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A Mind to Murder (Adam Dalgliesh Mysteries, No. 2)

By P. D. James



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Editorial Review

Review

“One of the finest, most absorbing craftsmen of the profession.” (*The Washington Post*)

“One of the most chilling crime writers around.” (*Observer*)

About the Author

P.D. James is the author of twenty previous books, most of which have been filmed and broadcast on television in the United States and other countries. She spent thirty years in various departments of the British Civil Service, including the Police and Criminal Law Departments of Great Britain's Home Office. She has served as a magistrate and as a governor of the BBC. In 2000 she celebrated her eightieth birthday and published her autobiography, *Time to Be in Earnest*. The recipient of many prizes and honors, she was created Baroness James of Holland Park in 1991 and was inducted into the International Crime Writing Hall of Fame in 2008. She lives in London and Oxford.

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Chapter One

Dr. Paul Steiner, consulting psychiatrist at the Steen Clinic, sat in the front ground floor consulting-room and listened to his patient's highly rationalized explanation of the failure of his third marriage. Mr. Burge lay in comfort on a couch the better to expound the complications of his psyche. Dr. Steiner sat at his head in a chair of the carefully documented type which the Hospital Management Committee had decreed for the use of consultants. It was functional and not unattractive but it gave no support to the back of the head. From time to time a sharp jerk of his neck muscles recalled Dr. Steiner from momentary oblivion to the realities of his Friday evening psychotherapy clinic. The October day had been very warm. After a fortnight of sharp frosts during which the staff of the clinic had shivered and pleaded, the official date for starting the central heating had coincided with one of those perfect autumn days when the city square outside had brimmed with yellow light and the late dahlias in the railed garden, bright as a paintbox, had shone like the gauds of high summer. It was now nearly seven o'clock. Outside, the warmth of the day had long given way, first to mist and then to chilly darkness. But here, inside the clinic, the heat of noon was trapped, the air, heavy and still, seemed spent with the breath of too much talking.

Mr. Burge enlarged on the immaturity, coldness and insensitivity of his wives in a querulous falsetto. Dr. Steiner's clinical judgment, not uninfluenced by the late effects of a large lunch and the unwise choice of a cream doughnut with his afternoon tea, told him that the time was not yet ripe to point out that the one defect shared by the three mesdames Burge had been a singular lack of judgment in their choice of husband. Mr. Burge was not yet ready to face the truth of his own inadequacy.

Dr. Steiner felt no moral indignation about his patient's behaviour. It would indeed have been most unethical had any such improper emotion clouded his judgment. There were few things in life which aroused Dr. Steiner's moral indignation and most of them affected his own comfort. Many of them were, indeed, concerned with the Steen Clinic and its administration. He disapproved strongly of the administrative officer, Miss Bolam, whose preoccupation with the number of patients he saw in a session and the accuracy of his travelling expense form he saw as part of a systematic policy of persecution. He resented the fact that his Friday evening clinic coincided with Dr. James Baguley's electro-convulsive therapy session so that his psychotherapy patients, all of them of high intelligence and sensible of the privilege of being treated by him,

had to sit in the waiting-room with the motley crowd of depressed suburban housewives and ill-educated psychotics that Baguley seemed to delight in collecting. Dr. Steiner had refused the use of one of the third-floor consulting-rooms. These had been formed by partitioning the large and elegant Georgian rooms and he despised them as badly proportioned and unpleasing cells, ill-suited either to his grade or to the importance of his work. Nor had he found it convenient to change the time of his session. Baguley, therefore, should change his. But Dr. Baguley had stood firm and in this, too, Dr. Steiner had seen the influence of Miss Bolam. His plea that the ground floor consulting-rooms should be sound-proofed had been turned down by the Hospital Management Committee on the grounds of expense. There had, however, been no demur over providing Baguley with a new and highly expensive contraption for shocking his patients out of the few wits they still possessed. The matter, had, of course, been considered by the Clinic Medical Committee, but Miss Bolam had made no secret of where her sympathies lay. In his diatribes against the administrative officer, Dr. Steiner found it convenient to forget that her influence over the Medical Committee was non-existent.

It was difficult to forget the irritations of the E.C.T. session. The clinic building had been put up when men built to last, but even the sturdy oak door of the consulting-room could not muffle the comings and goings of a Friday night. The front door was closed at 6 p.m. and patients at the evening clinics were booked in and out since the time, over five years ago, when a patient had entered unobserved, secreted herself in the basement lavatory and chosen that insalubrious place in which to kill herself. Dr. Steiner's psychotherapy sessions were punctuated by the ringing of the front-door bell, the passing of feet as patients came and went, the hearty voices of relatives and escorts exhorting the patient or calling good-byes to Sister Ambrose. Dr. Steiner wondered why relatives found it necessary to shout at the patients as if they were deaf as well as psychotic. But possibly after a session with Baguley and his diabolic machine they were. Worst of all was the clinic domestic assistant, Mrs. Shorthouse. One might imagine that Amy Shorthouse could do the cleaning early in the mornings as was surely the normal arrangement. That way there would be the minimum of disturbance to the clinic staff. But Mrs. Shorthouse maintained that she couldn't get through the work without an extra two hours in the evenings and Miss Bolam had agreed. Naturally, she would. It appeared to Dr. Steiner that very little domestic work was done on Friday evenings. Mrs. Shorthouse had a predilection for the E.C.T. patients -- indeed, her own husband had once been treated by Dr. Baguley -- and she was usually to be seen hanging around the hall and the ground floor general office while the session was being held. Dr. Steiner had mentioned it at the Medical Committee more than once and had been irritated by his colleagues' general uninterest in the problem. Mrs. Shorthouse should be kept out of sight and encouraged to get on with her work, not permitted to stand around gossiping with the patients. Miss Bolam, so unnecessarily strict with other members of the staff, showed no inclination to discipline Mrs. Shorthouse. Everyone knew that good domestic workers were hard to get but an administrative officer who knew her job would recruit them somehow. Weakness solved nothing. But Baguley could not be persuaded to complain about Mrs. Shorthouse and Bolam would never criticize Baguley. The poor woman was probably in love with him. It was up to Baguley to take a firm line instead of sloping around the clinic in that ridiculously long white coat which made him look like a second-rate dentist. Really, the man had no idea of the dignity with which a consultant clinic should be conducted.

Clump, clump went someone's boots along the passage. It was probably old Tippet, a chronic schizophrenic patient of Baguley's who, for the past nine years, had regularly spent Friday evenings carving wood in the art therapy department. The thought of Tippet increased Dr. Steiner's petulance. The man was totally unsuitable for the Steen. If he were well enough to be out of hospital, which Dr. Steiner doubted, he ought to attend a Day Hospital or one of the County Council's sheltered workshops. It was patients like Tippet who gave the clinic a dubious reputation and obscured its real function as an analytically orientated centre of psychotherapy. Dr. Steiner felt positively embarrassed when one of his own carefully selected patients encountered Tippet creeping about the clinic on a Friday evening. Tippet wasn't even safe to be out. One day there would be an incident and Baguley would find himself in trouble.

