."

For sixteen years and without the help of the father?"

"Naturally we get an affiliation order,

Dr. Maxie, whenever that is possible.

Unfortunately Sally has been very obstinate and won't tell us the name of the father so we are unable to help."

"A few shillings don't go very far these days." Stephen Maxie seemed perversely determined to keep the subject alive.

"And I suppose Sally doesn't even get the government children allowance."

"This is a Christian country, my dear brother, and the wages of sin are supposed to be death, not eight bob of the taxpayers' money."

Deborah had spoken under her breath but Miss Liddell had heard and felt that she had been intended to hear. Mrs. Maxie apparently felt that the time had come to intervene. At least two of her guests thought that she might well have done so earlier. It was unlike Mrs. Maxie to let anything get out of hand. "As I want to ring for Sally," she said, "perhaps it would be as well if we changed the subject. I'm going to make myself thoroughly unpopular by asking about the church fete. I know it looks as if I've got you all here on false pretences but we really ought to be thinking about the possible dates." This was a subject on which all her guests could be safely voluble. By the time Sally came in the conversation was as dull, amicable and unembarrassing as even Catherine Bowers could wish.

Miss Liddell watched Sally Jupp as she moved about the table. It was as if the conversation at dinner had stimulated her to see the girl clearly for the first time.

Sally was very thin. The heavy, red-gold hair piled under her cap seemed too heavy a weight for so slender a neck. Her childish arms were long, the elbows jutting under the reddened skin. Her wide mouth was disciplined now, her green eyes fixed demurely on her task. Suddenly Miss Liddell was visited by an irrational spasm of affection. Sally was really doing very nicely, very nicely indeed! She looked up to catch the girl's eye and to give her a smile of approval and encouragement.

Suddenly their eyes met. For a full two seconds they looked at each other. Then Miss Liddell flushed and dropped her eyes. Surely she must have been mistaken!

Surely Sally would never dare to look at her like that! Confused and horrified she tried to analyze the extraordinary effect of that brief contact. Even before her own features had assumed their proprietorial mask of commendation she had read in the girl's eyes, not the submissive gratitude which had characterized the Sally Jupp of St. Mary's Refuge, but amused contempt, a hint of conspiracy and a dislike which was almost frightening in its intensity.

Then the green eyes had dropped again and Sally the enigma became once more Sally the submissive, the subdued, Miss Liddell's favorite and most favored delinquent. But the moment left its legacy.

Miss Liddell was suddenly sick with apprehension. She had recommended Sally without reserve. It was all, on the face of it, so very satisfactory. The girl was a most superior type. Too good for the job at Martingale really. The decision had been taken. It was too late to doubt its wisdom now. The worst that could happen would be Sally's ignominious return to St. Mary's. Miss Liddell was aware for the first time that the introduction of her favorite to Martingale might produce complications. She could not be expected to foresee the magnitude of those complications nor that they would end in violent death.

Catherine Bowers, who was staying at Martingale for the week-end, had said little during dinner. Being a naturally honest person she was a little horrified to find that her sympathies were with Miss Liddell. Of course, it was very generous and gallant of Stephen to champion Sally and her kind so vigorously, but Catherine felt as irritated as she did when her non-nursing friends talked about the nobility of her profession. It was all right to have romantic ideas but they were small compensation to those who worked among the bedpans or the delinquents. She was tempted to say as much, but the presence of Deborah across the table kept her silent. The dinner, like all unsuccessful social occasions, seemed to last three times its normal length. Catherine thought that never had a family lingered so long over their coffee, never had the men been so dilatory in putting in their appearance.

But it was over at last. Miss Liddell had gone back to St. Mary's, hinting that she felt happier if Miss Pollack were not left too long in sole charge. Mr. Hinks murmured about the last touches for tomorrow's sermon and faded like a thin ghost into the spring air. The Maxies and Dr. Epps sat happily enjoying the wood fire in the drawing-room and talking about music. It was not the subject which Catherine would have chosen. Even the television would have been preferable, but the only set at Martingale was in Martha's sitting-room. If there had to be talk Catherine hoped that it would be confined to medicine. Dr. Epps might naturally say, "Of course you're a nurse, Miss Bowers, how nice for Stephen to have someone who shares his interests." Then the three of them would chat away while Deborah sat for a change in ineffectual silence and was made to realize that men do get tired of pretty, useless women, however well dressed, and that what Stephen needed was someone who understood his job, someone who could talk to his friends in a sensible and knowledgeable way. It was a pleasant dream and, like most dreams, it bore no relation to reality.

Catherine sat holding her hands to the thin flames of the wood fire and tried to look at ease while the others talked about a composer called, unaccountably, Peter Warlock, of whom she had never heard except in some vague and forgotten historical sense. Certainly Deborah claimed not to understand him but she managed, as usual, to make her ignorance amusing. Her efforts to draw Catherine into the conversation by inquiring about Mrs. Bowers was evidence to Catherine of condescension, not of good manners. It was a relief when the new maid came in with a message for Dr. Epps. One of his patients on an outlying farm had begun her labor. The doctor heaved himself reluctantly out of his chair, shook himself like a shaggy dog and made his apologies.

Catherine tried for the last time.

"Interesting case, Doctor?" she asked brightly.

"Lord no, Miss Bowers." Dr. Epps was looking around vaguely in search of his bag. "Got three already.

Pleasant little woman, though, and she likes to have me there. God knows why!

She could deliver herself without turning a hair. Well, good-bye, Eleanor, and thank you for an excellent dinner. I meant to go up to Simon before I left but 141 be in tomorrow if I may. You'll be needing a new prescription for the Sommeil I expect.

"I'll bring it with me." He nodded amiably to the company and shuffled out with Mrs. Maxie into the hall. Soon they could hear his car roaring away down the drive.

He was an enthusiastic driver and loved small fast cars from which he could only extricate himself with difficulty, and in which he looked like a wicked old bear out on a spree.

"Well," said Deborah, when the sound of the exhaust had died away, "that's that.

Now what about going down to the stables to see Boccock about the horses. That is, if Catherine would like a walk." Catherine was very anxious for a walk but not with Deborah. Really, she thought, it was extraordinary how Deborah couldn't or wouldn't see that she and Stephen wanted to be alone together. But if Stephen didn't make it plain she could hardly do so. The sooner he was married and away from all his female relations the better it would be for him. "They suck his blood" thought Catherine, who had met that type in her excursions into modern fiction. Deborah, happily unconscious of these vampire tendencies, led the way through the open window and across the lawn.

The stables which had once been Maxie stables and were now the property of Mr. Samuel Boccock were only two hundred yards from the house and the other side of the home meadow. Old Boccock was there, polishing harness by the light of a hurricane lamp and whistling through his teeth. He was a small brown man with a gnome-like face, slanting of eye and wide of mouth, whose pleasure at seeing Stephen was apparent. They all went to have a look at the three horses with which Boccock was attempting to establish his little business. "Really," thought Catherine, "it was ridiculous the fuss that Deborah made of them, nuzzling up to their faces with soft endearments as if they were human. Frustrated maternal instinct," she thought disagreeably. "Do her good to expend some of that energy on the children's ward. Not that she would be much use." She herself wished that they could go back to the house. The stable was scrupulously clean but there is no disguising the strong smell of horses after exercise and, for some reason, Catherine found it disturbing. At one time, Stephen's lean brown hand lay close to hers on the animal's neck. The urge to touch that hand, to stroke it, even to raise it to her lips was momentarily so strong that she had to close her eyes. And then, in the darkness, came other remembered pictures, shamefully pleasant, of that same hand half-circled around her breast, even browner against her whiteness, and moving slowly and lovingly, the harbinger of delight. She half-staggered out into the spring twilight and heard behind her the slow, hesitant speech of Boccock and the eager Maxie voices replying together. In that moment she knew again one of those devastating moments of panic which had descended upon her at intervals since she had loved Stephen. They came unheralded and all her common sense and will power were helpless against them. They were moments when everything seemed unreal and she could almost physically feel the sand shifting beneath her hopes. All her misery and uncertainty focused itself on Deborah. It was Deborah who was the enemy. Deborah who had been married, who had at least had her chance of happiness. Deborah who was pretty and selfish and useless. Listening to the voices behind her in the

growing darkness Catherine felt sick with hate.

By the time they had returned to Martingale she had pulled herself together again and the black pall had lifted. She was restored to her normal condition of confidence and assurance. She went early to bed and, in the conviction of her present mood; she could almost believe that he might come to her. She told herself that it would be impossible in his father's house, an act of folly on his part, an intolerable abuse of hospitality on hers.

But she waited in the darkness. After a while she heard footsteps on the stairs - his footsteps and Deborah's. Brother and sister were laughing softly together.

They did not even pause as they passed her door.

Upstairs in the low white-painted bedroom which had been his since childhood Stephen stretched himself on his bed.

"I'm tired," he said.

"Me too." Deborah yawned and sat down on the bed beside him. "It was rather a grim dinner-party. I wish Mummy wouldn't do it."

"They're all such hypocrites."

"They can't help it. They were brought up that way. Besides, I don't think that Eppy and Mr. Hinks have much wrong with them."

"I suppose I made rather a fool of myself," said Stephen.

"Well, you were rather vehement.

Rather like Sir Galahad plunging to the defense of the wronged maiden, except that she was probably more sinning than sinned against."

"You don't like her, do you?" asked Stephen.

"My sweet, I haven't thought about it.

She just works here. I know that sounds very reactionary to your enlightened notions but it isn't meant to be. It's just that I'm not interested in her one way or the other, nor she, I imagine, in me."

"I'm sorry for her." There was a trace of truculence in Stephen's voice.

"That was pretty obvious at dinner," said Deborah dryly.

"It was their blasted complacency that got me down. And that Liddell woman.

It's ridiculous to put a spinster in charge of a Home like St. Mary's."

"I don't see why. She may be a little limited but she's kind and conscientious.

Besides, I should have thought St. Mary's already suffered from a surfeit of sexual experience."

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't be facetious, Deborah!"

"Well, what do you expect me to be?

We only see each other once a fortnight.

It's a bit hard to be faced with one of Mummy's duty dinner-parties and have to watch Catherine and Miss Liddell sniggering together because they thought you'd lost your head over a pretty maid.

That's the kind of vulgarity Liddell would particularly relish. The whole conversation will be over the village by tomorrow."

"If they thought that they must be mad.

I've hardly seen the girl. I don't think I've spoken to her yet. The idea is ridiculous!"

"That's what I meant. For heaven's sake, darling, keep your crusading instincts under control while you're at home. I should have thought that you could have sublimated your social conscience at the hospital without bringing it home. It's uncomfortable to live with, especially for those of us who haven't got one."

"I'm a bit on edge today," said Stephen.

"I'm not sure I know what to do."

It was typical of Deborah to know at once what he meant.

"She is rather dreary, isn't she?

Why don't you close the whole affair gracefully. I'm assuming that there is an affair to close."

"You know damn well that there is -or was. But how?"

"I've never found it particularly difficult.

The art lies in making the other person believe that he has done the chucking.

After a few weeks I practically believe it myself."

"And if they won't play?"

"Then have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' "

Stephen would have liked to have asked when and if Felix Hearne would be persuaded that he had done the chucking.

He reflected that in this, as in other matters, Deborah had a ruthlessness that he lacked.

"I suppose I'm a coward about these things," he said. "I never find it easy to shake people off, even party bores."

"No," replied his sister. "That's your trouble. Too weak and too susceptible.

You ought to get married. Mummy would like it really. Someone with money if you can find her. Not stinking, of course, just beautifully rich."

"No doubt. But who?"

"Who indeed."

Suddenly Deborah seemed to lose interest in the subject. She swung herself up from the bed and went to lean against the window-ledge. Stephen watched her profile, so like his own yet so mysteriously different, outlined against the blackness of the night. The veins and arteries of the dying day were stretched across the horizon. From the garden below he could smell the whole rich infinitely sweet distillation of an English spring night.

Lying there in the cool darkness he shut his eyes and gave himself up to the peace of Martingale. At moments like this he understood perfectly why his mother and Deborah schemed and planned to preserve his inheritance. He was the-first Maxie to study medicine. He had done what he wanted and the family had accepted it. He might have chosen something even less lucrative although it was difficult to imagine what. In time, if he survived the grind, the hazards, the rat race of competition, he might become a consultant.

He might even become sufficiently successful to support Martingale himself. In the meantime they would struggle on as best they could, making little housekeeping economies that would never intrude on his own comfort, cutting down the donations to charity, doing more of the gardening to save old Purvis's three shillings an hour, employing untrained girls to help Martha. None of it would inconvenience him very much, and it was all to ensure that he, Stephen Maxie, succeeded his father as Simon Maxie had succeeded his. If only he could have enjoyed Martingale for its beauty and its peace without being chained to it by this band of responsibility and guilt!

There was the sound of slow careful footsteps on the stairs and then a knock on the door. It was Martha with the nightly hot drinks. Back in his childhood old Nannie had decided that a hot milk drink last thing at night would help to banish the terrifying and inexplicable nightmares from which, for a brief period, he and Deborah had suffered. The nightmares had yielded in time to the more tangible fears of adolescence, but the hot drinks had become a family habit. Martha, like her sister before her, was convinced that they were the only effective talisman against the real or imagined dangers of the night. Now she set down her small tray cautiously. There was the blue Wedgwood mug that Deborah used and the old George V coronation mug that Grandfather Maxie had bought for Stephen. "I've brought your Ovaltine too, Miss Deborah," Martha said. ("I thought I should find you here." She spoke in a low voice as if they shared a conspiracy. Stephen wondered whether she guessed that they had been discussing Catherine. This was rather like the old comfortable Nannie bringing in the night drinks and ready to stay and talk. But yet not really the same. The devotion of Martha was more voluble, more self-conscious and less acceptable. It was a counterfeit of an emotion that had been as simple and necessary to him as the air he breathed. Remembering this he thought also that Martha needed her occasional sop.

"That was a lovely dinner, Martha," he said.

Deborah had turned from the window and was wrapping her thin, red-nailed hands around the steaming mug.

"It's a pity the conversation wasn't worthy of the food. We had a lecture from Miss Liddell on the social consequences of illegitimacy. What do you think of Sally, Martha?"

Stephen knew that it was an unwise question. It was unlike Deborah to ask it.

"She seems quiet enough," Martha conceded, "but, of course, it is early days yet. Miss Liddell spoke very highly of her."

"According to Miss Liddell," said Deborah, "Sally is a model of all the virtues except one, and even that was a slip on the part of nature who couldn't recognize a high-school girl in the dark."

Stephen was shocked by the sudden bitterness in his sister's voice. (I don't know that all this education is a good thing for a maid, Miss Deborah.)

Martha managed to convey that she had managed perfectly well without it. (I only hope that she knows how lucky she is.

Madam has even lent her our cot, the one you both slept in."

