

# Inner Sanctum

**The Voice on the Wire (November 29, 1944)**

Synopsis and critique

Organ music. A smarmy announcer's voice, breaking into a chuckle occasionally on his 'r's as he speaks, says, 'Colgate Tooth Powder presents ...Innerrrrr Sanctum Mysterrries.'

A door squeeeeeeks open. The announcer continues. 'Good evening, friends of the Inner Sanctum. This is your host Raymond inviting you in to the squeaking door. Well, it's so nice of you to come here tonight and help me sit up with the corpse. He's such dull company...so cold and stiff. Bored with being dead. All the life seems to have gone out of him. What? You say you've seen him before? Oh, no, he's not that horror man who plays in pictures. But he does look like him. So much so that you might even call him a ...dead ringer. He hah he ha.

Tonight's Inner Sanctum mystery, 'The Voice on the Wire,' is an original radio drama by Robert Sloan, and stars Miss Leslie Woods in the role of Geraldine Reeves. It is produced under the direction of Himan Brown.'

Lesley Woods - Geraldine Reeves

Dr. Prizing

Harvey Reeves

Laura Reeves

Organ music.....then 'No doubt the telephone is an ingenious invention, but..um..as far as I know, no one as yet has been able to commit murder over it, although many people have wanted to. Still, there are worse things you can get on the phone than the wrong number...especially if you happen to call ...(hard tone) 'The Voice...on the Wire.'

'On a long narrow island just off the shore of one of our larger lakes, Mrs. Geraldine Reeves, widow of the late composer David Reeves, lives alone in a gaunt, gray shingled house. Only a few hundred yards away are the charred remains of her former home, where David was burned to death in a fire just two years ago. It's after dinner now, and as the clock in the hall strikes eight...'

Over the sound of the chimes, the voice of an elderly man with the slightest of Irish accents: 'You've got to get hold of yourself, Geraldine.'

'I can't help it, Doctor. You see, it starts every night, about this time.' Geraldine's voice is low and shaky and rapidly delivered, Judy Garlandish like, she's clearly a badly frightened woman.

Geraldine continues: 'Music...David's last composition, I hear it being played on a piano...and the notes seem to come from the old house...the house where David died in the

fire.”

“Well, perhaps someone is playing that piece on the piano. Someone on the island.” “No,” says Geraldine, her voice trembling. “No, there’s only one other house out here, and those people are away. And the dog. A dog keeps howling all night long...” “What dog?” “I don’t know! There’s no dog on the island but...” Her voice lowers. “David and I did have a dog, remember. He stayed with him, the night of the fire. He died with him, because David was too ill to get out of bed.”

A dog howls. “There! There it is again!” “Amazing,” comments the doctor calmly. “That’s a real dog...”

The telephone rings. Geraldine answers it. “Hello, Mrs. Geraldine Reeves?” “Yes, speaking.” “Listen.” Piano music comes over the wire, and cuts off abruptly. A man’s voice speaks very calmly, very slowly. “You have four hours to live, Mrs. Reeves. Four hours to live.”

“What! What did you say?!!!”

Geraldine tells Prizing what happened, hysterically.... The doctor takes the phone, he wants to try to trace the phone call. “Hello, hello!” No answer. He concludes that the wires have been cut. “We’d better get into my car and drive into town. Right away.” Menacing organ music as Geraldine agrees. “It isn’t safe for me to stay here another minute.” More organ music bridges their walking time to the garage, then there’s the sound of a car...refusing to turn over. They decide to try Geraldine’s car, but it isn’t in the garage. It’s been stolen! “Let’s not lose our heads,” the doctor says, calmly. “We can still walk.” It’s over a mile to the bridge across to the mainland, and the road down there is so dark...but they start heading in that direction.

Suddenly Geraldine stops. “Wait a minute. I just remembered. David’s brother is driving out here tonight...and his wife Laura. They said they’d be here by eight thirty and if we wait for them they can take us back in their car.”

The doctor agrees that it will be safer to wait for Harvey and Laura then to try to find their way down the treacherous road in the dark. From where they are they can see the bridge and any cars coming across it. Then he notices Geraldine’s horrified face.

“Heaven’s sake, Geraldine,” says the doctor over a sudden bout of sinister organ music. “What are you staring at?” “The bridge, doctor, the bridge, look!” cries Geraldine. “This end of it has been washed out out!”

