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OBSESSION

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comThe Chattanooga Times

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comThe West Orange Times

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THE UPSTART Comin August 1999

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MIRA

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THE OBSESSION

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PART ONE

The Garden Party

As he walked up the long, pine-bordered drive, so thick on either side were the trees that they dimmed the sound of voices and laughter coming from beyond them.

Approaching the end of the drive was like emerging into daylight after walking through a tunnel. From the surroundings it was obvious why the house was called Pine Hurst. This was the first time he had seen it for it was his partner's preserve. It was long but so low, and as his eyes travelled to the right they fell on what looked like a cottage attached to the end, it as was the rest, it was mullion-windowed. In front of the main building was a balcony from which steps led down to a gravelled area which in turn led the way to a large lawn.

It was a most attractive-looking house from its long line up to its ornamental chimneys, of which, he thought there were several, suggesting the house was more than it appeared to be from the outside.

The neighing of a horse coming from the far end indicated there was a stable yard round the corner. But

Catherine Cookson

The Obsession

He turned now from the house and looked to where two freshly clipped topiary lions guarded the low pillars that headed the four steps leading down to the lawn, not into a rose garden as one would expect, but to the large lawn on which was set a number of tables with

bright canopy umbrellas above them. Some people were already seated at the tables but more were walking about, and as he hitched up the small parcel under his arm he reminded himself that this wasn't only a garden party but a twenty-first birthday celebration for Miss Beatrice Penrose-Steel.

He noticed a man disengage himself from a group and walk towards him. This was, he surmised, the Lord of the Manor, as old Cornwallis dubbed him, and not a patch on his father, the late colonel.

Sion Steel greeted him, saying, "Ah! Ah, you found us then. How is Doctor Cornwallis?"

"Not in very good shape today, I'm afraid; his leg is very painful."

"Tis gout, but he won't have it, will he?"

No, he won't have it."

Ah well, come and meet my daughter."

He was now being led to a table at which sat a young woman, and immediately he noted the similarity between the father and daughter: they were of the same colouring, and both had light brown hair, grey eyes, the same-shaped mouth, wide but thin. Only their noses were different: his was beakish whilst hers was more inclined to be snub.

This is Doctor Falconer, my dear Doctor Cornwallis's deputy." He

John Falconer cast a sharp glance towards his host, and he had the desire to put him right and say, "Partly

for the man was aware that there was now a friendship between Dr Cornwallis and himself. But how do you do? May I wish you a happy birth-

day!

"Thank you." Her voice was light and her smile came and as she took the parcel he held out to her

"*Ullsd on a laugh, I must inform you that this present-

is not of my choice; Doctor Cornwallis said you

*eabbdg"... "...tilde . , *

But just but partial to chocolates."

"I am. Thank you so much." And two young women approached the table, she followed up and said, 'Oh, here are my sisters,' and in-

**but but but but and one, she said, this is my sister Fanny... Doctor Falconer."

She found herself looking at a young woman.

Her hair was a gleaming brown, her eyes a darker shade; her skin was like alabaster, her mouth wide and

fullll She was tall, almost as tall as
he: he was fivej bar "t eleven and she must be
all of fivefoot nine, and il bar every arried herself so
well... She was beautiful, unlike
llletter sister.

Iffis ttention was jerked from her by Beatrice
say'And this is Marion."

JM-ARION, too, was tall, but very fair. She,
too, was adlooldng, not quite beautiful. Sband had a
quiet ex bar t"...on but her eyes twinkled as she
said "I uppose bebar bar bar bar Bie
standing in for his bad leg...n gout. No, not
IIIB se added, mischievously, shaking her
bead;

li he answered her in the same vein as be hook
his d too, and laughing back at her, 'ationo, not
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Yes, Im leaing lat lesson 11' I

Miss... Marion." t

They lauhed together nov until t P in again quickly, 'Helen, Leona has amved" And on this the tall girl said, "Oh! CX " And then she made hastily for the steps an the tall' middle-aged man standing at the top of thl Marion caught John's atten10 " "

"As bar for me, I'd better go in and at to the " s

John Falconer looked sligh perplexed until Be-

atdce said somewhat primly, she has a
sultor and just like Heen's, he is in the too' Then
she added "I'm sorry I'm unable to show 011
round at the moment... But ah, here's osie 01"
be shown very much around by Rosie, m yongest sister, every
bar

little detail. Rosie!" she called to 1- who
was on t the point of rumung towards a101
g110 of g11- his ing young people. The giri ttf
an(1 11 to- J wards them, said, 'allyes,
Beatri *

*This is Doctor Falconer. W1 you like to show
be

him around and introduce him
'Oh yes. Yes." And lookin at John she
added' be

Tve seen you before in the to You are old
Cornwallis's man, aren't you?"

'I am his partner." his 4

*Partner? Oh, I'm son. I tt0 0 were
J I 1 one of those, what d'you call tb1
locums?" still Her voice stem, Beatrice
pt" ...ment i". sie! behave
yourself Please!" fc

Friend answer Rosie smiled wid at John
said' 11 *Come along. You'll get used
W us a11 before y011' bar bar finished."

Tm sure I shall," he nodded at her. She was
a very M

I, not more than sixteen or seventeen and with life,
which showed in her step and her
passed the steps above which were walking audful sister
and the very smart and pleasg man, he was informed in a
whisper, r future. They're going to be married.

He's he's a lovely man." He found he was
surprised at his own tone. IgEsd they are going
to be married, and he is a..." pBandment she's very
young," he put in quickly. SS-HE'S not, she's
twenty. Of course, as I said, he's tte a bit
older. Forty I think, which is old really, H'e's
nice. I'm nearly eighteen, and I wouldn't nd
having him." She laughed gaily. lie was shaking his
head as if at a naughty child Ifae said,

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it. aity-four,
I would have said." asting him a sidelong, laughing
glance, she said, iw this is the rose garden. But you
being a doctor, lever, you will already have guessed that."
And I aughed again, a gay, girlish laugh, then
added, bar Not this is the topiary. I'm not fond of
trees being tccand hacked about. Are you?" bar fe

thought for a moment, then said, "No, since you
 bar I'm not. I think they're grotesque. They were
 ier meant to grow like that." bar *ou're right. You're
 right." he skipped on ahead now, saying, 'And this,
 sir, e pine wood. You'll notice on each
 side of you are pine trees."
 He smiled broadly at her. She was an imp,
 this one, t a loving, kindly imp, if he knew
 anything about
 character Different from the rest. They were all different.
 W thought of the beautiful girl again who was going to De
 arried, and to a man twice her age. He couldn't
 remember seeing anyone really like her before.
 They merged from the wood into a green area that ran
 dow to he river. But he was brought to a stop by the sight
 of a very high wall. He looked to the right and couldn't
 see where it began for it was lost in trees. ut e
 could see that it ended on the river bank. She was
 by his side now and he looked at her and said,
 "That's a very high wall."
 "Yes; itused to e the kitchen garden. But it
 wasn't as high as that then, it's had another foot
 or so put on it."
 "Why?"
 "Oh! Oh, Doctor, it's... a...
 long... long... story."
 "Well, 11 long stories; I'd like to hear
 it."
 "Would you?"
 She no threw her arm around a young sapling and he
 thoug mat e was going to twirl herself about it; but sh
 sent her head against it and said, "I call it the
 "Wailmg Wall", rather like the one the Jews have in
 Jerusalm, or wherever it is."
 He smi d said, "Yes, wherever it is."
 "Well, I never was any good at geography.
 Anyway, that was the wall to our kitchen garden and, so
 I'm given to understand, to the best piece of land in the
 whole sixty acres or so."
 "Really! acres?"
 "Yes, bt not since that was cut off. Well, it
 all goes bac to Grandpapa. He was in the Army,
 you know, a Vly soldierly man. But he was
 lovely." Also-
 Ilih she was still smiling there was a touch of
 sadtSS m her voice as she added, *Oh
 yes, he was an bar bar er lovely man. And
 Grandmama was lovely, too.
 Ewas always shouting, bawling. And a would crook her
 finger at him like that' demonstrated, wagging her first

finger- greater-than uld come like a lamb, and she would say, s howling again," and he would answer, hly, "No, I'm not. No, I'm not." And she n say with a smile, "Well, it must be just dng." Sometimes he would yell, "Well, a fool." It was either Needier or Oldham and Grandmama would then say teasingly, bar 1 couldn't be James Macintosh." You see GrandWSI was very fond of James Macintosh." She now ded towards the wall saying, 'Robbie's his son." He wasn't enlightened, but he knew he would be l- * bar bar hey were walking on again as she said, "Grand- bar ta you see, was a lieutenant-colonel or colonel, or bar 6Bething like that and he had a batman named Ja bar Macintosh, who went to India with him. That was I first time Jamie rescued him. It was in a skirmish E nething like that. Grandpapa found himself in a @l was hemmed in and the brave Scots laddie," had dropped into Scottish brogue now and was at him- "shot his way in. In fact, I mink, Grandpapa he yelled a lot. He must have them to death which is why they ran. Anyt's how he got Grandpapa out. He was be they were both wounded; but Jamie got him ie second time was more serious. Jamie h, I understand was then a sergeant. They weren't in India this time but in some other outlandish place, and Grandpapa was in charge of a company or something, and they had to retreat." She turned now, her face bright and laughing. "You always hear of the British advancing, never retreating, don't you?" He bit on his lip but said nothing. And so she went on again, "Well, in their retreat the Ghurkas or whoever they were... which side were the Ghurkas on?" "It all depended," he said, "when all this happened." "Oh, but anyway, whoever it was, they shot Grandpapa in the leg. They thought he was dead and so they just tramped over him. But the great Jamie Macintosh" comshe had reverted to the Scottish brogue again- "what does he do? He goes out to that field at night and sorts out my Grandpapa. But they were lying in wait and they shot Jamie's arm off." His eyes widened and he said, "Really!" "Yes, really, right from there." She pointed above the elbow. "He used to have a hook. He could do lots of fanny things with that hook. Anyway, the great Jamie was decorated; quite a hero he was. And Grandpapa didn't lose his

leg, but he always had to walk with a stick.
 Jamie Macintosh, it's a wonder he didn't
 grow another arm. Anyway, there was our wonderful
 kitchen garden with the high wall all round it right down
 to the river. It was the best piece of soil, the
 gardener said in the whole of the estate, and beautiful
 fruit trees grew on the side of the wall where the
 sun hit them and the fruit and vegetables came up
 on their own. And at the head of that piece of land was a
 cottage. Well, it was bigger than a cottage,
 with eight rooms altogether, as well as offices, so it's
 bigger than a cottage, isn't it? He nodded at
 her. 'And
 had been empty for some time. So what does
 Grandpapa do? but get it fixed up for Janie.
 And, if I love, he had to do this in secret. Of
 course I-TANDINAMA knew, but she didn't.
 Father was very land-conscious; in
 fact, he is. But Grandpapa passed over
 to Jamie all the land beyond that wall. It was about ten
 acres of workite and planting land with a yard beyond for
 animals; or at least some. There are two
 meadows in it to run a horse and a couple of
 sheep. And, as the landmen said, it was the best
 piece of land in the estate, because with so many pine
 trees growing all over the place, the
 roots riddled the earth, so they had to break
 new ground on this
 to make a new kitchen garden. It used to be a
 walled garden with greenhouses and a vinery and so. It took
 hard work. I understand my father was gious, but he couldn't
 do anything about it because Grandpapa had passed it over
 as... ahem!" she licked her tongue before she
 asked as a question, of gift?"
 Yes, you can pass things over as a deed of
 gift, that's what he did. Then the war started,
 it didn't really start until after Grandpapa
 died. You see, the wall goes right down to the water
 and Grandpapa used to put on his high waterproof boots and
 wade into the river and round the wall. That was easy.
 I used to pledge The only other way in was to go on
 to the road and through the front gate. That was a walk for
 Grandpapa and he used to take me hand from when I was
 very small and we
 would go to Robbie's. Oh, I forgot to tell you that
 Jamie had married Annie, and she had Robbie.
 He was ten when I was born. I was the last of the
 tribe. Mrs Annie makes lovely griddles
 in the pan and thickens them with butter and honey. And of
 course, I used to be sick and there was always trouble.

I can remember from when I was three going
pldging round there. Robbie was thirteen then or
twelve or something like that, but I used to follow him
around like Floss. He seemed old to me. Then there
would be the days when Mary May and Henrietta those were
the cows, came round the wall and got into the garden and
ate the srubs. Oh my! Oh my! So, to keep the
peace, Grandpapa arranged for some railings and wire
to be attached to the wall and extend into the river. Of
course, it was further to pldge and get round; but there
were still times when Mary May made the journey. Ten
she calved and little Mary May used to follow her."

She fell silent now and she gazed towards me
wall and her voice had a deep, sad note to it as
she resumed, hey were wonderful days, beautiful
days. Even when it snowed and sleeted and rained, the
sun always seemed to shine, because Grandpapa and
Grandmama were here. They were lovely people. Then two
years ago everything seemed to happen at once."

She turned and stared him fully in the face, saying,
'Grandmama died, quite suddenly. Grandpapa was
sitting with his arm around her and she died like that; and two
months later, he died too:

he couldn't live without her. Prom the day she
died he never went into te water. He sometimes went
along the road to Robbie's front gate,

'cos Jamie had died the previous year and

Grandpapa missed him so

it Robbie acted as a good second and would all
Grandpapa's tales of what he and Jamie in the
wars, and what a brave man Robbie's been. Then
three months later Mama died, na in that one
year. That was two years ago. ave never been the
same since." She looked her feet now and said,
"Neither Grandmama dpapa wanted to die; their
life together was . But I think Mama wanted to die.

Oh yes. r head jerked up and her voice was a
whisper he said, 'I shouldn't have said that, should
not? It's in your mind and I'm a doctor,

Es the same as being a priest, you know; I
don't ngs on."

" There was a question in the word. he asked, 'Why are
things not the same now?'" was walking on again,
slightly ahead of him, aid, "Beatrice has
taken over; she's now head house. She loves the
house, you know. She in it. None of us have any
feeling for the house and Father have. She's very like Father.
Then the war between Father and Robbie. If you line down
here you'll see what I mean... down to bar Have
river."

pEley walked by the wall and as they neared
the she let out a high exclamation, crying, "Oh
no! ptey May. Oh no! Mary May," for
there, coming ptted the end of the wood and wire
entanglement was
bar pfe watched the girl now drop onto the
grass, pull bar 1 her shoes, then quite
unselfconsciously lift up her pull down her
garters from below her knees,
then her stockings, push hese into her shoes, tie
the laces together, sling them around her neck and dash
into the water, saying as she did so Take your shoes
off if you want to come."
'T'd rather climb the wall," he shouted back
at her.

"Can you?"

"Oh yes, yes; I'm used to climbing."

He watched her now get a hold of the cow's ear
and turn it about. The water was well over her knees
and soaking the bottoms of her petticoats and what
looked like the frill of her drawers. She was talking
all the time to the cow while at the same time shouting,
Robbie! Robbie!"

He glanced along the wall. Here and there a roug
stone protruded from it. He made for one, and hauled
himself up by it, far enough so that he could stretch and
grab at the top of the wall. From there he could see
he was right above a pig-sty with a grunter looking
enquiringly at him. Then, looking down the path, he
saw a young man, who cried at him, 'Hitch yourself
along to the right. There's a ladder there."

Glancing to the right he inched himself rather painfully
along the uneven stone wall until he reached some
espalier apple bushes trained along the wall.

Then he saw the ladder.

By the time he reached the ground the young fellow was
taking the cow from Rosie's hands and saying, "You should
have left her there."

"And let Father shoot her? He will, you know. As
sure as eggs are eggs he'll shoot her. He
told you last dme."

"Just let him try. I've got a very good aim
meself, and I've already promised him that."
an't you put a barrier across the bottom so they
t get into the water at all?"

hy should I? The river's a public pathway."

In't be silly, Robbie."

bar *ca not being silly, Rosie. The river is
a public

ay. You look it up."

it?" She had turned to John now who was
dust-
hanself down and wondering whether the seat of
pants would last out until he got back to his
lodg-
tliad he answered her 'I've never heard of
it; but
E " iend says it is, then I'm sure it
is."
" said Robbie.
Robbie. I've heard a lot about you."
Jre the new doctor?"
I'm the new doctor."
I hope you answer calls quicker than your
K, Ills not my boss, Robbie, he's my
partner."
b you're partners. Oh, partners? You've bought
Bood! Good! Well, I'll be pleased to see you
at lnae. Wait till I lock this one up, then
come up
Jand have a cup of tea."
disat least I am a guest at a birthday
party."
over the wall.
Well they won't miss you for an extra
i, so come and meet my moher. She's
bling about aches and pains; she'll be
bar bar But' see you."
tohn walked up the long path towards the pretty
P at the end of the land he could understand this
Pbba productive piece of ground, judging
by the
pfe plants were sprouting up all around him, and
bar bar hy the present owner next door hadn't
wanted
to lose it. Oh yes. Oh yes, he could see that
an right j But in a way he was glad that this forthright
young man was following in his fatr's footsteps.
He! sounded like his forebear: a man it would be good to have
with you in a tight comer i
Mrs Annie Macintosh seemed to him to be
well j named: she was round, plump, rosy ad
cheery. just.
'Oh, you're a welcome visitor
Doctor," she imblea mediately said to him.
"We'll likely get a bit of at-1 tention
now. You've got to be dead and ready for j your box
before the old 'un will put his neb in the j door and
then it's only to see if you're screwed down j
all right." bar

ohn laughed, flinking it was odd why
everybody bar referd to his partner as "the old
'un", when he was only in his fifties.
Admittedly though, he did look a bit wo.
Te batte had taken its toll, and in more
places than bis leg.
As he sat in the kitchen tasting Mrs
Macintosh's griddle cakes, hot off the pan, the
young fellow was saying to Rosie, "Get your shoes
and stockings on again; anything less like a young lady
I've never seen." I
"Oh you! Then you should keep your animals itt
order and I wouldn't have to strip off so many times.
John and Robbie exchanged a knowing glance at
mis and only just managed to suppress what could have
been a bellow of laughter at her words.
'allyou have a very nice house here, Mrs
Macintos, said Jon now.
'Aye, it isn't bad; and all due to me
Colonel, ble him. May he rest in peace. And
I'm sure he does, an
bar alongside him. He's a great miss. He
is that,
Jhe, Miss Rosie?"
es. Yes, he is, Mrs Annie. I miss
them both every because they were lovely people." ou're
not the only one, lass. You're not the only
IW-ELL now, another griddle Doctor?"
"lllationo No, thank you. I'm expected to go and
eat Ene birthday cake. Isn't that so,
Rosie?" SI bar at h yes, I suppose
so," she replied bending to faste lace of a shoe.
Then she stood up as she added,
should be there now, so come on. Her tone
1 casual as if she were addressing an old friend.
are you going to get back? I'm not going wall or
through that water. You can, but I'm down the road."
said I was going through the water? I'm gokwn the
road, too."
look out," said Robbie now to Rosie. be
squalls if you're caught." never been caught
yet." don't act too clever. Go on, get
yourself
was amused at the attitude between them. could have been
father and daughter, or bother
But if his guess was right, there were difthoughts in
Robbie's mind with regard to this iugh he didn't know
about her, for she was bar greater-than Bng; in fact,
childlike in her unconscious gaiety. minutes
later they had made their way through in the railings in the

pine wood to emerge onto and were walking side by side, as if they done the rounds. And Rosie's next remark HH-LILATION s attention back to her sister: 'Look!" she said; "Beatrice has already started on your chocolates. J She's got a thing about chocolates. She's always nib- j bling chocolates, but she never gets fat. It's a good job her fancy isn't towards wine or beer, isn't it? That would be something. Just think of the effect. Oh my!"

As her laughter joined his, he thought, she's like a bar breath of fresh air. It's to be hoped she'll remain so, J at least for a while fc m was to look back on the garden-cum-birthday gttty as the beginning of his new life. His medical lning seemed to be far away in the past. Two years bar "ent walking the wards were as if they had never ln. His mother was the only thing that remained ptMninent in that past. This reminded him that he bar KH-ILD have gone to see her today. But a visit would bar an a rush there and back and today was his day and he felt he wanted it to himself: to get away bar at m the town and people, to walk in wide open Spaces, to climb hills, if not mountains. He just bar anted to get away. Yes, just get away. Which is Ifaat he did, with a knapsack on his back and freshly bar ced buns and sandwiches from the bakers' and two ttles of ale.

It was the middle of July. The sky was high, and re was a slight breeze blowing that tempered the at. The ground was hard beneath his feet and, hav? taken off his cap, the wind blew coolly through is hair. Avoiding hamlets, he made for the hills. He knew

this route: it led slowly upwards towards a near vertical outcrop which brought him to a small plateau from where, in the far distance, could be seen Durham Cathedral rising from its perch on the bank of the river Wear. To the left was Gateshead, and beyond it, across the Tyne, was Newcastle.

He had only recently got to know the North country. His mother was a Sussex woman and his father half-French. But his mother's sister Ada lived in Middlesbrough which is where his mother was staying at the present time, and not liking the situation at all. And as her rheumatism was worsening with the years he felt, if not through love, which he had for her, then duty bound, he had to bring her nearer to him. But today he wouldn't think about it, today he was free:

there were no bowel troubles to see to, no
biles, warts, sore feet, headaches, all of which
were on the lighter side. The incurables were another
matter.

He now stretched himself out on the hard turf, his
hands behind his head, his cap shading his eyes, and it was
no surprise to him that his mind immediately touched on
Pine Hurst. He was again at the garden party and he
could see himself almost frolicking with that young sprite,
Rosie. Then came the picture of the sister
Helen, the one who was shortly to be married. And he
wondered, yet again, why her face should have made such
an impression on him. Yes, she was indeed
beautiful, but he had seen beautiful girls before,
beautiful women of all ages. Yes, of all
ages, because every age had its beauty. But hers was of a
different kind. And then there was Marion. Marion
puzzled him. She, too, he had learned, was going
to be married. His thoughts, of a sudden, jumped to the
*iltther. He was glad he wasn't on his
list; he couldn't

litnd his type; bumptious, arrogant. If
anyone played and L dg me anor, he did.

And yet, he under-

laod the man's father had been just the opposite.

He ieaHed Rosie's description of her
grandfather which litted in with what he had heard from
Comwallis. As Itosie had put it, he must have
been a lovely old man.

bar 0ey seemed to be a special word she used
in dellpribing those she liked. But where did the girl
Be-

itnce come in this family? She was running it now.

*bar ra way he felt sorry for her. He
didn't know why,

6Bt less-than De did. She wasn't like
any of the others. Alill)h she was quite pretty, she
had no particular

bar bar Braction.

22ar bar bar Ahwell, he sighed, they were
all down there in the iKey and he was up here, at
peace with the elements Id God. Yet was he? Why
did he keep thinking, in le back of his mind, that
he had arrived too late?

*gg'o late for what?

bar bar Jf..was that a rabbit scurrying across
the sward? wid one have scaled this tor? Why not?

Necessity, l bar like bar tongh time and
circumstance, made life. iWhen a dream voice
said, "I'm sorry," he answered bar bar bar

in return, saying, "You couldn't help it.
You weren't
32ar bar bar la"...ow. I came a year too
late. I'm sorry, too. These bar bar bar a
happen out of the blue." Then a warm, soft,
blankness came over him and he let himrto it.
ig he had slept he did not know. But he lis
face was hot. His cap must have slipped the sun was very
bright in his eyes. He'd orrow; his skin burnt
easily. But then it a nice tan, but a rough
brown. His mother
used to say it was attractive. That reminded him,
he must see about his mother. He must ask for a few days
off.

When he opened his eyes slowly and blinked into the
sunlight he saw a face, and it was smiling at
him. So he closed his eyes tight again.

You've had a nice sleep."

He sat up so quickly that his back went into a
cramp, and he grimaced as he stared to the side and
saw Helen Steel sitting there.

When he went to get to his feet she put her hand
out and said on a laugh, 'Don't jump up!
Doctors say it's bad for the heart. You could give
yourself a turn." She was nodding at him.

He covered his face for a moment, then
muttered, "I'm sorry. How long have you been up
here?"

"Oh, let me see." She put up a hand
to cover her eyes, and, her head back, she said,
"Since time and circumstance made life, and you were
sony for something."

"How long ago was that?"

She turned her fob watch around and after a moment
said, "Forty-two minutes, to be exact."

"And you've been sitting there all that time?"

"Well, lik you, I needed a rest after that
stiff climb. But I judged that you needed it more than
I, you having been up half the night."

His eyes widened and he ran his hand through his hair,
endeavouring to flatten it, before he asked her, "How
do you know I've been up half the night?"

"Needier told me."

"Needier?"

"Yes; he was taking Pansy to be shod and you were
returning the horse you had borrowed from Ben
AtldBson, the blacksmith, because Isaac
Green's place Ifca good four miles out and it was
three in the momland Nancy was having a very bad
time."

I think both Needier and Ben Atkinson
 should start a newspaper business."
 She laughed now as she said, "Was it a boy
 or a girl?" And when he answered,
 "Both," her mouth widened and she said, "Not
 twins!" And he nodded at her, but just but but
 and, "Yes, twins. That makes eleven." Good
 gracious! And she's also lost four."
 eyes widened still further. 'How do you know lost
 four?'" And then, both their heads bobbing, her they
 said, "Needier."
 was laughing out loud now as she went on, "yissst
 said that Isaac took Nancy for a rabbit and both
 ate the grass together. He also said that read the Bible
 every day and stuck to it to the
 body was bent forward now and they were laughing together;
 then, turning his head to the
 he rubbed the water from each eye, he said, "ink
 Needier forgets he's talking to a young lady."
 you shocked?'"
 shocked? Me! No. But it's a surprise
 to find young so well informed on certain matters."
 we're all well informed. Grandpapa saw to and good
 for Grandpapa. He used to take us next you know,
 when the pigs were being born, and B! I am used
 to talk about things. And then B was Robbie.
 Rosie's trailed Robbie since she go walk
 or crawl under the fence, or paddle round
 the pond. And like us all, her education was extended
 through a couple of cows, the five goats, and the
 pony which gave birth to a beautiful foal, but which
 died the same day; and on that day I can tell you there
 was a lot of wailing in our house that even Father
 couldn't stop. Of course, you will know by now about the war
 between Father and the Macintoshes, having talked with
 Rosie."
 He nodded at her, saying, 'Well, I did
 learn quite a bit, yes. He seems to be a very
 enterprising young man, that Robbie Macintosh: it's
 a miniature farm he has behind the wall."
 "Yes." Her face lost its smile now as
 she said, "And it still remains a bone of contention.
 Anyway, here we are." She leaned back on her
 hands and stared up into the sky saying, "Isn't this the
 most wonderful spot?'"
 "Yes. Yes, it is."
 "How did you come across it?'"
 "Oh, well, I'm a bit of a climber."
 "Really? You climb mountains?'"
 "If I can find one handy, yes. But that last

sixty feet almost vertical up to here
 keeps one in very good practice. How on earth
 did you make it?"

"I, sir, like climbing, too. I've come up
 here for... oh, years and years. Even in the winter.
 It's an amazing sight from here in the winter: everything
 stands out unblurred.

He now watched her pass her tongue over her
 lips, which caused him to ask, 'Are you thirsty?'"

"Yes. Yes, I am. I generally bring something
 with me but I didn't today; I came out in rather a
 hurry." Her face lost its laughter again. And
 now he said,

JS-JJI can quench your thirst, but will you be able
 to drink it? it's beer."

When she said, 'Old or mild?' he let out
 a hoot of bar bar gh, reached back, gripped his
 knapsack and, feel-

a bottle, he said, "Oh, it'll be mild,
 I think. It'll be warm; I should have put it in the
 shade." IS-LFELL, that would be difficult to find
 up here." bar bar CO-ULD have hung it down the
 rock if I'd had any bar bar [@.ence](#); here's a
 stump of a tree over there," he nodded Then he
 poured out a cupful of the beer and dedittoher.

When she emptied it on the second go,
 then handed bar just back the mug, he had to quell the
 sudden urge to put her hand and pull her to his side.

bar fe remained quiet as he poured out a drink for
 herself; then, taking the cardboard box from the middle
 of his knapsack, he said, 'Nothing in here comes from
 Mrs Pearson's.' "Is she as bad as all that,
 her cooking?" bar Worse. And the trouble is, if
 you're polite and say something, you
 get it five days in the week." bar 9h

Cook's like that, too. I once said I loved her
 dumplings and she's made me special ones since.

The dumplings can be having trifle, or apple dumplings,
 or bar tfaing, but I have plum duff." She now
 imitated k's voice in saying, "Cos Miss
 Helen's partial to at fcin"dis" She shook her
 head here and added, 'I've bar er been partial
 to packing. But I've got a good one in Janie.'

She nodded as she explained: "Janie tells the
 parlourmaid you know. And Flossie and bar dy, the
 dogs, always know when it's packing day hey bark their
 thanks when they see me."

Hand kept his eyes on her as he said,
 "Cheese, tomato or... their best ham."

"I'll take their best ham, sir, thank

you."

He handed her the box and joined in her mood as he said. "At your service, madam. They're on the right, that will be your left." Again they were laughing. He finished one bottle of beer and opened the second. And as she took the mug from him, she held it to her lips and laughingly said, "Wouldn't it cause a sensation if I went rolling in the front door and Father demaded, "Where have you been, girl?" and I replied this a wide grin, "Out with the doctor. Sitting on the top of Craig's Tor." ...Oh my!"

She drank the beer; then as she handed him the mug stie said, "I'm going to lose my ladylike manners again nd say I've thoroughly enjoyed this afternoon. I can't tell you when I've had such fun." He tared into her eyes; they seemed to be waiting for his gaze. He asked quietly now, "When are you going to be married?"

Her voice was as low as his, as she said, "Next

Easter.

'Whre are you going to live?" "In Hampshire at first. We've rented a little house there."

"Oh! Their gaze never wavered as he went on, 'I hope y'...u'Us be very happy."

"I'm sure I shall. Yes; yes," her nodding was e phatic, "I" sure I shall."

Suddenly he sat back and pulled out his watch and exclaimd in a loud voice, 'Good heavens! Do yo Inow the time? Half-past four and I've got a surgery

bar gye. I'll have to get down there quicker than I got bar bar bar dis.why had he said this? He had no surgery today. bar fter pushing the box and empty bottles into his lsack, he rose hastily to his feet and, looking ln at her where she remained sitting, her hands pBd her knees, he said, 'allyou won't be coming Itm yet" not as a question but in the form of a Hement and she said very quietly, "No; if you don't d Anyway I'm not going back home, I'm going

bar tere." She pointed. "Can you see the top of that

bar Se down in the valley?"

bar bar es. Yes, I can just see it."

ftliave a friend lives there. That's really where I was making for when I was tempted up here." Pand
*looks a long way off."

for as the crow flies. Three miles from here, perils about five or so from the town." pushing out the palm of his hand towards her, he said "Don't get up. Just sit there like that." And she looked up at him, her face unsmiling, then said quietly, "Thank you for a lovely afternoon. I'll always remember. So shall I, always," he said and turning quickly, he let himself over the edge of the plateau. Now his head disappeared she stared towards the bar in the far valley. Then she brought up her knees and put her hands around them, and laid her head back. And so she sat; and she said to herself Time and circumstance make life.

"Is Wallace's farm a big one, Robbie?" asked Rosie.

"Well, it's all a matter of what you call big. No, I wouldn't say it was big, anything but. Yet it isn't just a smallholding like this. He keeps half a dozen cows on it and a few sheep. And he also goes droving at times. That used to be his permanent job, a drover. Why do you ask?" "Oh, no reason."

"You never ask questions without a reason. Now, why do you ask?"

"Well, I saw the son, Jackie...isn't he called Jackie? And he was in our pine wood the other day."

Robbie stopped what he was doing and turned to her and said, "to your pine wood? What was he doing there? He'd better look out for your father, hadn't he? Especially if he's got his gun with him." He smiled.

"Well, that's what I thought."

"Was he picking up wood?"

"No; he was just walking, and he jumped the railing and went into the field... Is Mrs Wallace a nice woman, Robbie?"

"Yes" he gave a bit of a laugh as he said, "depends on what you mean by nice. To be nice and character... kindly?" "Yes, it is nice."

"He's pretty, and lively in a sort of way."

But

he got into your mind?"

