

The Summons

1956

Sophie looked into the mirror. The ugly black eye looked back. She lifted the powder puff, and again dabbed around the offensive mark, trying to make it inconspicuous. With a sigh, she replaced the puff and closed the compact. It's not so bad, she told herself. No one will notice. Except they would, of course. It was large, and still fresh; encircling her eye socket in a burst of bright red. But she'd be late for her train if she took any longer. She took one last peek in the mirror, and wished someone else was staring back. Her hands trembling, she covered her hair with a shawl, and quickly counted the change in her purse. She rose to leave, and hesitated, picking up her ticket, and the newspaper with the circled classified.

With a final glance at the sparse room, she gathered up the last of her courage, and, pulling her shawl down lower over her forehead, she grabbed the small bag at her feet. Her hands shook slightly, though the bag was not heavy. She opened the door, and surveyed the corridor. All clear. She shut the door behind her, then tip-toed down the hall, turning a corner to a large front door. This, too, she opened cautiously, and peered up and down the street several times. It was deserted.

London was just waking up. The mist was beginning to rise as the first light filtered on to the grey streets. Vendors were setting up, and the day's headlines screamed in black and white from boards on every corner.

It was less than half a mile to Euston, and her heart raced as she hurried down the street, willing with every step that she might disappear from sight. The city made itself known, the noise of motor vehicles on the road beside her, the pungent smell of grease on the pavement in front, but it all passed her by.