

DEATH AND THE CONJUROR

by Tom Mead

EXCERPT

Olive already had the phone in her hand. “Two three one, Dollis Hill,” she announced. “Dr. Anselm Rees has been murdered.”

While she provided a few scant details, she looked around the room and noticed something.

“The windows are locked,” she said as she hung up the phone.

“Mm?” Della sounded startled.

“The windows. They’re locked on the inside.” To prove this, she gripped one of the handles and rattled it. It would not move, and the key protruded from the lock.

“So?”

“Then how did the killer get away?”

“What do you mean?”

“He can’t have come out through the hall. I was there the whole time. And not five minutes ago—not five minutes—I can tell you that the doctor was alive and well in this room because I heard him talking on the telephone.”

Della thought about this. “It can’t be locked.” She reached out and tried the handle for herself. But the windows did not budge.

“It’s locked on the inside,” said Olive, “just like the door.”

Della turned and looked at the corpse. He had sunk down in the chair like an unmanned hand puppet.

In the far corner of the room lay the wooden trunk. Olive caught Della’s eye and nodded toward it. Della frowned incredulously. Olive shrugged, as if to say, *Where else would he be?*

The two women crept across the soft plush carpet toward the trunk. Olive looked at Della and held a finger to her lips. She seized the poker from the fireplace and raised it above her head. Then she gave Della a quick nod.

Della leaned forward and wrenched open the trunk.

Olive let fly a fierce war cry and swung the poker like a tennis racquet. But all she hit was empty air. The two women peered inside the trunk. It was perfectly empty.

Olive led the way to the kitchen—but not before pulling shut the study door behind her, sealing in the late Dr. Rees once again.

They both felt slightly better after a tot of brandy. No less horrified, but more prepared to deal with the practicalities of the situation.

“What I don’t understand,” Della said, “is where the killer could have gone.”

“Nowhere,” said Olive. “There was nowhere for him to go.”

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