"?" His eyes narrowed as he looked at her. is Rosie: if she asked a question it was thought. She was fast growing up; she much of a tomboy now. In fact, that phase has lessened during these last few years. He resisted putting his arm around her shoulder, 'Come on, spill it. You know me, I'll tell you.' That was a

tactic he had used when young wild; but now
 she was turning into it. The youngest of the Steel bunch,
 the Jrthem. What was he going to do about it? What bar
 every do about it? He knew what would happen, bar get
 a bullet in the back some dark night. He bar But
 told himself he wasn't afraid of anybody on
 t earth that he was like his father, but that was J0Us were
 facing an enemy, one you knew, to a B degree,
 what he was about. But you never bar what Simon
 Steel was about; he worked in the Jye, and in more ways
 than one. It wouldn't be Je had got wind of...?
 He swung round and "at her; but he couldn't see
 her face, for she leading over the calf and saying,
 "As it's a bull, on't have to shoot it, will you?"
 ot it?" His voice was loud. 'Good
 gracious! no. Bhim up and let him out for
 breeding, more
 'I'm glad of that; I can't bear the thought of
 i[going to market."
 "Mine never go to market."
 "The hens and ducks do."
 "Oh, well" comhe wagged his head- "only
 when they're vey old."
 "I don't know how you can kill a chicken, or
 a duck, or a goose, when you love animals
 so."
 "Oh, Rosie! I'm not feeling inclined
 to give you a lecture on life and the sustaining of it.
 But what I do want to know is why you are glum these
 days? Anything wrong over the wall?"
 "No; only that Helen will soon be gone and the
 Marion wil follow, and I'll be left."
 "With only me?"
 She turned now and laughed at him and at the face
 he was pulling, and she said, "Yes; and isn't that
 pros pect awful? Only you!" Then she thrust
 her hand out towards him as if pushing him away,
 saying, "Oh, you'll always be there, or here."
 It was a moment before he answered her, when he said,
 "Yes, Rosie, I'll always be there, or hereWhere
 you off to now?"
 "I'm going home; it will soon be teatime. But
 I'o not going by the front road or the river
 track, I'll going to cross the fields and up the
 pine walk. B seeing you."
 He didn't answer but stood watching her walk
 t the far end of the grounds, climb the fence, then
 cros! the field. And he remained so until she
 had disap peared from his view.
 There was something wrong with her, somethio! on her

mind. He knew his Rosie. Oh yes,
he kn
bar bar The Obsession 37 bar tosie. But his
Rosie didn't know him, not yet at
ead of going straight to the house, Rosie made
e gazebo that lay beyond the tennis court, and bar
slie sat down. She wished she had someone to @.E
greater-than . But whom could she confide in about this bar
bar bat was on her mind? Because she might be
1 But then again she knew she wasn't wrong.
H put her fingers between the slats in the seat ipped
te wood. Life wasn't nice; but it had bar
antil recently. Although she knew er father bar
Robbie, and Beatrice, too, disliked him almost
Bch, that had been something else, and she had bar with it.
But this other ting was something new
**aga-

turned her head quickly now as te sound of
2-his footsteps came to her from behind the be,, with
Helen's voice saying, "Let's stand
be""jletter' Marion, because you know Beatrice:
she's

4 in the back of her head at least when she's
. end of the balcony. And if she sees us and
talking she will want to know what it
Ar about... You say you would like us to have disa
wedding, Marion?

fes wou' Helen. Anything to get away. I
JS3UI from Harry yesterday. He said there's
2' of his being sent to India early next
IP he wants to come down and see ather. And y
up till recently I didn't really know how I
I him; but after his letter I... well I know now him.
And he thought of going away to
sJi him, or to follow him out or just to be
married to him. has become exciting. I could g
new life opening out for me." There was a pause.
" you love Leonard?"

There was another pause before Helen's ig came,
'Who could help loving Leonard? He's so
right-brace A so good, so caring."

"Yes. But do you love him, Helen?"

"Oh. Oh, yes, I love him... Yes!"

comthe voice louder now- "I love him. I'm going
to marry aren't I? I love him."

There was another silence before Marion asked Would you
put it to Father about us having a double wedding? I'll be
nineteen next month, so it isn't as if I'm a
ehild. And I know something and I thin you know the same
thing, that Beatrice will be glad to see the back of

both of us."

Rosie now turned and stared at the wooden partition that separated her from the others as she heard Helen say, 'But what about Rosie? She'll be late.'

"Oh. Well, it mightn't suit Rosie, Helen, but it'll suit Beatrice, 'cos if Beatrice likes any one of us it's Rosie. Odd, but I always thought she's treated quite as the child she'll never have. She'll not let Rosie go easily. And Rosie, somehow, is still so young for her age."

"Oh, I don't know so much about that; she's on eighteen. And remember the garden party and Teddy Golding? He's very smitten with her, and she likes him, too. And don't forget he's been down four times since. Of course, the last time he didn't see her when she supposedly had measles but turned out not to be measles after all. And he would get Father's permission all right because the Goldings are very well off and so connected. What's more, he's in the top greater-than Service. That sounds good at the tea table Gentlemen's Club. Anyway, what do you think Leonard did suggest we be married in. But I pushed it on to Easter. He thinks

I sent abroad and if he wanted to I would be with him... Oh, I think it will be for all of us. But wouldn't it be better if all of us were to go up the aisle on the same day! that would be possible I'm sure if it wasn't dear older sister."

J- Yes, it could be." This was Marion's voice she added, 'Oh, how she gets on my nerves here. The house. Father's got a mania for she's got a mania for the house. She's like disliking it, I wouldn't be surprised to see her going to get a feather duster one of these days. How it was when Mama was alive, and different when Grandpapa and Grandmama were still here- was good then, wasn't it, Helen?'"

I Yes, Marion; looking back life was good then... T! we all seemed so young and untroubled. After Grandpapa went we could still laugh and Robbie next door. But it didn't seem so long."

Just as a rustle in the grass, Rosie almost sprang

from the gazebo, landed on her toes for a moment to - a grating noise with her feet as if she were down the gravel path. But when she rounded the corner the sisters

were no longer there. Helen was towards the house
and Marion was making ?" rose garden.
i she had first sat in the gazebo she had felt

sad and worried, but now a sense of desolation wa
added to these feelings. Helen and Marion wanted were
get away. Well, they weren't the only ones;
she, too wanted to get away. Oh yes, she
did, even more'tha" they, but for different
reasons. She had made arrane ments to meet
Teddy on Saturday and should his manner be anything like
her sisters had prediced she would in ndg y
repulse him. Oh no! And it woudn' only be
to get away from here, but because she liked him. Did she
love him? Yes. Yes, she thought disshe loved hi
too, and she would give him an indiciition of it on
Saturday. Oh yes, she would. She woud.

lhurch bells had been ringing for the past
halfeopl were passing the surgery window on ay lo
the church, many of them intending just d ouside to see the
Steel girls emerge after Mible wedding. It was quite
an event, two sising married together, with the youngest
sister s bridesmaid.

n this bells had stopped ringing, John lay
back revolving leather chair and closed his
eyes But ven then he could visualise it all:
Helen Iking slowly up the aisle now on the left
arm athcr. with Marion on his right. The grooms
iting, standing beyond the first pew,
lanced at the clock. It was half-past ten in the
I. On an ordinary day there would still be paailing in
the other room, but today there was t on. He knew it
was Ethel Hewitt, for her stick bar But beating its
usual tattoo of impatience on the floor.
Bforced himself up from his chair and opened the "Good
morning, Ethel. Will you come in?"
pt before time an' all Doctor, and the place
empty. As she hobbled past him and took a seat
bar one side of the desk, she added, "It's a
wonder you'Knowledge not along there with the rest of the daft
'uns. They 1 don't know what's coing to them, they
don't. A bed of roses, they think. But just you
wait, they'll get their
eyes opened. Rich and poor alike, it's all
the same." " 'allyou're a born pessimist,
Ethel." J "I'm not from there Doctor. What
makes you say 1 that? I was taken for a
Lancastrian once, but I'm Dur- bar hana
born and bred." bar Another time he would have

laughed, but not to be
 day. "How's your leg?" he said. :
 "Well, I've still got it on," she said.
 "That's fortunate." , "Why aren't you along
 there?" bar "Well now, I ask you, if I was
 along there how could I see to you. And anyway
 Doctor Comwallis had to be there; he brought those
 two young ladies * into the world and-"
 "Aye," she interrupted him, "and he's going
 to see tilde them out of it, but in a different way,
 'cos they're bar going into another world. You know that,
 don't you? But then you don't because you've never been mar-
 3 ried.. dish you? I have three times. You can't
 tell e " anything about marriage. If I had that
 kind of brain I :
 coud write a story."
 'Without... that kind of brain, you could still write i
 a story, Ethel. Anyway, come on, let me have a
 loo
 at your leg."
 ifteen minutes later he escorted Ethel to the
 surgery door with the usual warning. "Keep off it
 as uch as you can. Rest it; if not you're in for trouble
 I've told you." i
 and I've heard you. What d'you expect me
 around on one leg, with eight grandbaims at
 a times of the day and sometimes the
 n a lucky woman, you know."
 5" was about to step into the street she paused, "
 were' head round towards him and her thin wrin-
 i -- took on a smile as she said, 'Aye,
 I know
 5So in a way, 'cos to speak plainly, all
 the
 1"" (ne or two dg mem etter man meletter
 isn't that I'm soft with them either. ii'iVery
 backsides, then end up makin' them taf-
 F hear her still chuckling as she hobbled
 (T- empty street that led to the church.
 So"" Comwallis was in the habit of iterating
 "i one time, there hadn't been a house or
 cottage
 ?"" " i the church and this his family home,
 that
 disless-than was back for almost three hundred
 years. When tTi first heard this remark he had
 laughingly was "Well, it's time it was seen to here and
 there,
 beity think?" but afterwards knew he had made
 - mistake when his superior had no conversaSi

him other than about medical matters for "dis
a week.

ldWi and waiting room were cut off from ,bar l"...i
house by a long passage and as he locked
of the surgery, there appeared at the end of
""jjir e fiS1 0 a woman. Her
appearance a?"l1" stiffen slightly, and before she
could ap i him he said "You're too late, Mrs
Wallace;

,eabar 1 urgent call." ,a walked towards
him saying now, "It's just
something for me stoach, Doctor. I... I can't
go, yo know."

"Well, I couldn't see to you in any case,
Mrs Wal- be
lace; you're Doctor Comwallis's
patient."

"Yes, I know. But the old fellow's at the
wedding isn't he?" She grinned at him. And I
thought you " might oblige. You see, I haven't
been for days." be

"Another few hours won't hurt you. And as
I said I've an urgent call." :

She was standing right in front of him blocking the way
out.

"I could go to Mrs McDougal, but the
doctors don't i ie that, do they?" *

"Well, that's up to you, Mrs Wallace, You
kno

at happened the last time you went to Mother
McDougal. She certainly made your bowels work
* didn't she?"

he woman made no reply for a moment, but
hitched up her breasts with her forearm and, her man er
changing from its fawning style and her voice now without
its pleading note, she said, You know
what you are Doctor?" j

'ationo! What am I, Mrs Wallace?" I

"You're a nowt. You're a snot and you're out
o bar place here. You ought to go back to where you carne
be

om, because you don't fit in. Never did and neve
will." And on (his she pursed her lips and
wrinkled be

her nose so much that, for a moment he tought s was
going to spit at him. Then she turned and flounced
along the passage, leaving him standing :
where he was. And in ths moment he felt she was be
right for he didnt fit in, and he longed to be
bac where he ame from, to where people did not coffl6

fTS-NOT of dirt. But he had but his
 boats,
 * to the weight of the practice was this great S him
 that had resulted from two short me nrst o which had
 been on a mere in-
 "i his shoulders and went out into the walked in the
 opposite direction from the
 his weekend off, and so he took he train to ,
 ySo and from the station a two-mile walk T him
 to his aunt's cottage, where his mother i for him.
 She was standing outside the W she called to him over
 the distance: 'Look!
 less-than s sne ec one nanc 0111 tne
 PP0 : railings, she wobbled and laughed; and when
 er an less-than P11 nls arms ner' e said,
 ,2' a length of railings. But you're looking fine.
 the same?""
 Physically I'm heaps better, although menul much
 worse." She was laughing at him.
 r on with you."
 J,; his arm around her waist now as he led her
 path towards the ivy-covered cottage. 'I'm
 to death, Johnny," she said quietly. "If we
 were town it wouldn't be so bad; but what do I see
 Cows, sheep, goats, a stray fox. Oh!"
 comshe ,3 her head now- great excitement
 last week. ,bbi- was a travelling fair. I
 didn't even see that,
 * ut near hurdy-gurdy from here." bebb551
 the cottage, he looked about him and said, s Aunt
 Ada?"" bebar 21Like she decided to go into town.
 She wanted
 Aiapmjp sasnoq luapire w laafls
 paqqo "r bar , puq 1 iou 'IB s'upiooi
 qo unpamos as o 'AO-PULMore qSnojip
 soo] 0io AJ ji *uprech" BqA
 piMpuv "vd np B in pre 'snoq *
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supporting each other, which seems to make up the
main part of Fellbufn"

He was smiling at her now. here is always
Brampton Hill, and the houses there have lovely
gardens, some of them two to three acres, and six
to eight bedrooms, servants' quarters, butler's
pantry, the lot;

"Well, I could aford one of those, Mr
Sarcas. And I just might, if you can't find me
anything decent in the town or near you. -. well, not
in the town proper, you know what I man."

He came to her again saying, "Yes, old
lady, I know what you meai And now, as we have
to wait for dear Aunt Ada to come back with the
special something for my lunch, do you think, in the
meantime, I might have drink of tea or coffee? A
drop of the hard stuff wold be even better."

She hobbled froirt hi now towards the kitchen,
saying, "It's going to be tea. Doctors shouldn't
drink not hard stuff, in ttie mornings. You should have
learned that already from your partner. By the way, how is
he?"

"When he's not ptting it on he's bad, when
he's! putting it on, for soine reason or other,
he's on the point of death. But sriously, that leg
of his is going
to be the finish of hin if he doesn't watch

out." be
 "Well, then you cod buy the practice." be
 "Mother!" He sounded shocked. "Give over,
 wish-be
 ing him dead! He's a decent old fellow
 really."
 He's a selfish old devil. Don't talk
 to me about j people being decent. The majority only do
 what suits j them: if they go out of their way they
 want soine j thing." J 'I don't know who you
 take after Mrs Falconj
 cynicism is bitter. Grandma and Granddad were
 V less-than *1 couple."
 ili I know, and everybody loved them and n they were
 a pair of old dears. That was in ,!" an when they
 were being made a fuss of;
 J bar just me tell you, like everybody else, they
 had selfj bar jKi. some broader than an arrow
 on a convict's and would go for each other, like cat and
 dog lit I was often woken up by it; all that
 sweetPeople light business made me sick."
 sat down near the kitchen table and started to i as
 he watched her making the tea. He knew that
 IJH-TINMMF.. as she called her arthritic
 pains, were HS right-brace . her gip and that she,
 herself, was putting act for him. Oh, he was
 glad she was coming
 l him, for he needed her company even more ir
 needed his: there was a great emptiness in J if she
 were available he could see life taking
 9iThat) pattern; she was so good to be with. *yet
 so sensible, and kind. And these qualities i"...tSo very
 much at the moment.
 Oimon Steel stood befor the hall mirror
 adjusting his cravat. Beatrice was t his side
 holding a thick overcoat and a tweed hat with side
 flaps.
 She watched her father now wet the end of a finger and
 rub it along each side of his narrow moustache. He
 was a handsome man, and she was very proud of him. As she
 now helped hdm into his coat, she said 'It's very
 cold out. How far are you intending to walk?'"
 "That all depends upon how I feel,
 Beatrice. If reach town I might stay ad have a
 bite." "Why don't you take this carriage
 Father?" He turned on her now, saying, "I'm
 not an old man Beatrice: I don't have to ride
 in the carriage every time I want some fresh sar. I
 hope that necessity doesn't happen for the next
 twenty years."

"Of course not Father, of course not. I
 was only-" "Yes, you were only playing the mother
 again. And you play it very well, dear, very well
 indeed. You'll be congratulated." As he took
 his hat from her
 "I was feeling in his pocket with the other "Oh,
 have you any loose change?" "change Father?" "if I
 what I said. Let me have a couple of
 **'I
 I perhaps three."
 .ipLITTLE Father' comshe stepped back from him-
 I- only enough of the housekeeping money
 through the week, until... until the end of , And
 then there are the bills Father."
 Iii his eyes as if attempting to be patient
 JEI 'allyou needn't remind me of the bills. II
 be settled at quarter day and that is in three i
 Now can I have some small change? the housekeeper;
 I would have thought that, good housekeepers, you manage
 to keep a
 H the sidest I ather; but it's eaten up with"
 comshe had
 IL "with your demands for small change." .
 she now turned about and walked down "i corridor
 to the office. Taking a tin box from i she looked
 down on it in apprehension for a before selecting
 two sovereigns. A few a later, when she handed
 them to him, he at them and the only remark he made was
 i a statement that cast her down: it was, 'allyou
 ii"" g dgf an old maid." Then he
 marched the wide hall, pulled open the front door
 and be it none too gently behind him, the while she be
 standing where he had left her.
 be, her father. She thought she understood
 S " comvas a wonderful man, kind, generous:
 he was ping people, wanting money to give away. be he
 said hurtful things. Yet she understood
 that as well, because she was the only one in family
 who took after him: she, too, said hurtfai things
 when she was annoyed. And she was annoye now, for there
 was Rosie coming down the stairs, a dressed up for
 going out, and she cried at her, 'Whe are you going on
 a bitter morning like this?"
 "Why are you asking the road you know, Beatrice
 I'm going next door, the ony place have
 to visit" bar "Well, all I can say is
 you've got very poor taste I've warned you,
 haven't I? If ather knew you went there so often
 there would be the devil to pay. And you know what he has
 threatened to do with those animals should they stray round that

fence. And he'll do it." Rosie stood at the foot of the stairs. She was half a head taller than her sister and she looked down on her as she said quietly, "If he didn't do it, you wouldn't you, Beatrice?"

There was a pause before Beatrice said firmly, "Yes. Yes, I would, because he's on land that doesn't belong to him."

"But it does belong to him; it was his father's.. Grandpapa gave it to his father. He saved... 'Oh, don't go over that again. I'm sick of listening to it. But I'll tell you this much: Father's going to set if something can't be done; there might be a loophole in this deed of gift business."

Rosie fastened the button on the collar of her coat under her chin, as she said slowly, "Oh, you would like that, wouldn't you? to see them turfed out, to see his livelihood taken away. Well, if that was the case and I wasn't going to marry Teddy, I would go home."

Beatrice laughed sneeringly at this, saying, "Don't you think so?"

"I don't know. Anyway, you can't do anything for more than three years: you're under father's jurisdiction until you are twenty-one. He could have taken you back from wherever you were and made you what he wanted. So, get that out of your head. It's a mistake to become engaged to your father's son," she said, surprised.

Beatrice turned towards her now and quietly said, "I'll tell you why he permitted it, it's because in the Ministry, the Diplomatic Service, and the House of Commons, and in high places, and Father is a member of the first water. And you take after him." Beatrice walked towards the door.

Beatrice gaped. "There went someone who had changed. Rosie was no longer her favourite, just one she liked among her sisters. She had - little girl who could be scolded, then pampered. But the child had been the child to whom she could play. But the child had gone; in fact, the young girl. It had rested her hand on the bannister as if before. She knew what both Helen and Marion felt. But Rosie had always been on her side. But she had chastised her about her visits next time. It had never turned on her and retaliated as just done.

Suddenly she felt a loss and she cried out against him who had been a kind of companion, with little to say, such a

good listener. And she laughed easily. when she
had upbraided her she would laugh. , toned her head
to look towards the door. It dis.jfjKnowledge on her
sister, not loudly, not with a bang,
as it had done on her father, but it had just closed a
"I if it had put an end to something, softly. But
what?; She told herself she must not go for Rosie
any! be
more, at least in connection with those next door. Mo
matter what she thought she would keep it to herself, she
couldn't lose Rosie, too. Before she had become
.. engaged to Edward Golding, she herself had had fear
at times of what might happen between Robbie
Macintosh and her, for it made little difference that he was
ten years older. She herself had been against " the
idea of her becoming engaged to Edward, but the .
alternative was unthinkable. backslash a
She gazed about the hall. She should be happy , very
happy, for now she was mistress of this house
backslash this beautiful, beautiful house.
She'd always loved ha be
home, but now it had become an obsession with
bet. She ruled it. She didn't own it, but she
ruled it. Now and again, though, a particular thought would
frighten her: What if her father decided to marry again?
In her mind she had screamed at what she
saw as the conj sequence. She would go mad. She
couldn't bear an other woman ruling this house. It
wasn't so much se could not think of her father taking
another wife, but it was another woman being mistress
of this house.
She took her hand abruptly away from the
bannister and her skirts seemed to dance from one side
to thej other as she briskly made her way towards the
draw;
ing-room to check Janie Bluett's work of the
morn
ing. *
Instead of taking her usual way by the wall and
t;
water to get into me smallholding, Rosie wal;
* the main gateway of the house and proceeded was
road.
TO IT strange that by whichever way she [l place
it was as if she were moving into world: she took deeper
breaths, and she
Ti the desire to sit down, even to lie down
- and stretch her body to its full extent and
just. Annie Macintosh hailed her from that part
WM where the animal enclosure was railed

It called to her, 'Isn't it a snifter!

But I love Mu I'm coming in, don't come down." merely nodded at her, then went into the cot straight to the kitchen, where immediately met her like a wave.

loosening her coat, she flopped down into the , to the right of the large open fireplace, emitted a long drawn-out sigh. If the kitchen I that of a huge farm it could not have rep? it more fully, for from its oak-beamed ceiling I of smoked ham and bunches of herbs. A I g a d d d i i kitchen table ran down the middle b e i f f f i The china-decked dresser stood against I p L i k e and flanking another was a padded settle, were' of which a door led into the long, cool con F always felt this to be a comforting room, so * (fae one in the house, and at the present mo- i' was feeling in need of comfort.

dis I l l woman came bustling in and as she be , S a heavy basket of sprouts onto the table, she

y- finger ends are dropping off."

H Robbie?"

"Oh, hes gone into town with a load. The cabbage is finished, and the carrots. There's only the sprouts left and the last of the clamped taties."

She stopped in the act of pulling her mittens off

and, looking hard at Rosie, she said,

"What's the mat. ter, girl?"

"Oh, everything, Mrs. Annie. I've just had word with Beatrice. The house is awful these days. Oh! I wish I was married and away."

Annie Macintosh took off her short coat befor reaching up to the delft rack to lift down two cups and saucers. Then, putt in these onto a tray she asked quietly, You want to be married so much?"

es. Oh, yes, Mrs Annie."

"You want to be married just in order to leave the house?"

Rosie did not answer immediately: she stared at ths dear friend of hers v h i i e she seemed to consider, then she said hesitantly, " ant to leave the house, but I do like Teddy."

Yo like Teddy? What does that mean, girl, you hke Teddy? You like me, you like Robbie, but if you're going to marry somebody you've ot to more than like them."

'Well...well, yes. Yes, i more than like him, I" very fond of him."

"Very fond of him."

Yes." Rosies voice was loud now. Does that mean you're in love with him?" "In love with him?"

Yes, i suppose so." 'allyou suppose so."

Annie went to the hob now, a teapot in her hand
tdted the spout of the siling kettle over it, this"

be it back to (he table, put its lid on and
then it with a tea cosy. And what she then said

"iiTiir. to do with love or emotions: 'I've
made Histo recipe, a kind of currant bun. I
had a go at B D'you want to try one?"

. was breathing quickly. She didn't answer but bement
the table at the elderly woman; then of aLike she
burst out laughing, spluttering as she to re the
runniest person I know, Mrs Annie."

3Like so far you don't know very many, unny." f
bar andi yes, I do. But they never say anything
funny." r her head now thoughtfully to one side,
she "l 'Come to think about it, the people around are
dull. They just talk about the weather, or . or
deaths. All, that is, except Doctor FalcomI
like him; he made me laugh the other day:

jEL "You know, last night I dreamt I was a
,ni," And I said, "What on earth made you dream
,y were a worm?" "Well," he said "I was up
to The Hall, and it was the way the butler at
me. They call him Lemas, so I made a "

rhyme up about him."" She started to laugh i'n,
'I can't remember it now, but it was fimny. I like
the doctor." As she took the cup of tea was
Mrs Annie's hand, she added, "I'll meet a
dif n class of person altogether when I'm
married." bar bar 822 well," said Mrs

Annie quickly, 'I hope they bar , you. But let
me tell you, girl" comnow she wagged a" nnger at
Rosie- "you've got a lot to leam, and what
you're saying now it'll be painful. I myself
" say' fancy talk and highbrow conversation

IS: make for happiness: it often hides meanness
TS many other things. And you haven't got to go
very far to find people like that." As she now stamped be
around the table Rosie got to her feet and laid
her i cup down, and, her head bowed she said, 'I
wasn't I meaning anything nasty, Mrs Annie.

I'm just...oh, I bar don't know..." l

When her voice broke with the tears, Mrs
Annie was around te table again and holding her in her
arms, saying, here now. There now, I understand You have a
pretty gloomy time next door you always have had, as
your mother did before you."

What?" Rosie's head came up from
 Mrs Annie's shoulder and she blinked and
 swallowed, and said again "What? What do you mean, as
 my mother before me? My... my mother was very happy."
 Your mother, girl, let me tell you, appeared
 to be happy in order to keep you girls happy.
 She wasn't a happy woman. Now that's all
 I'm going to say. There'll come a time when you'll know
 more about your mother."
 Well, who's to tell me if you don't?"
 "Well, I'm not saying any more, so there. I've
 said too much already. But it was your attitude made
 me do so. I can tell you this much though: your sisters
 can't enlighten you either. So it's no use asking them.
 Now drink up your tea because I'm off for the outside
 again: Mary Ann's not like her mother with her litter;
 she's not letting tem suckle properly.
 Let's go and talk to her; she likes to be talked
 to. Wrap up again." She now lifted her hand and
 said "I can see by your face you're going to ask
 questions. Well, girl, it's no good. I'm not going
 to say anything more. I'm sorry now for what 've
 said. But I'll add this: your mother, as you know, paid me
 many visits when your grand-
 bar rwas alive, and we talked And some day I
 may Hbu what we talked about. But not today,
 or to
 w" or e next dav' so colne alog'
 Hpe followed the bustling little body out of the
 d dow the garden and into the animal enHave, where ie
 sow, with her twelve of a itter,
 abbing herself uneasily on the frozen ground as
 mgsters tried to find her teats.
 that' now, Mary Ann." said Mrs Annie.
 Lie still M bar that ihem have their feed. Now be a
 good giri." Bp her arm over the low wall but could
 not reach gs head so, without removing her arm, she
 "You try, Rosie." And Roie pushed up
 her
 l leant over the wall and quite easily laid her
 bi on the sow and began to talk to her, saying, B
 bar so the matter, Mary Ann? Got a pai in your
 um? Be a good girl now and let them have their
 hen the pig grunted, Mrs Annie smiled and
 said ggSo at it girl, she's answering. You might
 do more jjin the vet man can do, because I was thinkig of
 j bar ng him the day, although I hate paying him good
 jSoey for what I used to do myself, but seemingly
 lost roe touch latey. But she's talking to yo
 jj[*reg] she goes again. Ob and look they've

all got j8e. That's good. Is yor
back reaking?" posie muttered No, no. ril
stay like this until they bar their feed."
Punny if I had to call on you every time they
lated a suck" Mrs Anie said, then added on a
gigFrom I would have to go to the back door though, dn't
I? and say, please tell Miss Rosie
to hurry
up, Mary Ann's refusing to give her baims
their dinner."

Rosie's body shook and she muttered,
'Don't make me laugh, these bricks are sticking
in me; in another minute I'll be down there beside
her."

Wel, take your hand away now and see what she
does."

Slowly Rosie removed her hand and painfully
straightened up. Then they both stared down at the sow
who remained passive and allowed her litter to get
on wih the job. And Mrs Annie smiled and said
'I'll tell Robbie. He'll be pleased, because
he's bee worried about her. He tried all ways
yesterday to let her give them a full belly, but
she was no sooner down than she was up. Thanks,
lass."

"You're welcome, madam. That'll be
two and sixpence."

"Will you have it now or will you wait till you get
it?"

They tamed from the sty and went over to the cowshed where the
two cows were peacefully chewing their cud.

"I haven't let them out the day, the grass is
so stiff it would cut their throats."

In the yard once more Mrs Annie pointed to this
chickens trying to scratch the earth and said, "Oh,
I had to laugh, the young ones couldn't understand why they
couldn't mount he bank, they were sliding down on their
backsides. Some of them were persistent, and it was
funny. Robbie brought me out to see them. He
cleared the steps, but they won't take the steps,
they've been used to the grass."

Rosie looked towards the mound. It wasn't very
SyEither from the top of it, there was an amazing
Sthe surrounding country. lih. seemed to have sensed
her thoughts, for be saying now: hings will be standing out
SW-II up there, this morning. I can't under"...ity people
say that frost flattens everything; to be"ff it
brings things to life. It gives the land "tii
different again from when the snow's
j bar not go and take a look" Rosie said.

* His: on the uneven top, she shouted
 down, but it is different. It's beautiful.
 I've never seen this before. And away to the right the
 countrybbccless-than less-than pink not white; must
 be the sun slanting
 i way"
 turned about then cried, "Good gracious! I can
 Mount the chimneys and the roofs. That must
 IIS-YOU mree miles away." bei of that,"
 Mrs Annie called back to her. "Tis
 (uy hard and bright frost. Frosts are not all
 I you know. Nature's got her moods through
 sun,
 tSo rain. Oh yes, yes, she has." A?
 gracious! I can see Wallace's farm as if it
 almost next door. Good Lord! We never see it
 down below. I suppose the wood cuts it off."
 Have)!- kept her eyes on the farm. There was some
 she should remember about it. She could now Lliir.
 movement over there. Someone coming into iIddi" ...fSo, She
 was puzzled for a moment. That field
 5ff"...S their property hi fact if she
 wasn't misiLike it led to me wood. She shook her
 head, then beea(31 carefully down the cleared steps,
 and Mrs An-
 vie said, 'Come on back to the house and
 get warmed. Robbie should be here any minute."
 She had been about to follow Mrs Anie, but the
 mention of Robbie halted her. In some way he was
 associated with the earlier conversation of her wanting
 to leave this place and get married. And he had a
 habit of probing and questioning, and getting things out of her.
 He always had. She could hear him saying, "Come on
 you, Rosie Steel; I don't want any painted
 lies, varnished truth is what I deal with." And
 she could hear herself responding, "You think you are
 clever, Robbie Macintosh, because you read books.
 ell, anybody with any sense can pinch words and
 sayings out of books."
 No, she didn't want to meet Robbie this
 morning. She couldn't explain why. Yet, she had
 explained why he'd get to the bottom of what was
 worrying her. But what was worrying her? Oh, she
 answered herself, just living by herself next door now the
 girls ere gone. But she shouldn't say that: there was
 Beatrice and her father. Oh, let her get away.
 She'd go for a walk. And so she said, "No,
 I've got to get bac I think Beatrice wants
 some help... in fact, I don't think it I know
 it. She's house mad you know. Tere's the two

girls working like slaves, polishing polishing,
and she would have me going round with a duster. Can you
believe it?"

"Oh yes, I can, dear, of Mistress
Beatrice. For what I gather, she takes a
great pride in ruling the roost. I think Cook
has her belly full of her at times."

Rosie laughed at this and said "We all have our
bellies full of her at times, I can tell you.

Yet, at times

"I don't know how you feel for her, and in time
for her"

"No! - you are, dear. Of course you are. But for
if you're going to have that walk through I get yourself
away now. If you look up,

- the sky is changing. I shouldn't be a bit
to see snow, although we generally have a
frost like this, and then the snow. But of she laughed
since I've stopped running you've got out of
hand."

"All her gently on the shoulder and she,
*** too, said "I'll go out the top way, because
way I'm going to climb that wall this morning off those
stepping stones that Robbie's " give very precarious
footholds as they are. be such a good climber I
would have been before now."

"You. Likely," said Mrs Annie as she
accompanied the field gate leading to the road.
Rosie on the cheek, she stood for a moment her
until she disappeared through a , dark wood. And as
she did so she thought less-than - a lovely
woman, and she's jumping out of it. If only...oh,
if only...

"A beautiful in the wood. The path stretched on
"less-than a silver river for some distance, but then
32Like it was cut off by a great barrier of frozen

*c

was a silence all about her. It was deep and
even the sound of her footsteps
the ground did not intrude.

now passing a section of the wood where
lined out a side, with low scrub between

was

them, and under which, surprisingly, the earth was
bare of frost. be

She was brought to a sudden stop by a sight that widened
her mouth and brought a gleam to her eyes, and she
uttered two words, "Oh, lovely!" as she
turned swiftly to the object that had attracted
her. It was an unusually tall fungus that could have

been eight
inches high. She bent over it; then, as she had
seen
Robbie do, she sat back on her hunkers and
looked
at part of nature's bewildering beauty. It was a
fairy bar house. She hadn't seen one for some
years. Toad bar stools, oh yes, big ones,
fairies' umbrellas, they called bar them, but not
a fairy house. Her hand wavered to wards it, then
stopped. It was so delicate that likel bar the
slightest touch would push it over. She thought it j was
the biggest and the most beautiful fungus she had bar
ever seen.

From its round base there rose striped columns
sup porting its circular roof an enormous deep
pink um breUa all of six inches across. The
ridged supporting bar columns were either dark green
or cream in colou and the whole was surrounded by a
spiked fence of j
silver grass an inch or so high. bar
As a child she had always imagined such a house j
to be full of fairies and she used to talk to the j
telling them not to be afraid and that she wouldn tell
any of the others where their house was in case j they should
come and knock it down. She had a vagii
memory of a sister kicking one down and of hers
screaming at her and of her mother having to put I to bed with
hot milk and cinnamon. bar Reluctantly she
rose and stepped back from it, ing herself that once she
got home she would dra j
pTonight it. She would never forget this morning fc
beautiful, beautiful fairy house. It had lifted
his;, It was a delightful morning, oh such a
de'IT morning.

about her; then bendig over her fairy with the very last
trace of childhood that, nLike was to be torn from her,
a moment she y"...TITfflbbi for the rest of her
life, she said, "a dear people, until next
year," and straight: "JJ into what was to be the
full realisation was made up of bitter reality, and with
no

'ib *"" oto the rooted pathway, and from ?"
the distance, could make out a boy who . be acting
strangely. He had emerged from on the opposite
side and he was looking , "gg'jt"...a", just a few
yards ahead, the path again
JE-LIKE away out of sight. He had his head to
: as if listening.

Wt still; she was curious. Then her eyes

disless-than when the boy jumped from the path and
into were of the wood again and, at the same moment, A
striding round the bend. Her mouth now Ito a gape:
it... it was her father.