Dr. Steiner's happy contemplation of his colleague in trouble was punctured by the ring of the front-door bell. Really, it was impossible! This time it was apparently a hospital car service driver calling for a patient. Mrs. Shorthouse went to the door to speed them away. Her eldritch screech echoed through the hall. "Cheerio, ducks. See you next week. If you can't be good be careful."

Dr. Steiner winced and shut his eyes. But his patient, happily engaged in his favourite hobby of talking about himself, seemed not to have heard. Mr. Burge's high whine had not, in fact, faltered for the past twenty minutes.

"I don't pretend I'm an easy person. I'm not, I'm a complicated devil. That's something which Theda and Sylvia had never understood. The roots of it go deep of course. You remember that session we had in June? Some pretty basic stuff came out then I thought."

His therapist did not recall the session in question but was unconcerned. With Mr. Burge pretty basic stuff was invariably near the surface and could be trusted to emerge. An unaccountable peace fell. Dr. Steiner doodled on his notepad, regarded his doodle with interest, and concern, looked at it again with the pad held upside down and became for a moment more preoccupied with his own subconscious than with that of his patient. Suddenly he became aware of another sound from outside, faint at first and then becoming louder. Somewhere a woman was screaming. It was a horrible noise, high, continuous, and completely animal. Its effect on Dr. Steiner was peculiarly unpleasant. He was naturally timid and highly strung. Although his job involved him in the occasional emotional crises he was more adept at circumventing than coping with an emergency. Fear gave vent to irritation and he sprang from his chair exclaiming.

"No! Really, this is too bad! What's Miss Bolam doing? Isn't anyone supposed to be in charge here?"

"What's up?" inquired Mr. Burge, sitting up like a jack-in-the-box and dropping his voice half an octave to its more normal tone.

"Nothing. Nothing. Some woman having an attack of hysteria that's all. Stay where you are. I'll be back," commanded Dr. Steiner.

Mr. Burge collapsed again but with eye and ear cocked for the door. Dr. Steiner found himself in the hall.

Immediately a little group swung round to face him. Jennifer Priddy, the junior typist, was clinging to one of the porters, Peter Nagle, who was patting her shoulder in embarrassed pity and looking puzzled. Mrs. Shorthouse was with them. The girl's screams were subsiding into whimpers but her whole body was shaking, and she was deathly pale.

"What's the matter?" asked Dr. Steiner sharply. "What's wrong with her?"

Before anyone had a chance to reply the door of the E.C.T. room opened and Dr. Baguley came out followed by Sister Ambrose and his anaesthetist, Dr. Mary Ingram. The hall seemed suddenly full of people. "Calm down, that's a good girl," said Dr. Baguley mildly. "We're trying to run a clinic." He turned to Peter Nagle and asked in a low voice: "What's the matter anyway?"

Nagle seemed about to speak when, suddenly, Miss Priddy gained control. Breaking free of him she turned to Dr. Baguley and said with absolute clearness:

"It's Miss Bolam. She's dead. Someone's killed her. She's in the basement record room and she's murdered. I

found her. Enid's been murdered!"

She clung to Nagle and began to cry again but more quietly. The dreadful shaking had ceased. Dr. Baguley said to the porter:

"Take her into the treatment-room. Make her lie down. Better give her something to drink. Here's the key. I'll be back."

He made for the basement stairs and the rest, abandoning the girl to Nagle's ministrations, followed in a jostling bunch. The basement at the Steen was well lit; all its rooms were used by the clinic which, like most psychiatric units, was chronically short of space. Here, below stairs, in addition to the boiler-room, the telephone equipment-room and the porters' quarters, was the art therapy department, a medical records storeroom and, at the front of the building, a treatment-room for the lysergic acid patients. As the little group reached the bottom of the stairs the door of this room opened and Nurse Bolam, Miss Bolam's cousin, looked out briefly -- a shadowy wraith in her white uniform against the darkness of the room behind. Her gentle, puzzled voice floated to them down the corridor. "Is there anything wrong? I thought I heard a scream a few minutes ago."

Sister Ambrose said with brusque authority:

"There's nothing wrong, Nurse. Get back to your patient."

The white figure disappeared and the door was shut. Turning to Mrs. Shorthouse, Sister Ambrose went on:

"And there's nothing for you to do here, Mrs. Shorthouse. Please stay upstairs. Miss Priddy might like a cup of tea."

Mrs. Shorthouse was heard to mutter rebelliously but beat a reluctant retreat. The three doctors, with sister in tow, pressed on.

The medical record-room was on their right, between the porters' rest-room and the art therapy department. The door was ajar and the light was on.

Dr. Steiner, who had become unnaturally aware of every small detail, noticed the key was in the lock. No one was about. The steel racks, with their tight-packed rows of manilla folders, ran ceiling high and at right angles to the door forming a series of narrow aisles, each lit by a fluorescent light. The four high windows were barred and dissected by the racks; it was an airless little room rarely visited and seldom dusted. The little group pushed its way down the first passage and turned left to where there was a small windowless space clear of shelving and furnished with a table and chair where records could be sorted for filing or information copied from the notes without the need to take the file away. Here was chaos. The chair was overturned. The floor was littered with records. Some had their covers wrenched apart and their pages torn, others lay dumped in shifting layers beneath gaps on the shelves which looked too narrow to have held such a weight of paper. And in the middle of this confusion, like a plump and incongruous Ophelia afloat on a tide of paper, was the body of Enid Bolam. On her chest rested a heavy and grotesque image carved in wood, her hands folded about its base so that she looked, horribly, like a parody of motherhood with her creature ritually laid to her breast.

There could be no doubt that she was dead. Even in the midst of his fear and repugnance Dr. Steiner could not miss that final diagnosis. Staring at the wooden figure he cried:

"Tippett! That's his fetish! That's the carving he's so proud of. Where is he? Baguley, he's your patient! You'd better handle this!"

He looked round nervously as if expecting Tippett to materialize, arm raised to strike, the very personification of violence.

Dr. Baguley was kneeling by the body. He said quietly:

"Tippett isn't here this evening."

"But he's always here on Fridays! That's his fetish! That's the weapon!" Dr. Steiner wailed against such obtuseness.