"Well, we aren't in it now." Stephen tried to keep the irritation out of his voice. Surely there had been enough talk about Sally Jupp! But Martha was not to be cautioned. It was as if she personally and not merely the family cradle had been desecrated. "We've always looked after that cot, Dr. Stephen. It was to be kept for the grandchildren."

"Damn!" said Deborah. She wiped the spilt drink from her fingers and replaced the mug on the tray. "You shouldn't count your grandchildren before they're hatched. You can count me as a nonstarter and Stephen isn't even engaged -nor thinking of it. He'll probably eventually settle for a buxom and efficient nurse who'll prefer to buy a new hygienic cot of her own from Oxford Street. Thank you for the drink, Martha dear." Despite the smile, it was a dismissal.

The last "good nights" were said and the same careful footsteps descended the stairs. When they had died away Stephen said, "Poor old Martha. We do rather take her for granted and this maid-of-all-work job is getting too much for her. I suppose we ought to be thinking of pensioning her off."

"On what?" Deborah stood again at the window.

"At least there's some help for her now," Stephen temporized.

"Provided Sally isn't more trouble than she is worth. Miss Liddell made out that the baby is extraordinarily good. But any baby's considered that who doesn't bawl for two nights out of three. And then there's the washing. Sally can hardly be much help to Martha if she has to spend half the morning rinsing out nappies."

"Presumably other mothers wash nappies," said Stephen, "and still find time for other work. I like this girl and I think she can be a help to Martha if only she's given a fair chance."

"At least she had a very vigorous champion in you, Stephen. It's a pity you'll almost certainly be safely away at hospital when the trouble starts."

"What trouble, for God's sake? What's the matter with you all? Why on earth should you assume that the girl's going to make trouble?"

Deborah walked over to the door.

"Because", she said, "She's making trouble already, isn't she? Good night."

Chapter Two

Despite this inauspicious beginning Sally Jupp's first weeks at Martingale were a success. Whether she herself shared this view was not known. No one asked for her opinion. She had been pronounced by the whole village to be a very lucky girl.

If, as so often happens with the recipients of favors, she was less grateful than she ought to be, she managed to conceal her feelings behind a front of meekness, respectfulness and willingness to learn, which most people were happy enough to take at its face value. It did not deceive Martha Bultift and it is probable that it would not have deceived the Maxies if they had bothered to think about it. But they were too preoccupied with their individual concerns and too relieved at the sudden lightening of the domestic load to meet trouble halfway.

Martha had to admit that the baby was at first very little trouble. She put this down to Miss Liddell's excellent training since it was beyond her comprehension that bad girls could be good mothers.

James was a placid child who, for his first two months at Martingale, was content to be fed at his accustomed times without advertising his hunger too loudly and who slept between his feeds in milky contentment. This could not last indefinitely. With the advent of what Sally called 'mixed feeding' Martha added several substantial grievances to her list. It seemed that the kitchen was never to be free of Sally and her demands. Jimmy was fast entering that stage of childhood in which meals become less a pleasant necessity than an opportunity for the exercise of power. Carefully pillowed in his high chair he would arch his sturdy back in an orgasm of resistance, bubbling milk and cereal through his pursed lips in ecstatic rejection before suddenly capitulating into charming and submissive innocence. Sally screamed with laughter at him, caught him to her in a whirl of endearments, loved and fondled him in contemptuous disregard of Martha's muttered disapproval. Sitting there with his tight curled mop of hair, his high beaked little nose almost hidden between plump cheeks as red and hard as apples, he seemed to dominate Martha's kitchen like a throned and imperious miniature Caesar. Sally was beginning to spend more time with her child and Martha would often see her during the mornings, her bright head bent over the pram where the sudden emergence of a chubby leg or arm showed that Jimmy's long periods of sleep were a thing of the past. No doubt his demands would increase. So far Sally had managed to keep up with the work allotted to her and to reconcile the demands of her son with those of Martha.

If the strain was beginning to show, only Stephen on his fortnightly visits home noticed it with any compunction. Mrs.

Maxie inquired of Sally at intervals whether she was finding the work too much and was glad to be satisfied with the reply she received. Deborah did not notice, or if she did, said nothing. It was, in any case, difficult to know whether Sally was overtired. Her naturally pale face under its shock of hair and her slim brittle-looking arms gave her an air of fragility which Martha, for one, thought highly deceiving. "Tough as a nut and cunning as a wagon-load of monkeys" was Martha's opinion.

Spring ripened slowly into summer. The beech trees burst their spearheads of bright green and spread a chequered pattern of shade over the drive. The vicar celebrated Easter to his own joy and with no more than the usual recriminations and unpleasantness among his flock over the church decorations. Miss Pollack, at St. Mary's Refuge, endured a spell of sleeplessness for which Dr. Epps prescribed special tablets, and two of the Home's inmates settled for marriage with the unprepossessing but apparently repentant fathers of their babies. Miss Liddell admitted two more peccant mothers in their place. Sam Boccock advertised his stables in Chadfleet New Town and was surprised at the number of youths and girls who, in new, ill-fitting jodhpurs and bright yellow gloves, were prepared to pay 7s. 6d. an hour to amble through the village under his tutelage.

Simon Maxie lay in his narrow bed and was neither better nor worse. The evenings lengthened and the roses came. The garden at Martingale was heavy with their scent. As Deborah cut them for the house she had a feeling that the garden and Martingale, itself, were waiting for something. The house was always at its most beautiful in summer, but this year she sensed an atmosphere of expectancy, almost of foreboding, which was alien to its usual cool serenity. Carrying the roses into the house, Deborah shook herself out of this fancy with the wry reflection that the most ominous event now hanging over Martingale was the annual church fete.

When the words "waiting for a death" came suddenly into her mind she told herself firmly that her father was no worse, might even be considered a little better, and that the house could not possibly know. She recognized that her love for Martingale was not entirely rational. Sometimes she tried to discipline that love by talking of the time when we have to sell as if the very sound of the words could act both as a warning and a talisman.

St. Cedd's church fete had taken place in the grounds of Martingale every July since the days of Stephen's great-grandfather.

It was organized by the fete committee, which consisted of the vicar, Mrs. Maxie, Dr. Epps and Miss Liddell.

Their administrative duties were never arduous since the fete, like the church it helped to support, continued virtually unchanging from year to year, a symbol of immutability in the midst of chaos. But the committee took their responsibilities seriously and met frequently at Martingale during June and early July to drink tea in the garden and to pass resolutions which they passed the year before in identical words and in the same agreeable surroundings. The only member of the committee who occasionally felt genuinely uneasy about the fete was the vicar. In his gentle way he preferred to see the best in everyone and to impute worthy motives wherever possible. He included himself in this dispensation, having discovered early in his ministry that charity is a policy as well as a virtue. But once a year Mr. Hinks faced certain unpalatable facts about his church. He worried about its exclusiveness, its negative impact on the seething fringe of Chadfleet New Town, the suspicion that it was more of a social than a spiritual force in the village life.

Once he had suggested that the fete should close as well as open with a prayer and a hymn, but the only committee member to support this startling innovation was Mrs. Maxie, whose chief quarrel with the fete was that it never seemed to end.

This year Mrs. Maxie felt that she was going to be glad of Sally's willing help.

There were plenty of workers for the actual fete, even if some of them were out to extract the maximum of personal enjoyment with the minimum of work, but the responsibilities did not end with the successful organization of the day. Most of the committee would expect to be asked to dinner at Martingale and Catherine Bowers had written to say that the Saturday of the fete was one of her off-duty days and would it be too much of an imposition if she invited herself for what she described as one of your perfect week-ends away from the noise and grime of this dreadful city". This letter was not the first of its kind.

Catherine was always so much more anxious to see the children than the children were to see Catherine. In some circumstances that would be just as well.

It would be an unsuitable match for Stephen in every way, much as poor Katie would like to see her only child eligibly married off. She herself had married, as they said, beneath her. Christian Bowers had been an artist with more talent than money and no pretensions to anything except genius. Mrs. Maxie had met him once and had disliked him but, unlike his wife, she did believe him to be an artist.

She had bought one of his early canvases for Martingale, a reclining nude which now hung in her bedroom and gave her a satisfied joy which no amount of intermittent hospitality to his daughter could adequately repay. To Mrs. Maxie it was an object-lesson in the folly of an unwise marriage. But because the pleasure it gave her was still fresh and real, and because she had once been at school with Katie Bowers and placed some importance on the obligations of old and sentimental associations, she felt that Catherine should be welcome at Martingale as her own guest, if not as her children's.

There were other things that were slightly worrying. Mrs. Maxie did not believe in taking too much notice of what other people sometimes describe as "atmosphere". She retained her serenity by coping with shattering common sense with those difficulties which were too obvious to ignore and by ignoring the others.

But things were happening at Martingale which were difficult to overlook. Some of them were to be expected, of course. Mrs. Maxie, for all her insensitivity, could not but realize that Martha and Sally were hardly compatible kitchen mates, and that Martha would be bound to find the situation difficult for a time. What she had not expected was that it should become progressively more difficult as the weeks wore on. After a succession of untrained and uneducated housemaids, who had come to Martingale because domesticity offered their only chance of employment, Sally seemed a paragon of

intelligence, capability and refinement.

Orders could be given in the confident assurance that they would be carried out where, before, even constant and painstaking reiteration had only resulted in the eventual realization that it was easier to do the job oneself.

An almost pre-war feeling of leisure would have returned to Martingale if it had not been for the heavier nursing which Simon Maxie now needed. Dr. Epps was already warning that they could not go on for long. Soon now it would be necessary to install a resident nurse or to move the patient to hospital. Mrs. Maxie rejected both alternatives. The first would be expensive, inconceivably possibly indefinitely prolonged! Would mean that Simon Maxie satisfied joy which no amount of intermittent hospitality to his daughter could adequately repay. To Mrs. Maxie it was an object-lesson in the folly of an unwise marriage. But because the pleasure it gave her was still fresh and real, and because she had once been at school with Katie Bowers and placed some importance on the obligations of old and sentimental associations, she felt that Catherine should be welcome at Martingale as her own guest, if not as her children's.

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I doubt there had been pleasant enough the easy undemanding companionship which they had enjoyed was more to her taste.

She did not want to fall in love again.

Months of annihilating misery and despair had cured her of that particular folly. She had married young and Edward Riscoe had died of poliomyelitis less than a year later. But a marriage based on companionship, compatible tastes and the satisfactory exchange of sexual pleasure seemed to her a reasonable basis for life and one which could be achieved without too much disturbing emotion. Felix, she suspected, was enough in love with her to be interesting without being boring and she was only spasmodically tempted to consider seriously the expected offer of marriage. It was, nevertheless, beginning to be slightly odd that the offer was not made. It was not, she knew, that he disliked women. Certainly most of their friends considered him to be a natural bachelor, eccentric, slightly pedantic and perennially amusing. They might have been unkind, but there was the inescapable fact of his war record to be explained away. A man cannot be either effeminate or a fool who holds both French and British decorations for his part in the Resistance Movement. He was one of those whose physical courage, that most respected and most glamorous of virtues, had been tried in the punishment cells of the Gestapo and could never again be challenged. It was less fashionable now to think of those things but they were not yet quite forgotten. What those months in France had done to Felix Hearne was anyone's guess, but he was allowed his eccentricities and presumably he enjoyed them. Deborah liked him because he was intelligent and amusing and the most diverting gossip she knew. He had a woman's interest in the small change of life and an intuitive concern for the minutiae of human relationships. Nothing was too trivial for him and he sat now listening with every appearance of amused sympathy to Deborah's report on Martingale.

"So you see, it's bliss to have some free time again, but I really can't see it lasting.

Martha will have her out in time. And I don't really blame her. She doesn't like Sally and neither do I."

"Why? Is she chasing Stephen?"

"Don't be vulgar, Felix. You might give me the benefit of a more subtle reason than that. Actually, though, she does seem to have impressed him and I think it's deliberate. She asks his advice about the baby whenever he's at home, although I have tried to point out that he's supposed to be a surgeon not a pediatrician. And poor old Martha can't breathe a word of criticism without his rushing to Sally's defense. You'll see for yourself when you come on Saturday."

"Who else will be there apart from this intriguing Sally Jupp?"

"Stephen, of course. And Catherine

Bowers. You met her the last time you were at Martingale."

"So I did. Rather poached-egg eyes but an agreeable figure and more intelligence than you or Stephen were willing to allow her."

"If she impressed you so much," retorted Deborah easily, "you can demonstrate your admiration this weekend and give Stephen a respite. He was rather taken with her once and now she sticks to him like a limpet and it bores him horribly."

"How incredibly ruthless pretty women are to plain ones! And by 'rather taken with her' I suppose you mean that Stephen seduced her. Well, that usually does lead to complications and he must find his own way out as better men have done before him. But I shall come. I love Martingale and I appreciate good cooking. Besides, I have a feeling that the week-end will be interesting. A house full of people all disliking each other is bound to be explosive."

"Oh, it isn't as bad as that!"

"Very nearly. Stephen dislikes me. He has never bothered to hide it. You dislike Catherine Bowers. She dislikes you and will probably extend the emotion to me.

Martha and you dislike Sally Jupp and she, poor girl, probably loathes you all.

And that pathetic creature. Miss Liddell, will be there, and your mother dislikes her. It will be a perfect orgy of suppressed emotion."

"You needn't come. In fact, I think it would be better if you didn't."

"But, Deborah, your mother has already asked me and I've accepted. I wrote to her last week in my nice formal way, and I shall now make a note in my little black book to settle it beyond doubt." He bent his sleek fair head over his engagement diary. His face, with the pale skin which made the hair-line almost indistinguishable was turned away from her. She noticed how sparse were the eyebrows against that pallid forehead and the intricate folds and crinkles around his eyes. Deborah thought that he must once have had beautiful hands before the Gestapo played about with them. The nails had never fully grown again. She tried to picture those hands moving about the intricacies of a gun, curled into the cords of a parachute, clenched in defiance or endurance. But it was no good. There seemed no point of contact between that Felix who had apparently once known a cause worth suffering for and the facile, sophisticated, sardonic Felix Hearne of Hearne and Illingworth, publishers, just as there was none between the girl who had married Edward Riscoe and the woman she was today. Suddenly Deborah felt again the familiar malaise of nostalgia and regret. In this mood she watched Felix writing under Saturday's date in his cramped meticulous hand as if he were making a date with death.

After tea Deborah decided to visit

Stephen, partly to avoid the rush-hour crowds but chiefly because she seldom came up to London without calling at St.