T couldnt be; he'd said he was going into "
As she had stood on the landing she had heard
S eatrice. But this was definitely her father.
another man like him.

on the point of going forward and hailing 'ii she
stiffened as the sound of snapping timthe silence. Then
she let out a scream as she isi" branch fall
across her father's path. The T sight had caused her
to screw up her face
and to close her and" and when she opened them shel
became aware of two things: the boy whom she kne
bar to be the Walla y was fast disappearing round bar
the bend with song trailing behind him, and than the branch
hadn" ross her father's path bt bar
directly onto hin bar She was now ing while
crying out wods

whic wee unintgble, but all bordering on,
"Help

When she reac T father she was unable to see his
face for blood she looked along the length of the bar
branch: it was this" ore like a tree itself. Oh, dear
bar God! What was h oing to do? She
looked about j her. And that boy. he might have gone
for help. No! bar no' What was s Udng? That
was a piece of rope j dragging behind m He had
been on the look-out bar for her father. Ob dear Lord!
She tried to lift one end be

of the branch, but success, all the while cry ing,
"Father! at1" hen, of a sudden she was flying back
te way she d come and yelling at the top be
of her voice, Roie! Robbie!" be

When she reai1 e road it was to see Char
Fenwick the coall1 l about to hump a sack
onto nis be
back from the dray cart and she yelled, Mr
Fenwic.

Mr Fenwick! Cofi qckly! Please! My
father's been hurt! A tree fell o0 hinl father's
been hurt!" bar

"What i it mis" iie two coaly hands
came o0 her shoulders. at "you say, your father's
bee hurt? Now, now, i" where is he?"

'In the wood! 1dg the wood! Please come!
He's all

blood!" * , Still keeping t101" of he, the
man tamed a" veiled "Mrs Anni1 s

Annie!" And when Mrs An'
i to the gate, she exclaimed, "Oh my the
matter, girl? Have you had a fa...?" ii finish
her sentence because the coalman his: her, saying, "She
says her father's been tree fell on him. He's
in the wood." It-nu him?"

Jjlggity Her eyes screwed up again, Rosie
was tes! Yes! Mrs Annie. He's all
blood" I conWi. it."

*P right girl, it's all right. Let me get
me coat. bar bar Charlie and let's go and see
what's hap-

?" reached the blood-covered prostrate figthe
branch Charlie Fenwick exclaimed, "Oh
What's happened here? Dear! Dear!" and he
*ness get this off him."

,ea.2i as gently as possible, they lifted the
enand broken branches away from the man's J bar
So seemingly reluctantly, Mrs Annie
knelt *) the frozen earth and after turning the head
, "...A too muttered, 'Oh my God!' Then
looking ."- said, here's a bit of a branch sticking
in bar bar do better not touch it. We'll have to get
the and... and some men from the house. I'll shout
- wall and get them. There's bound to be aiSo"
near," and turning to where Rosie was ,ness?
her hand across her mouth again and her i3So she said
Come, me dear. Come. Charlie Scomwith him. Come
on. Come on."

concci as if Rosie were rooted to the ground, s
nme to pull her away while repeating, bex- will stay
here with him. Come on now. Come
Rosie allowed herself to be led away. She felt
cold strange. She wanted to be sick, really
sick. Her chesggbar so heaving and she felt faint.
bar

Annie just managed to get her into the kitchen and bar
to the shallow stone sink into which she actually vom bar
ed, and she urged er: That's it, dear! Gt it upffbar
Then sit by the fire; I've got to get help. You
understand? You understand, girl? Well, do what I
say, sit bar by the fire.

Annie now went out of the house and to the wood shed,
where she grabbed a short ladder and, trailing bar it,
she mad her way to the wall. Prom the top rn bar
she could just see over the coping; and now, her voice
I as loud as she could make it, and that was very loud she
screamed, "Help! Help! Somebody come"

Help'i

Mr Steel's hurt in the wood." bar that was

Willie Connor who first heard her shout
H didn't know who it was, just that somebody was;
calling for help somewhere in the shrubbery at yon bar
end the garden. 1 When he reached the wall and saw
Annie's face
above it and heard what she was screaming at h said,
'Oh God in heaven! We'll be there.'
Her last words to him were, "Bring something him
on. And get the doctor." J
Rosie was still in Annie's kitchen, and she being
yelled at by Robbie, standing in front of he e
sat on the settle with Annies arm about her hoi
ing her tightly.
Annie loomed at her son and didn't interrupt
a day he was saying or check him for his manner, for
he was actually growling at Rosie. "Forget it".

*I Tw Wallace in the wood. You saw no
?"- wood. You were just going to meet your
Then the tree crashed down on him. "i
anyway, the whole branch was rotten. R he have
had anything to do with it?" that. did! I saw him
running. He was waiting he was waiting for Father.
I tell you, And he had something trailing behind. I
r? it was now, it was a rope. I tell you..."
tell me nothing, girl. Now listen to me,
Rosie your mouth and say that you saw the you're going
to cause such a sink in your r; you've never smelt
before. And you'll "it out of your nostrils."
"...dull??, to Annie now, saying, "He was
wait!". I saw him beforehand, he was waiting is
must have pulled that branch down jn. I tell you I
saw him. I..." had his hands on her shoulders
now. 'It's
hoodwinking you any more, miss, or letting your
eyes closed Very likely it was Jackie. L and
he had a reason, because you know It"" father had been?
He had just come back in bed with Jackie's mother.
Get that into : Listen!" He now caught her
face between "com and held it stiffly as he stared into her
eyes. IP" h J bn in bed with Jackie's
com That's where he often went, and the boy had be2" ... " ...r.
She supplied men when her poor man were' droving.
And all Jackie does is try to them off. He's
set fire to haystacks, he's left (ltd Like
he's done all kinds to frighten men off tJM.
But his mother is a whore. Do you know
what a whore is? You don't know what a whore
i do you? A whore is a loose woman who'll
let a man go with her for money, never for love, just

I money. And your father was a rotten man.
Ask MamI here. Your poor mother went through it for
years, but she had to put a face on it, to bring you
all up re spectable like, not looked down on as the
daughter of a woman-chaser." be
Now Rosie was struggling in his grasp, but he
did not let go of her. He was now holding her hands
as I he said 'allyou're going to sit there and come
to life, i come out of the little girl. I thought you had
whe you took up with fancy Mr Golding. But even
that didn't bring you into reality. Well, now you're in
it Your father was a stinker in every possible way. And
I'll tell you something else. Charlie Fenwick,
the coalman there, he wasn't delivering this morning,
not to your house, 'cos the bills haven't been paid for
bar months and months. Oh! That's opened your eyes
i more than the immorality has done. You can't
believe 1 it can you? He owes everybody in the
town. He's;
gambled and whored for years. Your grandfather paid bar
his debts just because of your mother. Then there was a point
when he, too, had to stop. He appeared to be a
jolly man, didn't he, your grandfather? Well,
let roe tell you, he had lived under a cover for
years, just to preserve something called class
respectability. Now greater-than now, my
girl, you mention Jackie Wallace's name an
all this will come out, and you'll have to live undr i And
do you think your fiance, Mr Golding, will big enough
to take it? He's in the Civil Servie, isn"
he? the Diplomatic side, and they're a very
snooty lot they are. They don't like scandals.
They may hav
bar bar Tf Obsession 77 "ijj themselves h,,
ti
ieTre like your wen concealed . wth anyth1 of them
be "g rather than have their class
s
and sghteningup,
remember that n " e" and as t trying to k
lad has 011 awae of tllgs frcm his Yet,
S but hes a goo is the of es in Wallace.
He A quiet years deserve her. And that
tolceepitfro11101111 and has her
visitors father'just by to Oh yes. he did managed
it with a lot leant back agt i bement arm went arSo
of ttle and
cold, right to the v dg g her close; but @.
never be wa vely heart of her she felt
1 she did be he eHeve

H feeling she had had expla*ind that
old f And now she reca some time about her bar that
made he w often her mother water she d
. passed her il lthe tilne that wallooked at
her. Sheh 1 and had laughed for her hat wasrt ought
she must be miTffT5i part of her straight and she
had bar 5t her father Mouse below her bs.
S suddenly she this oman ngaged herself from An-
therine oson
nie's hold and said, p bett . to me,
Robbie said, "All rihtp nce will as the
gate." He had ot adderi Isee you along as not
there to greet me any more Because your father'8

I rom the carbide lamp picked out only the
ay ahead as John pushed his bicycle slowly
" sr T T
l * e was tired. He'd had a long day; he
i from half-past eight when he took his
'yfsj" other person seemed to have either a , "
cold or bronchitis, among the minor ail""
n there had been the business of Steel. ItUs on
seven o'clock now and, following on
""*r- .l less-than -
" s afternoon, the ground was freezing l d llave
to watch out; he had almost skidded E11 a
little way back, and only his grabbing M1 had saved
him.
- his head as a swinging lantern appeared bar will of the
hill; and the bearer, when he comtti"" stopped and said,
hat you Doctor?" , hello, Mr Wallace.
It's going to be an-
" llace did not respond but said, 'allyou my
lad about, have you?" No. ell, what d'you mean?
Just lately, a of hours or so?"
y t greater-than less-than
the darie. He's been missing all day. I had
thou 'Hash would bring him back." bar "No been
playing truant?" bar so, bt -- He hasn't
been to school for a week f "Oh; is because he
wasn't feeling well." bar think of ow," John
put in. Yes, when I coe see, it vt I have
seen him. But it was... oh, letit bar by
Bisho t have been round about four o'clock ov. down the
Meadow. I wondered what he was doi old far"
Unless he was looking for stones from tht
wouldn'tl1 I l*1 telling myself, l "
didn't ti looking for wood because what the fin bar
"Bisho he children did." bar four o'cl Meadow?
Oh, thank you Doctor. Abotj

"Ye . his
 " t less-than *"
 long before ould be that. Has he ever been away his
 'ationo, ne I mean awav an day?" I he
 said, less-than That like' Never!" Dave
 Wallace paused befie j
 drove. I ven't been all that long back fro
 a:
 died. He comanother pause- 't Mr Steel
 has 'allyes. V hit by a falling tree, I
 understand." backslash you kno Quite a tragedy. A
 rotten branch. Wll;
 snap with * at they're like in this weather. They ca
 j
 place on esar of g l l The most dg10;
 frost there is in a wood when there's the kind o";
 "What tin s this morning." I "Oh, abo
 less-than iid it happen?" asked Dave
 Wallac. "And in " the middle of the morning."
 bar 'allyes. Ys. ood?" bar
 When t rlot far from your P1' the man tur as
 no response to this statement all j
 the swayi less-than 1 sharply away, John
 stood watchil bar antern, indicating that
 Wallace ba j
 tSB' which would take him into a field and
 3 Meadow. He wanted to say, "Hold your
 nii and I'll come along with you;" but he he was
 hungry. There came to his mind *" m tne
 P which had happened to fc visitors; or at least,
 to their property. bar "to TS been coing from the
 direction of the Sli" boy had been missing all
 day, and Dave a tormented man. It all seemed
 to link left-brace it was no surprise to himself when
 he " *; voice yell out, "Hold your hand a
 minute, I come along with you."
 iemoving the lamp from his bicycle he into te
 ditch, and jumped over it.
 Can'.. did not slacken his pace, but when n up
 with him, he said, here's no need,
 ptSiES-LII all the same." ITS
 to climb a stone wall to get into Bishop's .. and
 then they were walking down the gentle *iif"disww where
 the bumt-out farmhouse had ,E greater-than
 less-than they approached it, John raised his
 lamp
 l2 anc showed up a doorless scarred wall. of the
 roof had gone too, the slates likely "KIIK
 some other fanner's house. When he i down the
 lamp again, Dave Wallace had alEvery through the

opening, and John could see his face had revealed: the boy crouched (facing). He made no movement, but his eyes were wide, out of his head and his mouth was agape.

"In seconds they were both kneeling by his side. Wallace was saying, "It's all right, son. It's all right. It's all right. D'you hear? It's all right."

John now took one of the boy's wrists and began to check his pulse. The fingers were stiff and cold, and so he chafed the hands. The boy's face was as deadly pale, except for a blue tinge.

John said, "I...I didn't mean it Dad."

"It's all right, boy, it's all right. Don't talk." John said, "But he's...he's dead. I...I didn't mean it, Dad." John said, "I know you didn't; I know you didn't."

"Just... just to frighten... just to frighten him. But the branch was rotten. Wouldn't... wouldn't hurt. It's not... not really. Didn't mean it Dad." "Come along. Get up."

When they both now attempted to help the boy to his feet his legs buckled under him, so they laid him down again and began to rub the frozen limbs. John said, "I...I didn't mean it."

"Shh! Be quiet now. Be quiet. Your father knows you didn't mean it," John said. It was as if for the first time the boy had become aware of the doctor, for his mouth opened wide and he gasped, "Don't... don't take... don't take me away."

"Nobody's going to take you away. The only thing is" John was patting the boy's cheek now. "Listen to me. Don't talk about it. Do you hear? Don't talk about it. What did I say?"

John said, "D-d-do... don't talk... about it." John said, "That's right. Nobody knows but you..." John said, "Your dad doesn't know, and I don't know, only you, so don't talk about it. It was a rotten branch. Everybody knows that. Do you understand?"

"Don't... d-d-don't talk about it."

"Yes, Doctor. I was cold. I was cold for a long time, but I was cold."

John said, "I was cold for a long time, but I was cold."

John said,

"I'll be home, son. Come on now; get on."

John said,

"I'll"

John said, "I'll get him up again, but his legs still wobbled."

"I'll get him out of the derelict house, then. But"

ten minutes later when they reached the boy was walking unaided, although his back drooped and his breath came in short gasps. Dave Wallace pushed the cottage door open and John realised he was no longer the quiet FW-NOT led into the kitchen and there was his 'hn at one side of the table, and her head His?'" she said, 'So you've found him, have you? "be" trouble, as usual. And the doctor with him. il We have company this evenin", bar bar i we? What have we done to deserve this?'" " Wallace made a response to his wife's quip; "pKnowledge if he hadn't noticed her. But he guided his back John past the foot of the stairs in the middle "nii. and through a door into a bedroom. i* he thrust the lantern onto a low chest of drawers leading his son to the bed. i[. boy had been capable of saying anything he had remarked that this was his father and greater-than bed; but he wasn't and so allowed his father y! doctor to strip his clothes off him, then rub ,ea.gggreater-than with a rough towel before putting him away? bedclothes. jii.. in a low voice, John said, "I'll have to go ""Jf. the surgery; rie'll need some medicine," Dave ,:- said quietly, "Before you go, would you stay disfi'i for another five minutes? There's something 'allyes. Yes, Dave. Go on." Dave Wallace walked slowly from the room and closed the door behind him. Then, moving calmly to the table where his wife was still standing, and without saying a word, he drove his fist between her eyes; then as she fell back screaming, he gripped the front of her blouse, pulling her towards him until their breaths fanned each other. Then he growled, "You filthy, dirty, common slut! You're not fit to live. For two pence I'd send you along with him. You'd served him well afore the tree hit him. Well, better than the gun I was going to use on you both, for it saved me own neck. Now, you dirty whore, get up them stairs and get your fancy dubs together, and out. No waitin', no talkin it over this time. No promises. Out! Out It was his voice that was screaming now. He thrust her towards the stairs and, her back hitting the bannister post she almost slid to the floor. Then, her hand over her brow, she said, "You... you can't do this. I've nowhere to go." "What! You've nowhere to go? What about your

backslash clients? Their wives would
welcome you, especially Gladys Knowles. She
would tear the hair from your head if she knew that you had
started to serve him again. Now get up there before I
kick you up." foot went out as if he was about
to carry out his threat, and she stumbled up the stairs.
And he followed her.

Half the landing was taken up with a large cupboard,
the doors of which he pulled open, and from it he
dragged a twohandled canvas bag and threw it at
her feet, saying, here you are! Get your fancy
dibs into that, and what it doesn't hold you can hang
around your neck. But do it and do it now. And if
I look slipshod throw the window and
after the damned lot his by "S for a moment
defiant, she said, "Big fellow all
less-than bottom lip

1: before time," he yelled a less-than a
sudden." disl So- before time. If there's an er-
'ationo, by

In this world, it's been Godly been a This
time he did lift his foot every. Now get %
saying, "I'm going OUT, kicked at
TT." only giving" dis W she now grabbed
up blouse

as she went to get skirts and it
lower shelf she said, The balance oddments "ifffl:
me bits and pieces from do already furnished es, your its
and pieces. Yostairs." and your powders. Oh,
you'll cheap crack

3*1 need 'em in your trade." get those
all it! stairs, and from the back of the And he leapt
"ea" ...5t a bass bag and rushed into kitchen door
3f., on the chest of drawers he the bedroom.
and with a curved arm, he swept to one boxes into the
bag. Then he pulled a number of and tipped P
its contents into I open the top jacket this John
had not turned the bag. he was chafing the boy's
limbs on the bed, . of the woman's voice yelling
However, he I back on you, Dave Wallace,
get the bar for what's more. I haven't any
now you'll see. *2"...K: he pay you this morning?
Geioney His

3 So God I'll do for That you" are out!
Get out! ,door being banged closed. as the sound
it- Wallace did not return immediately less-than
S2i Like for he it as if he had just immediately to the
converged from
alone he fine Cookson backslash
Isicabatti backslash may be. instead, he

slumped against
and found to his chest; and so he
the right things. But the minutes were long
in the back of his
shook toward -- the bedroom door. then across
boy he *In And he put his hand on I'll
you longful Come on; sit on the bed. That bar
wanna hear' S or you. And
hot that be back shortly. Just keep him
D, shift in the bed and give him a bar all over
backslash
put himself to the Qo WOT-DO of but J!
to him to be led to the bed. And there he were
It found his son and brought his face up bar ve
en That an hour later when John fell to His
**ity
that 'shoes still at the side of the fan
In is an It was evident;
longful n * His
it was because of the fresh fall of snow
I had been so sparsely attended. Very few
not. returned to the house, but what was to the family was
the presence of four very gentlemen who were known to them
drank the much wine and seemed to enjoy
that was provided. It was four o'clock in the afternoon.
The
@n fire. heaped with logs, was burning . The
gas chandelier filled the room with light,
[*regg'l. no such illumination was registered on
the I the small assembled company. There was
Be*% her skin taking on the patina of
alabaster her heavy black garb, her eyes
wide-stretched tightly closed. Then there was
Helen, tall and more elegant than ever in her
mourning
Next to her sat her military looking husband
lastly there was Rosie. She was not sitting up in
her chair as were the others, but leaning
to side. her head resting on her hand, her elbow
on arm of the chair. And she did not raise her
head when the solicitor, Mr Coulson of
Coulson, Pratt and Sanders, who was sitting behind the
sofa table, said, "There is little to read as there are no
bequests, but just a simple letter. Your father left no
will." He was looking straight at Beatrice now.
"There had been a will of sorts, but that was before your mother
died. After he mortgaged the house..."
"What?" Beatrice was sitting on the edge of
her chair now. "What did you say?"
"I said, Miss Steel, after your father

mortgaged the house, and I may add,
although there is no will to read, there's a great deal to be
told."

"Mortgaged the house? This house isn't
mortgaged."

The solicitor's sigh was audible to all of them and
patiently now, his eyes still on Beatrice, he
said, his house, Miss Steel, is mortgaged to an
amount of ten thousand pounds. That is a great deal of
money. But the security for it did not rest with the house
alone. Numerous articles in it had to act as
security, including a number of the pictures which are
listed here." He tapped a document on his desk.
'I've pictures ill all, I think, which he
imagined were of great value. But only two were
authentic, one a Boucher. Unfortunately, the
Rembrandt was a copy."

His words were checked by Beatrice, who also
screamed at him, "What are you talking about?"

"Be quiet! for a moment, Beatrice," put in
Helen. Beatrice tamed on her now and yelled,
"It's all right for you, since there you're po-faced! You're
out of it nicely out of it; I'm left with all the
responsibility" and here I'm being told..."

"Do you wish me to continue Miss Steel? Or
shall

it be matter to one of my partners, and you can greater-than
That- office?"

... bowed her head for a moment, her knuck,
white where her hands were gripping and pressing a dent
into her black skirt. In silence in the room before
Mr Coulson he addressed: "I will now read this
private letter. More: know its contents; I only know that
the

gentleman" whom he seemed to stress the last left
it in our care to be opened after his
He let out a single page, fast it
for a few seconds before he raised and looked from one
to the other of the small

beabbbB

Since now voice ne

*i *ful- my estate to my eldest

*i.. Beatrice Steel, and express that she
find some means of
I'll it.

Signed, Simon Arthur Steel

"When assembled were all looking towards Beatrice
(Miss Rosie had straightened herself up. Belips were
no longer set in a line, her mouth ycc"...if and
shutting like hat of a gasping fish. Miss Leonard

Morton Spears who broke the si, His
 voice too was quiet, and he looked at the disW
 disand said, "What is the income?"
 *is little, sir, very hide. In fact, it's
 negligible
 f not! It's not!" Beatrice was shouting again.
 gf Catherine Cookson backslash
 here a bonds, securities; Pther received *
 I terest every quarter."
 "Your father Miss Steel, had for the last six
 onrtj be received a oan torn a company that charges
 exori I bitant interest rates. The bank had
 not allowed hmeabar I second mortgage, and he was
 reduced to bonog I 'But Mama's bonds, and
 investments, and..." bar bar Her voice now
 trailed away to a whisper, and the solicitor, with
 pity in his eyes and his voic, said "Your mama
 I'm sorry to say, Miss Steel, had to sell
 I a number dg er interests and bonds to meet-"
 h bar paused here, swallowed, then glanced at the
 othes I bar before adding, "your father's debts."
 S
 It was in a whimper that Bearice asked, "B..
 disb what debts? He only went to Newcastle
 to his cub bar twice r three times a week, an
 very rarely to Lonl
 I don." i "You don't need to travel far
 Miss, to spend bar
 thousands of pounds when youre addicted to gain bar
 bung." I
 "Father addicted to...?" Now Beatrice
 turned ap pealingly to Helen; then her eyes lifted
 to the man at bar her sister's side. But neither of them
 could find any- bar thing to ay to comfort her.
 Beatrice was looking at the solicitor again and
 s said, "Heh could not have lost all that money on
 gambling; he... he must have Won sometimes. He
 must."
 "Yes. Yes, he won at times, a little. But
 from what I gather, that was only an incentive to lay
 on or money, sometimes hundreds."
 Then the company was startled by Rosie's words stabbing
 like a wasp's sting: "And then there were hi
 laSa there were his women. You know 'fithat do you?"
 " rose from her chair and went to Rosie an arm
 around her shoulders, she said ip Rosie, please!"
 Miv she got, No, Helen! Let it an come
 S5fc) is too polite. And ll tell you
 somes Beatrice. The morning he died he had just
 one dg Is y e of them. to pay them, hadn't

he? And you had to
two pounds out of the housekeeping
were on the letter-leet now
like.. you're insane, girl, insane!"
espoused to this remark for a moment. sitting down again
almost with a sigh. No, Miss Steel; regrettably
she is right. too polite to put it as boldly as
she has. IsL'n- and land is in the state it is
today because of late father's weaknesses." His voice
becoming

JW said now There is one small item of
business discussed, but it is important. So will you
be seated." He now drew toward himself a
dishtowel of sheets of paper which had been lying
aside, and tapping them, he said, here are due standing
bills, not only from the local shop but
certain... we'll call them gentlemen if- here
today. Two are directors of the loan t--
greater-than the others are from a gambling syndicate.
demands are substantial. But there is a
little. As there is no money in the estate, I
don't either, legally, these men can call upon you
for your father's debts. I'll have to look into this.

I

The interest on their money alone will take some find
for +. To that, I'm afraid, has to be
added the interest for on the mortgage. If I may
advise you, and if there is any possible way you
can manage it, I would see to for the local
debts immediately; and also think about reducing your
staff. Consider too what you intend to do for with the
property, because, as I see it from here, it
left-branch will be impossible for you to continue living
here;

under the conditions I have stated." I

As he picked up a leather case and began
to return for the papers to it, Leonard Morton
Spears said, 'Leave for the bills for the local
debts, I shall see to those.'

Oh, that is kind of you, sir. And...and you know for
there is still hope. There is still something you can for
do." He was now looking across the table at
Beatrice who was staring at the floor. You still have
about fifty acres of land here, some of it unused,
I should imagine; well, I mean, it's just rough
woodland. I for think you should sleep on the idea of
selling a strip of it. You can get a good price for
building land less-than 1 to backslash day; that
is, for good-class houses. I'm sure the bank would
support you in this." " Beatrice's head came

up. Sell the lad? Father be
 would never..." bar
 "Shut up!" Again they were looking at Rosie,
 UD- J believing now, as she went on,
 "Don't bring P what bar Father would do and what
 he wouldn't do. To vj mind and everybody else's,
 he's done ore than enough, and he's hoodwinked us
 for years- And from what I understand he led Mother a
 terrible life."
 Helen now took Rosie by the shoulder and forceO
 her towards the doors. "Come along, dear! All
 rigt all right! Be quiet now, be quiet!"
 j mouth was again agape. Rosie. How v dare
 she! It didn't matter what ather she had no right
 to speak to her in public it had no right! She had no
 right!
 f: voice had yelled at her from inside Shut
 SSS' stopped, then sat down heavily.
 be"...icrBut backslash backslash went to her,
 put a hand on her and said Try not to take it too
 badly, BeI'M things happen. They'll work out
 though, i. they'll work out. We'll do what we can."
 n have raised her head and thanked him, .iff
 couldn't. He and Helen: he doted on ISSS-YOU.
 Life was unfair. Oh, how unfair it
 got up and left the room without even a
 nod te solicitor. And now Leonard turned
 to Mr you. saying, "It's a dreadful business.
 He really
 be utter swlne 've known it for some time. But bar
 less-than talk about such things, not to womenfolk,
 disliSo his daughters. Are things indeed so black?"
 SL from my point f view, sir, they could not
 Just' What should happen is that the house and i be
 sold, and what is left after the bank
 ii paid, would, I imagine, enable Miss Steel
 to , little place of her own. But I can see that it
 * be quite impossible. Oh yes, yes."
 isj. nodded at the man, saying, 'My wife's
 " said that Beatrice had an obsession with this which is
 why she always expects to be adas Beatrice
 Penrose-Steel. Even as a child, it a' to be a
 place for everything and everything in beM-. She used
 to be what they call the little be but now she's an
 infuriated woman. And the
 hardest part for her, I'm sure, will be to accept
 fc bar father's revealed character, because, in a way, frm
 bar the little I have seen of both of them. they were vey bar
 alie under the skin, except of course, orally;
 "Yes, of course, except morally. Well

now, sir, I bar will make my way
home. The rest of the business * will have to be attended
to at my office." *

As he rose to his feet and took up his case,
he said, *

John Leonard thought it was a most strange remark
to make. But he had to agree that it had not
been a happy

John to Helen who was standing near the foot of John
d, She'll sleep for a good twelve lope. What
brought this on'

oved from the bed towards the window and
wered T thinly falling snow before swerved, The
disclosure of my father's mis-

r

that a large number of local tradesmen;
one owing to fellow gamblers and to money
J's who bitant interest. And he left no
dignity at all?"

only a letter. Very brief, two lines
to Beatrice " not repeat what the two of them were,
because need so incredible in their subtle demand for e
to clear up the impossible situation he had
greater-than do that caused Rosie to become
hysterical? His look of incredulity and she
turned to him

of just that: she seemed to have been of all his
misdeeds before the solicitor brought
them into the open. And it wasn't just the none
alone." She walked past him now towards the door
and he stopped her opening it by saying quietly 'Well,
his liaisons were not only public knowledge but food
for parlour jokes, so I understand." He was I
standing close behind her now when she swung round
back to him and, in a low voice,
exclaimed, "I don't know how she got
to know this. Nor do I understand why left-behind we
were kept in the dark so long, because, apparently bar
my mother suffered at his hands, too. Yet looking I
back, it seemed to be a happy house. There was
all ways so much gaiety among us girls, and with
* mother too... Yes, that is strange, for she
alone seemed to set the tone of our lives: she
kept us happy bar and it wasn't until she died
that things changed, when bar one by one we expressed
our desire to leave the :

house; except, that is, for Beatrice. Marion
got away I at the same time as I did. She's
in India now, you bar know, with her husband." He
made no comment but kept his eyes fixed on her

her face as she went on, "And
 Rosie's going. She backslash won't be able
 to get away quickly enough from no J on." She moved
 her hand slightly in order to look
 towards the bed and sadly now, she added, "She was
 be
 the happiest of us all. A tomboy, a
 chatterbox. Never be
 still. But I was amazed at the change I saw in
 her backslash when we arrived three days ago.
 She acted strangely, on the point of tears all
 the time and didn't want to talk. But now we know the
 reason why. What is more, she must have been very
 unhappy for some time. This I gauged from her letters."
 "Are you happy?"
 *What?"
 was you happy?"
 iff" ...iMore- his deep, piercing look for a moment I
 said slowly, "Yes, I am very happy. I...I
 Wi husband. He is a lovely man... a
 U;: held until the movement she made
 to SiSo" me oor caused him to step back. And
 yTT-TITI words he followed her out and onto
 Jand down the stairs, to where Leonard for them and said
 to her, "Teddy's just " Golding. He couldn't
 get here for the lie felt he had to come and
 pay his recc"s more, he has to be off again this
 eveis she? Can he see her for a moment?" w
 addressing John. And John shook his d,
 "I've had to sedate her; she was near *i
 ne'll be all right tomorrow morning, but to keep her
 quiet for a day or two until she j*i the
 shock."
 ,i)- is Teddy?" Helen asked her husband.
 - has him in the drawing-room. We'd better
 S. and see him, dear, to explain things, because I
 iift; Beatrice is in a condition to entertain anythe
 moment, unless it is through blurting out iggw and blaming
 the world for her father's ji"disiri' He now turned
 to John, saying, "I'm sure coud do with a cup of
 tea or something before was out into that" comhe jerked his head
 back to the window. "It's getting thicker. Come
 into E32""*- there's a fire there and the girls will
 bring
 P"...@l hot drink' "n hesitated to follow
 him; in fact he was about
 to make an excuse that a patient was awaitin
 hij when he caught Helen's eye: it was as if she
 wa bar saying, 'Please be friendly. He's a
 lovely.. 3less-than mi bar man. bar

A few minutes later he was seated in a deep eather chair on the opposite side of the fireplace from eo"bar ard, although he found it impossible to open the con versation. Then there was no need, for the tall, ood looking soldier rose from his chair, saying on a laugh I asked if you'd like a hot drink then forgot to ring bar for it." He now pulled a cord to the side of the nre bar place before sitting down again and saying, "We've. never really met have we? Wat I mean is, weve never had the chance to talk. Yet, through Hele I seem to know a ot about you."

He found himself repeating inanely, "Through Helen?"

es. Yes, she thinks you're a splendid doctor wi bar the right personality and all that goes to make... well, not exactly the bedside manner, but the sort of fellow who gives a patient confidence and assures him he's not going to die from a tickly cough." They bot laughed, somewhat embarrassed now.

After a short silence Leonard said, 'I suppose it s stupid to ask why you went in for doctoring? No; take that back, because I know only too well wb some of you go into it for, especially the surgeon just for the money. Here and there you get one wb0 sees it as a vocation, a duty to mankind. And this l's le type we seem to get in the country."

You talk as if you'd had great experience w doctors."

'allyes. Yes, I have, unfortunately."

bar bar The Obsession 3 Ts eyebrows moved up slightly. "You've

* I on, the usual things that one picks up 'S5 malaria, fevers, this and that. But I've lw treat men like cattle, while others, jp have fallen asleep across the foot of

J* ('oe But I have a good one now." iWill' long have you been in the Army?"

I s eighteen."

Jl!" gg together as John said, 'I take **'dlere is a love i11 between you."

rSjSS, definitely. Add a little hate here and you'd be nearer the truth. I asked you why 11 doctoring. You didn't give me a reply.

*SS if it was the same way I got into the yae y father had been in it and you feel fonow in father's footsteps. Was your father

A* "dg was a stonemason."

stonemason?"

bar Ea a stonemason. He should have been called a lo because he could do anything with stone. But seed happy unless he was hanging on by ,1 to a church tower, when he was replacing a " dg e or a gargoyle, or adding to a coping "be manner it had been worked two hundreds years *s11"

the door opened and Janie Bluett entered the IL Leonard said to her, "Do you think we could ,coma tray of tea, Janie, with a few eats too?" He S thls a confidential, loud whisper, and she ia at as she said, "Of course, Mr Spears, and s of a lamb's tail."

The lamb's tail took five minutes over its shakin @. but then Janie brought in a large tray holding a tea i service, and behind her, Frances Middleton carried a I tray on which was an assortment of scones and bis- @. cuits. j

After Leonard had thanked them both warmly, John left-brace smiled at him as he said "With regard to a bedside t manner I am often accused of being too brusque, as I know I am with lead-swingers." I

Leonard was about to take the cosy from the teapot when he stopped and said, I hated my father at one time for encouraging me into the Army, but the day I got into my uniform he gave me a piece of advice:

"You'll see men," he said, "kicked around from dog to devil by their superiors. The bigger the bully, the louder the mouth, and the more hate they engender. Be firm. Don't be familiar with men out of your class;

that is the way to lose their respect. But when you deal with them, deal with them fairly, remembering they are human beings. Remember that but for my position, and my father's, and his father's, you could today be one of them."

I learnt more rom that little speech than from all my years at public school, and from the floggings."

He now pointed to the tray of food: 'See what it's done for us in this case."

John sat looking at him. He was a likeable fellow;

there was no doubt about it. And Helen saw hi s a lovely man. It was a term Rosie had a habit of using too; at least she had up to now.

He was the kind of man a woman would find very attractive. But did Helen love him? She said she was happy. But it would be a very odd woman who

couldn't be happy like a man like this.
, point the door opened again, and when, Leonard
cried, See! one can't get here, for But he
put down the teapot and with his arm about her shoulder he
had vacated near the fire. Then, looking
to the other, he said, "Oh, this is nice. It
from the war zone. SO-BSERVED them he wondered why
he was there and listen to this fellow whom she had
envied and, indeed at times hated.