Dr. Baguley gently lifted Miss Bolam's left eyelid with his thumb. Without looking up he said:

"We had a phone call from St. Luke's this morning. Tippett's been admitted with pneumonia. Last Monday, I think. Anyway, he wasn't here this evening." Suddenly he gave an exclamation. The two women bent closer to the body. Dr. Steiner, who could not bring himself to watch the examination, heard him say:

"She's been stabbed, too. Through the heart by the look of it and with a black-handled chisel. Isn't this one of Nagle's, Sister?" There was a pause and Dr. Steiner heard Sister's voice:

"It looks very like it, Doctor. All his tools have black handles. He keeps them in the porters' rest-room." She added defensively, "Anyone could get at them."

"It looks as if someone has." There was the sound of Dr. Baguley getting to his feet. Still keeping his eyes on the body he said: "Phone Cully on the door, will you, Sister. Don't alarm him, but tell him that no one is to be admitted or to leave the building. That includes the patients. Then get Dr. Etherege and ask him to come down. He'll be in his consulting-room I imagine."

"Oughtn't we to phone the police?" Dr. Ingram spoke nervously and her pink face, so ridiculously like that of an angora rabbit, flushed pinker. It was not only in moments of high drama that one was apt to overlook the presence of Dr. Ingram, and Dr. Baguley stared blankly at her as if he had momentarily forgotten her existence.

"We'll wait for the medical director," he said.

Sister Ambrose disappeared with a rustle of starched linen. The nearest telephone was just outside the record-room but, insulated by tiers of paper from every outside noise, Dr. Steiner strained his ears in vain to hear the lift of the receiver or the murmur of Sister's voice. He forced himself to look once more at Miss Bolam's body. In life he had thought of her as graceless and unattractive, and death had lent her no dignity. She lay on her back, her knees raised and parted so that there was an expanse of pink woollen knicker clearly visible, looking far more indecent than naked flesh. Her round, heavy face was quite peaceful. The two thick plaits which she wore wound above her broad forehead were undisturbed. But then, nothing had ever been known to disturb Miss Bolam's archaic hair style. Dr. Steiner was reminded of his private fantasy that the thick, lifeless plaits exuded their own mysterious secretion and were fixed for ever, immutably, about that placid brow. Looking at her in the defenceless indignity of death, Dr. Steiner tried to feel pity and knew that he felt fear. But he was fully conscious only of repugnance. It was impossible to feel tenderly towards something so ridiculous, so shocking, so obscene. The ugly word spun unbidden to the surface of thought.

Obscene! He felt a ridiculous urge to pull down her skirt, to cover that puffy, pathetic face, to replace the spectacles which had slipped from her nose and hung, askew, from her left ear. Her eyes were half closed, her small mouth pursed as if in disapproval of so undignified and unmerited an end. Dr. Steiner was not unfamiliar with that look; he had seen it on her face in life. He thought, "She looks as if she's just confronting me with my travelling expense form."

Suddenly he was seized with an intolerable need to giggle. Laughter welled up uncontrollably. He recognized that this horrible urge was the result of nervousness and shock but understanding did not bring control. Helplessly, he turned his back on his colleagues and fought for composure, grasping the edge of a filing rack and pressing his forehead for support against the cold metal, his mouth and nostrils choked with the musty smell of old records.

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He was not aware of Sister Ambrose's return but, suddenly, he heard her speaking.

"Dr. Etherege is on his way down. Cully is on the door and I've told him that no one is to leave. Your patient is making rather a fuss, Dr. Steiner."

"Perhaps I'd better go up to him." Faced with the need for decision, Dr. Steiner regained control. He felt that it was somehow important that he should stay with the others and be there when the medical director arrived; that it would be wise to ensure that nothing important was said or done out of his hearing. On the other hand he was not anxious to stay with the body. The records-room, brightly lit as an operating theatre, claustrophobic and overheated, made him feel like a trapped animal. The heavy close-packed shelves seemed to press upon him, compelling his eyes again and again to that lumpen figure on its paper bier.

"I'll stay here," he decided. "Mr. Burge must wait like everyone else."

They stood together without speaking. Dr. Steiner saw that Sister Ambrose, white-faced but otherwise apparently unmoved, stood stockily calm with her hands loosely clasped over her apron. So must she have stood time without number in nearly forty years of nursing, waiting at the bedside of a patient, quietly deferential, for the doctor's orders. Dr. Baguley pulled out his cigarettes, looked at the packet for a moment as if surprised to find it in his hand, and replaced it in his pocket. Dr. Ingram seemed to be silently crying. Once Dr. Steiner thought he heard her murmur: "Poor woman. Poor woman!"

Soon they heard footsteps and the medical director was with them followed by the senior psychologist, Frederica Saxon. Dr. Etherege knelt down beside the body. He did not touch it but put his face close to Miss Bolam's as if he were about to kiss her. Dr. Steiner's sharp little eyes did not miss the glance that Miss Saxon gave Dr. Baguley, that instinctive move towards each other and the quick withdrawal.

"What happened?" she whispered. "Is she dead?"

"Yes. Murdered apparently." Baguley's tone was flat. Miss Saxon made a sudden gesture. For one unbelievable moment Dr. Steiner thought that she was going to cross herself.

"Who did it? Not poor old Tippet? That's his fetish surely."

"Yes, but he isn't here. He's in St. Luke's with pneumonia."

"Oh, my God! Then who?" This time she moved close to Dr. Baguley and they did not draw apart. Dr.

Etherege scrambled to this feet.

"You're right, of course. She's dead. Stunned first apparently and then stabbed through the heart. I'll go upstairs to phone the police and let the rest of the staff know. We'd better keep people together. Then we three had better search the building. Nothing must be touched of course."

Dr. Steiner dared not meet Dr. Baguley's eyes. Dr. Etherege in his role of the calm, authoritative administrator had always struck him as slightly ridiculous. He suspected that Baguley felt the same.

Suddenly they heard footsteps and the senior psychiatric social worker Miss Ruth Kettle appeared from behind the filing racks, peering at them short-sightedly.

"Ah, there are you, Director," said Miss Kettle, in her fluting, breathless voice. (She was the only staff member, thought Dr. Steiner, to give Dr. Etherege that ridiculous title and God only knew why. It made the place sound like a nature-cure clinic.)

"Cully told me you were down here. Not busy, I hope? I'm so distressed, I don't want to make trouble but it really is too bad! Miss Bolam has booked me a new patient for ten on Monday. I've just seen the appointment in my diary. No consultation with me of course. She knows I always see the Worrikers then. It's quite deliberate, I'm afraid. You know, Director, someone has really got to do something about Miss Bolam."

Dr. Baguley stood aside and said grimly: "Someone has."