Luke's Hospital. She invited Felix to accompany her but he excused himself on the grounds that the smell of disinfectant made him sick, and sent her off in a taxi with formal expressions of thanks for her company. He was punctilious about these matters. Deborah fought against the unflattering suspicion that he had tired of her conversation and was relieved to see her borne away in comfort and with speed, and concentrated on the pleasure of seeing Stephen. It was all the more disconcerting to find that he was not in the hospital. It was unusual too. Colley, the hall porter, explained that Mr. Maxie had had a telephone call and had gone out to meet someone saying that he wouldn't be long. Mr. Donwell was on duty for him. But Mr. Maxie would certainly not be long now. He had been gone nearly an hour. Perhaps Mrs. Riscoe would like to go to the resident's sitting-room? Deborah stayed for a few minutes' chat with Colley whom she liked and then took the lift to the fourth floor. Mr. Donwell, a shy spotty young registrar mumbled a greeting and made a speedy escape to the wards leaving Deborah in sole possession of four grubby armchairs, an untidy heap of medical periodicals and the half-cleared remnants

of the residents' tea. It appeared that they had had Swiss roll again and, as usual, someone had used his saucer as an ash-tray. Deborah began to pile up the plates, but, realizing that this was a somewhat pointless activity since she did not know what to do with them, she took up one of the papers and moved to the window where she could divide her interest between waiting for Stephen and scanning the more intriguing or comprehensible of the medical articles. The window gave a view of the main hospital entrance farther along the street. In the distance she could discern the shining curve of the river and the towers of Westminster. The ceaseless rumbling of traffic was muted, an unobtrusive background to the occasional noises of the hospital, the clang of the lift gates, the ringing of telephone bells, the passing of brisk feet along the corridor.

An old woman was being helped into an ambulance at the front door. From a height of four floors the figures below seemed curiously foreshortened. The ambulance door was shut without a sound and it slid away noiselessly. Suddenly she saw them.

It was Stephen she noticed first, but the flaming red-gold head almost level with his shoulder was unmistakable. They paused at the corner of the building. They seemed to be talking. The black head was bent towards the gold. After a moment she saw him shake hands and then Sally turned in a flash of sunlight and walked swiftly away without a backward glance.

Deborah missed nothing. Sally was wearing her grey suit. It was mass-produced and bought off the peg, but it fitted well and was a foil for the shining cascade of hair, released now from the restraint of cap and pins.

She was clever, thought Deborah.

Clever to know that you had to dress simply if you wanted to wear your hair loose like that. Clever to avoid the greens for which most redheads had a predilection. Clever to have said "Goodbye" outside the hospital and to have resisted the certain invitation to the hospital supper with its inevitable openings for embarrassment or regret. Afterwards Deborah was surprised that she should have noticed so keenly what Sally was wearing. It was as if she saw her for the first time through Stephen's eyes, and seeing her was afraid. It seemed a long time before she heard the drone of the lift and his quick footsteps along the corridor.

Then he was by her side. She did not move away from the window so that he should know at once she had seen. She felt that she could not bear it if he did not tell her and it was easier that way. She did not know what she expected but when he spoke it was a surprise.

"Have you seen these before?" he asked.

In his outstretched palm was a rough bag made from a man's handkerchief tied together at the corners. He lifted one of the knots, gave a little jerk, and spilled out three or four of the tiny tablets. Their grey-brown color was unmistakable.

"Aren't they some of Father's tablets?"

It seemed as if he were accusing her of something. "Where did you get them?"

"Sally found them and brought them up to me. I expect you saw us from the window."

"What did she do with the baby?" The silly irrelevant question was out before she had time to think.

"The baby? Oh, Jimmy, I don't know."

Sally left him with someone in the village I suppose or with Mother or Martha. She came up to bring me these and 'phoned from Liverpool Street to ask me to meet her. She found them in Father's bed."

"But how, in his bed?"

"Between the mattress cover and the mattress. Down the side. His draw-sheet was ruckled and she was smoothing it and pulling the macintosh tight when she noticed a little bulge in the corner of the mattress underneath the fitted cover. She found this. Father must have been saving them over several weeks, perhaps months.

I can guess why."

"Does he know she found them?"

"Sally doesn't think so. He was lying on his side with his face away from her as she attended to the draw-sheet. She just put the handkerchief and the tablets in her pocket and went on as if nothing had happened. Of course they may have been there for a long time - he's been on Sommeil for eighteen months or more - and he may have forgotten about them.

He may have lost the power to get at them and use them. We can't tell what goes on in his mind. The trouble is that we haven't bothered even to try. Except Sally."

"But Stephen, that isn't true. We do try. We sit with him and nurse him and try to make him feel that we're there.

But he just lies, not moving, not speaking, not even seeming to notice people any more. He isn't really Father. There isn't any contact between us. I have tried, I swear I have, but it isn't any use. He can't really have meant to take those tablets. I can't think how he even managed to collect them, to plan it all."

"When it's your turn to give him his tablets, do you watch him while he swallows them?"

"No, not really. You know how he used to hate us to help him too much. Now I don't think he minds, but we still give him the tablets and then pour out the water and hold it up to his lips if he seems to want it. He must have secreted these away months ago. I can't believe he could manage it now, not without Martha knowing. She does most of the lifting and the heavier nursing."

"Well, apparently he managed to deceive Martha. But, by God, Deborah, I ought to have guessed, ought to have known. I call myself a doctor. This is the kind of thing which makes me feel like a specialized carpenter, good enough to carve patients up as long as I'm not expected to bother with them as people.

At least Sally treated him as a human being."

Deborah was momentarily tempted to point out that she, her mother and Martha were at least managing to keep Simon Maxie comfortable, clean and fed at no small cost and that it was difficult to see where Sally had done more. But if Stephen wanted to indulge in remorse there was little to be gained by stopping him. He usually felt better afterwards, even if other people felt worse. She watched in silence as he rummaged about in the drawer of the desk, found a small bottle which had apparently once held aspirin, carefully counted the tablets - there were ten of them - into the bottle and labeled it with the name of the drug and the dose. They were the almost automatic actions of a man trained to keep medicines properly labeled.

Deborah's mind was busy with questions she dared not ask. "Why did Sally come to you? Why not Mother? Did she really find those tablets or was it just a convenient ruse to see you alone? But she must have found them. No one could make up a story like that. Poor father.

What has Sally been saying? Why should I mind so much about this, about Sally?

I hate her because she has a child and I haven't. Now I've said it, but admitting it doesn't make it any easier. That handkerchief bag. It must have taken him hours to tie it together. It looked like something made by a child. Poor Father.

He was so tall when I was a child. Was I really rather afraid of him? Oh God, please help me to feel pity. I want to be sorry for him. What is Sally thinking now? What did Stephen say to her?"

He turned back from the desk and held out the bottle. "I think you had better take this home."

Put it in the medicine cupboard in his room. Don't say anything to Mother yet or to Dr. Epps. I think it would be wiser if we stopped the tablets for Father. I'll get you a prescription made up in the dispensary before you leave, the same kind of drug only in solution. Give him a tablespoonful at night in water. I should see to it yourself. Just tell Martha that I have stopped the tablets. When does Dr. Epps see him again?"

"He's coming in to see Mother with Miss Liddell after dinner. I suppose he may go up then But I don't expect he'll ask about the tablets. They've been going on for so long now. We just say when the bottle is getting empty and he gives us a fresh prescription."

"Do you know how many tablets there are in the house now?"

"There's a new bottle with the seal unbroken. We were to start it tonight."

"Then leave it in the cupboard and give him the medicine. I shall be able to talk to Eppy about it when I see him on Saturday. I'll get down late tomorrow night. You had better come with me to the dispensary now and it would be wiser to get home straight away. I'll telephone Martha and ask her to keep you some dinner."

"Yes, Stephen." Deborah did not regret the loss of her meal. All the pleasure of the day had evaporated. It was time to be going home.

"And I would rather you said nothing to Sally about this." <(I hadn't the slightest intention of doing so. I only hope she's capable of a similar discretion.

We don't want this story all over the village."

"That's an unfair thing to say.

Deborah, and you don't even believe it.

You couldn't have anyone safer than Sally. She was very sensible about it. And rather sweet."

"I'm sure she was."

"She was naturally worried about it.

She's very devoted to Father."

"She seems to be extending her devotion to you."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I was wondering why she didn't tell

Mother about the tablets. Or me."

"You haven't done much to encourage her to confide in you, have you?"

"What on earth do you expect me to do? Hold her hand? I'm not particularly interested in her as long as she does her work efficiently. I don't like her and I don't expect her to like me."

"It's not true that you don't like her," said Stephen. "You hate her."

"Did she complain of the way she's been treated?"

"Of course she didn't. Do be sensible, Deb. This isn't like you."

"Isn't it," thought Deborah. "How do you know what's like me?" But she recognized in Stephen's last words a plea for peace and she held out her hand to him, saying, "I'm sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me lately. I'm sure Sally did what she thought best. It isn't worth quarreling about anyway. Do you want me to wait up for you tomorrow night? Felix won't be able to get down until Saturday morning, but Catherine is expected for dinner."

"Don't bother. I may have to get the last bus. But I'll ride with you before breakfast if you like to call me."

The significance of this formal offer in place of the previously happily established routine did not escape Deborah. The chasm between them had only been precariously bridged. She felt that Stephen, too, was uneasily aware of the cracking ice beneath their feet. Never since the death of Edward Riscoe had she felt so alienated from Stephen; never since then had she been so in need of him.

It was nearly half past seven before Martha heard the sound she had been listening for, the squeak of pram wheels on the drive. Jimmy was whining softly and was obviously only persuaded from open bawling by the soothing motion of the pram and the soft reassurances of his mother. Soon Sally's head was seen to pass the kitchen window, the pram was wheeled into the scullery and, almost immediately, mother and child appeared through the kitchen door. There was an air of suppressed emotion about the girl.

She seemed at once nervous and yet pleased with herself. Martha did not think that an afternoon wheeling Jimmy in the forest could altogether account for that look of secretive and triumphant pleasure.

"You're late," she said. <I should think the child is starving, poor mite."

"Well, he won't have to wait much longer, will you my pet? I suppose there isn't any milk boiled?"

"I'm not here to wait on you, Sally, please remember. If you want milk you must boil it yourself. You know well enough what time the child should be fed."

They did not speak again while Sally boiled the milk and tried, rather ineffectually, to cool it quickly whilst holding Jimmy on one arm. It was not until Sally was ready to take her child upstairs that Martha spoke.

"Sally," she said, "did you take anything from the master's bed when you made it this morning? Anything belonging to him? I want the truth now!"

"It's obvious from your tone that you know I did. Do you mean that you know that he had those tablets hidden? And you said nothing about them?"

"Of course I knew. I've looked after him now for five years haven't I? Who else would know what he does, what he's feeling? I suppose you thought he'd take them. Well, that needn't worry you. What business is it of yours anyway? If you had to lie there, year after year, perhaps you might like to know that you had something, a few little tablets maybe, that would end all the pain and the tiredness.

Something that nobody else knew about, until a silly little bitch, no better than she should be, came ferreting them out. Very clever, weren't you? But he wouldn't have taken them! He's a gentleman. You wouldn't understand that either. But you can give me back those tablets. And if you mention a word of this to anyone or lay a hand on anything else belonging to the master, I'll have you out. You and that brat. I'll find a way, never fear!"

She held out her hand towards Sally.

Never once had she raised her voice but her calm authority was more frightening than anger and the girl's voice was tinged with hysteria as she replied.

"I'm afraid you're unlucky. I haven't got the tablets. I took them to Stephen this afternoon. Yes, Stephen! And now I've heard your silly twaddle I'm glad I did. I'd like to see Stephen's face if I told him that you knew all the time! Dear, faithful old Martha! So devoted to the family! You don't care a damn for any of them, you old hypocrite, except for your precious master! Pity you can't see yourself! Washing him, stroking his face, cooing to him as if he were your baby. I could laugh sometimes if it weren't so pitiful. It's indecent! Lucky for him he's half gaga! Being mauled about by you would make any normal man sick!"

She swung the child on to her hip and Martha heard the door close behind her.

Martha lurched over to the sink and clutched it with shaking hands. She was seized with a physical revulsion that made her retch but her body found no relief in sickness. She put a hand to her forehead in a stock gesture of despair. Looking at her fingers she saw that they were wet with perspiration. As she fought for control the echo of that high, childish voice beat in her brain. "Being mauled about by you would make any normal man sick... being mauled about by you... mauled about." When her body stopped its shaking, nausea gave way to hate. Her mind solaced its misery with the sweet images of revenge. She indulged in phantasies of Sally disgraced, Sally and her child banished from Martingale, Sally found out for what she was, lying, wicked and evil. And, since all things are possible, Sally dead.

Chapter Three

The fickle summer weather which, for the last few weeks, had provided a sample of every climatic condition known to the country with the sole exception of snow, now settled into the warm grey normality for the time of the year. There was a chance that the fete would be held in dry weather if not in sun. Deborah, pulling on her jodhpurs for her morning ride with Stephen, could see the red and white marquee from her window, and scattered around the lawn, the skeletons of a dozen half-erected stalls awaiting their final embellishment of crepe paper and Union Jacks. Away in the home field a course had already been ringed for the children's sports and the dancing display. An ancient car surmounted by a loudspeaker was parked under one of the elms at the end of the lawn and several lengths of wire coiled on the paths and slung between the trees bore witness to the efforts of the local wireless enthusiasts to provide a loudspeaker system for the music and the announcements. Deborah, after a good night's rest, was able to survey these preparations with stoicism. She knew from experience that a very different sight would meet her eyes by the time the fete was over. However careful people were - and many of them only began to enjoy themselves when they were surrounded by a familiar litter of cigarette packets and fruit peelings - it was at least a week's work before the garden lost its look of ravaged beauty. Already the rows of bunting stretched from side to side of the green walks gave the spinney an air of incongruous frivolity and the rooks seemed shocked into noisier than usual recriminations.

In Catherine's favorite day-dream of the Martingale fete she spent the afternoon helping Stephen with the horses, the centre of an interested, deferential and speculating group of the CM'hadfleet villagers. Catherine had picturesque if outdated notions of the place and importance of the Maxies in their community- This happy imagining faded in face of Mrs. Maxie's determination that both her guests should help where they were most needed. For Catherine this was plainly to be with Deborah on the white elephant stall. When the first disappointment had subsided it was surprising how pleasant the experience proved. The morning was spent in sorting, examining and pricing the miscellaneous hoard that had still to be dealt with. Deborah had an amazing knowledge, boom of long experience, of the source of most of her wares, what each article was worth and who was likely to buy it. Sir Reynold Price had contributed a large shaggy coat with a detachable waterproof lining which was immediately placed on one side for the private consideration of Dr. Epps. It was just the thing he needed for winter visiting in his open. car and, after all, no one noticed what you wore when you were driving. There was an old felt hat which belonged to the doctor himself and which his daily help tried to get rid of every year only to have it brought back by its irate owner. It was marked sixpence and prominently displayed. There were handknitted jumpers of startling style and hue, small objects in brass and china from the village mantelpieces, bundles of books and magazines and a fascinating collection of prints in heavy frames, appropriately named in spidery copper-plate. There were 'The First Love Letter', 'Daddy's Darling', an ornate twin pair called 'The Quarrel' and 'Reconciliation' and several showing soldiers either kissing their wives farewell or enjoying the chaster pleasures of reunion. Deborah prophesied that the customers would love them and declared that the frames alone were worth half a crown.