81 So it is

sat behind the desk in her study. Spread out in were
papers of all shapes and sizes. She had her
elbow on the desk and cupped the side of her head
and stared at the glass cabinet across the while
telling herself there was nothing to do as the
solicitor had advised: she must was of the land; perhaps
as much as twenty times prices were now it would realise
enough to "interest on the mortgage and clear the
debts her father had accumulated; or at least
the one in loan company. The gambling debt was
quite a matter of honour, Mr Coulson had
called. TTS also suggested that she cut down her
staff, but she had stood out firmly against that: the
staff represented prestige, and that was all she
house and its prestige, and she was going to let it
be. Oh, yes; yes, she was.

- began to look through the bills again. Leonard
had a number of them straight away. But since
others had come flooding in, all back debts were
two amongst them that caused her teeth

*.i

almost to draw blood from her lips, for they from a
fashionable shop in Newcastle. Two separate
bills for ladies' gowns, and they were dated six
months previous. Although she knew she had inherited
many of her father's traits, had he been here
less than half this moment she would have done him a
physical injury: she could see him standing at
your side of the desk and hear his voice saying,
"You know, you are rather extravagant regarding the
housekeeping bills but you'll have to learn how
to manage better." So

Over the past weeks she had learned a further
hard lesson: so-called friends backed discreetly
away from her the word "scandal" and all that was
attached to it. So she was now well known in the
vicinity that her father had left no will, but instead
a mountain of debt. On top of this, what the
solicitor was kind enough to call;
his weaknesses had also been exposed, proof of which

had straightaway shown itself when Dave Wallace's wife arrived at the inn in a very dishevelled state and with two rising black eyes. She now sat back in the chair. The house was very quiet: she was alone; she did not consider the staff as occupying the house.

Rosie had gone to Newcastle, there to meet Edward Golding, who had come up from London to do business. He would be here for two days. Apparently, had something special to say to Rosie, probably about the post he was hoping to get in Newcastle and where they would live.

Something had happened to Rosie since she had been made aware of the real nature of her father. Although she herself was shocked and sickened by it had not affected her to the same extent. But then, of

it was always child-like and would never reach life.

Ary-fairy was the word for her. But

Beatrice was glad that when she came to her she would be living near at hand, because "If only she would feel isolated altogether. And, so? her light character, she was fond of her; in fact, more than she did either Marion or, like yes, Helen got on her nerves, and that of hers too. Yes...

yes, he had been kind about bills, but then he had plenty of money to do so. Yet she had

earlier understood rich man. Oh, there were different

degrees. But Helen herself: oh no, she

couldn't dislodge So never could. There was that something which gave off the impression that she was (less-than) beautiful. Perhaps it was just because she was taller and good-looking. But, nevertheless, there was something that got under her skin and irritated her

Just as they met

I was a tap on the door and she called, "Enter!" Immediately Middleton came in carrying a silver salver, "Second post, miss."

There." Beatrice pointed to a corner of the

She gave the girl no thanks but went on

Just a while later and with some reluctance that she

opened the letters. The first one, she knew, was an-

5f bill combined with special envelopes.

She had come

to find that. But the second envelope she scrutinized carefully. Before reaching here it had

been delivered to two other addresses. She slit

open the envelope and saw immediately, from the heading,

*1 it was from a firm of solicitors. It began:

Dear Colonel Steel,

Swiftly now she looked back at the

envelope. It was addressed to Colonel Steel,

not to her father, but b" ...ful her grandfather She
went on reading. bar
bar

I have to inform you, sir, that your sister, Alice bar
Benton Forester, died on the 17th February, at
bar the amazing age of ninetyeight. We have had bar
difficulty in tracing your address, as the only I
thing she seemed to have remembered was your 1 name. She
left no will, and the annuity that kept bar her in he
home, of course, died with her. Her j
possessions were few: a bracelet and a pendant 4
neither of which is of great value. But I will send were
mem on to you, if you so wish. bar

I met the lady on a few occasions but that was bar
some years ago. She appeared to be a gentle bar
creature, as apparently she did to the nursing bar
home staff, who informed me that her records bar
showed that her illness had changed since she was forty
years old when her previous high spirits and
hysterical outbursts, during which her one desire
seemed to be to disrobe, and her fits, too, had
gradually diminished. Apparently she had been a
favourite among the staff.

She is being buried in the local cemetery and, as
it is not expected you will be able to attend I shall
follow your orders as to what is to be done
with the few trinkets. I await your reply.

Yours respectfully Thomas Harding
be flicked to the top of the page to read:
r Bright Solicitors". There was aPahnouth
down and to the side f the page.

1":. somebody who could leave them only bar 33
she thrust the letter away from her in disbar bar was was the
Aunt Ally of whom the family r grandmother would
talk and to grandfather would make the long journey
l

-

piTS her head to the side as her mind dis-
l repeated the word "disrobe". Well, they
J teir few trinkets. She wasnt going to
* letter, she had enough on her mind without anything more,
because the ext thing she (* would be a bill for the
funeral. She knew His,, She had had enough of them with
Mr Coull.t were supposed to be helpful and
arjPS business, but all he could advise was that t
the land. Then, of course there had been the
l from Helen, at she could let off the annexe,
was really a separate house. Well, let her
take dis'n advice and take lodgers into her home.
l she rose from her seat declaring, 'I can "com no

more today," and marched out of the room. the
hall, she hesitated. She had intended to go 'l
drawing-room, but coming from there was a ap sound, telling
her that one or other of the girls 'at work. So she
went upstairs. On the anding she ," paused and
peered over the balcony and down , te hall. How
was it that the house seemed so today? Likely it was because
Rosie was away. would she do when Rosie was
married? Of

- she could be living nearby, but that wasn't the
same as living in the house. Still it was preferable
Marion's choice, to go to India, and Helen's to li
in Hampshire. Of course, Helen would choose
thais place in order to live near her husband's
titled cousin Her reason had been that all the men
liked sailing.ea1 And she liked to be among the men,
didn't she? bar

She entered her bedroom and going straight to bar
side table she lifted the lid of a box of
chocolates bar picked one out and put it in her
mouth. And as she bar went to turn away she
hesitated, then grabbed upeathe i box and went to the
seat by the window, where she bar ate one chocolate after
another. Whenever she felt I distressed there was a
feeling in her to eat something bar sweet, and as far
back as she could remember choc olates
had been a source of comfort. bar Suddenly she
stopped chewing and pushed the box right-brace away.
She wished Rosie was back. bar She looked around
the room Everything was shi ing; but the sight brought no
satisfaction to her pres j ent mood, for this was
new and somewhat strange:

she had never imagined she needed people. She had always
kept her distance from company; chatter and laughter
irritated her.

She turned to look out of the window again: te rooks
were making their nightly journey home. She was on
her feet now. She hated rooks and their constant
cawing. She'd take the gun out tomorrow. Although her aim
was never as good as her father's, se was always able to account
for a few of them. B111 the last time they moved their
nests they picked on tree that was nearer still to the
house.

The sound of the front door being banged turned her
about, and she almost ran out of the room a11
Swi to see Rosie drawing the pins from she
approached her, saying, "Oh, you

fei not" comRosie was smiling widely- "I
iw bus from the station and walked the lovely." As she

pulled off her coat she "bar [be love
 a cup of tea, Beatrice." J 01 It now
 Come along to the little sittinggirls are giving the
 drawing-room a tum-
 less-than i. flopped down onto the sofa,
 Beatrice iWill you have a nice meal with Teddy?" ,
 wonderful. I've got news for you. Come .""
 here." Rosie patted the sofa cushion near i
 when Beatrice was seated beside her, she
 l her hand and said, 'I'm so excited," and she
 M head before she went on, "I can't believe
 *" believe it: I ay be going to America."
 -; a long pause, Beatrice said, 'What?
 Amer; eyes were screwed up as if she were enti
 greater-than 'i to imagine he distance to America. ,
 Yes, America. You know Teddy was going the opening
 in Newcastle, but he was called bar people Majesty"
 comshe napped her hand- "that's ,r calls the head
 one. Well, he is a very imporyf and as Teddy
 said you don't always get EandAs unless you're going
 to get pulled over sSS which he had thought was going
 to happen In She giggled now. 'And what do you think?
 """ to ask if he'd like to go to America.
 Apparently their men over there collapsed and died."
 The a went from her face as she added, "He was
 only i" ...i man, and... and unmarried.
 And that's the
 106 Catherine Cookson I
 point" comher face had lost its beam- "that's the
 poit right-brace They like their young men to go out there
 unmarried but they do make exceptions, and before Teddy
 r bar it to them he wanted to be sure I would
 marry him." bar
 Rosie bit on her lip to stop herself om grinning
 bar widely. "He's staying over in Newcastle
 for two or bar three days because he's coming to see you.
 Well, a l ther being gone, he would like to ask your
 permission bar as be would have done of Father. He's very
 proper, H is Teddy, even though he's so young.
 Well, not so m young, being twenty-four. He's
 staying at the George Inn and he would like us to go there
 to dinner the bar night before he leaves. Oh" comshe
 closed her eyes l tightly and hugged herself- Tm
 so happy I could * burst. America!
 Aerica!" Suddenly opening her eyes bar she
 looked at her sister, then said 'allyou're not pleased
 bar for me? I know, I know it's awful leaving you.
 We bar shall ave all left home then, but... but
 you must un- j derstand. I've been very unhappy
 lately, since... since j ather's business, and

to be able to get away..." She j was now
gripping both of Beatrice's hands: You could come out
there for a hoiday. It's easy now; the boats are so
quick. It only takes eight days, and you've never
been away from here. None of us have. Well,
Marion's now in India, and that's marvellous. In
her last letter she said it was simply out of tis
worid. But you still have Helen near at hand. She'll
visit you if you'll let her." She now drew the
hands within hers to her breast and held them there.
'allyou've never got on very well with Helen, but if
you'd only try, Beatrice. She's so nice. And
she thinks about you, she's concerned for you. She told
me so." Beatrice practically tore her hands from
the gentle

...,-. she was now on her feet looking down at
S saying, "I don't want any condescension
Si or from anyone else. Noone need be conr me;
I can see to myself. As for you and *"; you've thrown
at me: going to America! thinking about me, are you?
I'll be left

7 my own, but that doesn't matter. No, it "
She tued towards the fire now. 'I still have La and..
disand that's all that matters to me. Un-
3* that, having the house and being able to keep i as
she spoke she knew that it wasn't all that
to her at the moment: she needed company, "i
Rosie. Of course, she wanted the house. me
main thing in her life, but she wanted to
y comfort with... well not just anybody, but piit-
of them who had grown up in this house bar nSo
appreciate it and love it, and foster it, as
bebar Bi had almost thought, as her father had done.
II-LT didn't want to think about her father these
*

'r- was standing beside her now, her voice
li. 'allyou'll see him won't you, tomorrow af-
- He said it would be tomorrow afternoon." Yes, of
course I'll see him. In any case, as
, stand legally, I'm your guardian, I could ob-
ji you wouldn't do that, would you, Beatrice?
i know how I want to get away."
bar bar not why? Why? This is your home."
" now almost jumped back from Beatrice as
cried 'It isn't my home! I don't look
upon it as
L greater-than iHi any longer. To tell you the
truth, I'm much
, at home yon side of the wall."
"Oh, yes, yes; I can almost believe that with that

bar common pigbreeder and his mo-" bar
 "Don't you dare call him a common
 pig-breeder! If bar ever there was a real farmer, he
 is one. Only he hasn't I got enough land. Now
 if he had this" comshe swung I her arm wide-
 "you would see what he could make I of it!"
 Beatrice was staring at her wideeyed now: she was
 his looking at a young woman, no vestige of the child or
 bar the girl here; no-one she could dominate any
 longer, bar and that was a necessity as much as was the need
 for company. Although she might not have been aware of it
 she needed to use her questionable power on someone.
 As Rosie marched down the room her voice was still
 loudly indignant: "I'm going to America and
 there's nothing you can do about it." bar
 Her left arm thrust out her hand gripping the man-
 bar telpiece, Beatrice became taut as she
 thought, No, bar there was nothing she could do about it.
 Then, her bar whole body slumping, she dropped
 onto the couch be
 again and her hands covering her face, she groaned
 aloud. She had the unusual desire to cry.
 She straightened up, wiped her face with her
 handkerchief, then took in a number of deep breaths
 which seemed to signify resignation to the events that were
 about to happen...
 Te minutes later, in her study, she set about
 busily tidying her desk. The last thing she did was
 pick up a number of opened letters that she had not yet
 answered and tap them into tidy formation. It was as se
 did so her eyes fell on the letter she had received
 JpiRather solicitor, telling of the death of that
 unknown
 %greater-than in the nursing home.
 * was well acquainted with quotations from the days:
 A stitch in times saves nine. Big oaks tr
 acos grow. Her eyes remained riveted on jp:
 as her mind quoted, Desperate situations f".
 desperate remedies.
 now lifted the sheet from the rest and read the lffA,
 her eyes dwelling on the words:
 high spirits and hysterical outbursts "ta!" her one
 desire seemed to be to disrobe
 P herfits'
 * she had her fingers spread flat over the letter as
 "iwere pressing it into the table. She ooked back
 that. young sister's life. There was a thread there.
 ,SS2Y tere was a thread there. She wouldn't be
 She now grabbed up the letter, folded it, until she
 found its envelope, which she had I into the waste-paper

basket, then stood up, "n" she took
 in three long breaths, but for a i reason now.
 " Jvosie was sitting at one side of
 Annie's table. Annie
 was facing her and Robbie was standing behind his mother, his hand
 on the back of her chair. They were both staring at
 Rosie as Annie repeated, "America?"
 "Yes. Isn't it marvellous! Oh, please,
 please" comshe put her hand out across the table towards
 them- "don't say "it's a long way away" and
 "we're going to miss you", because you won't miss me
 half as much as I shall miss you. But I... I
 want to get away." The last words had been
 spoken in almost a whisper and, her voice still low, she
 said, "And soehow this seems to be an answer to my
 prayer. I don't just want to go into the next town,
 or Newcastle, or Durham, I want to get
 away, miles away, from that house." "What
 does Beatrice say about this?" "Oh, she was up
 in ais and threatened that she could stop me going, because
 I'm not yet twenty-one. But now I think she's
 accepted it. Teddy's coming to tea at three o'clock and
 I heard her ordering Cook to make some dainties
 which" comshe smiled now waly- "pointed to the fact that
 she wasn't just going
 The Obsession ji
 iUs with "good-afternoon", and "goodbye". rit-
 into Newcastle to see her solicitor about the land.
 It's the only thing she can do if she "*" keep the
 house going. But she said she'd be *?! one o'clock.
 I'm all churned up inside IT-RFRather And
 oh-" she glanced up towards Rob iji "don't
 look at me like that. Please! I shall 'w. to leave
 you. I shall, for you mean so ar to me. I mean, you both
 do. Without you these be5 I think I would have done something
 des"...Tffbackslash was even asked Jimmy
 Oldham to marry Ip's only about forty. But then
 they would have P* nother yard man. Still, he's always
 been
 : up! Stop talking like a town slut!" ?"
 gazed openmouthed to where Robbie was "iif out of the
 kitchen; then she turned to his ""Si"-.
 Annie's eyes were cast down at the table on jr
 her fingers were beating out a rhythm, the h"...8 of which
 seemed to increase loudly in Rosie's as she stared
 at her and waited for an explanation. bar to when it
 came it was simply a statement: "Rob
 3 very fond of you," she said. I...I
 kn-kn-kn-" now she was stammering- 'I Jiil that
 and I'm fond of him, very. But I was just

3 to put a lighter side on to why I
want to get
_"

Il know lass, I know." Annie thrust a hand
out the table and gripped Rosie's as she said, 'But
Ji a funny thing, lass, we never seem to see the
Wijt the important things, that are right under our
tuL"...K. We should be able to smell their meaning, but
- never do. It takes something, I don't know
what
'Sfriend

coml
. arthquake.. disa personal earthquake, or
i" before we get our eyes opened."
betweenw eld a perplexed expression and she
3 ac rs Annie couldn't be implying what
belfula as implying, because Robbie was gbt ss old,
and... and he had always been igUs yc o her; at
times, almost like a father. bf01 with her in his voice and
manner;
ias ro (ier softly as Mrs Annie did.
Well
* "p less-than .. He used to when she was
little. be piggy-backs then. But during this [d oefe
had been times when he had r were so. mouth
to her. And she knew he had
right-brace . peggy Morgan and Mary
MacicSo wl rfs greater-than Mary MacKenzie
was married ut oco disggnbered a young woman who used
ie r1 l pd Mrs Annie used to tell lies
stet) S was a grocer's daughter, and aso. yas
after Robbie's blood. She aid sb a funny thing
to say.
in . v inny any more. For a mo
0 i hat she was going to America
jVery these two people. She loved vl0 as the word, she
loved them s Ys greater-than t1 . yone in her
own family, not eS'i't6 Ae anyway. But she
was fond htb11 li Helen... Why was she r i
yes. uddling all her thoughts?
a. hei10 o on, have a word with
rJust s"
e s tempr h's in."
*iass?"" fl go greater-than dy00., to appy
and get away
door. He hates that house as rrc as I do.
s hated it longer. I thought he'd be happy
"dis.
*af rose from the table and turne to the stove

gTt, 'Go on; have a word im." jSo
Rosie rose from the chair and eft the room. *. "
where he'd be, and she made fo the cow-
i she opened the door he was stding at the nibbing
down one of the animals ith a bun-
His
to look at her.
H'm sorry if I upset you by saying sily
*. it' He turned and went on with the job in
Tt forget it. I... I'll liely be oing
away than ever I thought I would. An no matter
ril...ril miss you. You don't know mriiss
you."
al why are you doing it?" He had swg round,
i the straw to one side, and now w io to face almost
touching hers. And he demanded I Why are you doing
it?"

IA a sudden she couldn't answer him. e
throat bar "n The tears spurted from her eye ad
she bar people disz she gasped, 'allyou...y know vhy. You
why. I just must get... get...
A want to get away, there are other means of
'That dis .
a hurricane, an earthquake... a personal
earthquake, or just something, before we get our eyes
opened."

Rosie's face held a perplexed expression
and she told herself that Mrs Annie couldn't be
implying what she thought she was implying, because Robbie
was twenty-eight years old, and... and he had always
been like a big brother to her; at times, almost like a
father, And he was rough with her in his voice and manner;
he never spoke to her softly as Mrs Annie
did. Well, not now, he didn't. He used to when
she was little. He would give her piggy-backs then.
But during this last year or so there had been times when
he had hardly opened his mouth to her. And she knew
he had gone dancing with Peggy Morgan and Mary
MacKenzie. But of course, Mary MacKenzie
was married now. And she remembered a young woman who
used to call pretty often and Mrs Annie used
to tell lies and say he was out. She was a grocer's
daughter, and Mrs Annie said she was after
Robbie's blood. She used to think that was a funny
thing to say.

But nothing in life was funny any more. For a moment
she was sorry that she was going to America because she would
miss these two people. She loved them. Yes. Yes,
that was the word, she loved them, like she hadn't loved
anyone in her own family, not since her mother had

died anyway. But she was fond of Helen.
 Oh yes, she liked Helen... Why was she sitting
 here, her mind muddling all her thoughts?
 Annie said suddenly, "Go on, have a word with
 him."
 "He'll go for me, the temper he's in."
 "Well, what d'you expect lass?"
 "I expect him to wish me to be happy and get
 away
 door. He hates that house as much as I do.
 I?? s hated it longer. I thought he'd be
 happy
 His
 *fc from the table and tued to the stove
 B (Jo on; have a word with him." Rosie
 rose from the chair and left the room. -. where he'd
 be, and she made for the cow-
 T she opened the door he was standing at the m
 nibbing down one of the animals with a bun-
 'P* .i!
 W to look at her.
 m sorry if I upset you by saying such silly
 "Hn-, "dis""
 3! it." He turned and went on with the job in
 ,i l forget it. ...I" likely be oing
 away
 i than ever I thought I would. And no matter
 happens I'll...I'll miss you. You don't know
 T miss you."
 bar just bar 'wr why are you doing it?" He had
 swung round, . " ...i the straw to one side, and now was
 close to his face almost touching hers. Ad he
 demanded u 'Why are you doing it?"
 I*? a sudden she couldn't answer him. Her
 throat ftdl. The tears spurted from her eyes and
 she F as she gasped, "You...y I know why. You
 less-than why. I just must get...get..."
 011 want to away, there are other means of
 i tilde so'
 "- *comcomcomcom
 SsSSUsss-SY else had asked me to
 . *
 "...them."
 "Oh my God backslash girl." He now
 had his arms about her, holding her close. "Don't
 cry, love, don't cry. I unl derstand. I
 understand." Then in a whisper he said Nobody had
 asked you to marry them? Good God! I Bloody blind
 fool! Don't, love, don't cry like that I
 It's all right, I understand. Yes. Yes, I

understand." 5

Her tears subsiding, she drew herself from him bar
saying, 'I'm sorry...I'm sorry.'" bar

He looked into her eyes, his voice still quiet.

"All bar I want is for you to be happy,

Rosie. All I've ever bar wanted my main

aim in life even, since I dragged bar you down

from the tree, was that you should be happy bar and keep that

youthful spirit that made you different j from everybody

else. And it's still there, know it's bar still there.

It's concealed at the moment; growing up bar always

does blanket it down for a bit, but it'll come

back. You'll see. Wherever you are, in America

or Timbaktu, it'll come back. Come on now!

t greater-than on't start 5 again, 'cos Main will

knock me block off for upset ting you. You've had

enough upsets lately. You wan bar a little happiness.

Believe that, Rosie, believe that's I all I

want for you, to be happy." He now just stoppe

himself from adding, "And me along with you. O! yes, and

me along with you."

He put an arm around her shoulders and led her out

of the cowshed and back to the house. And in the kitchen

once more he said to his mother, "You haven't guzzled

the last of tat hard stuff, have you?"

"What d'you mean?" she came back

at him; i don't guzzle any of it But I could

put me name to wbdg does."

'Well, let's drink to America, eh?

Let's drink to America." He smiled at

Rosie, then tued to bis

stbar he thought for a moment that she too was T; out

crying, and he bawled at her, "Don't

- like a stuffed dummy, woman! Go and get

3"

iiKnowledge lifted the half bottle of whisky fro the

icom sideboard, she bit tightly on her lip and

.,bar bar to SS3Every "Annie Macintosh,

you've got a son

ft.ffi."

E! dgf Beatrice entering the drawing-room

"llher best dress brought Rosie to her feet,

say bar bar A!Like you do look nice,

Beatrice, I've always liked

3Sl it suits you. And thank you for getting

"*apd for the tea. My goodness! In the kitchen,

"j bar 5- think there was a party, the things that I

done. What time is it?"

was ooked at the clock. "Ten minutes to "

she said. "I hope he's a gentleman who

keeps
 bar bar i yes, he is. That's part of his work,
 aking
 *mTonight and arranging board meetings and such. aa
 he feels like a Parliamentary Secretary at He
 made me laugh yesterday when he said he's " the
 bridesmaid but never the blushing bride." yu
 hair's hanging over your cheek." Beatrice put
 her hand and, with a finger, she lifted the strand JSSS-THAT
 naletter fr01 Rosie's face and placed it behind
 v ear. It was such a tender action that Rosie leaned
 *.J forward and kissed her sister on the cheek.
 i.i sitting down, she murmured, "I'm nervous,
 you Si". This is going to be a formal meeting,
 isn't it" l bar Well, sort of...' II
 Three o'clock came.
 Half-past three came. His,
 And now Rosie, making for the door yet again, I
 said, He must have missed the train, or perhaps he i
 was unable to get a cab from the station. I told him be
 to take a cab." i
 "There is plenty of time. Sit yourself down.
 There's be
 nothing spoiling; Cook won't brew the tea
 until he comes. Come and have a chocolate."
 Beatrice held out the box of
 chocolates, and Rosie dutifully took one,
 although she wasn't very fond of chocolates. But she
 held it in her fingers as she watched Beatrice eat
 the cream, then pick up another before she laid the
 box back on the table. And she forced herself to say,
 "You'll lose all your appetite for tea if you
 go on eating those sweets."
 "It's odd," said Beatrice, "but they never
 interfere with my appetite... Do come and sit down,
 dear. You're getting on my nerves, walking
 around."
 It was ten minutes to four when there was a ring on the
 bell, and they both rose from the couch. And as
 Beatrice stroked down the skirt of her velvet
 dress and adjusted the waist, she put out her hand and
 checked Rosie from making for the door, again saying,
 "Prances will see to it, dear. Now, calm yourself."
 They heard voices coming from the hall; then the door
 closed, and presently there was the tap on the
 drawing-room door, and Frances entered carrying a
 salver on which lay a letter, and she looked from one to the
 other before handing it to Rosie, saying, "It's for you
 Miss Rosie."
 Rosie took the letter, broke the seal, then read:

My dear Rosie, It is most
unfortunate, but I have been called
* to London and must leave straightaway. I
few what this means in regard to ruhi America, but
I shall let you tai later
I has been decided. IpRBR you in the
deepest affection. wi me. Always.
f'...ment"...S at the sheet of paper. my dearest'.
No "I love you". "I lov y0" "how
I hate having to leave you". be7- couldn't understand
it. This wasn't li Teddy. kept his letters: they were
warm, lovg. even iwI" In a way, they had, she
felt kept her from I]?gg'Ki greater-than au
during these last few months SSSSSSSS-" sne
handed the letter to Beatrice, "dis "II ca't understand
it. I...I really can't! lis " She stopped
speaking. Sh could not hiswerewas:" his attitude of
yesterday, at the thought of ,i' less-than being
married and going to a foreig11 country:
* had been as excited as a young boy an
less-than 1 o1 about America and the life here.
Bot of course, he had warned her, they didn't like
young men "dis married before taking up a post tere.
Howl he had felt sure it would be all rigt But
as he l- yet put that question to his superiors, this
recall 'HiiTODAY-I could have nothing to do with
request i be married before leaving the country.
H After Beatrice had apparently read this letter
twice, Ipr said, To say the least, I think it's
very ad man-
His
I: "It... it must have been urgent, else h
wouldn't be
recalled." Rosie had risen to Teddy's
defence iraa diately. "He's not the kind of
man to be rude. In fact he is too formal. That
is part of his position. He meets so many people he
has to be formal. He explained it all to me."
She suddenly sat down on the couch. And now she
asked herself how long she would have to wait for an
explanation. He wouldn't see his superiors until
tomorrow, then he would have to write to her and she wouldn't receive
me letter until te next day. That was two full
days to wait after she got over today. She didn't
know how she was going to bear it
She looked at Beatrice wearing her best
dress; and she had gone to all that trouble about the
special tea and she knew of the special effort she
would have had to make to be nice. She said now,
brokenly, "I'm sorry, after all the trouble

you've gone to..."

"Oh" comBeatrice's tone expressed her concern- "please, please, don't worry about me, just because I put on a decent dress. With regard to the tea... well, we have to eat anyway. It was all nothing. But I'm sorry that you are disappointed. It's very odd. Sit down and I'll ring for tea"

"No, no. Please don't Beatrice. I couldn't eat anything at the moment; not even drink tea. I'll go out for a while."

As she turned away Beatrice said, "Where are you going?"

Rosie did not answer. She walked slowly towards the door until her sister's voice came at her, the tone more recognisable, "You're not going next door to tell them, are you?"

Rosie turned and looked at her. "Yes.

Yes, that's just what I'm going to do. I was going there in any

i tea to tell them about the arrangements, " and

ten them there " y ange-

ajyw I n't like you going there so uch,

3Rather! you do it?"

i greater-than More- they are my friends. They have always iends, and always will be, no matter what and m sorry to say, Beatrice, you an do

% about it I' always visit them as long as

"iMore- to visit."

was a pause during which they stared at each i the

distance, Rosie tued and went out, m the door

qeily behind her. And now, going S cloakroom,

she gathered her old coat and al l' and from a rack

at one side of the room IS up her overshoes.

This was the outfit that la wore when she had to scale the

wall. Yet Jy she wasn't going to scale the

wall today, going by the front way...

l nutes later, when Annie heard the tap on

**y" oor, then saw the figure standing there she

termed 'her old disabee", she exclaimed "Why,

what's the matter, girl? I thought you

- but her voice was cut off by Robbie's. He

nsen quickly from the table where he had been his tea, and

he cried at his mother. Will you A*ffl: of her way

and let her in? What's the matter "l you,

woman?" Then turning to Rosie, he said, ilLike

right-brace gone wrong? I thought..." 'lyy" I

have a cup of tea?"

iPeople es. Yes, unay, two, three cups.

Come and sit " by the fire."

*gfj

But less-than - was no more conversation until Rosie had drunk a cup of tea. Then looking from one to the other, where they were sitting on the settle opposite, she said, 'He didn't come, but he sent this.' She took the letter from inside her blouse and handed it towards them.

It was Robbie who read it first, after which he lifted his head and looked at her but said nothing, then passed the letter on to his mother. But after she had read it she said immediately, 'Odd business. Do you usually get letters like this from him? I mean, in this sort of tone?'

Rosie's head drooped before she said softly, 'ationo.' 'Well, there must be a reason for it all,' Robbie said; and he repeated, 'Well, there must be a reason and, as he says, he'll let you know in a couple of days. It was likely written when he was worked up and found he couldn't come and see you. You say they've got an office in Newcastle or some connection there anyway. And it's also distantly connected with the Government, isn't it? You never know about these things, the intricate business that goes on.' He got up from the settle and dropping onto his hunkers before her, he took her hands in his and said, 'It'll all work out. If I know anything, that fella thought the world of you. Yes, he did. So, as I see it, it's nothing to do with his... well, personal wishes, it's something that's come up in his business.'

'You think so?' Rosie looked into the deep brown eyes that held a tender expression in them and, her voice breaking, she said, 'The worst of it is, I was getting Beatrice on my side. She had put on her best dress, and had ordered a lovely tea. And she was putting on... well, trying to be very pleasant.'

(the Obsession 121 at's unusual for her'

Robbie goodnnded at er

g Yes' sh o t him- "Which mas l all the wo" mat er good intentions aod were to no val

rose from i huers, saying, T have to e iown. Betsy9 foars coming."

ie's voice a expression changed as she sid, isn't due fol a fortnight, you said."

i, I know. B11 e came ln tnls

afteoon aod

" there was something wrong. Well, she prac-spoke to m" so aa at she needs hlp1 have to get veterinary man, too."

by I come d less-than wn with 0"
as Annie who put i. "You've got your good
his, lass," at which Rosie tued to her, a half
n her fac as she said' But rve got my old
ith me, if youve noticed."
bar Yes. Yes, you have"
Robbie helped et mto her the" handed heletter bar
flie woollen hat a for a moment his hands indicated
bar that he was goio to put it on her head; but tey
paused halfway s he bn it to he bar Annie
said notSo te while she watched her son pull on
his coat ai People' pthis and on Rosie's bar elbow
as he ed et out of the door. And a stroge ought ran
throul her mind as she combined t0 quotations and p
them into her own words, "God slow but He's saf"
aal e es a number of sideroads His miracls
to perform."

It was three d later when Rosie received the letter.
She took it "P to e bedroom to read, a its

*

, Catherine Cookson backslash
contents so stunned her hat after readin it for the bar
third time, she let it nutter to the floor. And she
sat bar on the bed staring aead of her, until a
came on backslash the door t was opened
by Beatrice. What is it were'
dear? se said. 'allyou've had news?'" bar
Rosie looked at her, but she couldnt speak for the bar
moment. She pointed to the flor, and Beatrice
picked bar dg the letter. But before she began to ad ishe
led to the window as if to see it i better lght. bar
Then after a moment, she said. Oh. dear me!
Dear nrmsosoriystbutinsteadfturningabto
at this dejected figure sitting on the side of the
bed she addressed the window again saying Dear e!
Dear me! What a hing to happen." bar
Only hen she turned towards Rosie, saying
What
ateyougoingtodo" ...Butthenwhatcanyoudo" ...L..i
never expected this of him" I She handed back the
letter to Rosie who, after glancing at it again, folded
it into four and put it back
mto its envelope. Then she too rose and
walked past sister andout onto the landing. And tns very
action puzzled Beatrice, because her sister wasn t
cry-

*

she followed her along the landing, she said, Where are
you going, dear?'" .
She had received no answer before tey reached bar te

bottom of the stairs, but there, she added
 Let us
 have a cup of coffee, and...and talk this thing over.
 be
 for the first time Rosie spoke. What is (here
 to talk over? Nothing could be more final than this
 letter.'She lifted it up almost in front of
 Beatrice's face. In flight Beatrice
 retreated a step in something of a bar
 as she muttered, 'You don't take it too
 These...^the things happen. Come and...' TO BROKE
 off as she saw Rosie walk towards
 the door and she cried at her, "No!
 No! You are going next door, not in that state."
 "Well," rushed across the hall and attempted to take
 her coat from Rosie's hand, at the same time.
 It isn't right! Have some dignity, girl. One bar
 just greater-than @y go and spread one's troubles far and
 wide like individual." Her voice now
 dropped as she spoke more rapidly, 'You expect that
 from the new class. But remember who you are; and you
 belong to this house...' Beatrice could not have
 left her back quicker had a gun been
 pointed at her, 'Her voice was menacing as she
 yelled, "Damn! Blast the house!"
 Beatrice found herself almost tumbling
 back to the grandfather clock as Rosie's arm thrust
 her. It was characteristic of Beatrice that she turned
 toward the clock with both hands, then looked into its
 brass face as if for assurance that it had been
 damaged before she turned again on her who was now
 at the front door. But such was astonishment and more so
 her amazement when her emotion was streaked with fear and
 she asked if it could be possible. But her mind
 refused
 to explain why it was asking mis... then
 Rosie neared the cottage, it was to see Rob
 leading the horse and cart through the gate. but he
 "couldn't notice her until he left the animal
 to go back
 I close the gate.
 He looked at her openmouthed for a moment before
 he said simply,
 "Rosie!" Then going close up to
 her;
 so.
 and She told her in a short time! What is it
 you need? So drag off her coat and, Wheel
 off the kitchen chair
 and, and so she settled (the settle, from this

I ere she
his W1' Rosie less-than did not tu ftepr
nd trbled f\$0
Robe can backslash you're io need of here,
s8 she got up nd wet a'
feret , nothing was said ow; sp toe"...1
ouudianeru veri V01. he sd Conenn
tTebb0'
Pcet of
My dear : klng hn halld
I dont L. erforo just better std i
powers t SS "g to begin this yonger me * such
a tunno1. so I had
hed the to have been d by the o that y do not ow their yg.
B CO, before the have es-
shouad. On the other hand . t y stop me from
take this stp' then I

wl be deprived of promotion. Moreover I
H be sent to some outlandish country, and'in y
subordinate position. From what I underH1' mev
have already made arrangements for l0 go to America
to fill in this particular post l1w become
available by the unexpected lm of a young member of the
firm.

l0 OUT will see, my dear the position
I'm in bar were lQe time you receive this letter I shall be
on

j ay to America. But I can assure you, it is
Bl1 sad and heavy heart, for you know, Rosie
g bar have always held you in deep affection.
But

" Under the circumstances, it would be unfir
UQ-WISE to hold you to any promise. As I've
ained above, I don't know what my future
US disln us new country. Try to understand l10.
Rosie. All I can say is, I am too trou
. to wnte any more, but will always hold you H e
highest affection and will never forget our I ship.
orgive me and think kindly of e bar l1
y011 can, my dear Rosie.