At the other end of the square Superintendent Adam Dalgliesh of the Criminal Investigation Department was attending the ritual autumn sherry party given by his publishers which had coincided with the third reprint of his first book of verse. He didn't overestimate his talent or the success of his book. The poems, which reflected his detached, ironic and fundamentally restless spirit, had happened to catch a public mood. He did not believe that more than half a dozen would live even in his own affections. Meanwhile he found himself awash on the shallows of an unfamiliar sea in which agents, royalties and reviews were agreeable hazards. And now there was this party. He had thought of it without enthusiasm as something to be endured, but it had proved unexpectedly enjoyable. Messrs Hearne and Illingworth were as incapable of providing poor sherry as they were of publishing poor work; Dalgliesh estimated that his publishers' share of his own book's profits had been drunk in the first ten minutes. Old Sir Hubert Illingworth had made his brief appearance in the course of it, had shaken Dalgliesh sadly by the hand, and had shuffled off muttering under his breath as if deploring that yet another writer on the firm's list was exposing himself and his publisher to the doubtful gratifications of success. To him all writers were precocious children; creatures to be tolerated and encouraged but not overexcited in case they cried before bedtime.

There were less welcome diversions than the brief appearance of Sir Hubert. Few of the guests knew that Dalgliesh was a detective and not all of them expected him to talk about his job. But there were inevitably those who thought it inappropriate that a man who caught murderers should also write verse and who said so with varying degrees of tact. Presumably they wanted murderers caught however much they might argue about what should happen to them afterwards; but they displayed a typical ambivalence towards those who did the catching. Dalgliesh was used to this attitude and found it less offensive than the common assumption that there was a particular glamour in being a member of the murder squad. But if there had been the expected quota of furtive curiosity and the inanities common to all such parties, there had also been agreeable people saying agreeable things. No writer, however apparently detached about his talent, is immune to the subtle reassurance of disinterested praise and Dalgliesh, fighting the suspicion that few of those who admired had actually read and fewer still had bought, found that he was quietly enjoying himself

and was honest enough to admit why.

The first hour had been hectic but, soon after seven o'clock, he found himself standing alone glass in hand beside the ornate James Wyatt chimney-piece. A thin wood fire was burning, filling the room with a faint country smell. It was one of those inexplicable moments when one is suddenly completely alone in the middle of a crowd, when the noise is muted and the pressing bodies seem to recede and become remote and mysterious as actors on some distant stage. Dalgliesh leaned the back of his head against the mantelpiece, savouring this momentary privacy and noting appreciatively the elegant proportions of the room. Suddenly he saw Deborah Riscoe. She must have come into the room very quietly. He wondered how long she had been there. Immediately his diffuse sense of peace and happiness gave way to a pleasure as keen and painful as that of a boy in love for the first time. She saw him at once and, glass in hand, edged her way across the room to him.

Her appearance was wholly unexpected and he did not deceive himself that she was there on his account. After their last encounter that would hardly be likely.

He said, "It's very pleasant to see you here."

"I should have come anyway," she replied. "But actually I work here. Felix Hearne got me the job after Mummy died. I'm quite useful. I'm the general dogs-body. Shorthand and typing, too. I took a course."

He smiled.

"You make it sound like a cure."

"Well, in a way it was."

He did not pretend not to understand. They were both silent. Dalgliesh knew that he was morbidly sensitive to any allusion to the case which, nearly three years ago, had led to their first meeting. That sore could not stand even the gentlest of probes. He had seen the announcement of her mother's death in the paper about six months ago, but it had seemed impossible and impertinent then to send her a message or to speak the customary words of condolence. After all, he was partly responsible for her death. It was no easier now. Instead they talked of his verse and of her job. Taking his share of this casual undemanding small talk he wondered what she would say if he asked her to have dinner with him. If she didn't turn him down flat -- and she probably would -- it could be for him the beginning of involvement. He didn't deceive himself that he only wanted an agreeable meal with a woman he happened to think beautiful. He had no idea what she thought of him, but ever since their last meeting, he had known himself to be on the brink of love. If she accepted -- for this or for an evening -- his solitary life would be threatened. He knew this with complete certainty and the knowledge frightened him. Ever since the death of his wife in childbirth he had insulated himself carefully against pain; sex little more than an exercise in skill; a love affair merely an emotional pavanne, formalized, danced according to the rules, committing one to nothing. But, of course, she wouldn't accept. He had absolutely no reason to think that she was interested in him. It was only this certainty that gave him the confidence to indulge his thoughts. But he was tempted to try his luck. As they talked he mentally rehearsed the words, wryly amused to recognize after so many years the uncertainties of adolescence.

The light tap on his shoulder took him by surprise. It was the chairman's secretary to say that he was wanted on the telephone. "It's the Yard, Mr. Dalgliesh," she said with well-controlled interest as if Hearne and Illingworth's authors were accustomed to calls from the Yard.

He smiled his excuses at Deborah Riscoe and she gave a little resigned shrug of her shoulders.

"I won't be a moment," he said. But even as he threaded his way through the crush of chatterers he knew that he wouldn't be back.

He took the call in a small office next to the boardroom, struggling to the telephone through chairs heaped with manuscripts, rolled galley proofs and dusty files. Hearne and Illingworth fostered an air of old-fashioned leisureliness and general muddle which concealed -- sometimes to their author's discomfiture -- a formidable efficiency and attention to detail.

The familiar voice boomed in his ear.

"That you, Adam? How's the party? Good. Sorry to break it up but I'd be grateful if you'd look in over the way. The Steen Clinic, Number 31. You know the place. Upper class neuroses catered for only. It seems that their secretary or administrative officer or what have you has got herself murdered. Bashed on the head in the basement and then stabbed expertly through the heart. The boys are on their way. I've sent you Martin, of course. He'll have your gear with him."

"Thank you, sir. When was it reported?"

"Three minutes ago. The medical director rang. He gave me a concise account of practically everyone's alibi for the supposed time of death and explained why it couldn't possibly be one of the patients. He was followed by a doctor called Steiner. He explained that we met about five years ago at a dinner party given by his late brother-in-law. Dr. Steiner explained why it couldn't have been him and favoured me with his interpretation of the psychological makeup of the killer. They've read all the best detective fiction. No one has touched the body, they're not letting anyone in or out of the building and they've all collected into one room to keep an eye on each other. You'd better hurry over, Adam, or they'll solve the crime before you arrive."

"Who is the medical director?" asked Dalglish.

"Dr. Henry Etherege. You must have seen him on television. He's the establishment psychiatrist, dedicated to making the profession respectable. Distinguished looking, orthodox and earnest."

"I've seen him in court," said Dalglish.

"Of course. Remember him in the Routledge case? He practically had me weeping into my hankie and I knew Routledge better than most. Etherege is the natural choice of any defence counsel -- if he can get him. You know their bleat. Find me a psychiatrist who looks respectable, speaks English and won't shock the jury or antagonize the judge. Answer. Etherege. Ah well, good luck!"

