

SELWYN #1 (w/Christine)

(CHRISTINE is typing.)

SELWYN. How's it going?

CHRISTINE. Two chapters to go. I can break off for that review if you like.

SELWYN. Which one?

(CHRISTINE picks up a book)

CHRISTINE. The one by that new writer. *Death in Dunstable.*

SELWYN. Must I?

CHRISTINE. Unless you want to work over the weekend.

SELWYN. Certainly not. Ready? *(he dictates)* Mr. Preston's thriller completely held my attention — until the middle of chapter one.

CHRISTINE. I see. It's going to be one of *those* reviews.

SELWYN. A chapter which contained two split infinitives and, in addition to the inevitable homicide, many other examples of grammarcide. Full stop.

CHRISTINE. Not an exclamation mark?

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SELWYN. Certainly not. An exclamation mark is a device for rescuing an ill-designed sentence. Where had I got to?

CHRISTINE. Grammarcide.

SELWYN. But let us forget — with some eagerness — Mr. Preston's style and consider his substance. To begin with, there are no fewer than fourteen suspects, but, by a succession of further murders, the number dwindles rapidly to six. As these include the Home Secretary, the Dean of St. Paul's and the Headmistress of Roedean, I half suspected to find that the crimes had been perpetrated by all three of these dignitaries in collusion.

CHRISTINE. And had they?

SELWYN. I haven't the faintest idea. I gave up halfway through. Where was I?

CHRISTINE. In collusion, and getting ready for the *coup de grâce*.

SELWYN. I regret to note that *Death in Dunstable* is published by my own publishers, Belton, Gleeson and Douglas. In fact, I deeply regret that it is published at all. I regard the author as a threat to civilization second only to American fast food.

CHRISTINE. You said that about the last book you reviewed.

SELWYN. Did I? Then say: "the author is to the murder mystery what Nero was to Italian fire insurance".

CHRISTINE. That's better.

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SELWYN. Thank you.

CHRISTINE. You haven't used that one for more than a year. *(She picks up the book.)*

Goodbye, Mr. Preston. It seems your first novel was also your last.

SELWYN. You know, I sometimes think I enjoy being a critic even more than I enjoy being an author.

(SELWYN takes the book)

CHRISTINE. I'm not sure the two mix.

SELWYN. I disagree. What could be better than to spend my afternoons killing off my victims and my evenings killing off my competitors? *(He drops the book in the waste paper basket.)*

CHRISTINE. It does have its practical side.

SELWYN. Too true. People read my vituperative essays and then buy my books to see if I can do any better.

CHRISTINE. Which you usually can.

SELWYN. Usually? Did I hear you say "usually"?

CHRISTINE. No. I said "invariably".

SELWYN #1 (w/Christine)

SELWYN. I should hope so. If ever they let me review my own work, I shall say, "Selwyn Piper has raised literature to the level of the detective story".

CHRISTINE. A neat twist.

SELWYN. Neat twists are my forte.

CHRISTINE. As a writer, not a critic.

SELWYN. Granted. Neat thrusts are my critical forte. A talent I developed during my tempestuous marriage.

SELWYN #2 (w/Imogen)

IMOGEN. You're being incredibly helpful. You must have intimations of immortality.

SELWYN. Only about my books. But I've made such a good living out of murder. It would be churlish to cavil at finding myself the victim of one. Only not the victim of an amateur, please.

IMOGEN. Very well. Any more professional tips?

SELWYN. When you go down the fire escape, watch out for the people in the flat below. They're noise conscious, and you don't appear to have brought your broomstick.

IMOGEN. They go away every Friday afternoon and don't come back till Monday. My little man used that route to keep you under observation. You see, I've tried to be worthy of you.

SELWYN. But even if you get away unseen you'll still be the principal suspect.

IMOGEN. No, I won't. She'll be here with your body. In five minutes' time.

SELWYN. Christine!

IMOGEN. You seem concerned. Now you're beginning to realize I'm serious.

SELWYN. You haven't the courage.

IMOGEN. *(Glancing out over the balcony.)* Let's see, shall we? If I don't pull the trigger when I see her return, you'll be right. If I do, you'll have only a moment to contemplate your error.

SELWYN #2 (w/Imogen)

SELWYN. She has a key.

IMOGEN. But she always rings first. She only lets herself in if you don't answer. By that time I'll be well on my way.

SELWYN. What about the flat next-door? They'll hear the shot.

IMOGEN. I hope so. It would suit my book to have your randy little typist discovered alone with your body and my gun.

SELWYN. And her motive?

IMOGEN. Take your pick. A woman scorned. An expected legacy?

SELWYN. A mere couple of thousand?

IMOGEN. Perhaps she expected more. Wasn't she any good?

SELWYN. Your little man can't have told you we were having an affair.

IMOGEN. No, but John did.

SELWYN. John? Not John Douglas?

IMOGEN. Who else. And as he's due here in ten minutes' time, he'll be able to keep an eye on things. By that time the police should be here.

SELWYN #2 (w/Imogen)

SELWYN. So it's John Douglas. You surprise me. He's far too ineffectual. What's in it for him?
You?

IMOGEN. And half the insurance.

SELWYN. I wonder what he puts first. How long has he been...?

IMOGEN. Long enough.

SELWYN. He must have stamina as well as tolerance.

IMOGEN. Or luck as well as judgment. There's her car now.

SELWYN. So I've one minute to live.

IMOGEN. I hope you won't be bored, darling.

SELWYN. Supposing I yelled "Imogen!" at the top of my voice?

IMOGEN. Try it!

(He opens his mouth. She aims the gun.)

IMOGEN. And I'll shoot you now. What's up Selwyn? Cat got your tongue?

SELWYN #2 (w/Imogen)

SELWYN. No. And as for the spineless, crapulous parasite, Douglas, you can tell him this. Every penny, he makes comes from my work. He hasn't another writer on his books with enough talent to keep him in cigarettes, because he has the same instinct for picking ghastly authors as he has for picking ghastly women.