I Teddy.

An01 sat there" the letter stm m his d Until
nme s voice demanded, "Well, what does it
sa"

ld at this he handed her the letter. After readint
sT011 was the same as his' silence. until
she burst out less-than The swine of a more' 1
Hesa' of tales abot jiltmg but never read one.
n'ne0' It was a deep throaty demand of child

to notice for she cried at him'

Not Keep me tongue quiet, not for you or any.

her he looked into her face. He didn't ask any questions, but said "Go on in; I'll be with you in a minute, after I've put her in the stable."

In the kitchen Annie greeted her in a similar way. On a high note, she said, "Rosie! What is it?"

Annie watched the girl drag off her coat and hat and throw them across one of the kitchen chairs, then go and sit in the omer of the settle, from where she stared into the fire.

When Annie sat beside her, Rosie did not turn to her, and so, in an embarrassed and troubled fashion, Annie muttered, "I think what you're in need of, girl, is a cup of tea." And at this she got up and went about the process of making it, and nothing was said until Robbie came hurrying into the room and to the settle where, sitting beside her, and in a manner quite different from that of his mother, he said "Come on now; spit it out! What's happened? You've heard from him?"

For answer Rosie put her hand into the pocket of her house dress and, without looking at him, handed him the letter.

What he read was:

My dear Rosie,

I don't know how I am going to begin this letter, for my mind is in such a turmoil, so I had just better state facts. I have been told by the powers that be that they do not allow their younger members to marry before they have established themselves abroad. On the other hand I know that they couldn't really stop me from marrying. But should I take this step, then I

WnRather be deprived o promotion. Moreover, I bar llntt- be sent to some outlandish country, and inI ,12ar very subordinate position. Prom what I underf *ItetLike- they have alreay made anangements forj

E to go to Amrica to fill in this particular post bar has becoe available by the unexpected I of a young mber of the firm.j o, you wffl see, y dear'the position I'm in. the time you recei is etter I shall be onf, way to America. But I can assure you, it is bar a sad and heavy hart for you know, Rosieeaf ive always held y011 in affection.

B*bar ., under the circiiiO11'It would be unfairj unwise to hold yo to anv promise. As I've Rfiff3t above, I don't know what my

future

i in his new to understand myJust be
bar ituation, Roie. All I can is.I am too
trouj :

bled to write any more b w always hold youj I
in the highest affectioO "ever forget our bar bar .
friendship, Fbrgive me and think kindly of me, be.
if you can, my dear Rsie.

Teddy.i

t be* tt *1 " Robbie sat there, the

ltt1 sd in s hand until;

s voice demanded, Well, what does it
say?"bar " at this he handed her t11 tt After

reading itj L" response was the saffl as tus;

silence, until she bar "tr.r"...tion burst out,

"Te uty swine of a man! I'vej "Tr plenty

of tales abot Jilting but never read one.i

("sa..."bar Mother" It was a dep throaty

demand, of whichj "will. took no notice, for she

cried at him, 'I'm not bar to keep me togu

q "ot for you or any-j

body else. I'll say again, he's a

swine!" She now hur ied to where Rosie was

sitting, her head bowed, and thrusting her doubled fist

under Rosie's chin, she brought her face up with a

jerk and, looking down into it she said

"He's not worth your spit."

"Shut up! Mother, will you?" Robbie was on his

feet now, pulling her away from Rosie's side.

"And listen to me for once. I feel there's something
wrong here. There's more in that letter than meets the eye.

I've met that young bloke, and that letter and he don't

match." He now turned to Rosie who was staring up

at him and he demanded, "How was he when you last

saw him? I mean, in his manner."

How was he? She turned her head to the side as

if thinking. He had been wonderful, excited. After

they had eaten they had walked in the park and he had

pulled her into the shadow of some bushes and had kissed

her. Oh, how he had kissed her. But nevertheless,

besides all that, she knew he was ambitious. She

knew he wanted to go to America, his heart was set

on it. He had told her that one star had dropped from

heaven into his hands and that was her. And now another had

been presented to him, an opportunity he imagined

would never happen for years. A position in America

was a goal that those in the office were all aiming for.

They would be jealous, he had said;

there would be a lot of talk. But God had

spoken: he had raised his head and wagged his finger and

had said You're to go to America, Golding.
 Rtzsimmons has unfortunately died and you are
 to take his place as soon as possible."
 She looked back into Robbie's eyes, as she
 said, 'He...he was as usual, kind and-" her head
 bowed
 bar bar she muttered, "loving." Then as if
 her tongue ir loosened, she tued to Annie and wet
 i"...S I was excited, too. Oh, Mrs
 Annie, I was at the thought of leaving next door.
 Never live there again. To get away from Beatrice.
 comshe shook her head quickly now- to T? s been quite
 good over it. More ind than iThat she would be. But'
 comher voice sank- rasi she's still Beatrice, and
 she has her Oh, yes. Yes' comher voice rose
 as she nodded so' to the other- her house. She's mad
 about lltli I told you, didn't I? Her and her
 feather and one mustn't do this and one mustn't do "*-
 isn't done. It isn't done. What isn't
 done?"" She bar people." her feet now. "It isn't
 done to be happy; it isn't to want to be loved; it
 isn't done-" Her voice a crescendo, and then
 there came a sound ike
 I from her lips and the tears spurted from her
 ***BH j"l"" 'ib"" had their arms
 about her pressing her down
 was the settle again, sitting one on either side of
 her. : through her tears and sobbing, she cried, 'I...
 I
 to die. I...I feel dirty, used. He said
 friendship." bar i head was wagging on her shoulders now
 and neij of them could keep her still. 'It wasn't a
 friendi it was a courtship. It was, it was, it was
 a court." She turned her face towards Robbie
 and he
 hishis back at her, saying gently, Yes, dear,
 it was g courthip all right a very good courtship."
 bar bar A knock came on the door and a
 voice said, 'Anyy* at home?"" And when it was
 opened Annie ?"" up from the seat saying, Oh, come
 in Doctor. Ipre very welcome at this point, I
 can tel you."
 "What is it? What's the matter? John lid
 his bag on the table and pulled off his overcoat as if
 he were at home, then went to the settle and sat down
 next to Rosie. And, looking across at Robbie
 over Rosie's 1 bent head, he enquired
 'What's happened?"" tf.
 Oh, quite a deal Doctor. Rosie's had...
 well a his great disappointment. I'd like to talk to you

about it'

"No! No!" Rosie's tearstained face
came up now I and, looking first at one then the
other, she said, "Let it rest! It's finished!
It's my business! Yes, it is, it's I
over." 1

"Yes. Yes, dear, it's over. Don't
worry. All right we won't talk about it. Come
on, dry your eyes. Could you do with a cup of tea
Doctor?"

"I could that. Two cups, in fact. I've not
been near the surgery since I left it this morning.
I've been looking for a place for Mother, as I
told you, and my feet are worn down to my knees.
I'm going to get a horse bar and trap. All
right, all right, you did tell me should I have one
ages ago." He rose from the seat now and I
walked behind the settle to where Annie stood at the
end of the table pouring out the tea and he jerked his head
backwards, and in answer Annie reached out and
picked up the letter from me end of the table and silently
handed it to him.

As he read she watched his expression alter in
disbelief, and then he shook his head slowly and
muttered 'ationo, no! Not him.' "Aye, rim."

"I can't believe it." "Nor can I.

Worst of all, nor can she." He put the letter
back on the table, then went and sat by Rosie again and
gently turning her face to

bar bar The Obsession 129 disy1"1 De

sal less-than 'a y0 y iig at all of

bar have"...!iJust ad eased but the dry sobs in her
throat her speaking, and she brought out slowly,
Doctor. None., none."

RW send her a note three or four days ago
to he couldn't come to tea," said Robbie. 'He
'Just" this head of the house' comthere was a sneer now-
"for her hand, but instead he sent "disS say he
had been called back to London and EtiBTO
now he has written."

i]? ot to look at Annie, who was stand)")"

Rosie now, saying, 'Come on lass, into disjb
right-brace sam":: there's a fire on in there. I
don't wny I put it on, it being only
Saturday. Just to

JE" room y ppose, or I must have known ,
be needed. Come on. jmh almost like a child again, Rosie
al' herself to be led from the room, which left the lif
facing each other.

J" d'you make of it Doctor?" ust don't

know. I can't make it out, only that
 - strange. It seems a fanny business."
 said it there; a funny business. But I mean to
 "less-than the bottom of it. That fellow was in
 love with
 * much as..." Robbie stopped and walked to
 nre, and John said quietly, 'allyou were going
 as much as I am". "
 indignant now, Robbie said I wasn't go
 .; to say that." But then he asked softly,
 'Does it
 so much?"
 i I've been here nearly two years and I
 .2 I would have been a blind man if I hadn't
 seen how things were with you. If you had had any bar
 sense you would have spoken before now." backslash
 Robbie swung round on him. 'She was a child.
 I'm bar ten years older than she is. I've
 carried her around bar since she was a baby, when her
 grandfather used to bring her over here every day to talk with my
 dad, but leave her to me. She looks on me as a
 brother;
 sometimes, I've even thought, as a father, but in no
 other way." bar "You've never given her a
 chance. The Scot in you j has put bristles on
 your tongue, like all your clan. bar Oh"
 comhe flapped his hand- "don't get on your high
 horse." "I wasn't getting on any high
 horse Doctor,
 but...b I didn't think it showed like that."
 "Well, it doesn't to anyone else. You have very
 few visitors here. The Mackays, too, look
 upon her as a bar child. The Robsons..well, if
 I'm not mistaken and he dared risk it Harry would
 have showed his hand before now. But there was you to get over, and
 then the lord of the manor, next door. And now he's
 gone, j you feel the lady is worse. Her one
 aim in life is to j achieve prestige. And yet
 you know, I feel sorry for j her. She's got
 another side altogether. I've found that out of late,
 too. Quite a softer side, at least where be
 Rosie is concerned. She is fond of her and if
 it wasn t for her mania for the house and its
 surrounding grounds, she could be quite attractive and
 interesting 'Well, I've yet to find that out
 Doctor." "Yes, and so have other people. But we've
 all g01 two sides, you want to remember that.
 One of you you've kept dark for too long." "And
 what d'you want me to do about it now -
 'Just bar to 1) 'She'll never get over him, or

if she t- insult will remain with her the
rest of her Hi feel inferior. Women that are let
down li inferior."

you'll have to bunk her up, as you call it, llpWill
and stop making her feel inferior." The % tone
changed now as he said, Give her time, li see how
you feel in little ways."

l: if there's any chance of that Doctor.
She'll H as her brother, her big protective
brother until

J, We've been an escape hole for her and
we will be. I'll see to that. Anyway, what's
you here today?"

gSSS-IRT else that you're blind to. Your mother's
'Just Oh, yes, she says it's just a tickly
cough, but Ji easily become bronchitis, I'm
telling you, * in this dreadful climate of yours. Of
course, I it's as bad as Scotland, but it's bad
"3 in the winter."

bar S153TS tone had changed to one of deep
concern. s got something wrong with her chest?" bar
fel2* not something wrong, but she certainly will
- if she neglects it as she has been doing.

She's . a bad cough and she wheezes. Haven't you
heard What's more, she goes out in all weathers.

Well, AS up to you, you'll have to see that
she doesn't. s I'm leaving some medicine and
stuff to rub in i" you've got to see that she
takes that." bar . Robbie bowed his head before
saying, 'Funny,

l that are under your nose you never notice un-
iy they smell."

I "Well, there's something I smell, too and
it's about

letter. I have a cousin in the administrative
Civil

Service. It is just possible he could throw a little
light on the matter about marrying and so on. Meantime,
my advice to you, Robbie, is to forget about the
brother and fatherhood and make yourself even more
indispensable to her than you are already. You follow me?
If you don't you must be blind."

Robbie gave a "huh!" of a laugh and said,
"You're about as tactful as a charging rhino
Doctor, but I'm partial to charging rhinos."

was doin it bt Ive go to le he ".... Di

S'So equals

i5 equals equals 2

sTr"

* spent his time trimming trees.

becc.000

S-Bwraascnl

can do that, too, and put you in their place with a duster. You need to do something."

Rosie had been sitting on the couch in the drawingroom, but now she was on her feet, crying back at her sister and vehemently, 'allyou'll never get me working inside here. You and your house! That's all you think about, the house. And don't say to me what you're going to put me to. You'll put me to nothing more. For two pins, if it wasn't leaving you on your own I'd go to Helen's. I'd be welcome there."

"Oh, yes. Oh, I know you'd be welcome at Helen's. If Helen could do me a disservice, she would do it."

"Helen wouldn't do anybody a disservice.

You've been jealous of her all your life. You hate the idea of her being happy and living above the level you've always aimed at, lady of the manor. She's a natural lady of the manor."

One of these days..." Beatrice looked to be on the point of choking; then she flung round and hurried from the room.

Rosie sank back onto the couch again.

She couldn't stand much more of this. She asked herself why she was putting up with it; but she knew: being made as she was, she knew that if she left Beatrice here on her own she'd be worrying about her all the time, for she had no one in the world to care for her. She hadn't kept a personal friend over all these years. It seemed that, except for her father, she had never needed a friend. And now, since he had gone, she was adrift. Oh, what was she going to do about it? She was sick at heart; sometimes she felt she was of no consequence. Teddy... oh, don't let her think of Teddy, it would drive her mad. Months now and she y heard a word from him. That indeed had been it: of rejection. That was the word that bored into the time: rejection. What she would have done if, hadn't had Robbie and Mrs Annie, she didn't *".

And the doctor, too. Yes, he was nice. She had it in a number of times when he visited next door. ,eacomy. calling Robbie's place "next door", when it in all ways a thousand miles away from this I When she was there she had to force herself

,aijicom

oin here.

IIL that's whre she would go now. "ii
 thought brought her swiftly up from the couch she went fm
 the room into the hall. But as she to pass the ain
 door, which was wide open, . saw coming up the steps the
 man she had just nn about. And she went towards him,
 saying qui" "Have you come to the wrong house?"
 ytfc. I don't think so." His voice was as
 quiet as
 1 almost a whisper. He was smiling at her.
 'T've iiii in answer to the advert." bar bar
 "What? You mean, for the annexe?" H "Yes,
 for the annexe. I couldn't believe it. Is she
 letting it? It does mean here, doesn't it?"
 I? "Yes, it means here all right. And you are the
 first
 3SL I think. Come in. Come in." If
 As he stepped over the threshold his eyes lifted
 to *i Beatrice was now descending the stairs, and
 ii was certainly no welcome in her expression,
 nor bar gi her voice as she said,
 "Good-afternoon, Doctor."
 "Good-afternoon." He did not add Miss
 Beatrice or
 .i n'w:
 She was now asking plainly, "Did someone call
 'allyes. Yes." He moved his head
 twice, his maner now as stiff as hers. "A
 newspaper advert called e I understand you are
 letting part of your house?"
 He watched her expression slowly change, then
 resume its former stiffness as she said, "Not part of
 m house, Doctor, merely the annexe."
 "Well, your annexe."
 "Do you want to take it, the annexe?"
 "Well, it all depends."
 "Yes, yes." She nodded at him now. "But
 I must tell you straightaway that I would not allow a
 surgery to be held there."
 "I had no idea of setting up my surgery in
 there, Miss Steel" comhis tone now matched hers-
 "or of living here myself. I've been looking for a
 house or private apartments for my mother for some time
 now."
 "Oh, well, I'm sorry." Her words were
 apologetic. "I merely thought... well, you
 understand."
 He did not come back politely to say that he
 did understand, but tued to look at Rosie where she had
 been standing the while, and she said, "It really is
 nice, a house on its own," and Beatrice's

glance towards her sister was almost soft as she said, "Yes, as Rosie says, it's a house on its own: it has a private entrance and a conservatory, rather small, but leading to its own garden."

He was looking at Rosie now and he seemed to see the appeal in her eyes, as there surely was, for she was thinking, If his mother comes there and she's anything like him, it will be someone else to talk to. And he'll be popping in. I hope he'll take it.

She looked at Beatrice now, saying, "Will you go through the house or shall I get the key for the front door?"

beve can go through the house." Beatrice was galing now. And as she walked ahead, saying, I you like to come this way?" John and Rosie teed glances and followed her. d never been in this part of the house and he azed at the size of it. They were in a broad y now with doors going off one side and tall ws the other, facing out onto the garden. e they entered the small hall with a flight of going off it, Beatrice pointed to them, saying, leads to the servants' quarters, but this is the or to the annexe. Of course, it can be locked nently from the other side." iy had now turned down a short passage at the f which was a grey panelled door, and as she d it open she stood aside to allow him to enter. e put his arm out for her and Rosie to precede now found himself in a quite large, square, tiled md Beatrice was saying, 'It's a very compact house. There are only eight rooms altogether; are bedrooms upstairs." s put in here, "I'm afraid my mother would have iep downstairs as she suffers rather badly from natism." "h, that could be easily arranged, because this was used for children and there is a small bathroom astairs." ie led the way to a room across the hall, saying, s is the sitting-room."

e stood in the middle of the room looking about He was really amazed at the furnishing and the fort it expressed.

"It's a lovely room," he said. bar

Beatrice made no reply but said, "Come and see te dining-room."

The dining-room was much smaller but the table was large enough to seat six. Again he was amazed at the quality of the furniture and the curtains.

Next, as she thrust open another door, she

said, his would make a lovely bedroom for you mother. You see the long windows open out to the conservatory and there's the garden beyond. And the three bedrooms above, which I will show you, needn't be wasted, because she could have her friends to stay." Beatrice's smile was broad as she turned to Rosie, saying, hat's what Grandpapa built it for...well, I can to house a family."

It was Rosie who put in now, and she was smiling, too, the sad plaintive smile he had come to know.

"Mother's cousin used to love to come and stay. But they had four children and they were four too much for Grandpapa, because there was no controlling them." She turned now and looked at Beatrice, saying, Remember? they used to slide down the bannisters and into the hall.

We were all younger than they were but we emulated them as much as we possibly could And Marion nearly broke her neck. Remember the day?

Pandemonium."

'allyes. Yes, I remember." The sisters were nodding pleasantly at each other. "I remember distinctly Grandpapa laying down the law to Grandmama." Beatrice turned to John now, saying, "You see they were here for nearly two months in the year. And Grandmama's brother-in-law was an architect, and it was he who set the ball rolling. And Grandpapa took to it a new toy." Now she added on a laugh, he only because he had that wasn't of the Army." Then, her tone aging, she said, 'It cost quite a bit to build, but the sad thing about it, at least the annoying thing to it to Grandpapa was that it was used only for years after it was built, for my great-uncle, I understand, got another bee in his bonnet: it was called gratification and he whipped the whole family off to loads of all places."

John was laughing now, as he said, "And it's been used ever since?"

Oh no. No." That tone of dignity was back in Beatrice's voice. 'At one time when we were young-" glanced towards Rosie; then on a forced smile said "well, children, there were lots of parties. Grandmama seemed to have friends and distant, very distant relations in all parts of the country. You find when you've got a big house and there is free hospitality. Some of them, I recall, stayed for weeks end. And that's why the kitchen was added. Now."

She turned about and Rosie and John followed her greater-than the hall and to the far end where a door led into it was quite a small kitchen, but one that was

adately fitted.

As you can see," Beatrice began, "it isn't very so. My cook would turn her nose up at it. But it's quite."

John noted that Rosie had turned her head away. Either it was the words "my cook" or not he didn't will. Beatrice had gone to the small range and was in, "It's very cosy in here when the fire's on. And when the fire isn't on, it's a nice little room

John Catherine Cookson

with its cupboards and such and all the kitchen utensils. And now, I suppose, you would like to see the

garden." He admired the garden, having waded through the

conservatory to reach it, and as he looked to the wall of fir trees at the far end, he thought to himself She would love this, it's the very thing. He turned and, looking straight at Beatrice, he said, Well, we had better get down to business, hadn't we?" "All you like it?" "Oh, yes. Who couldn't like it? I'm sure my mother

Beatrice paused before saying, She will have her own furniture, I suppose? But that will prove no difficulty, as we can store everything here up in the attic " "Oh I'm afraid she hasn't any furniture; it went

with our house when she sold it. You see, she had the idea she was going to live with her cousin for the rest of her days. But I'm afraid that didn't work out And so for some months now she has been living in a guest house, while I have been trying to find a suitable place."

We then, would you take it as it is? "As it is" His voice rose. "Oh, yes! Yes, definitely She seemed to be relieved at this and her smile was wide again as she said. Well then, I'll be pleased to lease it to you. It will be on a lease, of course. 'Oh of course.'" His head was bobbing.

"The only proviso is that your mother must come and see it first." "Oh, indeed, yes. Will tomorrow be suitable still

"Any time. Any time. Would you like a cup of tea?" "Rather, Thank you." Then turning to Rosie, he said "You don't know what a relief this is. For as I have been in and out of people's houses - not including the empty flats, all advertised as outlooks which, in most cases, meant

71 street, or' come he pulled a face now - a

cul-

Sdg where there was no traffic." , s were
all smiling as they returned to the main again, and as he
took in his surroundings, he 'j bar tfflVerycc'ii. that
this was the kind of place he himself y liked, but without
the surgery of course. *v his mother would surely
love it and it would 'o. for him at times. He
wondered what she conless-than iHis?"" : for it and so
he put it to her now, saying ,E we had better
get down to business, hadn't we? are your terms?"
t- saw her wet her lips and give a little cough
2's hesitantly, she said, It... it would work
out, dis*" on a lease, at two pounds ten
shillings a week." bar bar kept his eyes on
her while being aware mat s head had jerked round
towards her. But if are taking it as it stands," she
went on, I... I have to ask another ten shillings
a week, for, said there's... well, as I said, as you
can see, it's

*ity to be lived in, even to the linen. There are
3nv of sheets and towels in the linen cupboard
on

*landing. And all that is needed to bring in... is
.?"

raised his hand and smiled as he said, "It's quite
l" right. It's quite all right; I'm
agreeable, and I'm
ny mother will be. You see, it will be in her

,
Catherine Cookson be But even as he spoke
he was thinking Thr

Also T e could have mwt a fine l still he the
town with four acs of land an
dist have cost him uch more than three pound
"lfalat Butsti". it was a lovely place?

*W It WOUI-DO e ideal for his mother. "e
still Beatrice but heard her sish

" T11'let us t that cup of corfee' ore
she was leading the way and befor
firstt her she turned nd looked at hini
Oy shake of her head which said qut
from backslash re bed; but as he would say
Wtv c0 it. bt my mother can first weu off Then
he let her know he un f still the meaning of her look
by patting her were still Pg his lips at her ere now in
the drawing-room of the main

W tooked about him in dmiration he know that the
decision he had just made
stfge the course of his life

V V ,V

Three pounds a week!" but
"But wait till you see it; I keep telling
you."

Well, yes, you do, but it's part of a house-an
annexed part of a house. I wanted something
private." His is as private as you'll ever get
in this town or hereabouts, unless you go right into the
country." But so that means more than one hundred and
fifty pounds a year. At that rate you could buy a
decent house within three years. And if it's as grand
as you say...well, I don't want anything
grand, just comfortable."

"Mother." He turned to her as they walked up
the Side drive, having left the cab at the
gate. "I'm telling you, if you don't take this
you'll have to take on the house-hunting yourself, because I
haven't the time or any more patience trying to find
exactly what you want."

Her voice was now apologetic as she said,
"I'm sorry. I'm sorry, dear. I know
I've put a lot onto you lately, but I just
wanted something... Oh! why don't I shut my
mouth until I see it, as you've been saying
name-" But even as he spoke he was thinking
Three pounds a week. He could have mortgaged a
fine house just outside the town with four
acres of land and it wouldn't have cost him much more than
three pounds a week, if that. But still, it was a
lovely place and he could see it would be ideal for his
mother.

He not only saw Beatrice sigh but heard her
sigh, then she said, "Well, let us get that cup
of coffee."

Once more she was leading the way and before Rosie
followed her she turned and looked at him and gave
a small shake of her head which said quite plainly
You're being robbed; but as he would say to her later,
"I couldn't afford it, but my mother can. She's
pretty well off." Then he let her know he
understood the meaning of her look by patting her shoulder
and pursing his lips at her.

They were now in the drawing-room of the main house, and
as he looked about him in admiration he was not to know that
the decision he had just made would change the course of
his life.

"Three pounds a week!" "Wait till you
see it; I keep telling you." Well, yes, you do, but it's
part of a house-an annexed part of a house. I
wanted something private." "Private" is as
private as you'll ever get in this town

iSl33Qi unless you go right into the country." Kli means more than one hundred and fifty S a year. At that rate you could buy a decent , within three years. And if it's as grand as you "***well, I don't want anything grand, just com-
"w"

jl Mother." He turned to her as they walked up the fj"- drive, having left the cab at the gate. "I'm telling

2l Like if you don't take this you'll have to take on the Sn yourself, because I haven't the time or "l2ar bar more patience trying to find exactly what you

his Her voice was now apologetic as she said, "I'm

*j"- I'm sorry, dear. I know I've put a lot onto you .s' but I just wanted something... Oh! why don't bar just shut my mouth until I see it, as you've been saying all along. You say it has its own private entrance not connected with the house?" "allyes. Yes, and this is the private drive to it. Woman-" he again stopped in his slow stride and, looking down into her face, he said, "if she had asked five or six pounds I would still have thought it was worth it and exactly what you need and it will be a way to get some of that money out of the bank's coffers. Anyway, the interest alone on some of your bonds will pay for the rent, and more." "All right, all right; let's see this wonderful place."

As they went through an ornamental gate and into the garden, she stopped and said, "Oh, well, this part's all right; very nice indeed."

He said nothing more but led her round the coer and to the front of the annexe, and there her impression was definitely favourable.

After unlocking the door he stood aside and let her enter the hall. And as she muttered, "Oh, yes, very nice, very nice indeed," the sitting-room door opened and there stood Beatrice, a vase of flowers in her hand. And she spoke immediately, saying, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I thought you wouldn't be here for a while and I... I was arranging a few flowers to brighten things up, and..."

He stopped her embarrassed prattle by saying. his is my mother...Mother-" he extended his hand towards Beatrice as he added 'Miss Penrose-Steel' "How d'you do?"

Beatrice quickly put the flowers down
 on a side table and, coming forward, she held out her
 hand as she said, "I...I'm so pleased to meet you,
 and I do hope you will be happy here. I can
 assure you that
 we have any unexpected visitors popping
 in, used to coming through the house, but you can go in- door
 on the inside."
 As Catherine Falconer surveyed the young
 woman greater-than she was seeing her as quite a bonny
 piece of work. nice speaking voice. She was
 looking older than her twenty-four-year-old that
 John had suggested. Knowledge in fact, old enough and
 capable enough to charge of such a splendid house, and she
 smiled disinterestedly. as she said, "Well, from
 what I've seen so far Steel, even Miss
 Penrose-Steel, it has been impressive and
 exactly what I would like-(The garden. And
 I see there's plenty of TOIRITTS round. I've
 always made syrups and jellies of the wild
 fruits."
 "That's interesting. Well, you'll find plenty of
 crab-apples, blackberries and sloes
 here, But now" she looked at John- "I'll
 leave it" would you like a cup of coffee? I'll have
 the girls bring it in from the kitchen. And
 can assure you, you won't be troubled by disquiet- from the
 house." She smiled widely as she
 said "Not more than you wish."
 "We'll see. We'll see." The answer
 was noncommittal. But Beatrice, still
 smiling, went about and went out.
 John now led his mother into the sitting-room, the of which
 brightened her face still further, as did the fire and the
 study, which was to be her room. In the kitchen she put
 voice to her pleasure, and "Well, I never! I
 never thought you would like a place like this for me.
 Talk about home life!-, It's lovely. It's
 a beautiful little place."
 "Yes" she nodded at her- "it is
 lovely."
 Quickly now she said, "There's three bedrooms
 upstairs, so I understand. Why don't you come and park
 here then?"
 His answer was quick: "No, Mother. I've told
 you, my business is in the town and I must be near it
 What's more" she smiled now- "I don't know
 whether or not lodgers come into the lease. Anyway, you
 know I'll pop in every day to see you. And by what you've
 already said, you're not going to be lost for an occupation with

all that material to hand." He motioned towards the window. "There's only one more thing I've got to say and then it's finished. You'll have to have someone to come in at least two or three times a week to clean for you."

"I can do that..."

"No you can't! and you're not going to. There's many a woman in the town who would be only too glad of the offer of a part-time job, when she knows she'll spend most of her time drinking tea and nattering over the kitchen table to the mistress. But one thing I'd advise you, Mrs Falconer, don't go on extolling the virtues of the South to any of these Northern ladies, whoever they are, or you'll lik find yourself in their black books and asked why don't go back there. I've been told tat nuerous times."

"You haven't!"

"Oh yes, I have. When the old boy's been laid up they've looked at me and said, "I want me own doctor. I'll wait until he's about again." They're a hardy lot around these quarters, I'm warning you, and that goes for the mistress of this house."

were' she seems very nice." r*, she is at times."

Si qualifying it. Have you had a do with her?" not what you would call a "d", but she can madam when she likes." his her other sister the same then?" i laughed now. 'Rosie? Oh, no, they're chalk and ., And the other two are much the same as Roallyet they are all different; but the lady of this iw is as different again, very unlike the rest of I.,," iiBut fro l me uttle rve seen of her'I the idea

Sl, get on together."

Hls hope so."

out seem to have doubts?"

I bar can. No, Mother. No, I have no doubts, merely just

*'ife an opinion, because, you know, you're a i old bird, too, when you can't get your own iw was a tap on the door and it opened and the came in with a tray. She smiled from one to the SiHave" then, addressing Catherinealconer, she said, 'So name's Janie Bluett, ma'am. I'm the parlourWill, And may I say, welcome to the annexe. I'm so you've taken it, being Doctor's mother." She cast nfflTiTj glance at John now before she added, "Tis to have somebody along here. I've always liked

- annexe; it's homely like,
ma'am."
bar bar 'allyes, Janie. I know what you mean,
and I may say
*" very pleased to be here. And thank you very TO"
for the coffee."
You're welcome, ma'am." Janie bobbed her
head
from one to the other, then tued and went out, her i
sile wide. bar
'ationow wasn't that nice?"
"Yes, very nice Mother, but don't expect that every
day. You're on your own here. This is a private
house and Im sure Miss Beatrice would like it
kept like that."
"You talk as if I was some nosy old
woman," said his mother now.
"And that's what you are. Oh, come on, drink up
this coffee." He handed her the cup. "And get that
look off your face, because I've got to be away and
if you want me to take you back and get your things
together, then just don't sip at it as if you were in the
drawing-room."
First, she sipped at the coffee while staring at
him;
then she said, here's times when I wonder
wy I " ever want to be near you."
"The same here, Mrs Falconer, the same
here. Come on now, finish it and let us get off, because
there's a lot to do between here and tomorrow, when ,j you start
your new life in your private section of the bar
mansion." I
J Beatrice was about to leave her office, having
the cook her orders for the day, which varied j little from the
day before, she had straightened bar bar apers on her
desk, then risen from her chair and bar rfggou to walk
towards the door when it was flung
* by a very excited Rosie, holding out a paper
J bar rds her and gasping now, as she said
"Robbie's shown me. It was in yesterday's paper.
Look! ik She pointed to the column on the folded
sheet, H Beatrice, taking the paper in her hand,
read:
l bar A tragedy occurred yesterday when Sir
Freder'Jjk Morton Spears and his son
Michael were
12ar oth drowned in a squall in Plymouth
Sound. Sir yederick was a well-known figure in
the sailing llgyorid, as was his son. Mr Michael
Morton pears, aged twenty-five, was unmarried

and as a Frederick leaves no other male
descendant the title falls to his cousin
Major Leonard Morbar ton Spears.
for Leonard .

Helen, ere both of spears his wife. *
y, like all Sir staying with letter
Frederick and
devastated by this fire are
- - - news.

The bodies were
the funeral is arranged late still night" and
October." fixed for Wednesday, the 3rd
when the power
she took it on her limp in hand" oh Helen
was always saying it awful! Awful were
lovely people about them' she said they thought
was soon " and the son" Michael she her last letter
" she he told me so well

'In her last letter? y' , , 'Well' I?

-- What do you mean?

get angry when she her head now "you always the
post." write to me, so I took it out of
"How could she and the head of the house " How could
you" and to me'

*Damn the house' she should be step when this excia
she actually back and dared to go on "v0
broke from her" and she

think about. well and the house' That shall be
will be feeling awful have been Do drowned Leo"
Sir Frederick " because he told me that he and
They were very much like brothers the cousins gone, and his
son's more greater-than of each other AD-DO now he
she doesn't Helen write to" and as you can do
say is' why the house? Well in you because you
are head of

to you. is because really you" why she write
Father died, less-than "and the father of P10 of
her when at that you've never got on
a. But now, what's not going to please you is
It! That inherits the title, Helen will be Lady
iTiWi Spears. That will endear her to you Every'day.
it? Oh, I can never understand you, Beatrice never!
Never!" On this she swung round and " room,
leaving Beatrice leaning against the
3' the desk, her hands gripping the edge.