By one o'clock the preparations were complete and the household had time for a hurried luncheon waited on by Sally.

Catherine remembered that there had been some trouble that morning with Martha because the girl had overslept. Apparently she had had to rush to make up the lost time for she looked flushed and was, Catherine thought, concealing some excitement behind an outward air of docile efficiency. But the meal passed happily enough since the company was at present united in a common preoccupation and a shared activity. By two o'clock the bishop and his wife had arrived, the committee came out of the drawing-room windows to arrange themselves a little self-consciously on the circle of waiting chairs and the fete was formally opened. Although the bishop was old and retired he was not senile and his short speech was a model of simplicity and grace. As the lovely old voice came to her across the lawn, Catherine thought of the church for the first time with interest and affection. Here was the Norman font where she and Stephen would stand at the christening of their children. In these aisles were commemorated his ancestors. Here the kneeling figures of a sixteenth-century Stephen Maxie and Deborah, his wife, faced each other for ever petrified in stone, their thin hands curved in prayer.

Here were the secular and ornate busts of the eighteenth-century Maxies and the plain tablets which told briefly of sons killed in Gallipoli and on the Marne.

Catherine had often thought that it was as well the family obsequies had become progressively less extravagant since the church of St. Cedd with St. Mary the Virgin, Chadfleet, was already less a public place of worship than a private repository for Maxie bones. But today, in a mood of confidence and exultation, she could think of all the family, dead and alive, without criticism and even a baroque reredos and Corinthian would have seemed no more than their due.

Deborah took her place with Catherine behind their stall and the customers began to approach and search warily for bargains. It was certainly one of the most popular attractions and business was brisk. Dr. Epps came early for his hat and was easily persuaded to buy Sir Reynold's coat for JI. The clothes and shoes were snapped up, usually by the very people Deborah had foretold would want them, and Catherine was kept busy handing out change and replenishing the stall from the large box of reinforcements which they kept under the counter. At the gate of the drive little groups of people continued to come in throughout the afternoon, the children's face stretched into fixed unnatural smiles for the benefit of a photographer who had promised a prize for the "Happiest Looking Child" to enter the garden during the afternoon.

The loudspeaker exceeded everyone's wildest hopes and poured forth a medley of Sousa marches and Strauss waltzes, announcements about teas and competitions, and occasional admonitions to use the rubbish baskets and keep the garden tidy. Miss Liddell and Miss Pollack, helped by the plainest, oldest and most reliable of their delinquent girls, bustled from St. Mary's to the fete and back again at the call of a conscience or duty. Their stall was by far the most expensive and the hand-made underclothes display suffered from an unhappy compromise between prettiness and respectability. The vicar, his soft white hair damped by exertion,, beamed happily upon his flock, who were for once at peace with the world and each other. Sir Reynold arrived late, voluble, patronizing and generous. From the tea lawn came the sound of earnest admonitions as Mrs. Cope and Mrs. Nelson, with the help of the boys' class from the Sunday school, busied themselves with bridge tables, chairs from the village hall, and assorted table-cloths which would all have to find their eventual way back to their owners.

Felix Hearne seemed to be enjoying himself as a free-lance. He did appear once or twice to help Deborah or Catherine but announced that he was having a much better time with Miss Liddell and Miss Pollack. Once Stephen came to inquire after business. For someone who habitually referred to the fete as "The Curse of Maxies", he seemed happy enough. Soon after four o'clock Deborah went into the house to see if her father needed attention and Catherine was left in charge. Deborah returned after half an hour or so and suggested that they might go in search of tea. It was being served in the larger of the two tents and late arrivals, Deborah warned, were usually faced with a weak beverage and the less attractive cakes. Felix Hearne, who had stopped at the stall to chat and pass judgment on the remaining merchandise, was commandeered to take their places and Deborah and Catherine went into the house to wash. One or two people were usually found passing through the hall either because they thought it would be a short cut or because they were strangers to the village and thought their entrance fee included a free tour of the house. Deborah seemed unconcerned.

"There's Bob Gittings, our local P.C., keeping an eye on things in the drawingroom," she pointed out. "And the diningroom's locked. This always happens. No one's ever taken anything yet. We'll go in the south door now and use the small bathroom. It'll be quicker." All the same it was disconcerting for them both when a man brushed past them on the back stairs with a hasty apology. They stopped and Deborah called after him. "Were you looking for someone? This is a private house." He turned and looked back at them, a nervous, lean man with graying hair swept back from a high forehead and a thin mouth which he drew back into a propitiatory smile. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize. Please excuse me. I was looking for the toilet." It was not an attractive voice. "If you mean the lavatory," said Deborah shortly, "there's one in the garden. It seemed adequately signposted to me." He flushed and mumbled some reply and then was gone.

Deborah shrugged her shoulders. "What a scared rabbit! I don't suppose he was doing any harm. But I wish they'd keep out of the house." Catherine made a mental resolve that when she was mistress of Martingale arrangements would be made to see that they did.

The tea-tent was crowded and the confused clatter of crockery, the babble of voices and the hissing of the tea-urn were heard against a background of the broadcast music which muted through the canvas. The tables had been decorated by the Sunday school children as part of their competition for the best arrangements of wild flowers. Each table bore its labeled jam jar and the harvest of poppy, campion, sorrel and dog-rose, revived from the hours of clutching in hot hands, had a delicate and unselfconscious beauty, although the scent of the flowers was lost in the strong smell of trampled grass, hot canvas and food. The concentration of noise was so great that a sudden break in the clatter of voices seemed to Catherine as if a total silence had fallen. Only afterwards did she realize that not everybody had stopped talking, that not every head was turned to where Sally had come into the tent by the opposite entrance, Sally in a white dress with a low boat-shaped neckline and a skirt of swirling pleats, identical with the one Deborah was wearing, Sally with a green cummerbund which was a replica of the one round Deborah's waist, and with green ear-rings gleaming on each side of flushed cheeks. Catherine felt her own cheeks redden and could not help her quick inquiring glance at Deborah. She was not the only one. Faces were turning toward them from more and more of the tables. From the far end of the tent where some of Miss Liddell's girl were enjoying an early tea under Miss Pollack's supervision, there was a quickly suppressed giggling. Someone said softly, but not softly enough, "Good old Sal".

Only Deborah appeared unconcerned.

Without a second glance at Sally she walked up to the counter of trestle tables and asked equably for tea for two, a plate of bread and butter and one of cakes.

Mrs. Partly splashed tea from the urn into the cups with embarrassed haste, and Catherine followed Deborah to one of the vacant tables, clutching the plate of cakes and unhappily aware that she was the one who looked a fool.

"How dare she?" she muttered, bending her hot face over the cup. "It's a deliberate insult." Deborah gave a slight shrug of her shoulders. "Oh, I don't know. What does it matter? Presumably the poor little devil is getting a kick out of her gesture and it isn't hurting me." "Where did she get the dress from?"

"The same place as I did, I imagine.

The name's inside. It isn't a model or anything like that. Anyone could buy it who took the trouble to -find it. Sally must have thought it worth the trouble."

"She couldn't have known you were going to wear it today."

"Any other occasion would have done as well, I expect. Must you go on about it?"

"I can't think why you take it so calmly. I wouldn't."

"What do you expect me to do? Go and tear it off her? There's a limit to the free entertainment the village can expect." "I wonder what Stephen will say," said Catherine. Deborah looked surprised. "I doubt whether he will even notice, except to think how well it suits her. It's more her dress than mine. Are those cakes all right for you or would you rather forage for sandwiches?" Catherine, balked of further discussion, went on with her tea.

The afternoon wore on. After the scene in the tea-tent the fun had gone out of the fete for Catherine and the rest of the jumble sale was little more than a laborious chore. They were sold out before five as Deborah had predicted, and Catherine was free to offer her help with the pony rides. She arrived in the home field to see Stephen lift Jimmy, screaming with delight, into the saddle in front of his mother. The sun, mellowing now at the if ending of the day, shone through the child's hair and turned it into fire. Sally's shining hair swung forward as she leaned down to whisper to Stephen. Catherine heard his answering laugh. It was a moment of time that she was never to forget. She turned back to the lawns and tried to recapture some of the confidence and happiness with which she had started the day. But it was of no use. After wandering about in desultory search for something to occupy her mind, she decided to go up to her room and lie down before dinner. She did not see Mrs. Maxie or Martha on her way through the house. Presumably they were busy either with Simon Maxie or with preparations for the cold meal which was to end the day. Through her window she did see that Dr. Epps was still dozing beside his darts and treasure hunt, although the busiest part of the afternoon was over. The winners of the competitions would soon be announced, rewarded and acclaimed and a thin but steady stream of people was already passing out of the grounds to the bus terminus.

Apart from that moment in the home field Catherine had not seen Sally again, and when she had washed and changed and was on the way to the dining-room she met Martha on the stairs and heard from her that Sally and Jimmy were not yet in. The dining-room table had been set with cold meats, salads and bowls of fresh fruit, and all the party except Stephen were gathered there. Dr. Epps, voluble and cheerful as ever, was busying himself with the cider bottles. Felix Hearne was setting out the glasses. Miss Liddell was helping Deborah to finish laying the table.

Her little squeals of dismay when she could not find what she wanted and her ineffectual jabbings at the table napkins were symptomatic of more than normal unease. Mrs. Maxie stood with her back to the others, looking into the glass above the chimneypiece. When she turned, Catherine was shocked by the lines and weariness of her face.

"Isn't Stephen with you?" she asked.

"No. I haven't seen him since he was with the horses. I've been in my room."

"He probably walked home with Boccock to help with the stabling. Or perhaps he's changing. I don't think we'll wait."

"Where's Sally?" asked Deborah.

"Not in apparently. Martha tells me that Jimmy is in his cot so she must have come in and gone out again." Mrs. Maxie spoke calmly. If this was a domestic crisis she evidently regarded it as a comparatively minor one which warranted no further comment in front of her guests. Felix Hearne glanced at her and felt a familiar tingle of anticipation and foreboding which startled him. It seemed so extravagant a reaction for so ordinary an occasion. Looking across to Catherine Bowers he had a feeling that she shared his unease. The whole party was a little jaded. Except for Miss Liddell's inconsequential and maddening chatter they had little to say. There was the sense of anticlimax which follows most long planned social functions. The affair was over and yet too much with them to permit relaxation. The bright sun of the day had given way to heaviness. There was no breeze now and the heat was greater than ever.

When Sally appeared at the door they turned to face her as if stung by a common urgency. She leaned back against the linen-fold panelling, the white pleats of her dress fanned out against its sombre darkness like a pigeon's wing. In this strange and stormy light her hair burned against the wood. Her face was very pale but she was smiling. Stephen was at her side.

Mrs. Maxie was aware of a curious moment in which each person present seemed separately aware of Sally and in which they yet moved quietly together as if tensed to face a common challenge. In an effort to restore normality she spoke casually. "I'm glad you're in, Stephen.

Sally, you had better change back into your uniform and help Martha."

The girl's self-contained little smile cracked into laughter. It took her a second to gain sufficient control to reply in a voice which was almost obsequious in its derisive respectfulness.

"Would that be appropriate, madam, for the girl your son has asked to marry him?"

Simon Maxie had a night which was no worse and no better than any other. It is doubtful whether anyone else beneath his roof was as fortunate. His wife kept her vigil on the day bed in his dressing-room and heard the hours strike while the luminous hand on the clock beside her bed jerked forward towards the inevitable day.

She lived through the scene in the drawing room so many times that there now seemed no second of it which was not remembered with clarity, no nuance of voice or emotion which was lost. She could recall every word of Miss Liddell's hysterical attack, the spate of vicious and half-demented abuse which had provoked Sally's retort.

"Don't talk about what you've done for me. What have you ever cared about me, you sex-starved old hypocrite? Be thankful that I know how to keep my mouth shut.

There are some things I could tell the village about you."

She had gone after that and the party had been left to enjoy their dinner with as much appetite as they could muster or simulate. Miss Liddell had made little effort. Once Mrs. Maxie noticed a tear on her cheek and she was touched with the thought that Miss Liddell was genuinely suffering, had cared to the limit of her capacity for Sally and had honestly taken pleasure in her progress and happiness.

Dr. Epps had champed through his meal in a sure sign that jaw and mind were together exercised. Stephen had not followed Sally from the room but had taken his seat by his sister. In reply to his mother's quiet "Is this true, Stephen?" he had replied simply, "Of course." He had made no further mention of it and brother and sister had sat through the meal together, eating little but presenting a united front to Miss Liddel's distress, and Felix Hearne's ironic glances. He, thought Mrs. Maxie, was the only member of the party who had enjoyed his dinner. She was not sure that the preliminaries had not sharpened his appetite. She knew that he had never liked Stephen and this engagement, if persisted in, was likely to afford him amusement as well as increasing his chances with Deborah. No one could suppose that Deborah would remain at Martingale once Stephen had married. Mrs. Maxie found that she could remember with uncomfortable vividness Catherine's bent face, flushed unbecomingly with grief or resentment and the calm way in which Felix Hearne had roused her to make at least a decent effort at concealment. He could be very amusing when he cared to exert himself and last night he had exerted himself to the full.

Surprisingly, he had succeeded in producing laughter by the end of the meal.

Was that really only seven hours ago?

The minutes ticked away sounding unnaturally loud in the quietness. It had rained heavily earlier in the night but had now stopped. At five o'clock she thought she heard her husband stirring and went to him, but he still lay in that rigid stupor which they called sleep. Stephen had changed his sleeping-drug. He had been given medicine instead of the usual tablet but the result appeared much the same.

She went back to bed but not to sleep. At six o'clock she got up and put on her dressing-gown, then she filled and plugged in the electric kettle for her morning tea.

The day with its problems had come at last.

It was a relief to her when there was a knock on the door and Catherine slipped in, still in her pyjamas and dressing-gown.

Mrs. Maxie had a moment of acute fear that Catherine had come to talk, that the affairs of the previous evening would have to be discussed, assessed, deprecated and re-lived. She had spent most of the night making plans that she could not share nor would wish to share with Catherine. But she found herself unaccountably glad to see another human being. She noticed that the girl looked pale. Obviously someone else had enjoyed little sleep. Catherine confessed that the rain had kept her awake and that she had woken early with a bad headache. She did not get them very often now but, when she did, they were bad.

Had Mrs. Maxie any aspirin? She preferred the soluble kind but any would do. Mrs. Maxie reflected that the headache might be an excuse for a confidential chat on the Sally-Stephen situation but a longer look at the girl's heavy eyes decided her that the pain was genuine enough. Catherine was obviously in no state for planning anything. Mrs.

Maxie invited her to help herself to the aspirin from the medicine cupboard and put out an extra cup of tea on the tray.

