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From Miss Dorothy Macardle, Tel. Howth 182.

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THE BOYS' ROOM

Angela had addressed the telegram to me in my unmarried name - Barbara ~~Shenevix~~ Shillingwood, and I knew why. It was because I used that name still when I write about psychic things.

Her telegram said: Trial in ten days and no evidence yet. Solicitor holds out little hope. Dad breaking down. Implore you to come at once.

I was dismayed. The private detective whom they had engaged must have failed to find anything. Almost certainly, I would fail, too. Those erratic experiences - those moods, emotions, visions or vivid dreams, - indeed I do not know what they are - that come to me, now and then, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ when I sleep in a strange room, cannot be evoked at will. It was to this utterly unreliable faculty that Angela was appealing in her family's agonising predicament.

I was selfish enough to shrink from the effort she asked of me. Supposing, in spite of all their repudiations of the idea, it had been suicide? I had once, in Vienna, had such a fearful dream; black, abject despair... and, whatever happened, to go would mean that I would have to immerse myself in the ~~Cher~~ Shillingwood's

tragedy and share their anguish if David were condemned.. But of course it was impossible to refuse.

Angela and I had been friends ever since I had been deputed to look after her when she was a new girl in school: a dear, impulsive child who was always talking about her big brothers. I remembered her, on fire with pride when they visited her and afterwards distributing snapshots of them to excited and envious girls.

Both lads were air pilots then. Later, when Johnny's lung gave trouble, they started a charter air line of their own. Johnny's brilliance and audacity, in combination with the patience and thoroughness in which David, the elder, resembles their father, produced a quick success, but it produced, also, quarrels - as vehement as they were brief. I had witnessed some of these with amusement. The brothers would have a shouting match after dinner, simmer down in the drawing-room over coffee and finally settle matters between them with half a word, a shrug and a grin, then they would go up in perfect amity to the bedroom at the top of the house which they still liked to share. "The boys' room", it had been called ever since nursery days, when there had been bars in the window. It had been Johnny's room while he was ill at home.

Unfortunately, that last quarrel had a witness - the mechanic whom David had sent for to reprimand and dismiss. He had taken chances which David declared outrageous, but

Johnny sympathised and upheld the man.

"You make a fetish of safety, David," he said. "No wonder you've stuck in the mud while I was away."

"And you're a gambler," was David's angry retort. "It's a crazy line to take; you'll ruin us with your recklessness if you go on. I won't stand for it, Johnny. I've built up a reputation and you'll wreck it. We'll have to split up if you go on like this."

He had his way, and the man was dismissed.

Scolded and teased by his mother, Johnny, half an hour later, said "Sorry" and promised to amend his ways, and by bedtime all was well. Next morning the gardener, coming early to work, had found Johnny sprawled on the grass patch beneath the window with a broken neck.

No one had broken in. The house stands alone on its hillside. The night had been still with light cloud and a bright moon. David had slept soundly the whole night through.

The mechanic went with his story to the police and David was arrested. He had had motive; the prosecution maintained he was sole director, now, of the charter line, and opportunity. The prosecution would argue that the family was conspiring in a lie when they swore that the quarrel had been resolved.

Suicide, everyone ruled out. Only three weeks before that night Johnny had returned from a sanatorium - a small private

châlet in the Alps of Savoy. He had come home in tremendous spirits, cured, and engaged to be married to a girl whom he had met there and whose recovery promised to equal his own. They expected a visit from his Deirdre in a few weeks.

An accident, of course, but utterly inexplicable. The bedroom window opened outward but it was two feet above the floor. Johnny had never been subject to dizziness and had never, since childhood, been known to walk in his sleep. As Counsel for the Defence, the family had secured Garrett Ingram. He would know how to make use of the least hint of a clue, but no evidence of an accident had been found.

It was six o'clock when the telegram came. The April evening was clear and there would be a moon. I drove the hundred and sixty miles to Moorlands in five hours.

I would not have believed that sorrow and strain could so imitate the ruthless effects of time. Both parents seemed to have grown old. Mrs. Chenevix clung to my hand and thanked me for coming, over and over again. She said she was going to pray all the night and felt sure that her prayers would be heard. The father, whom I had thought of as imperturbable, spoke in jerky phrases, moved about aimlessly, forgot what he had been going to say and kept offering me drinks that I did not want. Angela

brought me soup and sandwiches. Although she was as white and quiet as a ghost there was a light in her face: the light of hope. She scarcely spoke until we were alone together in the boys' room. The room struck cold and perhaps I shivered. She asked whether she should light a fire.

"No, no," I replied, "leave everything as it was" and she answered, shakily, "Nothing has been changed".

It was a big, airy, shabby room, lit by small oil lamps, one beside each bed - Johnny's bed, near the wide, curtainless window, and David's opposite the door. On the walls, among framed photographs of school groups and air crews, were pictures of film stars and holiday snapshots and some of Johnny's caricatures untidily pinned up. A rack held fishing tackle, and cricket bats lay on the top of a cupboard. Under the old, marble-topped washstand stood a great array of boots and shoes. A fox's mask grinned downfrom over the fireplace. The fox looked as if he knew.

Angela hovered nervously; anxious for me and reluctant to leave me; trembling between fear and hope. [illegible] I sent her away and very soon a heavy silence, a deadweight of stillness, had closed over the house.

As I lay in Johnny's bed I looked out at the moonblanched moor and the fleece of silvered clouds strung along the sky. My heart was thudding and I half wished that I had not come. I was tempted to run out of the room. [illegible] After the long

drive I was sure of sleeping and I could not help dreading the onset of sleep. I found myself clinging to consciousness, memory and reason, afraid of the moment when I might be left at the mercy of emotions and terrors and agonies not my own.

But I was there for a purpose and tried to carry it through, using all the means I knew to induce sleep. I stretched and relaxed, then lay quiet, wrists crossed and ankles crossed. I thought of hot colours and imagined myself expending effort; I imagined myself rowing a boat upstream.

It was becoming easier, now, with the tide. Now the river seemed to be flowing uphill. Up the mountain it bore me and through the door. Right through the door of the low, white house I was carried or wheeled on a bed. I was wheeled from the terrace into the white room where it was night, and I lay there alone. I could see the forest under the high moon.

Pure and fresh, pine scented, the air flowed in. I breathed; drew it deep into healthy lungs, and I was breathing life. I looked out at the gleaming peaks in the distance, and looked at the future: coming home; talking to David; flying ... and to another joy, a joy so sweet and exhilarating that I couldn't lie still.

But fear ached within the sweetness. Perhaps she was less well than they believed. Sometimes she looked frightened, frightened and so lonely, and very ill. Perhaps she was lying awake now, afraid. She had been crying, a little, last time, and, when she saw me, how she had smiled!