" Helen. Her, Lady Helen. Why was it that
she so lucky? There will be no holding her back in
society, perhaps presented at Court. all the good
things happen to her? Why did it all exciting come her
own way, something that to make her happy? She was

only twenty-four, i- considered she had
looks, interesting looks. yThat fair. Her hands
slackened on the edge of the
and now she almost groped her way back to the and sat
down. As she laid her head back she lffStill to be
calm, because when she got herself r" up in such a
state, inside it made her feel
. for days. And it became evident in her
expresi she knew that.
il now asked herself a question, even quietly, y
did she dislike Helen so much? Her dislike
alamounted to hate. Was it because she was so ffNot
entirely. No, not entirely. It was somey" about
her, that ease, that off-hand manner, that Ji of hers.
The way she talked, and she would talk "
anybody, always the same, to servants, trades
peoIIia anyone, just as Rosie did, while she
herself IpPn act like that. For one thing, her father US
have liked it. Her father had a sense of class. bar
rather", She almost sprang up from the chair now. Why
p she keep seeing the good side of him? He had
deceived her for years. She used to pride herself on
being like him. Now the one wish in her life was that she
could be someone different, free and easy in her ways.
But she had been more free and easy of late since
Mrs Falconer came, and the doctor.
Oh yes, the doctor. She could even joke with him:
they would laugh together as he teased his mother, especially
about the wine making. Mrs Falconer was teaching her
how to make wine. She never knew there were so many
different kinds that could result from the fruit in the
hedgerows: sloe, elderberry, rose-hip syrup,
besides all that could be made from vegetables, such as
rhubarb and potatoes, and a wonderful wine from
parsnips. Cook had been a bit uppish about
making jelly from rose-hips, but her ruffled feathers
had been soothed when Mrs Falconer had given her
a bottle of damson wine and sent her in tasters from
the others, too.
Altogether, she had felt happier of late, until
Rosie had dashed in with her news. She was finding
Rosie an irritant, more so as time went on.
Yet, she needed her. She couldn't think of living in
the house alone and eating alone.
The only comfort in all this was that Helen and her
husband were miles away, and that they were not likely
to move...
It was later in the day that John visited his mother
and the first words she said to him were, "Have you heard about
the sister becoming a lady?"

"Yes, Annie told me."

"What do you think of it?"

What did he think of it? In a way it had put the

jaal seal on his emotions: it had buried, as it were, the tender thoughts of her that he still harboured. Have'

"I think she'll carry the title very well. But then she as a lady before, and will always remain a lady." fs "His mother stared at him hard. "You liked her, dn't you?"

i bar He came back at her quickly now, saying, "I liked bar bar tem all. They are four unusual sisters." , Catherine stretched out her feet towards the blazing bar bar ogs; then, tuing her head to look at John sitting on e other side of the fireplace, she said, "You know, though Mrs Atkinson is a very nice woman, and bar good at her work, just look at this place; and she says j bar bar he would stay with me any time I wished, I must dmit I would have been a bit lonely at this end if it

itadn't been for Miss Beatrice coming in, and with her interest in the wine and things. I think she's what hey call up here a canny lass. And I can tell you this, t feel she is lonely under that prim exterior of hers, because when we get talking and she loosens up,

I here's a warmth there that hasn't been tapped." "I'm glad you find her so companionable. What about Rosie?"

"Oh, Rosie's a lovely girl. There are no complicaons about Rosie. I think she's got over that jilted business, although," she paused, "at times she before comes quiet, and there's a sad look comes into her

12ar eyes, as though she is lost. At those times I forget

to *; she's a young woman and I think I'm dealing with a child, but a hug and a cup of tea usually bring her around. She says I'm like her Mrs Annie next door; she says I'm comfortable."

,_

He laughed now as he said, "Yes, that's Rosie. She needs comfort people."

"She's a bonny g1 ld she's always talkng about that Robbie. Is ther something between them?"

"If Robbie ias anything to do about it, there will be some day. ut se still looks upon him more as a brother. I don't thil she"l l me to her senses with

regard to him until she realises she
might lose him."

'all yes, that's often the way. Do you know something? I'm
looking forward to Christmas."

That's weeks away'

"I know it is, but can still look forward to it. I
think it'll be lovely still: this trees and the garden
all covered with snow and the ground." She napped
her hand towards the grate as he laughed and said,
"Don't bank on it. It'll be pouring with
rain, then the nearest you'll get to it is sleet and a
wind that'll cut the face off you"

"Oh, you are a dapper aren't you? You're not going
yet? You've only been here an hour."

He looked at his watch. "I've been here
two hours and fifteen minutes, Mrs Falconer,
and I could have seen half a dozen patients in that time.
Now don't you get up: I'll see you out. If
I can I'll slip along
this evening."

"Do...d that" her voice was soft now- "and
we'll ask her in for a game of cards. She enjoyed
that
the other night."

"Yes, all right. I'll do that on one condition,
I'm not sticking my winnings in the poor
box. You understand?" "all yes, Mr Scrooge. I
understand." She waved to him as he went out laughing.
He was in the hall putting his coat on when the
communicating door opened and Beatrice appeared.
She hesitated, saying, "Oh, I'm sorry. I
didn't know you were here; I didn't think you were
expected until evening." As she made to step
back, he put out his hand and pulled her forward,
saying, "Don't be silly. Anyway, I think
she's waiting for you," and he turned his head
towards the sitting-room door. He was holding her
hand when he put his other hand on the back of hers,
saying in a low voice, thank you for being so kind
to her. She's very grateful for your company, and
so am I."

Her face flushed pink and her eyelids blinking,
she hesitated her lips before she said, 'It's
nothing, the

links are all on my side. She's taken
some... well, being given me a purpose in
life and taken some of my loneliness away."
They stared at each other; then in a very
small

voice, she said, Rosie spends a great deal of

her time

With the Macintoshes. As you know, I've never
apB"...ved of them but," she swallowed deeply now and
Bided, 'we all need something don't we?'"

His voice was as low as hers as he agreed,

"Yes,

Beatrice, you're right, we all need something. And
I have my deepest thanks and regards for your
affection to my mother. I have been very concerned about
her for some time. You see, her arthritis is worsening
and there will likely come a day when I'll need a
nurse. She makes herself walk about now, but it
can't go on for much longer. Of course, she fights
the fact all the time, because she used to be a live
wire: she could ride a horse as well as any
t

man, and row a boat, too. She used to go out
deep sea fishing from Rye, when we lived down
south." "I Really?" "Really." "I

"She never speaks of it." "No, of course
she wouldn't. She's still angry in- I side that it
all had to come to an end. Half her time she should
be in bed, so you can understand how grateful I am for
your attention to her." His hand slid away from
hers; then he was exclaiming almost in a horror
'Oh, my dear! Don't cry.

Please!"

"No, I'm not, I'm not. I was just... just being
silly. It isn't very often I...I am
thanked for anything I do."

"Well, if you want my opinion, that's bad
manners on the part of many people, I should think. But
don't, please, please don't upset yourself."

"I'm not; I'm just grateful. Now I don't
want your mother to see me like this; if you'll excuse
me." She backed from him, her lips quivering as
she pulled open the door and went back into the house
again, leaving him standing very perplexed.

Well! well! As his mother had said, there was another
side to Miss Beatrice Penrose-Steel.

Indeed, indeed there was. Her loneliness was a
cloak about her, a cloak that she had likely never
lifted to allow her sisters to see the person beneath.
He put on his hat and went thoughtfully out of the
house. Life was full of surprises. Was this why
she insisted on being called Penrose-Steel? He
was well acquainted with the ailments that attacked the
body; but not so much thought was given to the secret
ailments that attacked the mind, and so often loneliness
was one of them.

disbar
 less-than x3 lili"
 H bar 'Us do you good to get away, lass,
 Annie was bar
 pfes, it'll be nice to see Helen again, and she
 wants was j p to see the house before it is sold.
 Its much too B for them, she said; but it's a
 lovely place on the
 H'And you're travelling with her friend, you say?"
 H bar Yes, I remember her. A nice young
 woman. Helen Hpced to spend a lot of time at
 Col Mount. I once went Here on an errand
 years ago. I don't suppose it's j anged
 all that much. But it's a beautiful place. Gets
 Hps name from being in a pass between two hills." :
 1 "Is she coming here for you?" I H "No,
 we're meeting at Newcastle station. I think *
 lhe's moving, too. She lost her husband a little
 while bar
 l'ow l011 w1 y011 staying?" put in
 Robbie. bar just B bar Rosie turned to him, where
 he was sitting at the H bar end of the table, and said,
 "Til the New Year, which H Bill make it about
 a fortnight altogether." y What did Miss
 Beatrice have to say about that?
 'Oh" comRosie now looked from one
 to the other- "not as much as I had thought she would. She
 doesn't of course, like me going down to see Heen,
 and I was expecting to be faced with a battle. But she
 just said, "Well, you know what I think, but you do't
 take any notice of me.""
 "Is that all?" Annie's eyebrows were
 raised.
 "Yes, that's all, Mrs Annie. But she's
 been different of late, I must say. She's got
 a new interest now since the doctor's mother has
 taken the annexe. In fact she's never out of it."
 Annie's lips formed the words, "Oh! Oh!"
 "What do you mean, oh, oh?" Rose asked,
 with a smile.
 "Just, oh, oh. Is there not an ulterior
 motive there?"
 "You mean the doctor?"
 "Yes. Who else would I mean?"
 Rosie did not answer for a moment but she looked
 at Robbie and then shook her head and said, Oh,
 n," which wasn't convincing even to herself, and Robbie
 put in, "Why not? How old is she now,
 twenty-four? And hes what?"
 The question was put to Rosie, but she shrugged her

shoulders and said, "I don't know about him.

Thirty or so, I should say. But I can't imagine..."

"Now don't you say you can't imagine anybody falling for her" come Annie was wagging her finger at her- "men do strange things, especially to people who are kind to their mothers." And she laughed now as she looked at her son; then on a high note, she said, "Isn't it about time you did some strange things, too? What about cocking your cap at Bunting Bella? She's just been widowed for the third time." They all laughed at this suggestion, Robbie his hands towards his mother and said, "Sure if I did, wouldn't it? Desperate men do desperate deeds. And she's got five bairns, and two of 'em ready for work. Yes, it needs thinking about. None of the help I'd get in the yard."

Losie looked at these two friends and listened silly backchat, she thought, I'd really rather be for Christmas. But then, no, it's too near; and it will be lovely to see Helen again. Strange thought interrupted her thinking: Bend the doctor? No. No. He's too nice. He... he 't want her. Then again a thought: But she had suffered of late, hadn't she? Nicer, kinder. And if it did come about, it might make all the difference to life in the house. And if it made her... But the doctor, he's... he's really too good for her. And why should she have someone like him when she herself had been jilted by Teddy? Oh! Wouldy. The name now no longer revived a feeling of (very) bitter one of hate. She had received no word from him, nothing more since that final letter. There were times, even now, when she could hardly believe and thought she must be dreaming. But no, she wasn't dreaming. She had been spurned. That was the word an old-fashioned word, she had been spurned, ejected, thrown aside. And it had done something to a for she would never again feel young or gay. She

ugh at times, especially when she came over : this house was a refuge; these two people had saved her life. Well, if not her life then her sanity. "Do you visit the doctor's mother often?" "Yes. Yes, I'm always popping in on her. She's a very nice old lady, very jolly, but she's crippled with arthritis, yet she still gets about. She made piles with beer, bottles and bottles of wine these last weeks. But she said they're all going to get drunk at Christmas. So she's shown Beatrice how to take the wine. She

wanted to show me, but.. diswell, I
 wasn't interested. bar 'allyou're catching the ten o'clock
 train m the mom- bar
 ing; so I'll run you in."
 Oh, that's nice of you, Robbie. Thank you."
 bar He turned about now and without another word bar
 pulled his cap and coat from the back of the door and
 bar
 went out. s
 As she herself stood up to leave, Annie
 remarked, 5 You'll meet a lot of different people
 at Helen's. were' That'll be another kind of world.
 Who knows, you bar might come across the one you like." be
 It was almost with a bark that Rosie turned on her,
 saying, "I won't! I won't and I wouldn't.
 I...I'll never believe anybody again, not in that
 way. Never! D'you
 hear Mrs Annie? never!"
 Never's a long time, lass. Never's a long
 Ume. know how you feel, though, but stranger things have
 happened. Time will tell. It seems it could be
 happening to Robbie; there are two lasses after him
 again."
 Startled, Rosie said, 'What! After Robbie?
 Why look so surprised; he could marry any day it
 he had the mind," to which Rosie said nothing,
 she only stared wide-eyed at the older woman.
 ances Middleton set the large tray down on
 the b with a clatter, saying, "Well, they've done
 jus-
 * to that I must say. And they're as merry as
 church
 P; laughing their heads off." bar bar Well,
 so will we be," said Cook, when we get pgh these
 three bottles," she pointed to the bar bar Bser,
 "because it's good stuff the old lady makes, jpough
 she did warn me it's very new and needs to bar bar
 Bd for some time. My! I slept like a log last
 night bar te those couple of glasses."
 llt's because you mixed them Cook," said Mary
 nmons. 'Me dad says that's what makes you
 drunk, gung them, more than the amount" I These are
 home-made wines, miss know-all, not bar But?
 stuff your dad drinks."
 The kitchen maid bowed her head slightly, but
 Brie Bluett winked at her, saying, "Well,
 we'll see at happens later at least to me, because
 I'm havin" Be of each, and the sooner the better.
 So, let's get leared away and settle down to a
 night of it because e missis is quite set in there, I

can tell you."

here's a change, if ever I saw one,"

Frances Mid. dieton nodded her head. "I've never had a thank you out of her since she took over, until these last few months. And now she actually asks you to do some thing, not tells you. When I took tea in this afternoon for her and the old lady, she was laughing her head off. It was a sight to see, I can tell you."...

At this moment Beatrice was again laughing her head off as she said, Oh, I can't believe that, Mrs Falconer."

'allyou can, my dear, you can. He there, sitting grinning like an idiot now, went upstairs and wrecked his room. He even threw his toys out of the window, all because I wouldn't let him go on a day's outing with-" she now shook her head and looked at John, saying, "what was it? the Boys" Brigade, or the Band of Hope, or something? He was only six at the time. It was no use trying to knock into his head that you had to be invited, that it was only special children that went. We lived in Tunbridge Wells at the time, and the trip was to Hastings and he had been to Hastings a number of times before that. And then there was the time he was sent home from school for kicking a boy on the shins, and the parents came to the school and complained. But I was for him that time; he wasn't ten and this young lout was twelve or so, and a bully."

'Mother! Mother! Will you shut up? And put the corks in those botdes, or I shall start reminiscing, or perhaps recalling me story of a young lady who dived off (he end of Hastings pier in little more than her knickers."

"I didn't! I didn't! It wasn't like that at all."

p it was. And what you need now is a very H coffee."

(S Til tell the girls."

IQU'U do nothing of the sort." John stabbed his bar rather down at Beatrice who was about to rise from bar ouch. I'm the only steady one on my feet; I'll bar it. And Mother-" he tued now and his finger lag wagging to where she sat in the deep arm bar to the side of the e, and he said, "No more I, d'you hear? I'm on duty in the moing at 1past eight, and I know what your potions do to Hiead. I've had experience of them before. So, his (he corks where they are. Now, mean it."

I'll be right, all right. We'll see
about it after we've had the coffee."

After he had left the room there was silence for a
moment or two. Then Catherine Falconer said
quietly, "It's been a lovely Christmas,
hasn't it? I've never been so relaxed. I think
it's because he's got me settled in this lovely little
house."

Beatrice did not answer for a moment. She raised
her eyes and looked at the ceiling and in a thoughtful way
she said, "It's the nicest Christmas I've had
every...well, since I was a child. Even when they were
alive, my mother and father, there was always Ellen and Marion
and Rosie. They were always so kind and laughing, and somehow
I was never able to fit in. I don't know why. At
times I felt I had no one belonging to me, except
father. And then to find all that."

Now, now forget it, my dear. Forget it."

Catherine led herself painfully to the edge of her chair,
and said, again, "Forget about the past. You can never cure
the past. Just think of the future. You're a bonny
young woman... a bonny lass, as they say up
here"

Beatrice quickly pulled her head up from the back
of the couch, saying, "You think I'm bonny?"

"Yes. Yes, I do. You're very
presentable." "I'm... I'm putting on
weight; I eat too many chocolates."

"Well, the cure for that is to stop eating
chocolates. Ration yourself, and look to the future;
you're young and have all life before you." "Yes, I
will. I will."

"What will you do?" John was asking the question as
he appeared carrying a tray with three cups of
coffee. But it was his mother who answered him, saying,
"Never mind. Just let's have the coffee, and we can
pull out the corks again."

"Oh no, you can't Mother. I mean it."

"We'll see, we'll see..."

They drank their coffee. They had one more glass
of wine, and it was time. They talked, at least
Catherine did, recalling the days in Tunbridge
Wells, and Rye, and Hastings, and trips
to Eastbourne and Brighton. Then after a time, when she
sat for a while with her eyes closed, John said,
"I think you're for bed. Anyway, I want
to see you tucked up before I leave."

"Yes, I think you're right. It's been a long
day and a lovely day." She looked from one to the other
and repeated, "A lovely day." And as he

helped her to her feet and handed her her sticks, she said, "Now leave me alone; I can manage."

Beatrice was on her feet too, saying, "May I coe and help you?" i "Oh no!"

The protest was loud. hat'll be the day bar need somebody to help me to take my clothes od-night, my dear. See you in the moing." (d night, Mrs Falconer; and thank you." I've nothing to thank me for, my dear, the should be from me. Now you sit yourself She jerked her head towards her son. Give een minutes and I'll be all tucked up." y well; fifteen minutes."

f both remained standing watching her hobble he room; then John, turning to Beatrice and backslash out his hand said, Come and sit down." lid not actually touch her but she looked at him ent before taking her seat again at one comer couch while he dropped down onto the other d lying back and stretching out his legs, he 've never seen her so happy and contented for She missed my father terribly, and I couldn't place."

you fill her life now." umed to look at her. She, too, was lying back lng relaxed. He had never seen her look so I and, could he say, happy? Over these past i he had got to know her in a way hand would previously have imagined. The young madam embered appeared to have never been. Yet, he ell aware it must still be there, but her better which hadn't been given rein, had now come fore and made her into an attractive, pretty woman. Yes, and she was pretty. She hadn't a tike her sisters, for both Helen and Rosie were ike; Marion perhaps had been inclined to less, as was Beatrice herself, but it was a d and attractive plumpness. Above al, he would never have imagined he could grow fond of her, but he had. She had been so kind and thoughtful to his mother, too; and his mother's opinion of her was that she was a firstclass girl.

She broke into his thoughts by saying quietly, I don't think I'll ever experience another Christmas like this."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's been exceptional, in all ways. I imagined there would be just Rosie and me, and she would be spending most of her time next door, and...and I'd be on my own. When Grandpapa and Grandmama were here, and Mother and Father, and Helen, Marion and Rosie, I used to think I

wouldn't mind being on my own. The house
always seemed packed with people. Sometimes I longed to be
on my own, but...b not lately." Her voice was
very low now, and she brought herself upwards to the edge of the
couch and pressed her joined hands on her knees.
And, her head turning slowly towards him, she said,
"Do you know what it's like to feel lonely? Not only
lonely, but one alone, and out of it?"
He, too, had hitched himself upright and, after a
moment's thought he said "Not lonely in that way But,
you know, Beatrice, there is a feeling of what I
call aloneness in most of us. There are parts of us
that are empty and need to be filled-" he shook
his head now, he couldn't voice the word love, but in
a hesitant way he went on, "until it's
filled with something, companionship, affection.
I'm...I'm sorry, Beatrice, you have felt like
(his. I never guessed. Then no-one knows what
goes on in another's mind. But don't be sad,
or you'll spoil the day." He put out his hand and
Ers now, and he recalled that he had done before and
that it had made her cry; and it he same again, for her
eyes were bright tears. Hitching himself closer to her,
he "Oh! my dear, dear Beatrice. Please!
If you've been crying she'll kill me." ight.
It's all right. It's...x's just because
I... I feel needed now' comher eyes were i
his- "I...I have a friend in you." Beatrice, you
can rely on that." He was fmg her two closed
hands between his own now. bar when a voice from deep within
him said, Carelareful, he answered it loudly Why?
She takes bar Bf Mother. She's kind, and I'm
fond of her. Yes. bar Tve grown fond of her.
And what else is there me? The past is dead. Very
dead. In fact, it was Br bom; at least it was
never given birth; it was gled by time in just being too
late. So what is for me? Who do I meet at
old Comwallis's din)? His married contemporaries
and their wives, a dizzy young daughters, sometimes a
settled spin, And he must say he preferred the
spinster to the Ey ones, especially the
sixteen-year-old one, who i developed all
kinds of ailments to take her to his ay, until he
had the option either of actually berude to her or of
putting the case to Comwallis. chose the latter, after
which her visits ceased, only earn that the young lady in
question said she hated ctor Falconer, and that he
didn't know his job and dy should go to him. Such were the
passions of
tth

ut here he was facing a different case
altogether.

ttatrice was a very presentable young woman. More-
over, she was the owner of this beautiful house though
t was mortgaged to the hilt. Bt what she could offer,
there was herelf In

thoughtful, as her attention to his oSo had e was And
she was good comnanv own.

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toer h011 laughig Dow" their hea

shThat T words took the smile tace as she said,

I wouldn't mind if you hadnt a

penny now or at any other time * y

aHeThis pause before he said. O. Batrice.

Her head was drooped right down on her chest

ow as she muttered, I...I cant hep T

way I feel about you. There " Her " thf arc

was , -- comre "er head came up and the tears were

splashing down her face now and her

voce was thick as she muttered S"...@l is never

done ladies. But j

over, she was the owner of this beautiful house, even

though it was mortgaged to the hilt. But apart

fro what she could offer, there was herself. She was

thoughtful, as her attention to his mother had shown. And she

was good company. She was surprisingly wel read, which

must have developed from her loneliness and feeling apart from

the others. Of course, she still had the traits of her

father showing in her;

and she had a feeling for land, and definitely for the

house.

"I've...I've embarrassed you." Her

voice came to him softly, and he shook his head and

vehemently denied her statement by saying,

"Embarrassed me? Don't be silly, dear.

It's the reverse, you've...y've made me think,

and... and of the future. But there" -- he dropped her

hand and shrugged his shoulders- "I know what my

future is: I may have my own practice one of

these days and that's as far as it will ever go. No honour

or gory for me. Anyway, you only get those when

you start cutting people up and you take out the right parts and

manage not to leave any instruments inside."

They were both laughing now, their heads almost together.

But her next words took the smile fro his face as

she said, "I wouldn't mind if you hadn't a penny,

now or at any other time."

There was a long pause before he said,
"Oh, Beatrice." Her head was drooped right
down on her chest now as she muttered, "I...I
can't help it. It's...x's the way I feel about
you. There." Her head came up and the tears were
splashing down her face now, and his voice was
thick, as she muttered, his kind of thing is never done
by young ladies. But... but as I said, I
H bar lp it. I.. .I don't suppose I
would have had the
age if it hadn't been for-" she gave a wry
smile
ppointed her thumb towards the table on which
bar every a number of bottles and glasses.
'But... but
bar se, forget it. At least we'll both forget
it by to-
bar row morning. As... as long as you'll be my
friend,
bar bar dis.that wil be enough."
e had his hands on her shoulders now and his jbe was
quiet, as he said, "Beatrice. Look at
me."
pwen she looked at him, he said, "Would you
bar bar Her eyes were screwed up tight: the
tears were aming from her eyes and she was unable
to speak pis arms went about her, and she fell against
him. bar bar ft's all right, my dear, it's all
right." As he stroked bar hair he felt a
surge of feeling sweep through him. bar bar couldn't
put a name to it. It wasn't passion. Was ove? It
was something. Compassion, perhaps. Yes. s, compassion.
But even more than that. Pity?.. ell, no, no.
She wasn't the kind of person you could (ly. She was
too strong and... and she loved him. It bar as good
to be loved. Oh yes, it was good to be Sved. He
held her closer, and when she actually loaned, he
lifted her face from his shoulder and put bar so lips
on hers. And at this her arms went round his bar ck and
she returned his embrace with such fervour lat he
felt humbled at the feeling she was expressing,
moment later they were standing apart and he was raping her
eyes, as he said, "Well, if Mother's weakess
has brought this about, let us drink to it, eh? e" have
parsnip this time; it isnt so potent.
As he was about to move from her greater-than she said,
You ght be sorry in the morning."
'ationo, no." He shook his head. "I'm not
drunk. It takes a lot of that stuff to get me
over the top. I've been seasoned to it from a boy.

I admit it damps down the worries of the day, but drunk? No. And tomorrow morning I'll just feel the same."

"Oh John. You'll never know what you've done for me."

"You'll likely have to pay for it, my dear.

I'm bad tempered, I'm taciturn, I'm unstable, at least in my times, coming and going: as my mother has always told me, I'm never to be found five minutes in the same place."

She now dabbed her face with her own handkerchief as she smiled and said, "I'll put up with all that, dear."

And she knew she would. No matter what his foibles were, she would welcome them, because he would be hers. Her husband. She would be a married woman, a wife. She suddenly thought of Helen and a wave of emotion, not untouched with fear, swept over her.

Yet, at the same time she knew an elation.

Helen was married to a man twice her age, and she knew now as she had known then, that her main object in marrying Leonard had been to get away from here, and from her. Yes, from her, because there had never been any love between them. But now she was marrying someone younger, good looking, attractive and a doctor.

As she watched John pouring out the parsnip wine she had a great longing for it to be morning, for his reactions next day would confirm that it was no dream and he wasn't regretting what had happened tonight. On this thought she stiffened. She wouldn't let him

get. He mustn't, he had given his word, he had. She closed her eyes for a moment and told herself to

calm. "To us." Her eyes sprang wide.

She took the glass

from him and smiled as she repeated softly,

"To us," while the words in her head were loud, ringing.

"To us. To us. Oh yes, to us."

Looking back, Rosie remembered the shock she received when, in the New Year, she had returned home to be met by a radiant Beatrice. She recalled how first she had been surprised by the happy expression on her face, and of the gaiety in her voice as she had welcomed her back. Then later, in the study, Beatrice had poured out her news.

At first she had made no response to it, and the old Beatrice showed itself when she cried, "Why are you looking like that? Why shouldn't I be engaged?" and she had spluttered, "No-no reason at all, only

it's... a shock, a surprise. hat
John... the doctor, should love me?" The
doctor love her? Rosie recalled she had almost
said the words out loud, except that she would have changed the
word, "her" to "y". She had again stammered, as
she said, "We-well, it-it's so unexpected. I
mean, I never knew you loved him."

here's lots of things about me you don't know."
'allyes. Yes, Beatrice, you're right there." She
had nodded at her, then added, "But I am glad for
you." The rest of the conversation had been stilted and
B had gone upstairs and changed her clothes.

And when Beatrice saw her in her old coat and
hat, which leant she was going next door, she had
looked at her and said flatly, "What has
happened makes no difference to my opinion of our
neighbours and your constant visits there," to which she
had answered briefly, "It makes no difference
to me, either, Beatrice.?"...

Both Robbie and Annie had welcomed her
back so warmly that she felt she was really home. But
when Mrs Annie said to her, "Now give me your
news of Helen," she had replied "I'll deal with my
visit and Helen later; first, I'll give you the
doorstep news." But when she had told them,
they both stared in disbelief and said, "The
doctor and Beatrice?" with Robbie further
remarking, "He's such a sensible fellow. When did
this happen?"

"From our brief snatches of conversation,
I understand it was on the evening of Christmas
Day.

"He must have been drunk" Annie had
bobbed her bare head. "That's it. And let me tell
you, lass, you can't get drunk, more drunk on
home-made wine than the bar real stuff. I should
know." And she had bobbed her head again as if there were
a story behind her words. "Well, there's one thing for
sure," Rosie said;

"she'll be no longer on her own and needing me;
and so I shall get myself work of some kind."

"Work?" Robbie had turned on her. "Work?"

"What kind of work can you do? You'd have to go to one of these
secretarial colleges or something like that to learn."

"I wouldn't go to a secretarial college, I
would go on a farm. I've had enough experience here,
haven't I?" She looked from one to the other. "I
have dealt

with horses, cows, pigs and all the lesser
breeds haven't I? for years now. So, don't you

think I'm qualified to get a job on a farm?"

Robbie and his mother had looked at each other, and Robbie then said, "Aye, yes; you've had plenty of experience, with a couple of horses, a couple of cows and a couple of pigs."

And at this she had put in, "And don't forget your main trade, cabbage, onions, carrots, leeks, the lot on the ground, besides the staff clinging to the wall."

The response to this had been that both Robbie and his mother laughed loudly. And after a moment Rosie's voice joined theirs; and then she said,

"Well, you see what I mean?"

"Yes. Yes, lass, I see what you mean." Annie sat down at the other side of the table and she said, "I'm not making this up." She glanced over at her son now, asking, "Am I?"

"If you're going to say what I think you're going to say, no, you're not making it up, Mam."

Again Annie had looked at Rosie, then said, "Only yesterday, he there" and she nodded towards her son- was making enquiries in the market to see if there was any young fellow he could take on as a helper, an apprentice, sort of, you know. That's right, isn't it?" She had again looked at Robbie, and he nodded at Rosie, saying, "Allyes, that's quite right. We're not making it up; in fact, I've got two young fellows coming to see me today. If you stay long enough you'll meet them. But what Mam's trying to say is, there could be three applicants. D'you get me?"

Rosie, so to speak, got him, and her face brightened and she said, "Really?"

"Jfc, really. You see, as I've only the two horses hey're inside most of the winter, that field down j half of it at least, is wasted. So, the idea was 'low more. The town's spreading: they'll take as jh as I can give them and pay my price. The land s being built on now used to be alotments. Well, d'you say?"

jpi I'd love that' said Rosie. "Oh, yes." And she ,ment her hands across the table towards the older an and, gripping them, she said "It would be a Jfef to be out of the house all day and just have to jback there at night And she surely won't put up h resistance to it now. Anyway" comshe shrugged shoulders- "she's different. It shows in her face. "ow she's twenty-four, and an oldish twenty-four; j bar today she seems younger than me." And

now ling at Robbie, she said, "And will I be paid? Well, course I'll be paid, but how much?"

bar sHuh! It's started' comhe nodded at his mother-JB-EVERY money business. That's what one of them said to e in the market, "How much?" Well, miss-" his disfes on her again, his face took on a dark stem look

Esd, 'x all depends on your capabilities
Miss If you come up to expectations you'll get ten gs a week to start withand your grub. And I'd e to bet that's twice as much as your siter pays er cook."

Rosie did not come back at him with any jocular

but looking down towards the table, she said now, I've never had any money of my own; - ling used to be bought for me. I was sometimes ipven a shilling, but that was for a birthday, to spend bar bar "n weets. However, since Father died, there has been

nothing. She... Beatrice, reluctantly paid for my train fare to Helen's and I had nothing with which to buy Christmas presents. I felt awful. But Helen was kind. Helen is kind, always was.

I... I would have loved to stay down there, and I could have, only they are going to Switzerland: Leonard is not well, he's had to come out the Army, and he has to spend sottie months there. And you know what?" As she now looked from one to the other her eyes were moist as she said Helen gave me five pounds before I left and they had given me so many presents at Christmas."

"Don't cry, lass. Don't cry.

Anyway, yo" have Helen. And although we are poor substitutes, you've got us."

Rosie's lids blinked rapidly and she said, 'Oh, yes, I've got you both. And you know something? I wouldn't be here without you; I would have run away, done something quite stupid. You know I used to be airy-fairy, mad-hatter, more like a boy than a girl, but a dreaming one, I was always dreaming But no more, no more."

When her head drooped again Annie said briskly, "Well, if you're going to start work, miss, there's no time like the present, and we're not going to pay you for sitting there guzzling tea and eating me best scones. They were for the tea, anyway Now, come on, get yourself up and let's get outsid."

That had happened on the day she had come back. But

now this was another day: Beatrice's wedding day, and John's wedding day. John stood facing Doctor Comwallis. They were each dressed in a dark suit with a caration in the 12ar onhole. It was Doctor Comwallis.who spoke, say-
*We! day of execution," and he took two steps
pr John and, putting his hand on his shoulder, bar aid 'How d'you feel?'"
I don't mean physically, I mean mentally; how lbu feel about all this? It was a surprise to me, you
bar bar will, that you were going to take her on, because always found her a bit of a madam." Everyone has two sides, sir." plAnd you've seen the good side?"" bar bar Oh yes. Yes, I've seen the good side." bar bar And you're quite happy about all this?"" bar bar Yes, of course." A stiff note had entered John's pee ow.
bar bar Well, that's something to know. And you know, IB'RE doing yourself well. I know the place is up to p eck in debt, but nevertheless, it's a very fine bar mse; it'll be worth your paying off that debt, boy. s (he best house around here for miles except perps for The Hall, and that place is about as warm as bar beer cellar. But one thing I would ask you: why d't you have a church wedding?"" bar She didn't want a church wedding, sir; she wanted bar one quietly." He did not add "And quickly." She d seemed so anxious to get it over and done with. d he had wondered if it was because she sensed doubt in him. However, he had pushed this ought aside; she was a nice girl, a good girl, and was very, very fond of her. And he had to many Mnetime, for he wanted a family. Yes, he wanted a tanily. And that house was made for a family. He 8u see it swarming with children. Yes, he wanted a family, and she wanted children. Oh, yes, she had stated that quite openly: she would love children and she didn't care how many.
"Well, time's pressing, so let's away."
Doctor Comwallis thrust out his hand, saying, "I wish you all the best in the world, John. We have known each other long enough for me to be able to say two things I like about you: you're straight and you're a damn good doctor. And" comhe poked his head forward- "an uncomplaining one when Betsy Ann" comhe pointed to his leg- "decides she wants a rest; and so, thanks for that."