Catherine was not the companion she would have chosen, but at least the girl seemed prepared to drink her tea in silence.

They were sitting together in front of the electric fire when Martha arrived, her bearing and tone demonstrating a nice compromise between indignation and anxiety; "It's Sally, madam," she said. "She's overslept again I suppose. She didn't answer when I called her and, when I tried the door, I found that she's bolted it. I can't get in. I'm sure I don't know what she's playing at, madam." Mrs. Maxie replaced her cup in its saucer and noticed with clinical detachment and a kind of wonder that her hand was not shaking.

The imminence of evil took hold of her and she had to pause for a second before she could trust her voice. But when the words came, neither Catherine nor Martha seemed aware of any change in her.

"Have you really knocked hard?" she inquired.

Martha hesitated. Mrs. Maxie knew what that meant. Martha had not chosen to knock very hard. It was suiting her purpose better to let Sally oversleep. Mrs. Maxie, after her broken night, found this pettiness almost too much to bear.

"You had better try again," she said shortly. "Sally had a busy day yesterday as we all did. People don't oversleep without reason."

Catherine opened her mouth as if to make some comment, thought better of it, and bent her head over her tea. Within two minutes Martha was back and, this time, there was no doubt of it. Anxiety had conquered irritation and there was something very like panic in her voice. "I can't make her hear me. The baby's awake. He's whimpering in there. I can't make Sally hear!" "Mrs. Maxie had no memory of getting to the door of Sally's room. She was so certain, beyond any possible doubt, that the room must be open that she beat and tugged ineffectually at the door for several seconds before her mind accepted the truth. The door was bolted on the inside.

The noise of the knocking had thoroughly woken Jimmy and his early morning whimpering was now rising into a crescendo of wailing fear. Mrs. Maxie could hear the rattling of his cot bars and could picture him, cocooned in his woollen sleeping-bag, pulling himself up to scream for his mother. She felt the cold sweat starting on her forehead. It was all she could do to prevent herself from beating in mad panic at the unyielding wood. Martha was moaning now and it was Catherine who laid a comforting and restraining hand on Mrs. Maxie's shoulder.

"Don't worry too much. I'll get your son." "Why doesn't she say 'Stephen'?" thought Mrs. Maxie irrelevantly. "Stephen is my son." In a moment he was with them. The knocking must have aroused him for Catherine could not have fetched him so quickly. Stephen spoke calmly.

"We'll have to get in by the window.

The ladder in the outhouse will do. I'll get Hearne." He was gone and the little group of women waited in silence. The moments slowly passed.

"It's bound to take a little time," said Catherine reassuringly. "But they won't be long. I'm sure she's all right. She's probably still asleep."

Deborah gave her a long look. "With all this noise from Jimmy? My guess is that she won't be there. She's gone."

"But why should she?" asked Catherine.

"And what about the locked door?"

"Knowing Sally, I presume that she «•» wanted to do it the spectacular way and got out through the window. She seems to have a penchant for making scenes even when she can't be present to enjoy them.

Here we are shivering with apprehension while Stephen and Felix lug ladders about, and the whole of the household is disorganized. Very satisfying to her imagination."

"She wouldn't leave the baby," said

Catherine suddenly. "No mother would."

"This one apparently has," replied Deborah dryly. But her mother noticed that she made no move to leave the party.

Jimmy's yells had now reached a sustained climax which drowned any sound of the men's activities with the ladder or their entrance through the window. The next sound heard from the room was the quick scraping of the lock.

Felix stood in the doorway. At the sight of his face Martha gave a scream, a high-pitched animal squeal of terror. Mrs.

Maxie felt rather than heard the thud of her retreating footsteps, but no one followed her. The other women pushed past Felix's restraining arm and moved silently as if under some united compulsion to where Sally lay. The window was open and the pillow of the bed was blodged with rain. Over the pillow Sally's hair was spread like a web of gold. Her eyes were closed but she was not asleep. From the clenched corner of her mouth a thin trickle of blood had dried like a black slash. On each side of her neck was a bruise where her killer's hands had choked the life from her.

Chapter Four

"Nice-looking place, sir," said Detective Sergeant Martin as the police car drew up in front of Martingale. "Bit of a change I from our last job." He spoke with satisfaction for he was a countryman by birth and inclination and was often heard to complain of the proclivity of murderers to commit their crimes in overcrowded cities and insalubrious tenements. He sniffed the air appreciatively and blessed whatever reasons of policy or prudence had led the local chief constable to call in the Yard. It had been rumored that the chief constable personally knew the people concerned and, what with that and the still unsolved business on the fringe of the county, had thought it advisable to hand over this spot of trouble without delay.

That suited Detective-Sergeant Martin all right. Work was work wherever you did it, but a man was entitled to his preferences.

Detective Chief-Inspector Adam Dagleish did not reply but swung himself out of the car and stood back for a moment to look at the house. It was typical Elizabethan manor house, simple but strongly formalized in design. The large, two-storied bays with their mullioned and transomed windows stood symmetrically on each side of the square central porch. Above the dripstone was a heavy carved coat of arms. The roof sloped to a small open stone balustrade also carved with symbols in relief and the six great Tudor chimneys stood up 'boldly against a summer sky. To the west curved the wall of a room which Dagleish guessed had been added at a later date - probably during the last century. The french windows were of plated glass and led into the garden. For a moment he saw a face at one of them, but then it turned away. Someone was watching for his en arrival. To the west a grey stone wall ran from the corner of the house in a wide sweep towards the gates and lost itself behind the shrubs and the tall beeches.

The trees came very close to the house on this side. Above the wall and half concealed behind a mosaic of leaves he could just see the top of a ladder placed against an oriel window. That presumably was the dead girl's room. Her mistress could hardly have chosen one more suitably placed for an illicit entry. Two vehicles were parked beside the porch, a police car with a uniformed man sitting impassive at the wheel and a mortuary van. Its driver, stretched back in his seat and with his peaked cap tilted forward, took no notice of Dagleish's arrival while -his mate merely looked up perfunctorily before returning to his Sunday newspaper.

The local superintendent was waiting in the hall. They knew each other slightly as was to be expected with two men both eminent in the same job, but neither had ever wished for a closer acquaintanceship.

It was not an easy moment. Manning was finding it necessary to explain exactly why his chief had thought it advisable to call in the Yard. Dagleish replied suitably.

Two reporters were sitting just inside the door with the air of dogs who have been promised a bone if they behave and who have resigned themselves to patience.

The house was very quiet and smelt faintly of roses. After the torrid heat of the car the air struck so cold that Dagleish gave an involuntary shiver.

"The family are together in the drawing-room," said Manning. "I've left a sergeant with them. Do you want to see them now?"

"No, I'll see the body first. The living will keep."

Superintendent Manning led the way up the vast square staircase talking back at them as he went.

"I got a bit of ground covered before I knew they were calling in Central Office.

They've probably given you the gist.

Victim is the maid here. Unmarried mother aged twenty-two. Strangled. The body was discovered at about 7.15 a.m. this morning by the family. The girl's bedroom door was bolted. Exit, and probably entrance too, was via the window. You'll find evidence of that on the stack pipe and the wall. It looks as if he fell the last five feet or so. She was last seen alive at 10.30 p.m. last night carrying her late-night drink up to bed. She never finished it. The mug's on the bedside table. I thought it was almost certainly an outside job at first. They had a fete here yesterday and anyone could have got into the grounds. Into the house, too, for that matter. But there are one or two odd features."

"The drink, for example?" asked Dagleish.

They had reached the landing now and were passing towards the west wing of the house. Manning looked at him curiously.

"Yes. The cocoa. It may have been doped. There's some stuff missing. Mr. Simon Maxie is an invalid. There's a bottle of sleeping dope missing from his medicine cupboard."

"Any evidence of doping on the body?"

"The police surgeon's with her now. I doubt it though. Looked a straightforward strangling to me. The P.M. will probably have the answer."

"She could have taken the stuff herself," said Dagleish. "Is there any obvious motive?"

Manning paused.

"There could be. I haven't got any of the details but I've heard gossip."

"Ah. Gossip."

"A Miss Liddell came this morning to take away the girl's child. She was here to dinner last night. Quite a meal it must have been by her account. Apparently Stephen Maxie had proposed to Sally Jupp. You could call that a motive for the family, I suppose."

"In the circumstances I think I could," said Dagleish.

The bedroom was white-walled and full of light. After the dimness of the hall and corridors bounded with oak linen-fold panelling, this room struck with the artificial brightness of a stage. The corpse was the most unreal of all, a second-rate actress trying unconvincingly to simulate death. Her eyes were almost closed, but her face held that look of faint surprise which he had often noticed on the faces of the dead. Two small and very white front teeth were clenched against the lower lip, giving a rabbit-look to a face which, in life, must, he felt, have been striking, perhaps even beautiful. An aureole of hair flamed over the pillow in incongruous defiance of death. It felt slightly damp on his hand. Almost he wondered that its brightness had not drained away with the life of her body. He stood very still looking down at her. He was never conscious of pity at moments like this and not even of anger, although that might come later and would have to be resisted.

He liked to fix the sight of the murdered body firmly in his mind. This had been a habit since his first big case seven years ago when he had looked down at the battered corpse of a Soho prostitute in silent resolution and had thought, "This is it. This is my job."

The photographer had completed his work with the body before the police surgeon began his examination. He was now finishing with shots of the room and the window before packing up his equipment.

The print man had likewise finished with Sally and intent on his private world of whorls and composites, was moving with unobtrusive efficiency from door-knob to lock, from cocoa-beaker to chest of drawers, from bed to window-ledge before heaving himself out on the ladder to work on the stack-pipe and on the ladder itself. Dr. Feltman, the police surgeon, balding, rotund and self-consciously cheerful, as if under a perpetual compulsion to demonstrate his professional imperturbability in the face of death, was replacing his instruments in a black case.

Dagleish had met him before and knew him for a first-class doctor who had never learned to appreciate where his job ended and the detective's began. He waited until Dagleish had turned away from the body before speaking.

"We're ready to take her away now if that's all right by you. It looks simple enough medically speaking. Manual strangulation by a right-handed person standing in front of her. She died quickly, possibly by vagal inhibition. I'll be able to tell you more after the P.M. There's no sign of sexual interference but that doesn't mean that sex wasn't the motive. I imagine there's nothing like finding a dead body on your hands to take away the urge. When you pull him in you'll get the same old story, (I put my hands round her neck to frighten her and she went all limp'. He got in by the window by the look of it. You might find fingerprints on that stack-pipe but I doubt whether the ground will be much help. It's a kind of courtyard underneath. No nice soft earth with a couple of handy sole marks.

Anyway, it rained pretty hard last night which doesn't help matters. Well, I'll go and get the stretcher party if your man here has finished. Nasty business for a Sunday morning."

He went and Dalgleish inspected the room. It was large and sparsely furnished, but the overall impression it gave was one of sunlight and comfort. He thought that it had probably previously been the family day nursery. The old-fashioned fireplace on the north wall was surrounded by a heavy meshed fireguard behind which an electric fire had been installed. On each side of the fireplace were deep recesses fitted with bookcases and low cupboards.

There were two windows. The smaller oriel window against which the ladder stood was on the west wall and looked over the courtyard to the old stables. The larger window ran almost the whole length of the south wall, giving a panoramic view of the lawns and gardens. Here the glass was old and set with occasional medallions. Only the top mullioned windows could be opened.

The cream-painted single bed was set at right-angles to the smaller window and had a chair on one side and a bedside table with a lamp on the other. The child's cot was in the opposite corner half-hidden by a screen. It was the kind of screen which Dalgleish remembered from his own childhood, composed of dozens of colored pictures and postcards stuck in a pattern and glazed over. There were a rug before the fireplace and a low nursing chair. Against the wall were a plain wardrobe and a chest of drawers.

There was a curious anonymity about the room. It had the intimate fecund atmosphere of almost any nursery compounded of the faint smell of talcum powder, baby-soap and warmly-aired clothes. But the girl herself had impressed little of her personality on her surroundings. There was none of the feminine clutter which he had half expected. Her few personal belongings were carefully arranged but they were uncommunicative. Primarily it was just a child's nursery with a plain bed for his mother. The few books on the shelves were popular works on baby care. The half-dozen magazines were those devoted to the interests of mothers and housewives rather than to the more romanticized and varied concerns of young workingwomen.

He picked one from the shelf and flicked through it. From its pages dropped an envelope bearing a Venezuelan stamp. It was addressed to:

D. Pullen, Esq.,

Rose Cottage, Nessingford-road,

Little Chadfleet, Essex, England.

On the reverse were three dates scribbled in pencil - Wednesday 18th, Monday 23rd, Monday 30th.

Prowling from the bookshelf to the chest of drawers, Dalgleish pulled out each drawer and systematically turned over its contents with practised fingers. They were in perfect order. The top drawer held only baby clothes. Most of them were handknitted, all were well washed and cared for. The second was full of the girl's own underclothes, arranged in neat piles. It was the third and bottom drawer which held the surprise.

"What do you make of this?" he called to Martin.

The sergeant moved to his chief's side with a silent swiftness which was disconcerting in one of his build. He lifted one of the garments in his massive fist.

"Hand-made by the look of it, sir.

Must have embroidered it herself, I suppose. There's almost a drawer full. It looks like a trousseau to me." <I think that's what it is all right. And not only clothes too. Table-cloths, hand towels, cushion covers." He turned them over as he spoke. "It's rather a pathetic little dowry, Martin. Months of devoted work pressed away in lavender bags and tissue paper. Poor little devil. Do you suppose this was for the delight of Stephen Maxie? I can hardly picture these coy tray-clothes being used in Martingale."

Martin picked one up and examined it appreciatively.

"She can't have had him in mind when she did this. He only proposed yesterday according to the Super and she must have been working on this for months. My mother used to do this kind of work. You buttonhole round the pattern and then cut out the middle pits. Richelieu or something they call it. Pretty effect it gives - if you like that sort of thing," he added in deference to his Chief's obvious lack of enthusiasm. He ruminated over the embroidery in nostalgic approval before yielding it up for replacement in the drawer.

Dalgleish moved over to the oriel window. The wide window-ledge was about three feet high. It was scattered now with the bright glass fragments of a collection of miniature animals. A penguin lay wingless on its side and a brittle dachshund had snapped in two. One Siamese cat, startlingly blue of eye, was the sole survivor among the splintered holocaust.

The two largest and middle sections of the window opened outwards with a latch and the stack-pipe, skirting a similar window about six feet below, ran directly to the paved terrace beneath. It would hardly be a difficult descent for anyone reasonably agile. Even the climb up would be possible. He noticed again how safe from unwanted observation such an entry or exit would be. To his right the great brick wall, half hidden by overhanging beech boughs, curved away towards the drive. Immediately facing the window and about thirty yards away were the old stables with their attractive clock turret.

