

Miss Blacklock
Bunny
Julia
Patrice

MISS BLACKLOCK. Oh – there's no need...

JULIA. No, no – I've been spiteful. And, believe it or not, I rather like Phillipa. We seem to be on the same wave length. But, you do make too much fuss – of all of us.

MISS BLACKLOCK. I like having young people around me. So when your mother asked if you could stay here, I was delighted. It meant I could indulge myself...

(The Main Door opens and DORA BUNNER enters. She is slightly older than MISS BLACKLOCK.)

BUNNY. I can't find it, Letty. I can't find it *anywhere*.

(MISS BLACKLOCK looks up from her newspaper and smiles benignly.)

MISS BLACKLOCK. What dear?

(BUNNY goes to her.)

BUNNY. It's Friday...

MISS BLACKLOCK. *(with a wry smile)* All day, dear.

BUNNY. Yes.

JULIA. Friday, the thirteenth to be precise. *Ominous!*

BUNNY. *(worried)* Oh, dear... What was I saying, Letty?

MISS BLACKLOCK. You couldn't find *it*, Bunny dear.

BUNNY. Exactly. I can't find it anywhere. Have you seen it?

MISS BLACKLOCK. *(smiling)* Let's start at the beginning.

BUNNY. It's Friday – I always read it Friday morning after breakfast...

MISS BLACKLOCK. Oh, the *Gazette*, you mean...

BUNNY. Of course. That's what I've been telling you...

MISS BLACKLOCK. Yes, dear...

BUNNY. I can't find the *Chipping Cleghorn Gazette* anywhere. *(with a sudden thought)* You don't think they've gone on strike, do you?

MISS BLACKLOCK. They wouldn't do that, dear. Not *here*.

JULIA. What a lovely thought. A strike. Here. *Picket lines* – headlines in the national press... We might even be on the wireless. “Reporters on *Chipping Cleghorn Gazette* refuse to report Vicar’s garden party.”

MISS BLACKLOCK. Things like that don’t happen here...

JULIA. No. *Nothing* happens here. It’s another world, isn’t it?

MISS BLACKLOCK. And just as well, too.

(**PATRICK SIMMONS**, **JULIA**’s brother enters through the Main Door, reading the *Chipping Cleghorn Gazette*. He is a year older than his sister; a very handsome young man. He chuckles as he reads.)

PATRICK. Listen to this. It’s marvellous. Abso-blooming-lutely marvellous.

JULIA. (*sarcastically*) Oh, Patrick – *do* tell us what it is. We’re all dying to know.

PATRICK. Oh, dear. We are in a bad mood, aren’t we? Have a bad dream last night?

JULIA. A nightmare. It was all about you.

PATRICK. Well – it’s better than being ignored...

MISS BLACKLOCK. What’s so marvellous, Patrick?

PATRICK. The Personal Column in this rag, Aunt Letty. It’s better than Evelyn Home. Listen to this. (*reading*) “Young woman, said to be excitingly beautiful, seeks companionship with mature man. Love. Marriage. Rolls-Royce owners only.” (*He looks at BUNNY.*) Really, Bunny. I’m surprised at you. Wouldn’t a Bentley owner be just as suitable?

MISS BLACKLOCK. (*to PATRICK*) You know very well, young man, that Bunny *always* reads the *Gazette* first. I don’t have many rules in this house but that’s one. She’s been looking everywhere for it.

PATRICK. Well – she could have borrowed Mitzi’s.

JULIA. Mitzi?

PATRICK. She thinks it will help her to speak English.

(BUNNY comes back to life again at the mention of MITZI.)

BUNNY. Oh, dear me, no. I couldn't – I really couldn't. I've only got to walk past the kitchen and she snarls at me. I only want to help – that's all. I couldn't ask her – I just couldn't. She's horrid, that Millie.

MISS BLACKLOCK. Mitzi, dear.

BUNNY. Yes.

MISS BLACKLOCK. Well, you won't have to ask her, Bunny.

PATRICK. It's all yours, Bunny. (*He gives her the newspaper.*)

BUNNY. Thank you, Patrick.

PATRICK. And I promise I won't borrow it again.

BUNNY. (*coldly*) Why aren't you at College? It wouldn't have happened if you'd been at College...

PATRICK. I haven't got a lecture till this afternoon.

BUNNY. All that grant you get – and you never seem to do anything.

PATRICK. It's not my fault.

MISS BLACKLOCK. Just enjoy your paper, Bunny...

(MISS BLACKLOCK gently pats BUNNY's shoulder.

BUNNY opens the Gazette and starts reading.)

You are very lucky, Patrick...

PATRICK. I'm quite willing to go to more lectures.

JULIA. It's one giant holiday for him.

PATRICK. Oh, thanks for nothing – *sister!* Anyway listen to who's talking about a holiday – you've got the *whole* day off.