The A.C. was optimistic in supposing that his message could break up the party. It had long reached the stage when the departure of a solitary guest disconcerted no one. Dalglish thanked his host, waved a casual good-bye to the few people who caught his eye and passed almost unnoticed out of the building. He did not see Deborah Riscoe again. And made no effort to find her. His mind was already on the job ahead and he felt that he had been saved, at best from a snub and, at worst, from folly. It had been a brief, tantalizing, inconclusive and unsettling encounter but, already, it was in the past.

Walking across the square to the tall Georgian building that housed the Steen Clinic, Dalglish recalled some

of the scant items of information about the place that had come his way.

It was a well-known witticism that you had to be exceptionally sane to be accepted for treatment at the Steen. Certainly it had a reputation -- Dalglish thought probably undeserved -- for selecting its patients with more regard to their intelligence and social class than their mental condition, subjecting them to diagnostic procedures designed to deter all but the most enthusiastic, and then placing them on a waiting list for treatment long enough to ensure that the curative effect of time could exert their maximum influence before the patient actually attended for his first psychotherapy session. The Steen, Dalglish remembered, had a Modigliani. It was not a well-known painting, nor did it represent the artist at his best, but it was, undeniably, Modigliani. It hung in the first-floor boardroom, the gift of a former grateful patient, and it represented much that the clinic stood for in the public eye. Other National Health Service clinics brightened their walls with reproductions from the Red Cross picture library. The Steen staff made no secret that they preferred a second-rate original to a first-class reproduction any day. And they had a second-rate original to prove it.

The house itself was one of a Georgian terrace. It stood at the south corner of the square, comfortable, unpretentious and wholly pleasing. At the rear a narrow passage ran into Lincoln Square Mews. There was a railed basement; in front of the house the railings curved on each side of the broad steps which led to the door and supported two wrought-iron lamp standards. On the right of the door an unpretentious bronze plaque bore the name of the Hospital Management Committee which administered the unit and, underneath, the words, "The Steen Clinic". No other information was given. The Steen did not advertise its function to a vulgar world nor did it wish to invite an influx of the local psychotics seeking treatment or reassurance. There were four cars parked outside but no signs yet of the police. The house looked very quiet. The door was shut but a light shone from the elegant Adam fanlight above the door and between the folds of drawn curtains in the ground floor rooms.

The door was opened almost before he had taken his finger from the bell. They had been waiting for him. A stockily-built young man in porter's uniform opened the door and let him in without speaking. The hall blazed with light and struck very warm after the coolness of the autumn night. To the left of the door was a glass-panelled reception kiosk with a telephone switchboard. A second, and much older, porter sat at the board in an attitude of utter misery. He looked round and glanced briefly at Dalglish with rheumy eyes, then returned to his contemplation of the board as if the arrival of the superintendent was the last straw of an intolerable burden which, if ignored, might be lifted from him. In the main body of the hall the reception committee came forward, the medical director with outstretched hand as if welcoming a guest. "Superintendent Dalglish? We're very glad to see you. May I introduce my colleague, Dr. James Baguley, and the secretary of the Hospital Management Committee, Mr. Lauder."

"You got here very promptly, sir," said Dalglish to Lauder. The group secretary said:

"I didn't know about the murder until I arrived ten minutes ago. Miss Bolam telephoned me at lunchtime today and said she wanted to see me urgently. Something was going on at the clinic and she needed advice. I came as soon as I could and found that she'd been murdered. In the circumstances, I had more reasons than one for deciding to stay around. It looks as if she needed advice more than she knew."

"Whatever it was you've come too late, I'm afraid," said Dr. Etherege.

Dalglish saw that he was much shorter than his television appearances suggested. His large, high-domed head, with its aureole of white hair soft and fine as a baby's, looked too weighty for the slight supporting body which seemed to have aged independently giving him an oddly disintegrated appearance. It was difficult to guess his age but Dalglish thought that he must be nearer seventy than sixty-five, the normal

retiring age for a consultant. He had the face of an indestructible gnome, the cheeks mottled with high colour so that they looked painted, the eyebrows springing above eyes of a piercing blue. Dalglish felt that those eyes and the soft, persuasive voice were not the least of the medical director's professional assets.

In contrast, Dr. James Baguley was six feet tall, nearly as tall as Dalglish, and the immediate impression he gave was of intense weariness. He was wearing a long white coat which hung loosely from his bowed shoulders. Although he was much the younger man he had none of the medical director's vitality. His hair was straight and turning iron-grey. From time to time he swept it out of his eyes with long nicotine-stained fingers. His was a handsome, bony face, but the skin and eyes were dulled as if with permanent tiredness.

The medical director said:

"You will, of course, want to see the body straight away. I'll ask Peter Nagle, our second porter, to come down with us if you've no objection. His chisel was one of the weapons used -- not that he could help that, poor fellow -- and no doubt you will want to ask him questions."

"I shall want to question everyone here in due course," replied Dalglish.

It was apparent that the medical director had taken charge. Dr. Baguley, who had not yet spoken, seemed glad to accept that position. Lauder had apparently decided to adopt a watching brief. As they moved towards the basement stairs at the back of the hall he caught Dalglish's eye. The momentary glance was hard to analyse, but Dalglish thought he detected an amused gleam and a certain wry detachment.

They stood in silence as Dalglish knelt by the body. He did not touch it except to part the cardigan and blouse, both of which were unbuttoned, and expose the handle of the chisel. It had been driven in up to the hilt. There was very little bruising of the tissues and no blood. The woman's vest had been rolled up above her breasts to expose the flesh for that vicious, calculated thrust. Such deliberation suggested that the killer had a confident knowledge of anatomy. There were easier ways of killing than to pierce the heart with one thrust. But for those with the knowledge and the strength there were few ways so sure.

He got to his feet and turned to Peter Nagle.

"Is that your chisel?"

"Apparently. It looks like it and mine isn't in the box." Despite the omission of the usual "sir" the voice, educated and unemphatic, held no trace of insolence or resentment. Dalglish asked:

"Any idea how it got here?"

"None at all. But I'd hardly be likely to say if I had, would I?"

The medical director gave Nagle a quick frown of warning or admonition and placed his hand briefly on the porter's shoulder. Without consulting Dalglish he said gently:

"That will be all for the present, Nagle. Just wait outside, will you?"

Dalglish made no demur as the porter quietly detached himself from the group and left without another word.

"Poor boy! The use of his chisel has naturally shocked him. It looks unpleasantly like an attempt to implicate him. But you will find, Superintendent, that Nagle is one of the few members of the staff with a complete alibi for the presumed time of death." Dalgliesh did not point out that this was, in itself, highly suspicious.

"Did you make any estimate of the time of death?" he asked.