From their open shelter the window could be watched, but from nowhere else. To the left only a small part of the lawn was visible. Someone seemed to have been messing about with it. There was a small patch ringed with cord where the grass had been hacked or cut. Even from the window Dalgleish could see the lifted sods and the rash of brown soil beneath.

Superintendent Manning had come up behind him and answered his unspoken question.

"That's Doctor Epps's treasure hunt.

He's had it in the same spot for the last twenty years. They had the church fete here yesterday. Most of the bunting's down - the vicar likes to get the place cleared up before Sunday - but it takes a day or two to erase all the evidence."

Dalgleish remembered that the Super was almost a local man. "Were you here?" he asked.

"Not this year. I've been on duty almost continuously for the last week.

We've still got that killing on the county border to clear up. It won't be long now, but I've been pretty tied up with it. The wife and I used to come over here once a year for the fete but that was before the war. It was different then. I don't think we'd bother now. They still get a fair crowd though. Someone could have met the girl and-found out from her where she slept. It's going to mean a lot of work checking on her movements during yesterday afternoon and evening." His tone implied that he was glad the job was not his.

Dalgleish did not theorize in advance of his facts. But the facts he had garnered so far did not support this comfortable thesis of an unknown casual intruder. There had been no sign of attempted sexual assault, no evidence of theft. He had a very open mind on the question of that bolted door.

Admittedly, the Maxie family had all been on the right side of it at 7 a.m. that morning, but they were presumably as capable as anyone else of climbing down stack-pipes or descending ladders.

The body had been taken away, a white-sheeted lumpy shape stiff on the stretcher, destined for the pathologist's knife and the analyst's bottle. Manning had left them to telephone his office.

Dalgleish and Martin continued their patient inspection of the house. Next to Sally's room was an old-fashioned bathroom, the deep bath boxed round with mahogany and the whole of one wall covered with an immense airing-cupboard, fitted with slatted shelves. The three remaining walls were papered in an elegant floral design faded with age and there was an old but still unworn fitted carpet on the floor. The room offered no possible hiding-place. From the landing outside a flight of drugget-covered stairs curved down to the paneled corridor which led on the one side to the kitchen quarters and on the other to the main hall. Just at the bottom of these stairs was the heavy south door. It was ajar, and Dalgleish and Martin passed out of the coolness of Martingale into the heavy heat of the day.

Somewhere the bells of a church were ringing for Sunday matins. The sound came clearly and sweetly across the trees bringing to Martin a memory of boyhood's country Sundays and to Dalgleish a reminder that there was much to be done and little left of the morning.

"We'll have a look at that old stable block and the west wall beneath her window. After that I'm rather interested in the kitchen. And then we'll go on with the questioning. I've a feeling that the person we're after slept under this roof last night."

In the drawing-room the Maxies with their two guests and Martha Bultitaft waited to be questioned, unobtrusively watched over by a detective-sergeant who had stationed himself in a small chair by the door and who sat in apparently solid indifference, seeming far more at his ease than the owners of the house. His charges had their various reasons for wondering how long they would be kept waiting, but no one liked to reveal anxiety by asking.

They had been told that Detective Chief Inspector Dalglish from Scotland Yard had arrived and would be with them shortly. How shortly no one was prepared to ask. Felix and Deborah were still in their riding-clothes. The others had dressed hurriedly. All had eaten little and now they sat and waited. Since it would have seemed heartless to read, shocking to play the piano, unwise to talk about the murder and unnatural to talk about anything else, they sat in almost unbroken silence. Felix Hearne and Deborah were together on the sofa but sitting a little apart and occasionally he leaned across to whisper something in her ear. Stephen Maxie had stationed himself at one of the windows and stood with his back to the room. It was a stance which, as Felix Hearne had noticed cynically, enabled him to keep his face hidden and to demonstrate an inarticulate sorrow with the back of his bent head. At least four of the watchers would have liked very much to know whether the sorrow was genuine. Eleanor Maxie sat calmly in a chair apart. She was either numbed by grief or thinking deeply.

Her face was very pale but the brief panic which had caught her at Sally's door was over now. Her daughter noticed that she at least had taken trouble in her dressing and was presenting an almost normal appearance to her family and guests.

Martha Bultitaft also sat a little apart, ill at ease on the edge of her chair and darting occasional furious looks at the sergeant whom she obviously held responsible for her embarrassment at having to sit with the family and in the drawing-room, too, while there was work to be done. She who had been the most upset and terrified at the morning's discovery now seemed to regard the whole thing as a personal insult, and she sat in sullen resentment. Catherine Bowers gave the greatest appearance of ease. She had taken a small notebook from her handbag and was writing in it at intervals as if refreshing her memory about the events of the morning. No one was deceived by this appearance of normality and efficiency, but they all envied her the opportunity of putting up so good a show. All of them sat in essential isolation and thought their own thoughts. Mrs. Maxie kept her eyes on the strong hands folded in her lap but her mind was on her son.

"He will get over it, the young always do. Thank God Simon will never know.

It's going to be difficult to manage the nursing without Sally. One oughtn't to think about that I suppose. Poor child.

There may be fingerprints on that lock.

The police will have thought of that.

Unless he wore gloves. We all know about gloves these days. I wonder how many 11 r\ people got through that window to her. I suppose I ought to have thought of it, but how could I? She had the child with her after all. What will they do with Jimmy?

A mother murdered and a father he'll never know now. That was one secret she kept. One of many probably. One never knows people. What do I know about Felix? He could be dangerous. So could this chief inspector. Martha ought to be seeing to luncheon. That is, if anyone wants luncheon. Where will the police feed? Presumably they'll only want to use our rooms today. Nurse will be here at twelve so I'll have to go to Simon then. I suppose I could go now if I asked.

Deborah is on edge. We all are. If only we can keep our heads."

Deborah thought "I ought to dislike her less now that she's dead, but I can't. She always did make trouble. She would enjoy watching us like this, sweating on the top line. Perhaps she can. I mustn't get morbid. I wish we could talk about it. We might have kept quiet about Stephen and Sally if Eppy and Miss Liddell hadn't been at dinner. And Catherine of course.

There's always Catherine. She's going to enjoy this all right. Felix knows that Sally was doped. Well, if she was, it was in my drinking mug. Let them make what they like of that."

Felix Hearne thought, "They can't be much longer. The thing is not to lose my temper. These will be English policemen, extremely polite English policemen asking questions in strict compliance with judges' rules. Fear is the devil to hide. I can imagine Dalglish's face if I decided to explain. Excuse me, Inspector, if I appear to be terrified of you. The reaction is purely automatic, a trick of the nervous system. I have a dislike of formal questioning, and even more of the carefully staged informal session. I had some experience of it in France. I have recovered completely from the effects, you understand, except for this one slight legacy. I tend to lose my temper. It is only pure bloody funk. I am sure you will understand, Herr Inspector. Your questions are so very reasonable. It is unfortunate that I mistrust reasonable questions. We mustn't get this thing out of proportion of course. This is a minor disability. A comparatively small part of one's life is spent in being questioned by the police. I got off lightly. They even left me some of my finger-nails. I'm just trying to explain that I may find it difficult to give you the answers you want."

Stephen turned round.

"What about a lawyer?" he asked suddenly. "Oughtn't we to send for Jephson?"

His mother looked up from a silent contemplation of her folded hands.

"Matthew Jephson is motoring somewhere on the the continent. Lionel is in London.

We could get him if you feel it to be necessary."

Her voice held a note of interrogation.

Deborah said impulsively, "Oh, Mummy!

Not Lionel Jephson. He's the world's most pompous bore. Let's wait until we're arrested before we encourage him to come beetling down. Besides, he's not a criminal lawyer. He only knows about trusts and affidavits and documents. This would shock his respectable soul to the core.

He couldn't help."

"What about you, Hearne?" asked

Stephen.

"I'll cope unaided, thank you."

"We should apologize for mixing you up in this," said Stephen with stiff formality. "It's unpleasant for you and may be inconvenient. I don't know when you'll get back to London." Felix thought that this apology should more appropriately be made to Catherine Bowers. Stephen was apparently determined to ignore the girl. Did the arrogant young fool seriously believe that this death was merely a matter of unpleasantness and inconvenience? He looked across at Mrs. Maxie as he replied.

"I shall be very glad to stay -voluntarily or involuntarily - if I can be of use."

Catherine was adding her eager assurances to the same effect when the silent sergeant, galvanized into life, sprang to attention in a single movement. The door opened and three plainclothes policemen came in. Superintendent Manning they already knew. Briefly he introduced his companions as Detective Chief-Inspector Adam Dalglish and Detective-Sergeant George Martin. Five pairs of eyes swung simultaneously to the taller stranger in fear, appraisal or frank curiosity.

Catherine Bowers thought, "Tall, dark and handsome. Not what I expected.

Quite an interesting face really."

Stephen Maxie thought, "Supercilious looking devil. He's taken his time coming.

I suppose the idea is to soften us up. Or else he's been snooping round the house.

This is the end of privacy."

Felix Hearne thought, "Well, here it comes. Adam Dalglish, I've heard of him. Ruthless, unorthodox, working always against time. I suppose he has his own private compulsions. At least they've thought us adversaries worthy of the best."

Eleanor Maxie thought, "Where have I seen that head before. Of course. That Durer. In Munich was it? Portrait of an Unknown Man. Why does one

always expect police officers to wear bowlers and raincoats."

Through the exchange of introductions and courtesies Deborah Riscoe stared at him as if she saw him through a web of red-gold hair.

When he spoke it was in a curiously deep voice, relaxed and unemphatic. (I understand from Superintendent Manning that the small business room next door was been placed at my disposal.

I hope it won't be necessary to monopolize either it or you for a very long time. I should like to see you separately please and in this order.

"See me in my study at nine, nine-five, nine-ten..." whispered Felix to Deborah.

He was not sure whether he sought relief for himself or her, but there was no answering smile.

Dalgleish let his glance move briefly over the group. "Mr. Stephen Maxie, Miss Bowers, Mrs. Maxie, Mrs. Riscoe, Mr.

Hearne and Mrs. Bultitaft. Will those who are waiting please stay here. If any of you need to leave this room there is a woman police officer and a constable outside in the hall who can go with you. This surveillance will be relaxed as soon as everyone has been interviewed. Would you come with me please, Mr. Maxie?"

Stephen Maxie took the initiative.

"I think I had better begin by letting you know that Miss Jupp and I were engaged to be married. I proposed to her yesterday evening. There's no secret about it. It can't have anything to do with her death and I might not have bothered to mention it except that she broke the news in front of the village's prize gossip, so you'd probably find out fairly soon."

Dalgleish, who had already found out and was by no means convinced that the proposal was nothing to do with the murder, thanked Mr. Maxie gravely for his frankness and expressed formal condolences on the death of his fiancée.

The boy looked up at him with a sudden direct glance.

"I don't feel I've any right to accept condolences. I can't even feel bereaved. I suppose I shall when the shock of this has worn off a little. We were only engaged yesterday and now she's dead. It still isn't believable."

"Your mother was aware of this engagement?"

"Yes. All the family were except my father."

"Did Mrs. Maxie approve?"

"Hadn't you better ask her that yourself?"

"Perhaps I had. What were your relations with Miss Jupp before yesterday evening. Dr. Maxie?"

"If you are asking whether we were lovers the answer is 'no'. I was sorry for her, I admired her and I was attracted by her. I have no idea what she thought about me."

"Yet she accepted your offer of marriage?"

"Not specifically. She told my mother and her guests that I had proposed so I naturally assumed that she intended to accept me. Otherwise there would have been no point in breaking the news."

Dalgleish could think of several reasons why the girl should have broken the news, but he was not prepared to discuss them.

Instead he invited his witness to give his own account of recent events from the time that the missing Sommeil tablets were first brought into the house.

"So you think she was drugged, Inspector? I told the Superintendent about the tablets when he arrived. They were certainly in my father's medicine chest early this morning. Miss Bowers noticed them when she went to the cupboard for aspirin. They aren't there now. The only Sommeil in the cupboard now is in a sealed packet. The bottle has gone."

"No doubt we shall find it, Dr. Maxie.

The autopsy will discover whether or not Miss Jupp was drugged, and if so, how much of the stuff was taken. There is almost certainly something other than cocoa in that mug by the bed. She may, of course, have put the stuff in it herself."

"If she didn't, Inspector, who did? The stuff might not even have been meant for Sally. That was my sister's drinking-mug by the bed. We each have our own and they are all different. If the Sommeil was meant for Sally it must have been put in the drink after she had taken it up to her room."

"If the drinking-mugs are so distinctive it is curious that Miss Jupp should have taken the wrong one. That was an unlikely mistake surely?"

"It may not have been a mistake," said Stephen shortly.

Dalgleish did not ask him to explain but listened in silence as his witness described the visit of Sally to St. Luke's on the previous Thursday, the events of the church fete, the sudden impulse which had led him to propose marriage and the finding of his fiancée's body. The account he gave was factual, concise and almost unemotional. When he came to describe the scene in Sally's bedroom his voice was almost clinically detached. Either he had greater control than was good for him or he had anticipated this interview and had schooled himself in advance against every betrayal of fear or remorse.

"I went with Felix Hearne to get the ladder. He was dressed but I was still in my dressing-gown. I shed one of my bedroom slippers on the way to the outhouses opposite Sally's window so he reached them first and gripped the ladder.

It's always kept there. Hearne had dragged it out by the time I caught up with him and was calling out to know which way to carry it. I pointed towards Sally's window. We carried the ladder between us although it's quite light. One person could manage it, although I'm not sure about a woman. We put it against the wall and Hearne went up first while I steadied it. I followed him at once. The window was open but the curtains were drawn across. As you saw, the bed is at right angles to the window with the head towards it. There's a wide window-ledge where the oriel window juts out and Sally apparently kept a collection of small glass animals there. I noticed that they had been scattered and most were broken. Hearne went over to the door and pulled back the lock. I stood looking at Sally. The bedclothes were pulled up as far as her chin but I could see at once that she was dead.

By this time the rest of the family were around the bed, and when I turned back the clothes we could see what had happened. She was lying on her back - we didn't disturb her - and she looked quite peaceful. But you know what she looked like. You saw her."

"I know what I saw," said Dalgleish.

"I'm asking now what you saw."

The boy looked at him curiously and then closed his eyes for a second before replying. He spoke in a flat expressionless voice as if repeating a lesson learnt by rote. "There was a trickle of blood at the corner of her mouth. Her eyes were almost closed. There was a fairly distinct thumb impression under the right lower jaw over the cornu of the thyroid and a less clear indication of finger marks on the left side of the neck lying along the thyroid cartilage. It was an obvious case of manual strangulation with the right hand and from the front. Considerable force must have been used, but I thought that death was possibly due to vagal inhibition and may have 'been very sudden. There were few of the classic signs of asphyxia. But no doubt you will get the facts from the autopsy."

"I expect them to be in line with your own views. Did you form any idea of the time of death?"