They have made the long walk back to the house, and are in the back, where the doctor searches vainly for the cut telephone wires. He wants to splice the wires back together so they can call the police. But he’s having no luck and has to calm Geraldine through another bout of

hysterics, because it's almost nine and if she's not out of there by twelve...the dog howls again. Then they see a strange light on the road! It's a car. A car that's turning into the driveway. It's David's brother Harvey and his wife Laura. They say they just drove over the bridge not more than two minutes ago.

Prizing and Laura try to tell the cheerful couple all that has been happening. Prizing gets into his car to demonstrate its uselessness – it starts right up. Geraldine tells them the wires have been cut, and then the telephone rings. Geraldine and Harvey go inside, and she picks up the receiver. "Hello, Mrs. Reeves?" "Yes?" "Listen." The piano music again. Abruptly it stops. It's nine o'clock, Mrs. Reeves. You have three hours to live."

"I can't stand this waiting. This endless waiting. Why don't the police come?" asks the worried voice of Geraldine Reeves over the ticking of a clock. "Easy now, Gerry, they'll be here." Soothes Harvey. "You only phoned them a few moments ago." "Something can happen before they get here," insists Geraldine.

"I have a gun ready, just in case anything *should* happen," says the doctor. "And I won't hesitate to use it." "You have a gun, doctor?" the voice of Laura sounds worried. The doctor confirms that Geraldine had given it to him just before she and Harvey arrived.

Laura gasps. "Face at the window! I just saw a face at the window!" Her husband scoffs at her, but then he and the doctor rush out to investigate. The two women are alone. Laura confides her fear to Geraldine. She doesn't trust Dr. Prizing. She reminds Geraldine of Prizing's activities at the trial, in which Geraldine was accused of setting the fire that killed her husband. Prizing had testified against her. He had said he wasn't on the island that night, but Laura knows he was. She produces a melted cigarette lighter that she says proves it. She says she found it in the lake. "I hope you're wrong," says Geraldine. Suddenly...the lights go out. Laura screams – the man whose face she'd seen at the window is in the room. He strangles her!

The music rises and falls. "It was meant to be me, Harvey. Whoever came through that door intended to kill me." "Gerry, please," says Harvey. "How is Laura, doctor?" The doctor tells him his wife is dead. "Oh, Laura!" Harvey chokes up.

Harvey, all wrought up, strikes out verbally at the doctor. When the police arrive, he's going to tell them about the doctor's suspicious actions – how the doctor ran away from him when they were outside, how he was in the living room when the lights came back on. The doctor speaks calmly to him, but then Geraldine interrupts. "Where is the cigarette case Laura had in her hand?" The doctor denies all knowledge of it, but Harvey intends to search him. The doctor does not object.

At that moment, Geraldine picks up the phone to call the police. She wants to know what 's

taking them so long. But she gets...the voice on the wire. "Headquarters...Do you think you've been calling the police department all this time, Mrs. Reeves. The piano music comes again. "It's ten o'clock, Mrs. Reeves. You have two more hours."

There's a knock on a door. "Gerry, are you in your room?" Harvey whispers rather loudly. Geraldine opens the door to him. "What is it?"

"This is our chance, Gerry." Harvey wants them to run away now, in his car, while they are alone (Prizing has gone outside to look for the dog). Geraldine acquiesces. Harvey hears footsteps...in the living room...he goes to it, Geraldine following behind him. Dr. Prizing is in the living room. He tells them he was outside but saw someone moving in the living room. When he got there, "Your wife's body was gone."

Harvey and Geraldine express amazement. Harvey accuses the doctor, the doctor points out that Harvey had been alone in the living room himself. "What are you driving at?" Harvey demands. "Draw your own conclusions," says Dr. Prizing. "I've drawn mine."

The dog howls again. They look out the window, and see a fire burning over where the old house used to be. "I've got to put it out," says Harvey. He thinks it's his wife's body being burned over there. Harvey rushes out.

"I'm going to lose my mind if someone doesn't stop these awful things from happening," cries Geraldine. "Take a sip of this brandy." Geraldine takes the brandy...but is too scared to drink it. Offended, the doctor takes back the glass and drinks it. "I'm the best friend you have in the world right now." he informs her. "You've got to understand that."

Prizing tells her of *his* suspicions. Harvey and Laura must have been on the island longer than they said. The bridge has been out all evening. The doctor had seen the bridge out with his own eyes just a few minutes ago. Prizing insists that they go out and check the bridge, and at the same time get away from Harvey – whom he says killed Laura by mistake. Geraldine refuses to believe him, until Prizing gives her the gun. "If you make one false move I'll kill you in cold blood."