"Well, sir, I've... I've been very happy here and hope to go on being so and working with you for a long time with Betsy Ann." They both laughed as the older man pushed him in the shoulder, saying, "Go on. Get yourself away to a lifetime of worry, frustration and regret."

As John led the way, he repeated the words to himself, A lifetime of worry, frustration and regret." Oh, no! he hoped not. It would be a happy house, and what was more, his mother was settled for good and delighted about the arrangements, for she had taken to Beatrice and Beatrice to her. Yes, that was one of the main advantages, they had taken to each other...

As Rosie looked at and listened to the man behind the desk uttering the words that were marrying her sister to John Alconer, the lovely doctor, as she thought of him she could not take it in that this was a marriage: everywhere was so bare, so stingy looking and all without God. It was a queer thing to think, but but it jumped into her mind: there was nothing re j disJ

,Jas or holy happening that was tying these two i bar "le together for life. It seemed to be over in a few 'Btes, and then she was kissing Beatrice and then it. And John put his arms about her and again she ght He's such a lovely man. She did not at that jinent add, 'What does he see in our Beatrice?'" but thought was wavering somewhere in the back of ind...

he dining table was beautiflly set, but there were "jy ten people seated around it. Yet, the talk was ,d and merry, dictated mostly by Doctor ComwalThen, at three o'clock the coach was at the door L they were waved off to spend their honeymoon Still Leonards, which was a part of Hastings, so well wn to John, and which had been suggested by his her. Apparently Beatrice had no preference for Are they spent their honeymoon: as she had laugh'y said to his mother, "It wouldn't matter where it as spent, even in Bog's End, as long as I was with j bar hn."

This had caused a great laugh between them ,;; Bog's End was known as the lowest part of Pelln and ruled by the riff-raff.

It was half-past seven in the evening. John came through the communicating door from the annexe to meet his wife in the hall. Her face was straight, her tone tart. "Why must you always go next door before you come home?" she demanded. less-than thought it was all my home." His

voice was weary.

"Don't be silly. You know what I mean, the meal's been waiting since half-past six."

"And don't you be silly, either, Beatrice,"

he said in a sharp tone. "You know I've told you again and again that I can't walk out and leave a full surgery if the old man is not able to do it."

"You have an assistant."

"Well, the assistant's surgery was full, too. And what's more, I had a call."

Saying, "Calls. Calls," she led the way now to the dining-room. He did not follow her, but said, "Would you allow me to go into the cloakroom first?"

After washing his hands he gazed at his reflection in the mirror. His face had changed over the past eight-

months, he told himself. Had he been married for eighteen months? It seemed like eighteen, at least, the last year had. The first six months had been enjoyable... well, up to a point. He had known it all; at least about sex and marriage. He dealt with the effects of it every day. But hadn't experienced his own. During the first few years, he had to admit, he had been attracted by her intense desire of him; then it had become a little more, finally wearisome; sometimes he would describe her as ravenous. He knew now that she had really inherited her father's trait; the one that had led to his death.

Finally, he had turned on her and said, "No more. Not tonight. I'm...I'm a tired man. I do a twelve-hour day, and I can't keep this up."

She could see her now, her face a beetroot red, and she had jumped out of the bed and walked the floor for a while he had got up and calmed her down, imploring, "Try to understand there's moderation in everything."

While at the same time thinking how awful it was going to say this to a woman, and she his wife. But was telling him up and now blaming him because hadn't given her a child. He had often thought, secretly, that her antics should have produced children just one or two. He hadn't told her that he hadn't come straight from work that night, but had called in

to see Annie who, like his mother, was beset with arthritis; although not in her state, that extent. But Annie had found out late that day great pain in her left arm from her shoulder aches and it had put a stop to some of her hard

* Luckily, Rosie was proving a marvellous helper. He had never seen Rosie looking so happy well, not exactly happy, that girl would never really feel happy again unless she were to realise how Robbie felt about her. But she loved being in that house. Sometimes he did not see her for a week or more because when she came in she generally went straight up to her room, and he was either in his office working, or with his mother... and Beatrice. That was another thing, Beatrice hardly ever allowed him to be alone with his mother. And what was also beginning to trouble him now was the fact that his mother was seeing another side to her daughter-in-law. Only yesterday she had said to him, "Things aren't right, are they?" and he had answered, "Oh, just the usual marriage pains," to which she had replied, "She's changed... changed in all ways. I've never seen her like this."

"Of course you haven't, Mother, because you didn't know her before you came here." He could have enlarged on this by adding, "You first met her just when she was setting her trap," for he knew now from his inner knowledge of his wife that she had worked up to that proposal. Oh, yes, it was quite clear to him now. Still, it was done and the thing to do was to make the best of a bad job. Life must go on.

At this moment he was asking himself, "But how was it to go on like this?" for he was feeling angry inside... They were halfway through the meal when he looked across at her and said "Why couldn't you tell me that Helen had moved back here?"

He watched her gulp on her food before she answered, "Because I didn't think it would be of any interest to you."

"I doubt that your sister had come to live here again, could call?" he won't call."

"No, I suppose not, knowing the welcome she had."

"May I ask how you've just found out? You must have been over to the piggeries and talked with Robert."

"Yes, I called in to see my friends... and Rosie, whom I haven't seen for over a week, informed me I she had told you about Mrs Sylvia Davison selling-

the Col Mount and that Helen and Leonard were buying it."

"Then can you tell me why she has bought it when Was ordered to Switzerland, from which one could have assumed that

he had consumption or some such, . surely
this end of the country is no help to a
j bar sumptive? Answer me that: why did she
buy it?"

"You had better ask her when you see her, or
at

3st I will."

bar bar You won't!" She had half risen from
her chair.

bar out wont go and visit them."

(Iw-hy not?"

He'd really had no intention of visiting them; the
ought of seeing Helen again would be too much.

H he had said, 'She is my sister-in-law,
and I liked

rionard very much. Out of courtesy we should visit
y233 we could go together."

bar lShe banged down her knife and fork on me

dis* her lips hardly moved as the words came
through.

"You know how I feel about Helen, so don't you
dare i suggest that I... that we visit them."

He was on his feet now, his anger showing, as he
cried at her, "Don't you dare tell me what
I can or cannot do. I intend to visit them,
so get that into your head, and anyone else I wish
to see, when and where I like. Ive had enough of your
niggling. I think that the less we see of each other
for the time being, the better. So from now on I'll make
it my bsiness to sleep in the guest room..."

Before he could finish she was round the table, crying at
him, Oh no! No, you won't! You won't show me
p in front of the staff." But then her commanding
voice changed to a plea as she said, 'Please

John, don't do that. Don't do that to me. I
promise you, I... I won't be..." She

drooped her head; she could not put a word to the demands
she made on him, that feeling that consumed her, that
made her want to bury herself in him, possess him,
make him hers alone. Oh, yes, hers alone.

Even his feelings for his mother were intruding into her
emotions now; he spent too much time with his mother. If
she wasn't careful she would come to dislike her.

He put out his hand and touched her shoulder, saying,
All right, all right. Don't get upset.

We'll see. Just leave it. I'm...I'm going
into the office; I've got some work to do now.

"Please! Please finish your dinner."

"No, I can't. I'm not really hungry.

Ask Frances to bring a cup of coffee in to me."

She bowed her head again and stood still, and he walked past her and out of the room.

In his office he sat staring down at the neat array

of pads, papers, penils, pens and ink, everything in place and a place for everything He closed his eyes, put his elbows on the table and leant his head against his hand. Helen in Col Mount, not twenty minutes away

His elbow seemed to slide away from him and his head came up with a jerk as he asked himself, What difference does it make? She's married, I'm married I don't forget she's married to... a lovely man. He couldn't hear her voice saying it. And who was he married to? A termagant, and an obsessive one, and an enigma: she was two or more persons-the housewife which she acted the madam; and at times the talkative, pleasant young companion, a facet of her character which had disappeared long ago into the hungry, insatiate even indecent creature of the night, rav-

ish at times.

He wanted love, he wanted bodily satisfaction, but was a limit. He couldn't imagine that this feeling had been inspired in her just by marriage; and yet I had no man before himself. He'd heard of such women but had never thought to experience the effects of one. He wished he could talk to someone about it. But he couldn't imagine himself bringing up such a subject with Cornwallis. It must surely be an inherited trait one which led back to her father. But Helen was back and into his mind too and he could see himself sitting with her on the top of Craig Ior, and her pointing across the valley to her friend's house. And the sad thing about it then was that they both had been aware they had met too late, just a little too late. But he raised his eyes to the ceiling when he heard to

muted footsteps going across the floor. She was in the bedroom. He rose quickly and went quietly out, through the hall, down the long corridor and into the annexe.

His mother was in bed. He tapped on the bedroom door, calling, "All right?"

"All yes, all right dear. Come in."

Catherine looked at her son and said, "Been getting it in the neck again?"

He pulled up a chair to the side of the bed as he said "Sort of."

She stared at him and watched his head droop, and then she said softly, "Would you like to talk about it? There's something happening and I can't get to the bottom of it."

He lifted his head quickly and looked at her.

Yes, Yes, he'd like to talk about it And he could talk to her: she was a wise woman was his mother. He asked quietly, "Have you heard of or had any experience of knowing women who are... well, very highly sexed?"

He watched her eyes become hooded, and then she said, "I was right then."

What d'you mean?"

"I guessed it was something like that. Oh yes, lad, I've heard of women who can eat a man alive.

Yet, when you see them during the day they are so pitiful that you'd think butter wouldn't melt in their mouths.

It's only when someone speaks about it that you learn of these things. It's natural with some men; but when it's a woman I understand it's worse. You might not believe it but your Aunt Ada's sister-in-law was one such. He had to leave her. I suppose you could say it's not really their fault, it's the way they're made."

There was a long pause before he nodded.

And it's odd' com her head was wagging now- it's generally the quiet ones, the demure ones that turn out like that. Under other circumstances they would likely be on the streets... as prostitutes."

Oh, Mother!"

"Now don't say it like that son, but it's true.

D'you remember Farmer Braithwaite, and how everybody condemned him because he walked out and left his poor little wife with the farm and three children? Well, he had something on his side as well, he told his father all about it. His work and everything else had suffered because of her."

"Mrs Braithwaite?" His eyes were wide.

Yes. Mrs Braithwaite."

He looked to the side. She had been a smallish man, not unlike Beatrice in figure and ways; a housewife, bossy. The things you knew and the things she didn't know.

"I would sleep in another room for a time."

I told her that, but she got into a state."

"Well, it might calm her down. She should be taking a sedative, you know, one to knock her asleep."

"can't see that ever happening."

"No, nor can I win her."

You know, I thought the world of her at first. But here you are, you don't know people until you live it with them closely."

She put her hand out. "I'm sorry, son."

He stood up and went to the window and looked Kit into the twilight as he said "Helen has come to me at Col Mount and she knew it and never told me I got it from Rosie."

"So did I."

He swung round and looked at her. "You knew?"

"Yes. Yes, I knew, and I also know other things, so I thought the less you knew, the better for your peace of mind."

Oh, Mother!" He sat down again. And as he muttered something, she repeated it, 'alright, it's a hell of a life, but it's got to be lived, and you've got to put your foot down. Move to that other room."

"No," he shook his head. "I can't do that yet. She was in a state."

"Well, it's up to you. But looking at you now, I think what you need most is sleep. So, give me a kiss and get yourself away."

He kissed her and they held on to each other for a moment. Then he turned and went out and back into his office.

It was after twelve when he went upstairs. She was lying on her side and she appeared to be asleep. And when he lay down beside her she did not turn towards him. And he sighed a deep sigh, but it was some time before sleep overtook him and gave him enough rest to face another day.

For rather the past two days John had been attending a series of lectures at a London hospital, and he had just left Trafalgar Square and was walking towards the Strand when a figure he had noticed darting between two cabs came to a breathless stop in front of him and gasped, "I really thought it was you, but I'm not sure."

John saw a tall, well-dressed, tanned young man, and for a moment he did not recall who he was, until rather every young man added "You're a long way from Pellam. I never expected to see anyone from there down the line, and...and it's my last day. Well, I leave tomorrow. Until that moment John had been unable

to recall jilbo the man was. And then me
name hit him. This ts Teddy, Rosie's Teddy;
Edward Golding, whom Jlle had first met at the
garden party, on Beatrice's pwenty-first birthday.
But this wasn't the Teddy who Pd ruined
Rosie's life. He had changed. The other
3eddy had been more like his name; young, very bar
3oung. This one was a mature man And now he was
being asked if everything was all right back in
Fellbum. And he answered stiffly, Yes; when
I left three days ago, things were much as usual.
His voice low and his face now unsmiling, the young
man said, 'How is Rosie?'"

The nerve of the fellow, to ask how Rosie was;
so he answered bluntly, "She's very well and
apparently enjoying her work."

"Rosie working? Is she better then?"

John put his head to one side, saying,
"Better? I have never known Rosie to be ill,
except wih a cold."

"You what? You...y are her doctor, aren't
you?"

"Yes, I am her doctor."

"And... and you say she has never been ill?"

"Yes, that's what I said."

John ow watched the young fellow look
towards the traffic that was passing thickly on the
road, then put out his hand as if to rest it against the
shop window, as if he were changing his mind. And now
speaking briskly, he said, here's... there's a
coffee shop further along. Would... would you mind
if... if we talked for a moent?"

What John answered now was, 'I have an hour
before my train goes. All right."

Neither of them spoke again until they had entered the
coffee shop and taken a seat in the far comer. They had
the place almost to themselves; there wee only two other
customers seated. It was John who ordered the
coffee and while they waited for its coming John
watched the young man run his hands through his thick hair
before he said again, "You said that Rosie had never been
ill?"

"That's what I said, except..." but John
was inter-

ed by the young man saying, But...b twice n I
called she had what was supposed to be meaAnd then after
her father died, I met you dis.and you wouldn't let me
see her.

o, I wouldn't let you see her because I had
given and edative. She needed one. She had just leaed

roth about her father's character. He had left them
o the eyes in debt through his women and gam-
*"

ut...what about the problem she had inherited?"
nherited? Inherited what?" John watched me ig
man now grip his forehead with his stretched
l and say, he grandfather's sister, the one who
in the asylum. I...I saw the letter and...and it
been passed on and I couldn't..."

Vhat in me name of God! ae you talking about?"
i now hitched himself forward on his seat and 'aid
Golding swallowed deeply as he murmured
itriche, she... she came to Newcastle and... and
red me the letter. It related how the old aunt had
in the asylum the grandfather's sister. It...x exied
her mania." He stopped for a moment wetted ips,
then seemed to be troubled with swallowing re he went
on. "She... she apparently had fits dis.and what
I imagined was a..well...a sort of eria mat
caused her to disrobe... recall that word solicitor
had used, she disrobed, he said and ...went tearing
around the place. And... and Bee said that" he now
put both elbows on the table gripped his head for a
moment until John asked
quietly, "Said what?"

nd still in the same position, but in a
whisper, the ig man said "Rosie had inherited...
and that's

why I couldn't see her when I called on those
two casions. She...she suggested that because the news
would have to be broken to me sooner or later she felt
duty-bound to tell me then. As she put it, it would
be dreadful for both of us if this happened in
America; here, she could have treatment and understanding."

He now stared at John across the table, but John
felt unable to make any comment and the young man went
on, "You... you will remember that Rosie was y
gay; in fact, when I first saw her she was up a
tree- And she danced about and sang." Again he
closed his eyes. "It all seemed to fit into the
pattern. *I was devastated. I loved Rosie
deeply then" -- me Words had been muttered-
"And I... I still do. heart has been sore for
her these past years." his voice becoming almost
demanding, he leaned towards John and said "Why?
Why? Why would she have done this?"

Tl reply John could have given him at that mo
ment was, "Because she's an evil, deceiving
woman." Wht she had put to this man about Rosie
was an evil g; what she had done to himself was a

deceiving thing: she had ensnared him into marriage with a soft side, a part of a character that didn't belong to her. She had played on her loneliness. She was afraid of lonely, which very likely had been the cause of her determination to separate the young couple and so keep Rosie with her.

The young man was speaking again, saying, "She made me promise never to tell Rosie the reason for breaking off the engagement because this would only increase her trouble."

Suddenly John put his hand across and gripped the fellow's wrist as he said, "Come back with me;

she is there. She has never got over you, I'm sure. It's a dreadful thing you did, but I can see now

just bar bar you're not to blame." Once more Edward Golding drooped his head and bar bar said "I...I can't. I'm married. I...I had a daughter just a month ago."

bar bar bar John's grip slackened and fell away and he sat back bar bar his seat and stared at the bent head opposite, and bar bar repeated to himself, "Married and has a daughter."

But it was a natural thing to do to seek solace with someone else.

"That woman!" The young man was sitting upright and taut now. "I could go to her now and bar bar throttle her, really throttle her. Why? Why did she do

bar bar *Simply because she couldn't bear to be left alone. bar bar believe if you had married Rosie and lived in Newfie, you would have heard nothing about this, but bar thought of Rosie going so far away, and with her bar bar two sisters already cut off from her, apparently P couldn't bear it. But oh, that is no excuse. It was a devil thing to do. Dear God! I'll say it was."

He bar NOW, Edward Golding was leaning across towards her and in an intense whisper asked, "Will you tell her? Will you explain to her? Tell her

I...I've bar thought about her every day in sorrow for her-" he bar every a shake of his head as if throwing off the word he was about to say, "disease. At times it was unable to think about it. She was so beautiful, I so gay. That was it." He nodded. That's what she stressed, Beatrice, her gaiety, which had been the bar symptom of the other poor woman," he

Did you actually read the letter?"

Ob yes. Yes. She handed it to me first before she said a thing. I tell you I nearly went berserk.

But I see now that she had it all planned out. I wasn't to see Rosie. And the fact that I would have to get permission to marry and take her with me all worked in to her plan. And then there was something else. As Rosie seemed so unhappy, Beatrice suggested that...well, she was aware of her condition and that's why she wanted to get away from home, thinking that marriage would cure her. The other poor woman had never been married. She...she even suggested that her grandfather was slightly unbalanced, which was why he had given the land to his batman or sergeant, or someone. You know, the fellow next door whose son now has the place."

John closed his eyes and for the moment his thoughts centred entirely around his own condition. He was married to her and she would never let him go, unless he divorced her. And on what grounds could he get a divorce? That his wife was an evil woman, a schemer?

"Will... will you do something for me?"

Yes. if I can.

*Will you tell Rosie? Will you explain to Rosie? That would ease my mind a lot if she knew the truth of why I seemed to scamper off like a cur. And I can tell you I felt like a cur of the lowest order."

There was a short silence between them before Edward Goldig spoke again. And then he asked, Is she still there, in the house? I know she had no greater-than eye.

At this, John buttoned the top button of his coat and had his hand along the seat and picked up his hat and then, getting to his feet, he said, 'Allyes, she's still 'ere. I married her eighteen months ago. The other of another of her plots.' 'H'Qh, my God!' The young man, too, was on his now, and he was stammering, 'I...I'm...I'm ...sorry. But...but I didn't know.' bar bar "Please! Please! Don't worry yourself more than

*how to. I found my mistake out some time ago. I mean let's get out of this place." He thrust his hand into his pocket, brought out some loose change and placed it on the bill that had been left on the tinner of the table. Out on the street again, they stood

Aang each other until John asked
 quietly, "Are you
 Happy in your marriage?"
 bar bar left-brace There was a pause before
 Edward Golding said
 llallyes. Yes, in a way, for she is...well,
 she is a lovely
 I."
 f A lovely girl... a lovely man. He
 could hear Helen
 Hsing Rosie's words, 'He's a lovely
 man." What did
 mean; a lovely man, a lovely girl?
 H He held out his hand now, and when it was
 Iferaped he said, "You've got your life before
 you. Porget this end of it. I think that Rosie will
 eventually lpd happiness with Robbie.. .robbie
 Macintosh. He's e fellow next door.
 She's looked upon him as a bar rother for years, but
 he doesn't see her in that relajjltionship. And
 they've been working close together for bar bar some time
 now. So, try not to worry about her any
 more. Get on with your life. You owe that to your wife
 and child."
 The young man seemed to find it difficult to speak.
 When he did his words were halting, "In
 one way Im glad we met up. But in another, not
 because the burden is on you now. I...I didn't
 know, you see."
 "Please! Please! Think no more about that. I'm
 used to dealing with problems; I'll deal with this one."
 As he finished his words, a voice loud in his head
 cried, "By God! I will. Yes, I will!" for the
 anger in him was rising, but it had yet to reach its
 height.
 not.;
 His,.
 hn arrived at the house in the early evening and
 Jok the side drive to the annexe. His mother was in the
 sitting-room, reading. Seeing ya she threw the
 book aside, started to say, 'Hello, Jfear,"
 then changed it to, "What's the matter? What's
 bar bar appened?"
 bar bar He drew in a long shuddering breath as
 he stood jjboldng down on her, saying, 'A
 great deal. First of U I'm going to lock me
 inside of the communicating oor. I don't want her
 in here with you, and neither ll you when you hear what I have
 to say." f "Dear Lord! Sit down, man.
 Sit down. What is it?" Very briefly, he

gave her the outline of his meeting with
Teddy Golding. And when he finished she was putting
with her hand across her mouth, muttering, "ationo!
No! She wouldn't!"

"She did! Now stay quietly there, and
don't distress yourself at least try not to."
"She's...I told you, she's been different
of late." "I "She's always been different Mother.

As she
planned Rosie's future, she also planned
mine. As I've said this more than once. But there's a
limit,"

John? John! She called to him as he went
to the door, and when he stopped and looked back
at her she pleaded, "Please! Don't lose your
temper with her. Please! Remember, I'm still
here, and...and I need you."

He said nothing, but went out and through the grounds and
into the front door of the house. Seeing Frances going
towards the kitchen door, he called to her,
"Where's your mistress?"

"Oh, it's you, sir. You're back? Oh,
well, she's gone down to the bottom land. She's very
angry, for the gypsies have gone into the field again. You
know, they used to do it but they haven't been back for
some time. She had already been down and warned
them but they took no heed and went into the field
and..."

She broke off but he didn't wait for her to go
on;
instead he hurried down the corridor and into Be-
atrice's office. And there, pulling open one
drawer after another of her desk, he rummaged through
the neatly stacked papers. But when he didn't find
the letter he was about to leave the room when he noticed a
deed box on the top shelf of the alcove near the
fireplace. Then he returned to the desk, the
middle drawer this time, where he kept her keys were
kept, and within seconds he had the box on the table
and was taking out one parchment deed after another until he
came to a long white envelope. The heading of the letter
inside told him it was what he was looking for. After
he had read it, he understood how easy it had been
for Beatrice to ruin her sister's life.

He returned the letter to the envelope and
put it in his pocket put the deeds back into the
box and returned it to the shelf.

When he entered the hall Frances was still
standing just before the door, and she hurried towards him
saying, "Toto, I...I didn't tell you-"

She didn't add that he didn't wait
to be told but went on 'the mistress with a gun with
her"
"What!" He jerked his head in
her direction as if he had just become aware of her
presence. "She...she was angry, and she took
a gun." He left her at a run, went
straight across the lawn through the gardens and wood to the
field that bordered the river. But once he reached it he could hear
people yelling.
A yellow caravan, one horse between the
shafts, the other tied to the back was being urged
back to the gate by an elderly man and a
woman, with other youths and other children all yelling at the
figure passing by the tree with the gun poised. "He had
approached Beatrice so quickly from behind that he was able to
knock the gun upwards before she was hardly aware of him. And
(then he was tugging with her. He had no compunction in using
his fist to knock her flying up against the tree trunk where
she stood stunned for a moment her eyes wide and
glazing, her face scarlet. He was in possession of the
gun now, and he yelled at the man to stop, then he called
"Get back! Stay as long as you need. You won't be troubled
again." "They were all silent now, staring at him. Thank you
master. Thank you" the man called. "I will only be your friend
a day or so. Thank you and God's blessing on you." Then one of
the younger men led the horse and caravan on to the road, turned
it about, and they all re-entered the field.
He stood watching them until they reached the place where the
spring water ran into the horse trough and spilled over into a
pipe that led to the river. He had heard from Robbie that until
the grandfather died the same family of gypsies had come each
year, and that he himself had watched some of the children grow
up. If he remembered rightly, the old man had had six sons and
there used to be three caravans. Now there was only the one, and
two box carts which were likely used as sleeping quarters. The
old lady was a fortune teller, and they eked out a living by
making clothes pegs and baskets, the younger ones going round
the doors selling them.
He now turned back to Beatrice and saw her standing away from
the tree, her hand on the back of her head. "How dare you!" she
yelled. Then again, "How dare you!"

"Get up to the house!

Her eyes widened the colour deepened if that was possible, then she muttered, "What did you say?"

"I said, get up to the house! Because if you don't, I'll bring this across your back. Before God! I'll bring this across your back, that's if I don't throttle you."

She backed away from him: he looked like a madman. All at once she knew a deep fear of him. But when he made another step towards her, she moved, and she was about to make for the wood when he grabbed her arm and dragged her along by the bottom fence until it opened abruptly into another field edge-

the river. As he made towards the bank, still dragging her, she cried, "You're mad! You're mad!" did not release his hold on her until they reached the river, at which point lifting the gun by aid of its barrel, he swirled it around his head letting it fly and into the water. She could not have been more startled if he had tried to drown her. It was Father's."

Get up your mouth! and get back to the house and yours." "What did you say?" She was stepping back from him now, one at a time as if she were measuring the ground, hoping to give her enough distance to turn from him and run. And this is eventually what she did do. She ran up over the field and into the wood, and he followed behind, keeping her in sight all the way. When he entered the hall, the two maids, Frances and Annie both turned sharply and on the sight that he did they, too, stepped back; then with awed gaze, they watched him take the stairs two at a time. And when the door clashed overhead they looked at each other before moving to the foot of the stairs and, with their heads cocked to the side, strained ears to hear what the doctor was yelling. "You wicked, horrible creature! If your great-aunt's secret was passed on to anyone, it was you." Mrs. Deane was standing near the head of the bed her hands clutching her neck. Then her eyes wide and her mouth became a gape as the light fell on her: it wasn't her attitude towards the gypsy that had made him mad, but... Oh no! Oh no! "as shaking her head now and he came back at her and can shake your head woman; and at this moment I'd like to shake the life out of you. You're evil. I repeat it, you're evil. To ruin your sister's life. Yes, open your mouth wider. It's unfortunate for you that I ran across Teddy Golding in London. His first enquiry was about Rosie. Was she still at home or- he didn't actually say-in

the asylum? For that's where you suggested, like the one mentioned in this letter." He now pulled the envelope from his pocket and said, "That's right, sit down on the bed; you're going to need all the support you can get. And why didn't you, when you were on, bring the evidence of the letter you got from the solicitor, eh? You took it to prove to him that your lying, filthy scheme had some foundation."

He suddenly stopped yelling; the sweat was running down his face. She was staring at him, her eyes stretched so wide they seemed to be popping out of their sockets. Then he broke the heavy ominous silence by saying, "Marion got out of your clutches. Helen did too. And Rosie wanted to follow them to be rid of you, because they knew you for what you were, your father's daughter. And you are your father's daughter, aren't you? Because if any woman has inherited whoring instincts, it's you. You should have been on the streets, eating men up like you've tried to do me. You inveigled me into marrying you. I see that now as plain as the scheme you planned to keep Rosie by your side, because you were afraid to be left alone in this mausoleum of a house you're obsessed with. Did you ever think of turning it into a whore shop? Or becoming a madam? because let me tell you, that prim exterior of yours must have been ready to burst by the time you hooked me. It's under you weren't up in the loft with Needier or Jem. Now I'm asking myself why young Arthur Jier suddenly gave in his notice. I can recall seeing with him one day in the harness room. When I opened the door it nearly knocked you on your head and the fellow looked not only embarrassed, but ashamed. I thought nothing of it at the time, but I have since. Well, from now on, let me tell you, have to look for someone else to ease your feelings, for I wouldn't touch you again if you dying at my feet. You smell, you stink. If it wasn't that my mother was in such a bad state and you inveigled her on the side—oh yes, on the side; I knew nothing about it, or I would have put a stop to it, to pay in advance for a five-year lease on my nose—I'd be out of here tomorrow. But from now on I live there and don't you dare come near it, I know what I may be tempted to do to you; at the moment I want to drive my fist into your mean, crying face."

*He drew in a long breath, then swinging about, he rushed into the dressing-room. Pulling out one drawer after another, he threw his clothes here and there on the small settee and the chair. He next

went to a wardrobe from which he brought greater-than bed at his suits. Then pulling open the door leading into the corridor, he let out another yell: "Trances! Come here!" It was as if he knew they would be at the foot of the stairs. And when, whiteed they appeared at the door, he said "Take as many of these suits and coats and underwear as you can and leave them at the communicating door leading into the annexe." As each girl, with trembling hands, picked up a number of garments, he pulled two suitcases from the side of the wardrobe and began stuffing the remainder of his shirts and underwear into them.

It was some minutes before the girls returned, and when he saw they were visibly trembling, his voice was quiet now as he said, "Will you take these, please, and put them with the others? I'm just going to collect some books from the guest room. I'll take what I need at present; I can collect the others at any time."

Neither of them spoke, nor did they make any motion with their heads; and he went past them, into the corridor and along to the end to the guest room where his books were stored on several shelves. They were mostly medical books and the reason why they hadn't been put in the library downstairs was that most of the shelves there were filled with leather-bound volumes; and he had been quick to discover that Beatrice didn't like them out of order, that the whole contents of the room were mostly for show, as were a number of first editions behind glass-fronted cabinets. The old colonel, it would appear, had been a collector but not a reader. And so, his own tattered volumes had been relegated to the shelves in the spare room. He now picked a book out here and there until he had his arms full, then went downstairs.

The house was very quiet. It was as if a death had just occurred. And yes, a sort of death had really taken place, for their marriage was certainly over. And, too, she might as well have killed Rosie as do what she did to her. Although it was now a long time since that happening, Rosie still bore that look of rejection, even behind her laughter. Once his things inside that annexe, he would go to Rosie and that look from her face... it was not more than twenty minutes later when, coming along the road towards Robbie's, he saw Rosie...approaching. She was smiling as she came up to and said immediately, "You're back, then. I thought you wouldn't be home till later. I'm going in to ask a case. I had a letter

from Helen today: they'll
12ar greater-than ack. from London tonight and she
wants me to go bar stay with her for a while. She's very
worried disut Leonard; he seems to be no
better." She paused, JB said, "Is something
the matter? What is it?" Before he answered her
question, he said, "LeonIB? What about
Leonard?"
HW-ELL, you know he's been ill. That's why
they aeSo to Switzerland. For his consumption. But...
but Bt is it? Why are you looking like that? Has
somejjag happened in town?"
e took her arm, pulled her round gently and
dked her back towards Robbie's, saying, 'allyes,
Biething happened in London and... and it concerns
His
1Me?"
bar teallyes, you. That's what I said." lIBut
how? Why?"
H Wait until we get inside. I think
Robbie would like Jhear this, too."
J bar bar She remained silent but her step
quickened to keep ce with his. And then, without knocking,
he was eiring the kitchen door and pushing Rosie in
before n to meet the surprised gaze of Robbie and his
ther. bar bar It was Annie who repeated
Rosie's words now as
she looked at John, saying, Is there something the
matter? What is it? Has something happened?"
'es, Annie, you could say something's happened.
Let's all sit down."
Robbie pulled a chair out for Rosie, then sat
next to her; but he didn't ask any quesons,
he just kept his eyes on John. And John now
leaned across the table and gripped Rosie's hand as he
said, "You can take that look off your face from now
on and out of your heart as well: Teddy never
rejected you."
"What?" It was a small sound, almost a
whimper.
"You heard what I said. Your dear Teddy never
rejected you. The siple truth is that he was waed
off by your dear sister to prevent him from being saddled with a
wife who would eventually go mad as did your
great-aunt, ho apparently danced about naked."
Rosie now drew her hand from his and put it up
to her throat and whispered, "She wouldn't! She
wouldn't! Not that!"
"She did, and in detail."
From then on, John described how he had met

Edward Golding and what had transpired.

When he had finished there was utter silence at the table. Even Annie made no comment. Then Rosie asked quietly, "Where is he now?"

"In London, but he returns to America tomorrow." He paused before he added, "He has a wife and a young baby now."

John watched Rosie's eyes widen, then her gaze drop to the table to where her hands were joined, and her voice sounded steady as she said, "Well, that doesn't matter any more." And suddenly lifting one

as she put it on top of Robbie's, where it was jammed the edge of the table; he grasped it, but said a word, leaving the expression on his face as he looked at her to declare his thoughts. Then he turned, glanced at his mother, but the words she muttered were unintelligible.

(When the three of them were startled as Rosie moved to her feet, saying, "In a way, she's done me good turn, but I'll never forgive her for what I've been through. No! I'll never forgive her.

She's barbaric! Wicked! She always was. I knew she was. *Barbaric's why I wanted to get away. There was always something in her. If anyone has inherited Aunt Ally's spirit, it's her. She was nodding at John now as he looked at her. "Yes, you may be right there. In fact, I think you are right."

Barbaric Then she gave a shake of her head as if she were barbaric recognising a fact and said, "But you are married to her, John."

"I'll say, I am married to her, dear. But you leave me manage that. I'm going to live in the annex with her until I can find a suitable place, although, as barbaric you know, she inveigled her into signing a lease for five years. Payment in advance, of course. In every way she's a scheming devil."