"There were some rigor mortis in the jaw and neck muscles. I don't know whether it had spread any farther. I'm describing the signs that I noticed almost subconsciously. You will hardly expect a full post-mortem account in the circumstances."

Sergeant Martin, his head bent over his notebook, detected unerringly the first note of near hysteria and thought "Poor devil.

The old man can be pretty brutal. He stood up to it all right so far, though. Too well for a man who has just discovered the body of his girl. If she was his girl." (I shall get the full post-mortem report in due course," said Dalgleish equably. "I was interested in your assessment of the time of death."

"It was a fairly warm night despite the rain. I should say not less than five hours nor more than eight."

"Did you kill Sally Jupp, Doctor?"

"No."

"Do you know who did?"

"No."

"What were your movements from the time that you finished dinner on Saturday night until Miss Bowers called you this morning with the news that Sally

Jupp's door was bolted?"

"We had our coffee in the drawingroom. At about nine o'clock my mother suggested that we should start counting the money. It was in the safe here in the business room. I thought they might be happier without me and I was feeling restless, so I went out for a walk. I told my mother that I might be late and asked her to leave the south door open for me. I hadn't any particular idea in mind, but as soon as I'd left the house I felt I should like to see Sam Bocock. He lives alone in the cottage at the far end of the home meadow. I walked through the garden and over the meadow to his cottage and stayed there with him until pretty late. I can't exactly remember when I left, but he may be able to help. I think it was just after eleven. I walked back alone, entered the louse through the south door, bolted it behind me and went to bed. That's all."

"Did you go straight home?"

The almost imperceptible hesitation was not lost on Dalgleish.

"Yes."

"That means you would have been back in the house by when?"

"It's only five minutes' walk from Bocock's cottage, but I didn't hurry. I suppose I was indoors and in bed by eleven-thirty."

"It's a pity that you can't be precise about the time, Dr. Maxie. It's also, surely, surprising in view of the fact that you have a small clock on your bedside table with a luminous dial." <l may have. That doesn't mean that I always take a note of the times I sleep or get up."

"You spent about two hours with Mr.

Bocock. What did you talk about?"

"Horses and music mainly. He has a rather fine record-player. We listened to his new record - Klemperer conducting the Eroica to be precise."

"Are you in the habit of visiting Mr.

Bocock and spending the evening with him?"

"Habit? Bocock was groom to my grandfather. He's my friend. Don't you visit your friends when you feel like it, Inspector, or haven't you any?"

It was the first flash of temper.

Dalgleish's face showed no emotion, not even satisfaction. He pushed a small square of paper across the table. On it were three minute splinters of glass.

These were found in the outhouse opposite Miss Jupp's room, where you say that the ladder is normally kept. Do you know what they are?"

Stephen Maxie bent forward and studied this exhibit without apparent interest.

"They're splinters of glass obviously. I can't tell you any more about them. They could be part of a broken watch-glass I suppose."

"Or part of one of the smashed glass animals from Miss Jupp's room."

"Presumably."

"I see you are wearing a small piece of plaster across your right knuckle. What's wrong?"

"I grazed myself slightly when I was coming home last night. I brushed my hand against the bark of a tree. At least, that's the most probable explanation. I can't remember it happening and only noticed the blood when I got to my room.

I stuck this plaster on before I went to bed and I'd normally have taken it off by now. The graze wasn't really worth bothering about, but I have to look after my hands."

"May I see, please?"

Maxie came forward and placed his hand, palm down, on the desk. Dalgleish noted that it did not tremble. He picked at the corner of the plaster and ripped it off.

Together they inspected the whitened knuckle underneath. Maxie still showed no sign of anxiety, but scrutinized his hand with the air of a connoisseur, condescendingly inspecting an exhibit which was hardly worthy of his attention.

He picked up the discarded plaster, folded it neatly and flicked it accurately into the waste-paper basket.

"That looks like a cut to me," said Dalgleish. "Or it could, of course, be a scratch from a fingernail."

"It could, of course," agreed his suspect easily. "But if it were wouldn't you expect to find blood and skin under the nail which did the scratching? I'm sorry I can't remember how it happened." He looked at it again and added. "It certainly looks like a small cut but it's ridiculously small. In two days it won't be visible. Are you sure you don't want to photograph it?"

"No thank you," said Dalgleish. "We've had something rather more serious to photograph upstairs."

It gave him considerable satisfaction to watch the effect of his words. While he was in charge of this case none of his suspects need think that they could retreat into private worlds of detachment or cynicism from the horror of what had laid on the bed upstairs. He waited for a moment and then continued remorselessly. <l want to be perfectly clear about this south door. It leads directly to the flight of stairs which go up to the old nursery.

To that extend Miss Jupp slept in a part of the house which can be said to have its own entrance. Almost a self-contained flat in effect. Once the kitchen quarters were closed for the night she could let a visitor in through that door with little risk of discovery. If the door were left unbolted a visitor could gain entrance to her door with reasonable ease. Now you say that the south door was left unbolted for you from nine o'clock when you had finished dinner until shortly after 11 p.m. when you returned from Mr. Bocock's cottage.

During that time is it true to say that anyone could have gained access to the house through the south door?"

"Yes. I suppose so."

"Surely you know definitely whether they could or not, Mr. Maxie?"

"Yes, they could. As you probably saw, the door has two heavy inside bolts and a mortice lock. We haven't used the lock for years. There are keys somewhere, I suppose. My mother might know. We normally keep the door closed during the day and bolt it at night. In the winter it is usually kept bolted all the time and is hardly used. There is another door into the kitchen quarters. We're rather slack about locking up, but we've never had any trouble here. Even if we did lock the doors carefully the house wouldn't be burglar-proof. Anyone could get in through the french windows in the drawing-room. We do lock them, but the glass could easily be broken. It has never seemed worthwhile worrying too much about security."

"And, in addition to this ever-open door, there was a convenient ladder in the old stable block?"

Stephen Maxie gave a slight shrug.

"It has to be kept somewhere. We don't lock up the ladders just in case someone gets the idea of using them to get through the windows."

"We have no evidence yet that anyone did. I am still interested in that door.

Would you be prepared to swear that it was unbolted when you returned from Mr. Bocock's cottage?"

"Of course. Otherwise I couldn't have got in."

Dalgleish said quickly, "You realize the importance of determining at what time you finally bolted that door?"

"Of course."

"I'm going to ask you once more what time you bolted it and I advise you to think very carefully before you reply."

Stephen Maxie looked at him straight in the eye and said almost casually.

"It was thirty-three minutes past twelve by my watch. I wasn't able to get to sleep and at twelve-thirty I suddenly remembered that I hadn't locked up. So I got out of bed and did so. I didn't see anyone or hear anything and I went straight back to my room. It was no doubt very careless of me, but if there's a law against forgetting to lock up I should like to hear of it."

"So that at twelve-thirty-three you bolted the south door?"

"Yes," replied Stephen Maxie easily.

"At thirty-three minutes past midnight."

In Catherine Bowers Dalgleish had a witness after every policeman's heart, composed, painstaking and confident. She had walked in with great self-

possession, showing no signs of nervousness or grief. Dalgleish did not like her. She knew that these personal antipathies had been long ago learned both to conceal and evaluate them. But he was right in supposing her to be an accurate observer. She had been quick to watch people's reactions as she had been to note the sequence of events. It was from Catherine Bowers that Dalgleish learned how shocked the Maxies had been at Sally's announcement, how triumphantly the girl had laughed out her news and what an unusual effect her remarks to Miss Liddell had produced on that lady. Miss Bowers was perfectly prepared, too, to discuss her own feelings.

"Naturally it was a terrible shock when Sally gave us her news, but I can quite see how it happened. No one is kinder than Dr. Maxie. He has too much social conscience as I am always telling him and the girl just took advantage of it. I know he couldn't have loved her really. He never mentioned it to me and he would have told me before anyone. If they had really loved each other he could have relied on me to understand and release him."

"Do you mean that there was an engagement between you?"

Dalgleish had difficulty in keeping the surprise out of his voice. It needed only one more fiancée to make the case fantastic.

"Not exactly an engagement, Inspector.

No ring or anything like that. But we have been close friends for so long now that it was rather taken for granted... I suppose you might say we had an understanding. But there were no definite plans. Dr. Maxie has a long way to go before he can think of marriage. And there is his father's illness to consider."

"So that you were not, in fact, engaged to be married to him?"

Faced with this uncompromising question Catherine admitted as much, but with a little self-satisfied smile which conveyed that it could only be a matter of time.

"When you arrived at Martingale for this week-end, did anything strike you as unusual?"

"Well, I was rather late on Friday evening. I didn't arrive until just before dinner. Dr. Maxie didn't arrive until late that night and Mr. Hearne only came on Saturday morning, so there were only Mrs. Maxie, Deborah and me at dinner. I thought they seemed worried. I don't like having to say it, but I'm afraid Sally Jupp was a scheming little girl. She waited on us and I didn't like her attitude at all."

Dalgleish questioned her further but the "attitude" as far as he could judge consisted of nothing more than a slight toss of the head when Deborah had spoken to her and a neglect to call Mrs. Maxie "Madam". But he did not discount Catherine's evidence as valueless. It was likely that neither Mrs. Maxie nor her daughter had been entirely oblivious to the danger in their midst.

He changed his tack and took her carefully over the events of Sunday morning. She described how she had woken with a headache after a poor night and had gone in search of aspirin. Mrs. Maxie had invited her to help herself. It was then that she had noticed the little bottle of Sommeil. At first she had mistaken the tablets for aspirin but had quickly realized that they were too small and were the wrong color. Apart from that, the bottle was labeled. She had not noticed how many Sommeil tablets were in the bottle but she was absolutely certain that the bottle was in the drug cupboard at seven o'clock that morning and equally certain that it was no longer there when she and Stephen Maxie had looked for it after the finding of Sally Jupp's body.

The only Sommeil in the cupboard then had been an unopened and sealed packet.

Dalgleish asked her to describe the finding of the body and was surprised at the vivid picture which she was able to give.

"When Martha came to tell Mrs. Maxie that Sally hadn't got up we thought at first that she'd just overslept again. Then Martha came back to say that her door was locked and Jimmy crying so we went to see what was wrong. There's no doubt that the door was bolted. As you know, Dr. Maxie and Mr. Hearne got in through the window and I heard one of them drawing back the bolt. I think it must have been Mr. Hearne because he opened the door. Stephen was standing near the bed looking at Sally. Mr. Hearne said, 'I'm afraid she's dead.' Someone screamed. It was Martha, I think, but I didn't look round to see. I said, 'She can't be! She was all right last night!' We had moved over to the bed then and Stephen had drawn the sheet down from her face.

Before that it had been up to her chin and folded quite neatly. I thought that it looked as if someone had tucked her up comfortably for the night. As soon as we saw the marks on her neck we knew what had happened. Mrs. Maxie closed her eyes for a moment. I thought that she was going to faint so I went over to her. But she managed to keep on her feet and stood at the bottom of the bed gripping the rail. She was shaking violently, so much that the whole bed was shaking. It is only a light single bed as you will have seen, and the shaking made the body bounce very gently up and down. Stephen said very loudly, 'Cover her face', but Mr.

Hearne reminded him that we had better not touch anything more until the police came. Mr. Hearne was the calmest of us all, I thought, but I suppose that he is used to violent death. He looked more interested than shocked. He bent over Sally and lifted one of her eyelids. Stephen said roughly, (I shouldn't worry, Hearne.

'She's dead all right.' Mr. Hearne replied, 'It isn't that. I'm wondering why she didn't struggle.' Then he dipped his little finger into the mug of cocoa on the bedside table. It was just over half full and a skin had formed on the top. The skin stuck to his finger and he scraped it off against the side of the mug before putting the finger in his mouth. We were all looking at him as if he were going to demonstrate something wonderful to us. I thought that Mrs. Maxie looked - well, rather hopeful. Rather like a child at a party. Stephen said, "Well, what is it?"

Mr. Hearne shrugged his shoulders and said, That's for the analyst to say. I think she's been doped.' Just then Deborah gave a kind of gasp and fumbled towards the door. She was deathly white and was obviously going to be sick. I tried to get to her, but Mr. Hearne said quite sharply, 'All right. Leave her to me.' He guided her out of the room, and I think they went into the maids' bathroom next door.

I wasn't surprised. I would have expected Deborah to break down like that. That left Mrs. Maxie and Stephen in the room with me. I suggested that Mrs. Maxie should find a key so that the room could be locked and she replied, 'Of course. I believe that is usual. And oughtn't we to telephone the police? The extension in the dressing-room would be best.' I suppose she meant that it would be the most private. I remember thinking, 'If we 'phone from the dressing-room the maids won't overhear', forgetting that 'the maids' meant Sally and that Sally wouldn't be overhearing anything again."

"Do you mean that Miss Jupp was in the habit of listening to other people's conversation?" interrupted the inspector. «I certainly always had that impression, Inspector. But I always thought she was sly. She never seemed the least grateful for all that the family had done for her. She hated Mrs. Riscoe, of course. Anyone could see that. I expect you've been told about the affair of the copied dress?"

Dalgleish expressed himself interested in this intriguing title and was rewarded with a graphic description of the incident and the reactions it had provoked.

"So you can see the type of girl she was. Mrs. Riscoe pretended to take it calmly, but I could see what she was feeling. She could have killed Sally." Catherine Bowers pulled her skirt down over her knees with complacent mock modesty. She was either a very good actress or she was unconscious of her solecism. Dalgleish continued the questioning with a feeling that he might be facing a more complex personality than he had first recognized.

"Will you tell me please what happened when Mrs. Maxie, her son and you reached the dressing-room?" «I was just coming to that, Inspector. I had picked up Jimmy from his cot and was still holding him in my arms. It seemed terrible to me that he should have been alone in that room with his dead mother. When we all burst in he stopped crying and I don't think any of us thought about him for a time. Then suddenly I noticed him. He had pulled himself up by the bars of his cot and was balancing there with his wet nappy hanging around his ankles and such an interested look on his face. Of course, he is too young to understand, thank God, and I expect he just wondered what we were all doing round his mother's bed. He had become perfectly quiet and he came to me quite willingly. I carried him with me into the dressing-room. When we got there Dr. Maxie went straight to the medicine cupboard. He said, 'It's gone!' I asked him what he meant and he told me about the missing Sommeil. That was the first time I heard about it. I was able to tell him that the bottle had been there when I went to the cupboard for aspirin that morning. While we were talking Mrs.

Maxie had gone through to her husband's room. She was only there for a minute and when she came back she said, 'He's all right. He's sleeping. Have you got the police yet?' Stephen went across to the telephone and I said that I would take Jimmy with me while I dressed and then give him his breakfast. No one replied so I went to the door. Just before I went out I turned round. Stephen had his hand on the receiver and suddenly his mother placed her hand over his and I heard her say, 'Wait. There's one thing I must know.' Stephen replied, 'You don't have to ask. I know nothing about it. I swear that.' Mrs. Maxie gave a little sigh and put her hand up to her eyes. Then Stephen picked up the receiver and I left the room."