The wind blows strongly, as Geraldine sees the proof – the bridge *is* washed out. But that means they still can't get away. They decide to go to the other house on the island, take the boat that Geraldine says is there and row to the mainland. They begin running. A dog howls

and a man's footsteps chase them as they run. The dog is just like the dog she and David owned...and the man...it's David...!

They keep on running. "We've lost them," gasps Prizing finally. They arrive at the other house – the boat isn't there. They decide to break into the house and hide there til morning. After all, Geraldine still has the gun. She says she doesn't know how to use it, but refuses to give it up when Prizing asks for it. "I'm the one who's been threatened, so I'm the one who really should have the gun."

Prizing breaks a window and climbs in, then opens the front door to Geraldine. The dog's howl continues to rise and fall. Dr. Prizing picks up the phone, trying to get the operator. "Hello, hello operator." "This isn't the operator." says a grim voice. "Tell Mrs. Reeves it's eleven o'clock. She has one more hour to live."

"Half past eleven..." murmurs the doctor. "I won't leave this house," Geraldine says, relatively calmly. "I'm not going to run away any longer. If they're going to kill me let them come here and do it." Her voice escalates. "Only for heaven sakes why don't they do it right away? Why don't they come here and get it over with."

Prizing tries to calm her. He eases her into a chair, then sits at the piano and starts to play. It's the same melody – it's David's music. "Yes, Geraldine, I rented this house, to protect you from David and the dog."

"Well, stop it!" Geraldine shrieks. "Stay where you are."

"I won't harm you, as long as you have that gun." says the doctor. "But the gun won't stop David." "David's dead!" snaps Geraldine.

The dog howls. "He's right outside the door," Prizing says grimly. "In a moment he'll be here, to take you with him."

The door opens. Footsteps. "David! David!" shrieks Geraldine.

"Yes, Geraldine, I've come back to see you." "Stop!" "You killed me..."

"Stay where you are!" Her shots are greeted with laughter. "Your bullets can't harm me now. Nothing you can do can harm me, because I'm dead and you're still alive."

Geraldine cracks. Her words spill over each other as she confesses that she killed him, that is was *cigarette* case that Laura had found.... "I guess that's all we need, Harvey." says the calm voice of Dr. Prizing. "A full confession, with two witnesses." "Harvey!" gasps Geraldine.

"Yes, Geraldine. I do look like my brother in this dim light. And the dog Laura's holding

outside is the same breed as the one you owned."

"Laura!" gasps Geraldine. Laura enters. "Then you were all in this together," Geraldine says viciously. "You *forced* this confession out of me."

Harvey tells her that the blank cartridges in the gun Prizing had given her really turned the trick. The telephone rings and he excuses himself to answer it! "...Oh, hello, inspector. Yes, it's all right now. You can hook the wires up again. She's told us the truth. And you'd better get to work on that bridge right away. It's uh, still down."

"What an outrage." says Raymond. "All those opportunities for murder and not a drop of blood spilled all night long. Oh, well, some days you can't lay away a corpse."

"And now a moment while our Colgate voices bring you a message."

"Well, it's time for me to join the moonbeams, now. But before I leave under a cloud, before I'm mist....(he pauses in hopes that his listeners will get the pun) I thought I might pass on the moral of tonight's story. If you must light a fire under your husband's bed, be careful where you drop the ashes.

By the way, this month's Inner Sanctum mystery novel is *Puzzle for Puppets*, by Patrick Quentin. Well, now its really time to close that there squeaking door until next week, when Colgate tooth powder brings you another Inner Sanctum mystery. So until then, good night. Pleasant dreeams." Squeaking door opens and closes.

### Critique

Announcers with smarmy voices, full of sarcasm, were all the rage as hosts of mystery and horror programs back in the '30s and 40s. Today, Raymond comes across merely as annoying.

Plots of people (husbands or relatives) trying to drive a women insane through supernatural events were newer in 1944 than they are today, but they are still going strong. The most famous tale is of course *Gaslight*, based on the play "Angel Street."

Geraldine is an extremely brave woman. The 'hauntings' on the island had apparently been going on for several days - yet she had a car and she could have left the island at any time. After Harvey and Laura arrive - they could have easily gotten into their car and off the island (if one believed their tale that they had just driven over the bridge). Why oh why phone the police and wait for them to come?

The actor who played David needed to work a bit on his 'outpourings of grief,' one of the most unconvincing displays of emotions I've heard by a radio actor. Full marks to the rest of the cast, though.