Dr. Etherege replied:

"I thought that it must have been very recent. That is Dr. Baguley's view too. The clinic is very warm today - we've just started our central heating -- so the body would cool very slowly. I didn't try for rigor. I am, of course, little more than a layman in such matters. Subsequently I knew that she must have died within the hour. Naturally we have been talking among ourselves while waiting for you and it appears that Sister Ambrose was the last person to see Miss Bolam alive. That was at twenty-past six. Cully, our senior porter, tells me that Miss Bolam rang him on the internal phone at about six-fifteen to say that she was going down to the basement and that Mr. Lauder should be directed to her office if he arrived. A few minutes later, as far as she can judge, Sister came out of the E.C.T. room on the ground floor and crossed the hall to the patients' waiting-room to let a husband know that his wife was ready to be taken home. Sister saw Miss Bolam going down the hall towards the basement stairs. No one saw her alive again after that."

"Except her murderer," said Dalgliesh.

Dr. Etherege looked surprised.

"Yes, that would be so, of course. I mean that none of us saw her alive again. I have asked Sister Ambrose about the time and Sister is quite sure..."

"I shall be seeing Sister Ambrose and the other porter."

"Of course. Naturally you will want to see everybody. We expect that. While waiting we telephoned our homes to say that we would be delayed tonight but gave no explanation. We had already searched the building and ascertained that the basement door and the ground floor rear entrance were both bolted. Nothing has been touched in here naturally. I arranged for the staff to stay together in the front consulting-room except for Sister and Nurse Bolam who are with the remaining patients in the waiting-room. No one but Mr. Lauder and you have been allowed in."

"You seem to have thought of everything, Doctor," said Dalgliesh. He got up from his knees and stood looking down at the body.

"Who found her?" he asked.

"One of our medical secretaries, Jennifer Priddy. Cully, the senior porter, has been complaining of stomach-ache most of the day and Miss Priddy went to find Miss Bolam to ask if he could go home early. Miss Priddy is very upset but she was able to tell me..."

"I think it would be better if I heard it from her direct. Was this door kept locked?"

His tone was perfectly courteous but he felt their surprise. The medical director's tone did not change as he replied:

"Usually it is. The key is kept on a board with other clinic keys in the porters' duty-room here in the basement. The chisel was kept there, too."

"And this fetish?"

"Taken from the basement art-therapy-room across the passage. It was carved by one of our patients."

It was still the medical director who replied. So far Dr. Baguley hadn't spoken a word. Suddenly he said:

"She was knocked out with the fetish and then stabbed through the heart by someone who was either knowledgeable or damned lucky. That much is obvious. What isn't obvious is why they had this free-for-all with the medical records. She's lying on them so it must have happened before the murder."

"The result of a struggle, perhaps," suggested Dr. Etherege.

"It doesn't look like it. They were pulled out of the shelves and deliberately chucked about. There must have been a reason. There wasn't anything impulsive about this murder."

It was then that Peter Nagle, who had apparently been standing outside the door, came into the room.

"There's been a ring at the door, sir. Would that be the rest of the police?"

Dalglish noted that the records-room was almost soundproof. The front-door bell was strident but he had not heard it.

"Right," he said. "We'll go up."

As they moved together towards the stairs Dr. Etherege said:

"I wonder, Superintendent, if you could see the patients fairly soon. We have only two still with us, a male psychotherapy patient of my colleague Dr. Steiner, and a woman who has been receiving lysergic acid treatment down here in the basement front treatment-room. Dr. Baguley will be able to explain the treatment to you -- she is his patient -- but you can be assured that she wasn't capable of leaving her bed until twenty minutes ago and certainly wouldn't know anything about the murder. These patients become quite disorientated during treatment. Nurse Bolam was with her all the evening."

"Nurse Bolam? She is a relation to the dead woman?"

"Her cousin," said Dr. Baguley briefly.

"And your disorientated patient, Doctor. Would she know if Nurse Bolam left her alone during treatment?"

Dr. Baguley said curtly:

"Nurse Bolam would not have left her."

They mounted the stairs together to meet the murmur of voices in the hall.

That ring at the door brought into the Steen Clinic the paraphernalia and skills of an alien world. Quietly and

without fuss the experts in violent death got busy. Dalgliesh disappeared into the record-room with the police surgeon and photographer. The print man, small and plump-cheeked as a hamster, with tiny delicate hands, gave his attention to door handles, locks, the tool case and Tippet's fetish. Plain-clothes men, looking disconcertingly like television actors playing plain-clothes men, made their methodical search of every room and cupboard in the clinic verifying that there was indeed no unauthorized person on the premises and that the back doors both of the ground floor and the basement were securely locked from the inside. The clinic staff, excluded from these activities and congregated in the front ground-floor consulting-room, which had been hastily furnished with additional easy chairs from the patients' waiting-room, felt that their familiar ground had been taken over by strangers and that they were caught up in the inexorable machinery of justice and being ground forward to God knew what embarrassments and disasters. Only the group secretary appeared unperturbed. He had stationed himself in the hall like a watchdog and sat there patient and alone until his turn came to be interviewed.

Dalgliesh took Miss Bolam's office for his use. It was a small room on the ground floor situated between the large general office at the front of the building and the E.C.T. treatment-room and recovery-room at the rear. Opposite it was a suite of two consulting-rooms and the patients' waiting-room. The office had been formed by partitioning the end of a larger room so that it was oddly proportioned and unattractively narrow for its height. It was sparsely furnished and lacked all evidence of personal taste except for a large bowl of chrysanthemums set on one of the filing cabinets. There was an old-fashioned safe against one wall and the other was lined with green metal filing cabinets. The desk was unostentatious and held nothing but a stationery office desk calendar, a jotting pad, and a small stack of manilla folders. Dalgliesh looked through them and said, "This is odd. These are staff dossiers apparently, but only of the female staff. Her own isn't here incidentally. I wonder why she got these out?"

"Checking on people's annual leave entitlement or something like that perhaps," suggested Sergeant Martin.

"Could be, I suppose. But why only the women? Oh well, it's hardly of immediate importance. Let's have a look at that jotter."

Miss Bolam was apparently one of those administrators who prefer not to trust to memory. The top leaf of the jotter, headed with the date, was well filled with notes in a sloping, rather childish handwriting.

Medical Committee -- speak M.D. re proposed Adolescent Dept.

Speak Nagle -- broken sash cord Miss Kallinski's room.

Mrs. Shorthouse -- ? leave.

These notes were at least self-explanatory but the jottings below them -- written it appeared in some hurry -- were less explicit.

Woman. Here eight years. To arrive 1st Monday.

Dalgliesh said: "These look like the jottings of a telephone call. It could have been a private call, of course, and nothing to do with the clinic. It could have been a doctor trying to trace a patient, or vice versa. Something, or someone, is apparently expected to arrive on the first Monday or on Monday the first. There are a dozen possible interpretations and none of them relevant to the murder. Still, someone phoned recently about a woman and Miss Bolam was obviously examining the dossiers of every woman on the staff except herself. Why? To check which of them were here eight years ago? It's all pretty far-fetched. We'll leave the

pleasures of conjecture for the moment and get down to seeing these people. I'd like that typist in first. The girl who found the body. Etherege said she was upset. Let's hope she's calmed down by now or we'll be here half the night."