She paused and looked up at Dalgleish as if expecting or inviting his comment.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "Please go on."

"There isn't really much more to tell you, Inspector. I took Jimmy to my room, collecting a clean nappy from the small bathroom on my way. Mrs. Riscoe and Mr. Hearne were still there. She had been sick and he was helping to bathe her face.

They didn't seem very pleased to see me. I said, 'When you feel better I daresay your mother would like some attention. I'm looking after Jimmy.' Neither of them replied. I found the nappies in the airing cupboard and went to my room and changed Jimmy. Then I let him play on my bed while I dressed. That only took about ten minutes. I took him to the kitchen and gave him a lightly boiled egg with bread and butter fingers and some warm milk. He was perfectly good the whole time. Martha was in the kitchen getting breakfast but we didn't speak. I was surprised to find Mr. Hearne there, too. He was making coffee. I suppose Mrs. Riscoe was with her mother. Mr. Hearne didn't seem inclined to talk either.

I suppose he was annoyed with me for saying what I did to Mrs. Riscoe. She can do no wrong in his eyes as you've probably guessed. Well, as they didn't seem inclined to discuss what should be done next I decided to take matters into my own hands and I went into the hall with Jimmy and telephoned Miss Liddell.

I told her what had happened and asked her to take back the baby until things had been sorted out. She came round by taxi within about fifteen minutes and, by then, Dr. Epps and the police had arrived. The rest you know."

"That has been a very clear and useful account, Miss Bowers. You have the advantage of being a trained observer, but not all trained observers can present their facts in logical sequence. I won't keep you very much longer. I just want to go back to the earlier part of the night. So far you have described very clearly for me the events of yesterday evening and this morning. What I want to establish now is the sequence of events from ten p.m. onwards. At that time I believe you were still in the business room with Mrs. Maxie, Dr. Epps and Miss Liddell. Could you please go on from there."

For the first time Dalgleish discerned a trace of hesitation in his suspect's response. Until now she had responded to his questioning with a ready fluency which had impressed him as being too spontaneous for guile. He could believe that, so far, Catherine Bowers had not found the interview unpleasant. It was difficult to reconcile such uninhibited outpourings with a guilty conscience.

Now, however, he sensed the sudden withdrawal of confidence, the slight tensing to meet an unwelcome change of emphasis. She confirmed that Miss Liddell and Dr. Epps had left the business room to go home about ten-thirty. Mrs. Maxie had seen them off and had then returned to Catherine. Together they had tidied the papers and locked the money in the safe. Mrs. Maxie had not mentioned seeing Sally. Neither of them had discussed her. After locking away the money they had gone to the kitchen.

Martha had retired for the night, but had left a saucepan of milk on the top of the stove and a silver tray of beakers on the kitchen table. Catherine remembered noting that Mrs. Riscoe's Wedgwood beaker wasn't there and thought it strange that Mr. Hearne and Mrs. Riscoe could have come in from the garden without anyone knowing. It never occurred to her that Sally might have taken the beaker although, of course, one could see that it was just the sort of thing she might do.

Dr. Maxie's mug had been there, together with a glass one in a holder which belonged to Mrs. Maxie and two large cups with saucers which had been put out for the guests. There were a bowl of sugar on the table and tins of two milk drinks. There was no cocoa. Mrs. Maxie and Catherine had collected their drinks and taken them up to Mr. Maxie's dressing-room where his wife was to spend the night. Catherine had helped her to make the invalid's bed and had then stopped to drink her Ovaltine before the dressing-room fire. She had offered to sit up with Mrs. Maxie for a time but the offer had not been accepted. After about an hour Catherine had left to go to her own room. She was sleeping on the opposite side of the house from Sally. She had seen no one on the way to her room.

After undressing she had visited the bathroom in her dressing-gown and had been back in her room by about a quarter past eleven. As she was closing the door she thought she heard Mrs. Riscoe and Mr. Hearne coming up the stairs but she couldn't be sure. She had seen or heard nothing of Sally up to that time. Here Catherine paused and Dalgleish waited patiently, but with a quickening of interest. In the corner Sergeant Martin turned over a page of his notebook in practised silence and cast a quick sidelong glance at his chief. Unless he was much mistaken the old man's thumbs were pricking now. "Yes, Miss Bowers," prompted Dalgleish inexorably. His witness went bravely on. "I'm afraid this part you may find rather strange but it all seemed perfectly natural at the time. As you can understand the scene before dinner had been a great shock to me. I couldn't believe that Stephen and this girl were engaged. It wasn't he who had broken the news after all, and I don't think for one moment that he had really proposed to her. Dinner had been a terrible meal as you can imagine and, afterwards, everyone had gone on behaving as if nothing had happened. Of course, the Maxies never do show their feelings but Mrs. Riscoe went off with Mr. Hearne and I've no doubt they had a good talk about it and what could be done. But no one said anything to me although, in a sense, I was the one who was most concerned. I thought that Mrs. Maxie might have discussed it with me after the other two guests had left, but I could see that she didn't mean to. When I got to my room I realized that if I didn't do something no one would. I couldn't bear to lie there all night without knowing the worst. I felt I just had to find out the truth. The natural thing seemed to be to ask Sally. I thought that if she and I could only have a private talk together I might be able to get it all straightened out. I knew that it was late but it seemed the only chance. I had been lying there in the dark for some time but, when I had made up my mind, I put on the bedside lamp and looked at my watch. It said three minutes to midnight. That didn't seem so very late in the mood I was in. I put on my dressing-gown and took my pocket torch with me and went to Sally's room.

Her door was locked but I could see that the light was on because it was shining through the keyhole. I knocked on the door and called her softly. The door is very strong as you know, but she must have heard me because the next thing I heard was the sound of the bolt being shot home and the light from the keyhole was suddenly obscured as she stood in front of it. I knocked and called once more but it was obvious that she wasn't going to let me in, so I turned and went back to my room. On the way there I suddenly thought I had to see Stephen. I couldn't face going back to bed in the same uncertainty. I thought that he might be wanting to confide in me, but not liking to come and see me. So I turned back from my own bedroom door and went to his.

The light wasn't on so I knocked gently and went in. I felt that if only I could see him everything would be all right."

"And was it?" asked Dalgleish.

This time the air of cheerful competence had gone. There could be no mistaking the sudden pain in those unattractive eyes.

"He wasn't there, Inspector. The bed was turned down ready for the night but he wasn't there." She made a sudden effort to return to her former manner and gave him a smile which was almost pathetic in its artificiality. "Of course, I know now that Stephen had been to see Bocock, but it was very disappointing at the time."

"It must have been," agreed Dalgleish gravely.

Mrs. Maxie seated herself quietly and composedly, offered him whatever facilities he needed and only hoped that the investigation could be carried out with disturbing her husband who was gravely ill and incapable of realizing what had happened. Watching her across the desk Dalgleish could see what her daughter might become in thirty years' time. Her strong, capable, jeweled hands lay inertly in her lap. Even at that distance he could see how alike they were to the hands of her son. With greater interest he noticed that the nails, like the nails on the surgeon's fingers, were cut very short. He could detect no signs of nervousness. She seemed rather to personify the peaceful acceptance of an inevitable trial. It was not, he felt, that she had schooled herself to endurance. Here was a true serenity based on some kind of central stability which would take more than a murder investigation to disturb. She answered his questions with a deliberate thoughtfulness.

It was as if she was setting her own value on every word. But there was nothing new that she could tell. She corroborated the evidence of Catherine Bowers on the discovery of the body and her account of the previous day agreed with the accounts already given. After the departure of Miss Liddell and Dr. Epps at about half past ten, she had locked up the house with the exception of the drawing-room window and the back door. Miss Bowers had been with her. Together they had collected their mugs of milk from the kitchen - only her son's then remained on the tray - and together they had gone up to bed. She had spent the night half sleeping and half watching her husband. She had heard and seen nothing unusual. No one had come near her until Miss Bowers had arrived early and had asked her for aspirin. She had known nothing of the tablets said to have been discovered in her husband's bed and found the story very difficult to believe. In her view it was impossible for him to have hidden anything in his mattress without Mrs. Bulttaft finding it. Her

son had told her about the incident, but she had substituted a medicine for the pills. She had not been surprised at this. She had thought that he was trying some new preparation from the hospital and was confident that he would have prescribed nothing without the approval of Dr. Epps.

Not until the patient probing questions of her son's engagement was her composure shaken. Even then it was irritation rather than fear which gave an edge to her voice. Dalgleish sensed that the smooth apologies with which he usually prefaced embarrassing questions would be out of place here, would be resented more than the questions themselves. He asked bluntly:

"What was your attitude, madam, to this engagement between Miss Jupp and your son?"

"It hardly lasted long enough to be dignified with that name surely. And I'm surprised that you bother to ask, Inspector. You must know that I would disapprove strongly."

"Well, that was frank enough," id thought Dalgleish. "But what else could she say? We would scarcely believe that she liked it."

"Even though her affection for your son could have been genuine?"

"I am paying her the compliment of assuming that it was. What difference does that make? I would still have disapproved. They had nothing in common. He would have had to support another man's child. It would have hindered his career and they would have disliked each other within a year. These King Cophetua marriages seldom work out. How can they? No girl of spirit likes to think she's been condescended to and Sally had plenty of spirit even if she chose not to show it. Furthermore, I fail to see what they would have married on. Stephen has very little money of his own. Of course I disapproved of this so-called engagement. Would you wish for such a marriage for your son?"

For one unbelievable second Dalgleish thought that she knew. It was a commonplace, almost banal argument which any mother faced with her circumstances might casually have used.

She could not possibly have realized its force. He wondered what she would say if he replied, "I have no son. My own child and his mother died three hours after he was born. I have no son to marry anyone - suitable or unsuitable." He could imagine her frown of well-bred distaste that he should embarrass her at such a time with a private grief at once so old, so intimate, so unrelated the matter at hand.

He replied briefly:

"No. I should not wish it either. I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time with what must seem no one's business but your own. But you must see its importance."

"Naturally. From your point of view it provides a motive for several people, myself particularly. But one does not kill to avoid social inconvenience. I admit that I intended to do all I could to stop them marrying. I was going to have a talk with Stephen next day. I've no doubt we would have been able to do something for Sally without the necessity of welcoming her into the family. There must be a limit to what these people expect."* The sudden bitterness of her last sentence roused even Sergeant Martin from the routine automatism of his notetaking.

But if Mrs. Maxie realized that she had said too much she did not aggravate her error by saying more. Watching her, Dalgleish thought how like a picture she was, an advertisement in water-color for toilet water or soap. Even the low bowl of flowers on the desk between them emphasized her serene gentility as if placed there by the cunning hand of a commercial photographer. "Picture of an English lady at home," he thought, and wondered what the Chief Superintendent would make of her and, if it ever came to that, what a jury would make of her.

Even his mind, accustomed to finding wickedness in strange as well as high places, could not easily reconcile Mrs.

Maxie with murder. But her last words had been revealing.

He decided to leave the marriage question at present and concentrate on other aspects of the investigation. Again he went over the account of the preparation of the nightly hot drinks.

There could be no confusion about the ownership of the different mugs. The Wedgwood blue one found at Sally's side belonged to Deborah Riscoe. The milk for the drinks was placed on top of the stove.

It was a solid-fuel stove with heavy covers to each of the hot-plates. The saucepan of milk was left on top of one of these covers where there could be no danger of its boiling over. Any of the family wanting to boil the milk would transfer the saucepan to the hot-plate and replace it afterwards on top of the cover. Only the family's mugs and cups for their guests were placed on the tray. She could not say what Sally or Mrs. Bultitaft usually drank at night but, certainly, none of the family drank cocoa. They were not fond of chocolate.

"It comes to this, doesn't it," said Dalgleish. "If, as I am now assuming, the post-mortem shows that Miss Jupp was drugged and the analysis of the cocoa shows that the drug was in her last night drink, then we are faced with two possibilities. She could have taken the drug herself, perhaps for no worse reason than to get a good sleep after the excitement of the day. Or someone else drugged her for a reason which we must discover but which is not so difficult to guess. Miss Jupp, as far as is known, was a healthy young woman. If this crime was premeditated her murderer must have considered how he - or she - could get into that room and kill the girl with the least possible disturbance. To drug her is an obvious answer. That supposes that the murderer is familiar with the evening drink routine at Martingale and knew where the drugs were kept. I suppose a member of your household or a guest is familiar with your household routine?"

"Surely then he would know that the Wedgwood beaker belonged to my daughter. Are you satisfied, Inspector, that the drug was intended for Sally?"

"Not entirely. But I am satisfied that the killer did not mistake Miss Jupp's neck for Mrs. Riscoe's. Let us assume for the present that the drug was intended for Miss Jupp. It could have been put into the saucepan of milk, the Wedgwood beaker itself either before or after the drink was made, into the tin of cocoa, or into the sugar. You and Miss Bowers made your drinks from the milk in the same saucepan and sugared them from the bowl on the table without ill effects. I don't think that the drug was put in the empty beaker. It was brownish in color and would be easily seen against the blue China. That leaves us with two possibilities. Either it was crumbled into the dry cocoa or it was dissolved in the hot drink some time after Miss Jupp made it but before she drank it." <(I don't think the latter is possible, Inspector. Mrs. Bultitaft always puts on the hot milk at ten. At about twenty-five minutes past we saw Sally carrying her mug up to her room."

"Who do you mean by 'we', Mrs.

Maxie?"

"Dr. Epps, Miss Liddell and I myself saw her. I'd been upstairs with Miss Liddell to fetch her coat. When we came back into the hall Dr. Epps joined us from the business room. As we stood there together Sally came from the kitchen end of the house and went up the main she was with you?"

"No. Neither of us did. My son had given his father something earlier to make him sleep and he appeared to be dozing.

There was nothing to do for him except make his bed as comfortable as possible. I was glad of Miss Bowers's help. She is a trained nurse and, together, we were able to tidy the bed without disturbing him."

"What were Miss Bowers's relations with Dr. Maxie?"

"As far as I know Miss Bowers is a friend of both my children. That is the kind of question which it would be better to ask them and her."

"She and your son are not engaged to be married as far as you know?"

"I know nothing about their personal affairs. I should have thought it unlikely."

"Thank you," said Dalgleish. "I will see Mrs. Riscoe now if you will be good enough to send her in."

He rose to open the door for Mrs. Maxie but she did not move. She said, "I still believe that Sally took that drug herself. There's no reasonable alternative.

But if someone else did administer it then I agree with you that it must have been put into the dry cocoa. Forgive me - but wouldn't you be able to tell that from an examination of the tin and its contents?"

"We might have been," replied Dalgleish gravely. "But the empty tin was found in the dustbin. It had been rinsed out. The inner paper lining isn't there. It was probably burnt in the kitchen stove.

Someone was making assurance doubly sure."