

(**ROMAINE** enters. She is a foreign woman of great personality, but very quiet. Her voice has a strangely ironic inflection.)

**MAYHEW.** (crossing to right of **ROMAINE**) My dear Mrs. Vole. (He goes towards her with a great air of sympathy, but is slightly rebuffed by her personality.)

(**CARTER** exits, closing the door behind him.)

**ROMAINE.** Ah! You are Mr. Mayhew.

**MAYHEW.** Yes. This is Sir Wilfrid Robarts, who has agreed to handle your husband's case for him.

**ROMAINE.** (crossing to centre) How do you do, Sir Wilfrid?

**SIR WILFRID.** How do you do?

**ROMAINE.** I have just come from your office, Mr. Mayhew. They told me you were here with my husband.

**SIR WILFRID.** Quite, quite.

**ROMAINE.** Just as I arrived I thought I saw Leonard getting into a car. There were two men with him.

**SIR WILFRID.** Now, my dear Mrs. Vole, you must not upset yourself.

(**ROMAINE** is not in the least upset)

(He is slightly disconcerted) Won't you sit down, here?

**ROMAINE.** Thank you. (She sits in the chair left of the desk.)

**SIR WILFRID.** (moving above the desk to right of it) There is nothing to be alarmed about as yet, and you must not give way. (He moves below the desk.)

**ROMAINE.** (after a pause) Oh, no, I shall not give way.

**SIR WILFRID.** Then let me tell you that, as perhaps you already suspect, your husband has just been arrested.

**ROMAINE.** For the murder of Miss Emily French?

**SIR WILFRID.** I'm afraid so, yes. But please don't be upset.

**ROMAINE.** You keep saying that, Sir Wilfrid, but I am not upset.

**SIR WILFRID.** No. No, I see you have great fortitude.

**ROMAINE.** You can call it that if you like.

**SIR WILFRID.** The great thing is to be calm and to tackle all this sensibly.

**ROMAINE.** That suits me very well. But you must not hide anything from me, Sir Wilfrid. You must not try and spare me. I want to know everything. (*with a slightly different inflection*) I want to know – the worst.

**SIR WILFRID.** Splendid. Splendid. That's the right way to tackle things. (*He moves to right of the desk.*) Now, dear lady, we're not going to give way to alarm or despondency, we're going to look at things in a sensible and straightforward manner. (*He sits right of the desk.*) Your husband became friendly with Miss French about six weeks ago. You were – er – aware of that friendship?

**ROMAINE.** He told me that he had rescued an old lady and her parcels one day in the middle of a crowded street. He told me that she had asked him to go and see her.

**SIR WILFRID.** All very natural, I think. And your husband did go and see her.

**ROMAINE.** Yes.

**SIR WILFRID.** And they became great friends.

**ROMAINE.** Evidently.

**SIR WILFRID.** There was no question of your accompanying your husband on any occasion?

**ROMAINE.** Leonard thought it better not.

**SIR WILFRID.** (*shooting a keen glance at her*) He thought it better not. Yes. Just between ourselves, why did he think it better not?

**ROMAINE.** He thought Miss French would prefer it that way.

**SIR WILFRID.** (*a little nervously and sliding off the subject*) Yes, yes, quite. Well, we can go into that some other time. Your husband, then, became friends with Miss French, he did her various little services, she was a lonely old woman with time on her hands and she found your husband's companionship congenial to her.

ROMAINE. Leonard can be very charming.

SIR WILFRID. Yes, I'm sure he can. He felt, no doubt, it was a kindly action on his part to go and cheer up the old lady.

ROMAINE. I daresay.

SIR WILFRID. You yourself did not object at all to your husband's friendship with this old lady?

ROMAINE. I do not think I objected, no.

SIR WILFRID. You have, of course, perfect trust in your husband, Mrs. Vole. Knowing him as well as you do...

ROMAINE. Yes, I know Leonard very well.

SIR WILFRID. I can't tell you how much I admire your calm and your courage, Mrs. Vole. Knowing as I do how devoted you are to him...

ROMAINE. So you know how devoted I am to him?

SIR WILFRID. Of course.

ROMAINE. But excuse me, I am a foreigner. I do not always know your English terms. But is there not a saying about knowing something of your own knowledge? You do not know that I am devoted to Leonard, of your own knowledge, do you, Sir Wilfrid? *(She smiles.)*

SIR WILFRID. *(slightly disconcerted)* No, no, that is of course true. But your husband told me.

ROMAINE. Leonard told you how devoted I was to him?

SIR WILFRID. Indeed, he spoke of your devotion in the most moving terms.

ROMAINE. Men, I often think, are very stupid.

SIR WILFRID. I beg your pardon?

ROMAINE. It does not matter. Please go on.

SIR WILFRID. *(rising and crossing above the desk to center)* This Miss French was a woman of some considerable wealth. She had no near relations. Like many eccentric elderly ladies she was fond of making wills. She had made several wills in her lifetime. Shortly after meeting your husband she made a fresh will. After some small

bequests she left the whole of her fortune to your husband.

ROMAINE. Yes.

SIR WILFRID. You know that?

ROMAINE. I read it in the paper this evening.

SIR WILFRID. Quite, quite. Before reading it in the paper, you had no idea of the fact? Your husband had no idea of it?

ROMAINE. (*after a pause*) Is that what he told you?

SIR WILFRID. Yes. You don't suggest anything different?

ROMAINE. No. Oh, no. I do not suggest anything.

SIR WILFRID. (*crossing above the desk to right of it and sitting*) There seems to be no doubt that Miss French looked upon your husband rather in the light of a son, or perhaps a very favourite nephew.

ROMAINE. (*with distinct irony*) You think Miss French looked upon Leonard as a son?

SIR WILFRID. (*flustered*) Yes, I think so. Definitely I think so. I think that could be regarded as quite natural, quite normal under the circumstances.

ROMAINE. What hypocrites you are in this country.

(*MAYHEW sits on the chair left of the fireplace.*)

SIR WILFRID. My dear Mrs. Vole!

ROMAINE. I shock you? I am so sorry.

SIR WILFRID. Of course, of course. You have a continental way of looking at these things. But I assure you, dear Mrs. Vole, that is *not* the line to take. It would be most unwise to suggest in any way that Miss French had – er – any – er – feelings for Leonard Vole other than those of a – of a mother or – shall we say – an aunt.

ROMAINE. Oh, by all means let us say an aunt, if you think it best.

SIR WILFRID. One has to think of the effect on the jury of all these things, Mrs. Vole.