But Jennifer Priddy was perfectly calm. She had obviously been drinking and her grief was overlaid with a barely suppressed excitement. Her face, still swollen from crying, was blotched with high colour and her eyes were unnaturally bright. But the drink had not fuddled her and she told her story well. She had been busy in the ground-floor general office for most of the evening and had last seen Miss Bolam at about five-forty-five when she had gone into the A.O.'s office with a query about a patient's appointment. Miss Bolam had seemed the same as usual to her. She had returned to the general office and had been joined by Peter Nagle at about six-ten. He was wearing his coat and had come to collect the outgoing post. Miss Priddy had registered the last few letters in the post book and handed them to him. At about quarter- or twenty-past six Mrs. Shorthouse had joined them. Mrs. Shorthouse had mentioned that she had just come from Miss Bolam's office where she had been settling a query about her annual leave entitlement. Peter Nagle had gone out with the post and she and Mrs. Shorthouse had stayed together until his return some ten minutes later. Nagle had then gone down to the basement porters' room to hang up his coat and feed Tigger, the office cat, and she had followed him down almost immediately. She had helped him feed Tigger and they had returned to the general office together. At about seven the senior porter, Cully, complained again about his stomach-ache which had been troubling him all day. Miss Priddy, Mrs. Bostock, the other medical secretary, and Peter Nagle had all had to take Cully's place at the switchboard from time to time because of his stomach-ache, but he had refused to go home. Now he was willing to go and Miss Priddy had gone to the A.O.'s office to ask Miss Bolam if he could leave early. Miss Bolam wasn't in her office so she had looked in the nurses' duty-room on the ground floor. Sister Ambrose told her that she had seen the A.O. passing down the hall towards the basement stairs about thirty minutes or so earlier, so Miss Priddy had looked in the basement. The record-room was usually kept locked but the key was in the lock and the door just ajar, so she had looked inside. The light was on. She had found the body -- here Miss Priddy's voice faltered -- and had rushed upstairs at once to get help. No, she hadn't touched anything. She didn't know why the medical records were strewn around. She didn't know how she had known that Miss Bolam was dead. It was just that Miss Bolam had looked so very dead. She didn't know why she had been so sure it was murder. She thought she had seen a bruise on Miss Bolam's head. And, then, there had been Tippet's fetish laying on the body. She was afraid that Tippet was hiding among the record racks and would jump out at her. Everyone said that he wasn't dangerous -- at least everyone except Dr. Steiner -- but he had been in a mental hospital and, after all, you couldn't be really sure, could you? No, she hadn't known that Tippet wasn't in the clinic. Peter Nagle had taken the call from the hospital and had told Miss Bolam but he hadn't told her. She hadn't seen the chisel in Miss Bolam's chest but Dr. Etherege had told the staff about the stabbing when they were gathered together in the front consulting-room waiting for the police. She thought that most of the staff knew where Peter Nagle kept his tools and also which key opened the door of the basement record-room. It hung on hook number 12 and was shinier than the other keys, but it wasn't labelled. Dalgliesh said:

"I want you to think very hard and very carefully. When you went downstairs to help Mr. Nagle feed the cat was the record-room door ajar and the light on as it was when you went down later and found Miss Bolam?"

The girl pushed back her dark blonde hair and said with sudden weariness:

"I...I can't remember. I didn't go past that door you see. I went straight into the porters' room at the bottom of the stairs. Peter was there clearing up Tigger's plate. He hadn't eaten all of his last meal so we scraped it off his plate and washed it at the sink. We didn't go near the record-room."

"But you could see the door as you came down the stairs. Would you be likely to notice if the door were

ajar? The room isn't often used, is it?"

"No, but anyone might go there if they wanted a record. I mean, if the door were open I wouldn't go to see who was there or anything like that. I think I would notice if the door was wide open so I suppose it wasn't, but I can't remember, honestly I can't."

Dalgliesh ended by asking her about Miss Bolam. It appeared that Miss Priddy knew her outside the clinic, that the Priddy family attended the same church and that Miss Bolam had encouraged her to take the job at the clinic.

"I shouldn't have got this job if it hadn't been for Enid. Of course, I never called her that inside the clinic. She wouldn't have liked it." Miss Priddy gave the impression that she had only reluctantly brought herself to use the Christian name outside the clinic. She went on: "I don't mean she actually appointed me. I had to be interviewed by Mr. Lauder and by Dr. Etherege, but I know she spoke up for me. My shorthand and typing weren't very good then -- it was nearly two years ago when I came -- and I was lucky to get here. I didn't see very much of Enid at the clinic but she was always very kind and keen for me to get on. She wanted me to take the Institute of Hospital Administration Diploma so that I needn't be a shorthand typist all my life."

This ambition for Miss Priddy's future career struck Dalgliesh as a little odd. The child gave no impression of being ambitious and she would surely marry in time. It hardly needed the Institute's diploma, whatever that might be, to save her from being a shorthand typist for life. He felt a little sorry for Miss Bolam who could scarcely have picked a less promising protégée. She was pretty, honest and naïve, but not, he thought, particularly intelligent. He had to remind himself that she had given her age as twenty-two not seventeen. She had a shapely and oddly mature body, but her thin face with its frame of long, straight hair, was the face of a child.

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There was little she could tell him about the administrative officer. She hadn't noticed any change recently in Miss Bolam. She didn't know that the A.O. had sent for Mr. Lauder and had no idea what could be worrying Miss Bolam at the clinic. Everything was going on very much as usual. Miss Bolam had no enemies as far as she knew, certainly no one who would wish to kill her.

"She was happy here, then, as far as you know? I was wondering whether she had asked for a move. A psychiatric clinic can't be the easiest unit to administer."

"Oh, it isn't! I don't know how Enid carried on sometimes. But I'm sure she would never ask for a move. Someone must have given you the wrong impression. She was never one to give up. If she thought people wanted her to go she'd dig her toes in. The clinic was a kind of challenge to her."

It was probably the most illuminating thing she had said about Miss Bolam. As he thanked her and asked her to wait with the rest of the staff until his preliminary interviews were over, Dalgliesh pondered on the possible nuisance value of an administrator who regarded her job as a challenge, a battleground from which she would never willingly retreat. He asked next to see Peter Nagle.