JULIA. Only because I've worked over-time – *every* night this week.

PATRICK. Huh! Pull the other one. I wouldn't be surprised if you haven't been working over-time at all. Been to the *pictures* more likely.

(*There is an odd glare between them. They hold it a moment.*)

MISS BLACKLOCK. My goodness, you two – did you always bicker like this at home?

JULIA. *He did. I didn't!*

(Quite suddenly BUNNY sits upright.)

BUNNY. Letty! Letty!

(BUNNY's tone is enough to make MISS BLACKLOCK get to her feet.)

MISS BLACKLOCK. What is it, Bunny? What's wrong?

BUNNY. Letty, dear. What does it mean?

(MISS BLACKLOCK moves to BUNNY.)

Oh, my goodness. Whatever can it mean?

MISS BLACKLOCK. I won't know unless you tell me.

(BUNNY indicates the newspaper.)

BUNNY. Here. In the *Gazette*. Right at the bottom of the Personal Column.

MISS BLACKLOCK. Yes, dear?

BUNNY. It's an announcement...

MISS BLACKLOCK. How nice.

BUNNY. No, no – you don't understand...

MISS BLACKLOCK. No, I know I don't.

BUNNY. It says... Oh, dear – I can't bear to read it...

JULIA. *(sweetly)* But, you will...

(BUNNY glares at JULIA.)

BUNNY. Yes. *(Reading)* "A murder is announced and will take place on Friday, October the thirteenth, at Little Paddocks – at six-thirty P.M. Friends please accept this, the only intimation."

(BUNNY looks up at MISS BLACKLOCK.)

MISS BLACKLOCK. Are you sure that's what it says?

(BUNNY indicates the newspaper.)

BUNNY. Right at the bottom...

MISS BLACKLOCK. This house? Little Paddocks?

BUNNY. Yes.

PATRICK. Read it again, Bunny.

BUNNY. (*reading*) "A murder is announced and will take place on Friday October the thirteenth..."

JULIA. (*interrupting*) Today! I knew something dreadful was going to happen.

MISS BLACKLOCK. A few minutes ago you were complaining that *nothing* happened here. (*to BUNNY*) Finish it.

BUNNY. (*reading*) "... at Little Paddocks at six-thirty P.M. Friends please accept this, the only intimation."

(*BUNNY stops reading and looks around at them. It's an awkward moment as they look from one to the other*)

Oh, Letty...

MISS BLACKLOCK. Let me see. (*She takes the newspaper from BUNNY.*)

JULIA. It's a joke.

(*MISS BLACKLOCK looks up at her.*)

Well, it has to be. I mean, who'd be daft enough to advertise a *real* murder in the newspapers.

PATRICK. A madman might...

MISS BLACKLOCK. It's nothing to do with you, is it, Patrick?

PATRICK. I'm not potty.

JULIA. That's debatable.

PATRICK. Ho ho!

MISS BLACKLOCK. (*turning to JULIA*) I wouldn't put it past you.

(*JULIA is quickly on the defensive - perhaps a little too quickly.*)

JULIA. It's nothing to do with me. Perhaps Phillipa can throw some light on it.

PATRICK. No, it's not the sort of thing she'd get up to, anyway.

MISS BLACKLOCK. I agree! Well *someone* seems to think it's amusing.

BUNNY. It frightens me.

MISS BLACKLOCK. It's nothing to worry about.

BUNNY. But what will happen at six-thirty?

PATRICK. Delicious Death!

BUNNY. (*hand to mouth*) Oh...

MISS BLACKLOCK. *Really*, Patrick!

JULIA. He means Mitzi's special cake. We always call it Delicious Death.

PATRICK. Yes Bunny. (*reading*) "Friends, please accept this, the only intimation." Somebody's bound to drop round. I thought we might get her to make one.

MISS BLACKLOCK. I'm sure you did. (*to BUNNY*) Nothing will happen at six-thirty, Bunny. Except Patrick is probably right in suggesting that one or two people might drop in out of curiosity.

JULIA. It might turn into a party.

MISS BLACKLOCK. It most certainly won't!

PATRICK. (*trying to make amends*) So, there's nothing to worry about, Bunny. Nothing.

BUNNY. *You really think so?*

PATRICK. Of course.

BUNNY. Oh, good. That makes me feel better.

MISS BLACKLOCK. We'll all laugh about it tomorrow, Bunny.

BUNNY. Yes. (*She starts to read again. The crisis is over.*)

(There is a moment's pause, then the Main Door opens and MITZI, MISS BLACKLOCK's cook enters, brandishing a copy of the Gazette. She is about twenty-five or twenty-six, small and dark - a mid-European, (Hungary, Roumania or perhaps Yugoslavia). She is an explosive character inclined to believe that everyone is against her. At the moment she is in one of her moods - upset and crackling.)