If the junior porter was worried by the killer's choice of his chisel as a weapon he gave no sign. He answered Dalgliesh's questions calmly and politely, but so dispassionately that they might have been discussing some minor point of clinic procedure which was only doubtfully his concern. He gave his age as twenty-seven and an address in Pimlico and confirmed that he had been employed at the clinic for just over two years and was previously at a provincial art school. His voice was level and educated, his mud-brown eyes were large,

almost expressionless. Dalgliesh noticed that he had unusually long arms which, held loosely from his short and powerful body, gave an impression of simian strength. His hair was black, coiling tightly over the scalp. It was an interesting face, withdrawn but intelligent. There could scarcely have been a greater contrast with poor old Cully, long since despatched home to nurse both his stomach-ache and his grievance at being kept late.

Nagle confirmed Miss Priddy's story. He again identified his chisel with no more emotion than a brief moue of distaste and said that he had last seen it at eight o'clock that morning when he arrived on duty and -- for no particular reason -- had made a check of his toolbox. Everything was in order then. Dalgliesh asked whether it was generally known where the box was kept. Nagle replied:

"I'd be a fool if I said no, wouldn't I?"

"You'd be a fool to say anything but the truth now or later."

"I suppose most of the staff knew. Those who didn't could find out easily enough. We don't keep the porters' room locked."

"Isn't that rather unwise? What about the patients?"

"They don't go down to the basement on their own. The lysergic acid patients are always escorted and the art therapy people usually have someone keeping an eye on them. The department hasn't been down there for long. The light's bad and it isn't really suitable. It's a temporary department."

"Where used it to be, then?"

"On the third floor. Then the clinic Medical Committee decided they wanted the large room there for the marital problems discussion groups, so Mrs. Baumgarten -- she's the art therapist -- lost it. She's been agitating to get it back, but the M.P.D. patients say it would be psychologically disturbing for them to meet in the basement."

"Who runs the M.P.D.?"

"Dr. Steiner and one of the psychiatric social workers, Miss Kallinski. It's a club where the divorced and the single tell the patients how to be happy though married. I don't see how it can concern the murder."

"Nor do I. I asked about it to satisfy my curiosity as to why the art therapy department was so unsuitably housed. When did you hear that Tippet wasn't attending today, by the way?"

"At about nine o'clock this morning. The old boy had been worrying St. Luke's Hospital to telephone and let us know what had happened. So they did. I told Miss Bolam and Sister."

"Anyone else?"

"I think I mentioned it to Cully when he came back on the board. He's had belly-ache for most of the day."

"So I'm told. What's wrong with him?"

"Cully? Miss Bolam made him go to hospital for an examination but nothing was found. He gets these belly-

aches if anyone upsets him. They say here it's psychosomatic."

"What upset him this morning?"

"I did. He got here before me this morning and started sorting the post. That's my job. I told him to concentrate on his own work."

Dalgliesh took him patiently over the events of the evening. His story agreed with Miss Priddy's and, like her, he was unable to say whether the door of the basement record-room had been ajar when he returned from posting the letters. He admitted that he had passed the door when he went to ask Nurse Bolam if the laundry was sorted. It was usual for the door to be closed as the room was seldom visited and he thought he would have noticed had it been open. It was frustrating and maddening that this crucial point could not be cleared up, but Nagle stood firm. He hadn't noticed. He couldn't say. He hadn't noticed, either, whether the record-room key was on the board in the porters' rest-room. This was easier to understand. There were twenty-two hooks on the board and most of the keys were in use and missing. Dalgliesh said:

"You realize that Miss Bolam's body was almost certainly lying in the record-room when you and Miss Priddy were together feeding the cat? You realize how important it is to remember whether the door was open or shut?"

"It was ajar when Jenny Priddy went down later. That's what she says and she's no liar. If it was shut when I got back from the post someone must have opened it between six-twenty-five and seven. I don't see what's so impossible about that. It would be better for me if I could remember about the door, but I can't. I hung up my coat in my locker, went straight to ask Nurse Bolam about the clean laundry, and then returned to the rest-room. Jenny met me at the bottom of the stairs."

He spoke without heat, almost unemotionally. It was as if he said, "That's what happened. Like it or not, it happened that way." He was too intelligent not to see that he was in some danger. Perhaps he was also intelligent enough to know that the danger was minimal to an innocent man who kept his head and told the truth.

Dalgliesh told him to let the police know at once if he remembered anything fresh and let him go.

Sister Ambrose was seen next. She strutted into the room, armour-plated in white linen, belligerent as a battleship. The bib of her apron, starched rigid as a board, curved against a formidable bosom on which she wore her nursing badges like medals of war. Grey hair spurted from each side of her cap which she wore low on her forehead above a face of uncompromising plainness. Her colour was high; Dalgliesh thought that she was finding it difficult to control her resentment and distrust. He dealt with her gently, but his questions were answered in an atmosphere of rigid disapproval. She confirmed briefly that she had last seen Miss Bolam walking through the hall towards the basement stairs at about twenty-past six. They had not spoken and the administrative officer had looked the same as usual. Sister Ambrose was back in the E.C.T. room before Miss Bolam was out of sight and had been there with Dr. Ingram until the body was found. In reply to Dalgliesh's question whether Dr. Baguley had also been with them for the whole of that time, Sister Ambrose suggested that he should ask the doctor direct. Dalgliesh replied mildly that this was his intention. He knew that the Sister could give him a great deal of useful information about the clinic if she chose but, apart from a few questions about Miss Bolam's personal relationships from which he gained nothing, he did not press her. He thought that she was probably more shocked by the murder, by the calculated violence of Miss Bolam's death, than anyone he had yet seen. As sometimes happens with unimaginative and inarticulate people, this shock gave vent to ill-temper. She was very cross; with Dalgliesh because his job gave him the right to ask

impertinent and embarrassing questions; with herself because she could not conceal her feelings; with the victim, even, who had involved the clinic in this bizarre predicament. It was a reaction Dalgliesh had met before and no good came of trying to force co-operation on such a witness. Later on Sister Ambrose might be induced to talk more freely; at present, it was a waste of time to do more than elicit the facts which she was prepared to give. One fact at least was crucial. Miss Bolam was alive and making her way towards the basement stairs at about twenty-past six. At seven o'clock her body was discovered. Those forty minutes were vital and any member of the staff who could produce an alibi covering them could be eliminated from the enquiry. On the face of it the case presented little difficulty. Dalgliesh did not believe that an outsider had somehow gained access to the clinic and lain in wait for Miss Bolam. The killer was almost certainly still in the building. It was now a matter for careful questioning, for the methodical checking of alibis, for the seeking out of a motive. Dalgliesh decided to talk to the one man whose alibi appeared unassailable and who would have the detached, outsider's view of the clinic and its varied personalities. He thanked Sister Ambrose for her valuable co-operation -- a flicker of the eyes behind the steel-rimmed spectacles suggested that the irony was not lost on her -- and asked the constable at the door to send in Mr. Lauder.

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Users Review

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