Then Rosie now turned to Annie, saying, "I was about to

go and pack my case, as you know, to go to Helen's. Now, if you don't mind, I'll bring the rest of my JP-IGS here, because I'll not live in that house again. I'll stay with Helen for a time and..." "Oh, dear, why do you need to ask? This is your real home, always has been. Go on and get your cases; I'll go along with you."

s

"No. No." Rosie tued now and
looked at Robbie I'll go on my own."
For answer, Robbie went to the back of the door
took down his coat and his cap, and for the first time he
spoke, saying, 'I'll not go in. I have no
desire ever to enter that house, but I'll be there
to carry your things."
Rosie stared at him; then turning to John, she
said quietly, "It's you I'm sorry for now;
I...I feel free. It's...x's as if I'd
lived all my life under that feeling of rejection and
not knowing why, only that rejection makes you a lesser
being to yourself. But... but you, you are tied to her."
"Don't worry about that. But get yourself away and
finish the business, and then start your new life."
John looked from one to the other.
It was Robbie who answered him: Yes, John,
we'll start a new life, and not before time. But there's
still years ahead of us and we'll make up for it," and
he took hold of Rosie's arm, saying, 'She
knows how I feel... at long last."
When they had gone, Annie put out her hand and
took hold of one of John's and, shaking it, said,
"I can say in all honesty, John, this is the
happiest day of my life. My lad has come
into his own at last, and if anybody has
worked and waited for it, 'tis he."
At the front door of the house, Robbie said
quietly, "Try to keep calm. The least said is
soonest mended, and this could be the last dme you need ever
see her," and Rosie answered him with a small
nod of her head, then went inside.
Frances was coming down the stairs and Rosie
j bar until she reached the bottom before she
asked, BB is Miss Beatrice?"
BB-CES'S voice had a slight stammer to it as
she JS-HAVE... shes in her still...study, miss, and
she's in jt less-than of a tear."
jiHave you come and help me pack?"
ss, Prances; I'm leaving home" comshe looked
her- "this house for good."
18 missbbn you an an'not ydgan' aii."
jat's got to be, Frances. Will you?" Jpb,
yes, miss. Yes, miss," and she tured and
folRose up the stairs, where, as had happened gly
a short time before, drawers were pulled open
* clothes rammed into cases. And when at last
three were full, Frances picked up two of them and the
third, and with loose garments hanging over r nee
arm, without a backward glance she left the that had

been her own since she was ten years
Friend had placed the cases at the foot of the
tall uow from next door; then she was stepping back
I e hall to take the other case and loose
garments from Rose when, from along the passage, her
misrw peared.

Beatrice's hair was dishevelled and there was a
IM-OOK about her. The spring she made across the
Isie bore out her Warance, for she bar yeu6d
What d'you mink you're doing?"

I Sne pushed Prances to one side and glared at
the man standing outside the door, the cases at his
feet oetore banging the door closed. Then her
back against t she cried, "What dyou think youre
up to l

'ationo. No." Rosie tued now and looked at
Robbie. I'll go on my own."

For answer, Robbie went to the back of the door,
took down his coat and his cap, and for the first time he
spoke, saying, 'I'll not go in. I have no
desire ever to enter that house, but I'll be there
to carry your things."

Rosie stared at him; then turning to John, she
said quietly, "It's you Im sony for now;
I...I feel free. It's.ddit's as if I'd
lived all my life under that feeling of
rejection and not knowing why, only that rejection makes
you a lesser being to yourself. But... but you, you are tied
to her."

"Don't worry about that. But get yourself away and
finish the business, and then start your new life."

John looked from one to the other.

It was Robbie who answered him: "Yes,
John, we'll start a new life, and not before time.
But there's still years ahead of us and we'll make up
for it," and he took hold of Rosie's arm,
saying, She knows how I feel... at long
last."

When they had gone, Annie put out her hand and
took hold of one of John's and, shaking it, said,
'I can say in all honesty, Jon, this is the
happiest day of my life. My lad has come
into his own at last and if anybody has worked and
waited for it, 'tis he."

At the front door of the house, Robbie said
quietly, "Try to keep calm. The least said is
soonest mended, and this could be the last time you need ever
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nod of her head, then went inside.

Frances was coming down the stairs and Rosie

ited until she reached the bottom before she asked, here is Miss Beatrice?"

Frances's voice had a slight stammer to it as she said, "Sh...she's in her study, miss, and she's in it of a tear."

"Will you come and help me pack?" "Pack?"

"Yes, Frances; I'm leaving home," she looked at her - "his house for good." Oh, miss; not you and all, not you and all." It's got to be, Frances. Will you?" "Oh, yes, miss. Yes, miss," and she turned and found Rosie up the stairs, where, as had happened only a short time before, drawers were pulled open, clothes rammed into cases. And when at last three cases were full, Frances picked up two of them and took the third, and with loose garments hanging over her arm, without a backward glance she left the room that had been her own since she was ten years old.

Frances had paced the cases at the foot of the tall row from next door; then she was stepping back into the hall to take the other case and loose garments to Rosie when, from along the passage, her mistress appeared.

Beatrice's hair was dishevelled and there was a dark look about her. The spring she made across the hall towards Rosie bore out her appearance, for she said, "What do you think you're doing?" he pushed Frances to one side and glared at the woman standing outside the door, the cases at his feet, and banging the door closed. Then her back against the wall he cried, "What do you think you're up to?"

"You can see what I'm up to: I'm leaving."

"Oh, but you're not. Oh, but you're not. I've gone through too much for you to..."

"Shut up! What you have done is tried to ruin my life with your lying and your schemes. You're evil. You always have been."

At this Beatrice turned and yelled at Frances, "Get away? Get away!" And the girl actually ran now, down the hall and through the door leading to the kitchen.

But she didn't close it, and she could hear her mistress yelling, at her husband, or supposed husband of mine, is a liar: he's told you half-truth. What I did, I did for you, because..."

"You didn't do it for me. You did it because you couldn't bear to be left alone in this beastly house. You weren't married then and there was no hope of anyone

ever taking you. And I wondered why John had stepped in. But now I know it was through pity for you. Anyway, I have no pity for you at this moment, but in a way, I should thank you for what you did. I have been haunted by the thought of rejection, but now I know where my true feelings lie. I know that I've always loved Robbie Macintosh, and what's more, I'm going to marry him and" comshe was almost screaming now-"live next door! Do you hear?"

A scream which outdid Rosie's came from Beatrice as she sprang again on her sister, almost knocking her off her balance as she yelled, Never! Never! I'll see you dead first. Married to that coarse, ignorant..."

'Leave go of me!"

"I won't! You're not going. I'll see you dead first." When Rosie's doubled fist came up between Be-

"dis

I The Obsession 211

'f right-brace

bar ce's hands, which were gripping her sister's shoulder so, and landed on her mouth, she was released *tly. But Beatrice did not fall back, she just triggered a little ad put her hand quickly up to her ie. And when she looked at her hand and saw the pod she gave a gasp of astonishment. Then it was this frenzied rage that she again attacked Rosie, and could seem that she was intent on tearing the hair n her head when the front door was thrust open, also was the kitchen door, and Frances and Janie oett rushed into the hall, there to join Robbie as he a endeavouring to pull Rosie away from Beatrice's

fenzied, clawing hands.

'Mistress! Mistress! Stop it! Stop it!"

The girls were ding on to Beatrice now. Blood was running from

ar mouth and over her chin onto their hands as they bar continued to hold her back for, still consumed with Ethe sight of Robbie Macintosh was infuriating urther, and she screamed at the top of her voice, out! Get out, you! Out of my house!" fe But he, one arm around Rosie's quivering body, W case in the other, her coat over his shoulder ttused and, casting a withering glance at Beatrice, Sried back at her, 'allyes, I'll get out, and your sister "this me for good and all. And I'll say this to you, man: if there's anyone inherited insane traits in our family, it's yourself!"

This statement, one would have expected would
greater-than ave torn Beatrice from the servants'
hold; instead, it d the opposite effect, for they
fet their mistress oing limp under their hand, and then her
body bening to shake as if with ague.

torn Needier had appeared on the drive and
Robbie

called to him, "Would you mind hauling the rest of
her luggage down, Tom!" And Tom, his eyes
wide, hurried forward, saying, "Yes, laddie.
Yes. Don't worry about it; I'll bring the lot
to the gate."

Rosie's face was bleeding from two nail
scratches down the side of her right cheek. Her
body, too, was shaking, but this was due to her shuddering
crying.

When they reached the gate, Robbie called back
to Tom, "Just leave them there, Tom. I'll come
back for them."

"From what I saw of her," torn Needier
called, "she won't be on the look-out to see what
I'm up to for some little time. So leave the lot and
I'll get them along to your place."

Rosie was awake, but she hadn't yet opened her
eyes. She knew that she was lying in Robbie's bed
and her mind was perfectly clear as to what
had transpired last night. She could recall that
she had been unable to stop crying. Mrs. Annie
had held her and Robbie had held her, but still she
couldn't stop. Then John had arrived and he had
seen to the scratches on her face. He had said
soothing words to her about her future, and of how happy
she was going to be. But still she had been unable to stop
crying. Then he had made her drink something and she
must have gone to sleep. But now, when she felt a hand
lift hers from the counterpane, she opened her eyes and
looked at Robbie. He was bending towards her, and
he smiled softly as he said, "You've had a good
sleep. D'you feel better now?"

She did not answer for some time. She didn't know
whether she felt better or not. Her face was
paining;

*3 she put up her other hand to it, asking
quietly,
it much?"

H'l't's enough," he answered in his blunt
way. "But
im says it isn't very deep, which is a good thing.
It
jgl soon heal."

She found it painful to turn her head to the
 side in
 "er to see him the better; and then quietly she
 said,
 @l"" i over." Sfes, love, it's over."
 be watched im lower his head for a moment, sn look
 at her again and say, I heard it all from fMside.
 Was it true what you said?" There was no coyness about
 the answer, just a j bar ain, 'allyes, Robbie, it
 was true." j lAnd not as a brother, or a...?"
 y'ationo, not as a brother, or anything else. But as
 it lould have been years ago, if I'd...if I'd
 had any nse.
 *j bar He lifted her hand and brought it to his
 chest. .l 'How long have you felt this way... about
 me, I ean?"
 JO-HAVE, for some time. But I...I don't think
 I could disJ have told you, because I was still carrying that
 Peadfiil feeling of rejection."
 11 'Oh, my dear. You must have known you would
 jggve found no rejection in me, because I've loved
 you Still your life. When you were a child I loved you. yien
 I loved you as a young girl, and that was a bar bar
 ainful time, because I knew how you viewed me. bar
 put not so painful as when you became a young fomait and
 were about to marry." I "Oh, Robbie,
 Robbie." She had raised herself from J lSbe
 pillows now and, bringing her face close to his,
 she said, "You know something? You have never kissed
 me. Patted me, hugged me, but you've never kissed
 me."
 "Oh, Rosie, Rosie." His face looked
 on the point of laughter; then his lips fell gently
 on hers and he held the kiss for some dme. Now,
 pressing her face from him, he said, hat's merely
 an introduction. When your cheek is better I'll
 do it properly." And attempting to smile now, she
 murmured, 'Oh, Robbie, Robbie. I love
 you. I do, I do. I... I never felt like this
 with... well, I can say, with Teddy. Looking
 back, that seems like a girlish dream, something that
 all girls have to go through. You... you believe me?"
 "I believe you, love. Oh, yes, I
 believe you. And all I want to know now is, how
 soon d'you think it will be before we can get married?"
 She brought a deep gurgling laugh from him when she
 said, "Make it tomorrow, or a week at most. In
 any case, as soon as we can. But I would like it
 to be in church."
 "So would I, dear; although the lady downstairs"

-- he laughed- "will call me a hypocrite. But there's something in what you say, 'cos the quicker it's done, the quicker we'll get the winter cabbage in."

The bed shook through their mingled laughter and Annie Macintosh, who had been about to enter the room, stopped with her hand on the door knob, hesitated a moment, then turned about and went slowly downstairs again. But when she reached the bottom, she lifted her eyes to the ceiling, and said, "At last; thanks be to God. But not afore time."

M

When he first saw the house from the drive, John was asking himself why he had offered to bring them the trap. Robbie could have brought Rosie on the be*ment She wouldn't have cared how she had got her long as he was within her.

Robbie's voice came softly at him now, saying, "Knowledge's a bonny hoi Lovely." in his dis'it's better inside" Rosie said, and he smiled at her

He made no further comment. He drew this horse to a stop at the foot of four or five steps; but before moving from his seat, he looked to where Helen was standing almost at eye-level at the top, and his heart jerked against his ribs. "g"...living the old man and making him chastise him-

He She ran down the steps, hugging Rosie to her, but she turned to Robbie, saying, "How nice to see you Robbie."

John still had to lift his seat and she looked up at him and her voice changed as she said, "Hello, John." "Hello, Helen" he forced himself to smile as he pointed to the horse's head, saying, "Where am I to put this?"

"Oh, Henry will see to it. Look, here he comes."

A small, thick-set man appeared, and she pointed to the horse, saying, "Stable him, will you Henry, please?"

"Yes, ma'am." There was a broad smile on the man's face; but then his head turned sharply as John, descending from the trap, said, "Oh, I won't be able to stay long. Just put him under shelter because I fear" as he looked up at the sky- we're in for a shower, or a thunderstorm."

'Good enough, sir. Good enough, sir," and the man led the horse and trap away.

Walking side by side with Robbie,
John followed the two sisters and for the first time he
entered Col Mount.

He recalled the day that Helen had pointed it out
to him from Craig's Tor, and it came to him that the name
didn't really suit the house. It was a harshsounding
name whereas this hall, with its rose wallpaper,
gilt-framed pictures, polished floor,
scattered rugs and soft pinkish upholstered chairs
and curtains appeared anything but masculine. Perhaps
panelled walls and a broad oak stairway would have
better suited the entrance to such a named house.

They were in the drawing-room now and here the femininity
was even more emphasised. But at the moment it did not
impinge upon him for he was staring at the man who had
pulled himself up from a chair and was shaking hands with
Robbie. And he could not believe that this was the man
whom he had continued to envy over the years, thinking of
him always

tall man with a military bearing. This man was
JE tall, but he looked emaciated.

ello, Doctor, so nice to see you again. It's
a long

3 since we met."

JSY-ES, sir. Yes, it is a long time
since we met." He "ped himself from adding,
"How are you?"

bar bar WeUs, don't let us stand here like
stoks, as Cook dd say. Sit yourself down...

Hello, my dear." He bar 1 turned
to Rosie but didn't kiss her or put his arms ut
her. Instead, his hand went out and gently jlched her
cheek.

bar Sfohn had not sat down, and Helen repeated
her hus'jpd's words: 'Do sit down, John.'

He had been askimself why he hadn't sat down
and was still lding like a stok, and he put it down to the
change was seeing in this military man because he
recog, .3d impending death when it stared him in the
face, fss from a distance.

.has he sat down, he heard Helen say,

"I'll ring for Jine tea," and he realised that

she was very ill-at less-than "ae; also that she too
had changed: she looked older, even more beautiful.

Afterwards, he couldn't remember what he had ten for
that tea. All he recalled of it was that Leonjoked
with the two maids who brought it in, Han.h and
Betty, and that they were rosy-cheeked, ight-eyed,
middle-aged women. After the tea had Sen cleared
away, a silence had fallen on the five of im

until it was broken by Rosie excitedly saying, "Xin... we're going to be married, Robbie and I." She thrust her hand out and gripped Robbie's hand. "But it all happened quite suddenly, and I'm going to let John tell you about it." She now turned to him, saying, "Tell... tell them John, everything. Please! Every word." He felt his face flushing. He had not expected this. He had thought that she would do the telling, and in her own way, and he said so: "It... should really come from you, Rosie."

"No. No. Please, John. I couldn't. I mean..." She drooped her head and at this he looked from Helen to Leonard then after a long pause, he said "Well, it was like this. I was up in London for four days, on a two-day course of lectures and we bumped into each other in the street." He stopped here, then said "I'm referring to Teddy Golding..."

"Teddy Golding?" Helen's voice was high with surprise, and at this, her husband put out his hand and, patting her knee, said, "Shh! Listen, dear." And as John went on, so she sat and listened. And now and again she would turn her head and glance towards Rosie, her look saying, "I can't believe it"

When John neared the end of the tale he left out the scene between Beatrice and himself. But what he did say was, "I know I could have kept this to myself, but I also knew how Rosie was still feeling. As she herself said, the feeling of rejection was unbearable at times, more so, I should think because she did not know the reason for it. Teddy's rejection of her had seemed to be so casual, and knowing what had previously transpired between them, she had found it impossible to come to terms with it. And another reason why I felt she should be told was that if she ever married or I should perhaps say, allowed herself to be married the feeling would have remained with her, for she had lost her trust in men." He now looked

at Rosie, to see her gazing at him, her eyes still. "And it had prevented her from showing her feelings for Robbie." He now drew in a long breath and said, "Rest Rosie can tell you herself. I think her expression speaks for her."

*Helen rose from her chair and went to Rosie and, kneeling her up from the couch, put her arms about her rather, but seemingly found it difficult to speak, so Rosie said "It's all right, Helen."

I'm...I'm all right now. bar to Bce
 John told me the truth that feeling of stigma
 dgS been lifted off my mind, and I no longer
 feel Nequate. Yet, it all happened at a
 cost to John. It's et his life."
 bar bar At this John remarked promptly,
 "You needn't J bar ny about that, Rosie; it was
 upset some time ago." What are you going to do?"
 Helen's question did bring an immediate answer from him. And
 when gave it, his gaze was directed away from her.
 'I'm iwing her. In fact, I've already done so.
 I have ved into the annexe with Mother. And," there was bar
 te a long pause before he added, "I'm applying
 for tegal separation."
 l bar There followed another embarrassed
 silence, until bar bar onard altered the course
 of the conversation as he . ked at Rosie and Robbie and
 asked "When is it to
 the wedding?"
 y0h' comRobbie jerked his chin- "for myself it
 Uld have been next week. But this woman here" --
 glanced at Rosie- "fancies a church
 wedding." Bid Rosie, smiling now, added
 simply, he banns up on Sunday."
 i bar Good. Good. I'm happy for you both.
 And that dises for Helen, too, doesn't
 it?"
 Helen answered briskly. "Oh, yes.
 Yes. But it should have happened ages ago. You're a
 stiff-necked Scot. D'you know that?" comshe stabbed
 her forefinger towards Robbie- "You should have made your
 feelings clear years ago."
 "Helen! Helen!" Leonard, catching hold
 of her skirt, tugged her gently towards him,
 saying, "Every man has his reasons, and Robbie
 certainly had his. Not everyone is like me, rushing in
 where angels fear to tread."
 John did not feel envy, but just a slight pain
 in that special place below his ribs as he saw the
 exchanged glance between them. Then Leonard again changed
 the subject by looking at him and saying, "Do you
 play bridge?"
 Oh bridge?" John shook his head.
 'Haven't done for years; not since college
 days."
 "Whist then?"
 "Oh, yes, whist. I've devised a
 two-handed game with my mother. It's a bit
 complicated. You've got to do as much thinking as one would
 at chess."

"You play chess?"

"Yes. Yes, I like a game of chess, whenever possible. But I seem to have so little spare time."

He was about to go on when Helen, getting to her feet, said suddenly, "Come on, Rosie, let's show Robbie how to grow vegetables. We've got a good patch, too, you know." And Robbie, smiling at her, said "I'm out to learn Miss Helen," only to glance quickly toward Leonard and apologise, "Oh, I'm sorry. It's...x's habit. I meant..."

"Never mind what you meant" Helen put in quickly, "just drop the miss, for you will soon be roylerin-law." She smiled widely at him now. Then s a short pause, she ended, "And that will be most Keome. But come on, both of you, before it starts j bar Left alone, the two men looked at each other and eemed that one was waiting for the other to speak. was Leonard who spoke and there was bitterness Ns voice as he said, his is a stinking disease, "*tit?"

(bar bar ohn found himself blinking rapidly, and he wetted, - lips before he could answer. 'I understand they researching hard for a break-through."

Jl*allyes, that's what they tell me. But in the meantime JB is sent to the South coast, or to Switzerland. And Jliat does it do? Just prolongs the agony." Then, his e altering, he said, 'allyou likely know Doctor Pe-disgreater-than ?"

jl'allyes. Yes, we've met on several occasions." He

3de himself smile as he said, 'allyes, he has his patch d Doctor Comwallis our patch."

H'Have you many TB patients? bar i "A few. It seems to run in families." bar bar

"Do you find them ostracised?" t'John raised his eyebrows as he repeated, "Ostrajled?" Then after thinking a minute, he said, "Yes, I ppose they are to a certain extent. But it isn't depberate; it must really be through fear." "

'allyes, fear." Leonard's head now was nodding.

We've experienced that. But I wouldn't give a damn bar lw myself; it's...x's Helen." He moved forward in e chair, then turned and looked towards the window bar te he said slowly, 'allyou know, when we were first bar tnarried and used to come here visiting Helen's

friends the place seemed to be swarming with other visitors, all desirous of giving us a good time.

It was the same up in town, especially after
 I unfortunately came into the title. But when I
 developed this" comhe tapped his chest- "except for
 one or two here and there, the others melted like snow under
 sun, espe cially those who had young sons or
 daughters. But it's" comand he smiled wanly now-
 "I suppose it's natural. I've asked
 myself, would I not have done the same? But-" he
 deliberately tamed and looked at John again as
 he said, "I'm not concerned about company for myself it's
 Helen. She hides it but she has felt the
 rejection of friends. There were the Maldons, and the
 Oswalds, and the Fenwicks. They had known her for
 years, long before I came on the scene. In fact,
 I understand that the older members had been regular
 visitors at their house. But now the only ones she
 sees are the Conisbees and the Maguires, and, of
 course Dashing Daisy. Oh, I don't know how
 she would get on without Daisy. You'll have to meet
 her." He gave a mirthless augh now as he said,
 "Lena Conisbee's as deaf as a stone, and he
 has a voice like a roaring bull. You know, I
 look forward to their visits, because one can't help
 laughing at them especially when she answers the question
 he has never asked. And then she yells, and he
 yells at her, and she yells back
 "I'm not that deaf." The Maguires are different:
 they are quiet, too sympathetic. But there again,
 they never bring their two sons. I understand all this, for
 myself I do, but when I realize that I brought all this
 on Helen..."

John put in sharply, You shouldn't think about it like
 that; I'm sure Helen doesn't. She's deeply
 con-

Htted for you, that's all, she won't be thinking of
 Helf. And feel sure that you are the only company
 wants."

BiLeonard stared at John for a long moment before
 bar said, 'Would you come over now and again for a Bne of
 whist or chess, or what have you?'"

bar *allyes, I would like to; but ten, it must
 perfrce be dmatter of timing. You see, I do
 surgery most eve-
 gs; I have one day off a week, and a full
 week-
 d a month. The afternoons would be my best time
 Iptween half-past two and five."

I ha would be fine. Yes; yes. But what do you
 do
 er you finish surgery? Oh, I forgot I'm

sorry, one B bar ecomes selfish.
 You have your mother with you, and B bar understand she is rather
 porly."
 p'Oh, well, she's not poorly i what you could
 say
 sick way, but she suffers badly from arthritis in
 her
 bar bar eggs and finds it difficult to get about'
 I "Would she mind meeting me?"
 l Mind... meeting you?" John had spaced the
 words;
 spti repeated them quickly, saying, Mind meeting
 HO? Mother? She'd be delighted. But
 unfortunately
 could never get her up into the trap, it's too
 high."
 bar bar What about a carriage? I mean, our
 carriage. It
 tos two detachable steps. s she a big
 woman?"
 bar bar 'ationo, anything but."
 jl "Then she could be lifted into the carriage.
 It's very
 bar comfortable."
 I John thought for a moment; then smiling, he said,
 bar She would like that. Oh, yes. She
 never gets out. Yes.
 Yes, indeed, she wuld like that."
 I "We'll do something about it then, eh?" and
 Leon-
 bar ard returned John's smile, his gaunt
 features stretched
 ,eaaRather"ffBS'L1"1

o you've come back at last Miss
 Simmons?" IglWell, Cook 'tis me
 half day of" replied the Itefaen aid. "And
 I was, sort of comshe grinned dely now-
 'detained."
 ""Detained?" This came from Frances, who sat
 at I end of the kitchen table drinking a cup of tea.
 aDd she tued er head towards Janie Bluett,
 sitting
 iposite, and repeated, Detained? She was
 detained." 'en looking at the young girl, she said,
 'And who
 ee you detained by?"
 H Mary now slowly took off her short
 jacket and unaned her straw hat before, brightly, she
 said, The

ide."

H When she did not go on, but turned to hang her at on the back of the kitchen door Cook, with an jkaggerated gesture, pulled out a chair and said, jon't you sit down, miss?"

1 And when, quite coolly, Mary sat down, the two aids burt out laughing; and Cook, gazing down on

* r young assistant, said "You're askin" for your ears ybe clipped, aren't you? Well... go on."

When Mary did not go on, Frances, leaning forward on the table, looked at her and said, 'Tell us about the wedding. How did she look?'"

Immediately Mary's small show of defiance was swept away, and following Frances's action, she too leaned forward and, joining her hands tightly to gether, as if to give emphasis to her words, she said, "She looked lovely. Beautiful. And he was as smart as smart. It was lovely. Her dress wasn't exactly white; not white, you know, just like a creamy colour, and it had three skirts, and the bodice was all tucks. And she had elbow sleeves and the rill on the end was embroidered with tiny pink roses. It was the same on the panel in the ront of her bodice. Oh, she did look lovely."

"Was the church full?" Cook had now seated herself, and Mary answered, "No. No, it wasn't really full, and they were mostly Robbie Macintosh's people. There seemed a lot of them; but Miss Rosie only had the doctor and Miss Helen. He gave her away. Oh, he looked smart an" all. And Miss Helen. Eeh!"

comshe put her hand across her mouth- 'I always call her Miss Helen-I don't think of her as Lady Spears-but she looked lovely an" all. She always did look lovely, didnt she? And the organ played lovely and when Miss Rosie walked back down the aisle, her arm linked in Robbie Macintosh's, I could have cried. There were crowds outside and they followed them across to the George and Crown where the re' ception was being held." She now looked from one to the other as she said, 'I forgot to tell you that she arrived in the coach with Miss Helen and the doctor.

husband didn't come; Miss Helen's, hat is. They lbe's bad."

lyell," put in Cook, 'where did this, your being lned, come in?'"

IpVell, you see Cook, it was like this:

I went with acowd across the road, and I can tell you
I nearly J bar at on me back once with all
the rice that was lying "that. Anyway, gradually people
thinned out, you w, when they couldn't see any more, and
I was Then up came this fella. He startled the
wits out

" Hisby '*So'-

jae. He grabbed my arm and he said, "Come on
k the bride wants to see you." And I was for
sayWell, I can't go in there. I'm not ogged
up," he said, 'She wants a word with you. Come
on!"

the actually pulled me up the steps and into the and then
into a room where there was a crowd ffolk And he pushed
his way to where Miss Rosie . standing, and she took
my hand. And you know at she said?"

J bar They waited, all staring at her. And now
there was bar bar aeak in Mary's voice as she went
on, 'She said, ifts lovely to see you, Mary.
Tell Cook and the girls ,bar ish they could have been
here." Yes, that's what

* i said."

ll'There was silence around the table and Cook's
region was to pat her lips quickly with her fingers.

3t both Frances and Janie groped
for handkerchiefs stnd their apron bibs and dabbed at
their eyes.

bar It was a full minute later when Mary went
on with Cr tale. "Miss Rosie then said, "You
must stay and disave something to eat." And then there was a
lot of 'JS-KNOWLEDGE and laughter and pushing and shoving, and
there aas waiters going round with trays with glasses
of

wine on them, and Robbie Macintosh took off
one and handed it to me. Well, me hand shook so much that
I narly spilt it; and then he bent towards me and
whispered, "Don't waste that stuff, Mary; it cost
a lot of money." And at this Miss Rosie
laughed out loud, and she pushed him, he who's her
husband now, and their glasses nearly spilt. And
tere we were-I couldn't believe it-the three of us
laughing our heads off; and then his mother came up and
spoke to me, and she started to laugh, and that seemed
to set off everybody else. Most of them didn't
know what they were laughing about. Eeh! It was lovely.
And then the doctor came and told Rosie that they were
waiting for her to sit down. The tables were arranged like
a horseshoe. Anyway, I was making for the door
when the doctor was back again and saying, "Where are you

off to, Mary?" And then he didn't
 wait for me to tell him, but he took my hand and
 pulled me through all the bustle to the bottom of one
 side of the table. And he pulled a chair forward from
 against the wall and said, "You sit there, and enjoy
 yourself. It's Miss Rosie's special day. You
 understand?" He looked solemn for a moment and I said,
 "Yes, Doctor." Then he laughed and again said,
 "Enjoy yourself." Then amid all the noise and
 chatter he went up to the top table, and the meal began.
 It was very nice, very nice. But I thought you Cook,
 could have done better." Tactfully, now, she nodded
 to her superior;
 then she went on, "After that there was speeches and a
 lot of laughter. I couldn't hear what they were
 laughing at; I was too far down, you see. Robbie
 Macintosh didn't say much, and it sounded very
 solemn, until the end when he went into broad
 Scots
 'sere was a lot of laughter then. And then" comher
 ice was slowing up now- "they cut the cake. His d
 was on top of hers. That finished me; I was all
 Soked up." Her lids blinking rapidly, she
 looked ffit a one to the other, then dropped her head
 onto her lded arms on the table and she began to cry,
 and " others, rising to their feet,
 commiserated with her. jI"...d it was Cook who said,
 'Come on now. Go up to ur room and wash your
 face and pull yourself toher. Then come down and have a
 cup of tea?... They had been sitting in silence
 when Cook again (ke, saying quietly, "I've
 been thinkin" about her ,bar wig there all day. She
 must be goin' through hell." She's gone through two
 boxes of chocolates that .ibiow of," said
 Janie now. "She must spend a small une on
 them. Yet, she's cutting down on the store "board
 and us, isn't she?"
 JI'I can't help but feel sorry for her, too
 Cook," dis.bar rances said; 'b she's asked for
 all she's got, if we y go by the bit we've
 heard and seen. She was a lUferent woman altogether when
 she first used to go bebar bar o the annex. And Mrs
 Falconer and she got on so ell together. And look
 how she used to come into 'pa Cook, and get you
 to make the old girl special
 jlallyes. Yes, we all know about that," Janie
 put in jw. "But, if you ask me, it was all a
 sprat to catch mackerel, because, there's no gettin"
 away from it, e trailed the doctor: for him she
 put on a different e from the one she used for Miss

Rosie; she was it butter and sugar when
he was about. And I'll tell u something else' comshe
now leant down the table wards the cook- "As
I've said to you Cook, I've
ia""

230 Catherine Cookson
heard things upstairs, things here and there, that seemed
very odd at times. And knowing her now makes me think
she is one of those women who eat men alive."

"Oh! Oh! Janie Bluett. Be
quiet!" Frances had turned on her workmate
now. he things you say."
he things I say? What have you been sayin" all
along? Anyway, me mind's settled. I'm going
to look out for a change. And if you had any sense you
would do the same, "cos to my mind, she's going up
the pole. I'll tell you something you didn't know.
I was putting her linen away the other day in the top
drawer and I managed to feel something hard. I
pulled it out, and it was one of the doctor's scarves,
and it had knots in it from beginning to end, tight, tight
knots."

"No!" Cook was now biting on her lower lip
and Janie turned to her, saying, "Yes, Cook.
Tight, tight knots. Don't you think that means
she intends to do him an injury? And I
don't want to be here when it happens."

A bell attached to a board on the wall rang
loudly, and Frances, rising with a sigh, said, "Here
we go again. What now?"

PART THREE

Helen

i-

- fScSo:

eonard was saying, "I should have been there. I was
Hjquite capable..." when Helen cut him off
by bending lover him and putting her lips to his brow as
she said, If YOU weren't quite capable and you know it.
So, I don't let's be silly."

H 'If there's anyone silly in this menage, it
isn't me. I could have made it couldn't I,
John?" t "No, you couldn't."

"Well, well." Leonard put his hand up
to his thin, gaunt face and shook his head: "Not
a Mend in the
world," he said.

"Poor soul!" When Helen again kissed his
brow he caught her hand and said, hey looked so
happy when they came in, didn't they? Joy
personified."

'allyes, dear, joy personified."

Helen bit on her lip and her eyes became moist as she said on a shaky laugh, hey're looking round the kitchen garden I again, would you believe it? She's so interested in bar their future. And I can see them making quite a busi bar s of their bit of land, more so than it is now. Odd' bar comshe straightened up and looked at John- "she was never happy unless she was over there: she loved that house and his mother."

"You say Robbie's mother's having a ceilidh tonight?" Leonard said.

"Yes, she's entertaining all his friends. Her cousin and his wife are staying with her for the four days, and they are Scots, too."

"I always thought that a ceilidh was an Irish pastime."

No; it's a Gaelic name for a do. Of the two nationalities I wouldn't lay bets as to who makes the more noise, or drinks the more whiskey, or which one of them finishes up without a fight. But I doubt if the atter will happen with Robbie's mother about... You're not going now?" Leonard pulled himself up slightly from the back of the long lounge chair as John got to his feet.

Yes, because if I stay five minutes longer I'll be invited to dinner."

"Well, you haven't a surgery tonight; you said so."

"Yes, I know, but I've got a mother. I've had a number of late nights during the last few weeks, don't forget. Your gambling sesions have got me hooked."

Leonard lay back and smiled his gaunt, wide smile as he said, "Oh, yes. I reckoned up yesterday, you must have lost all of fifteen shillings; but what you shouldn't forget is mat you've aso had tuition for that amount"

Helen had said nothing during this jocular exchange, for she was used to such banter, but now she went from the room, saying, TU call that pair in to say goodbye. Anyway, it's almost dark and they won't be examining vegetables in (his light'

*bar eft alone for a moment, Leonard put his hand out rards John and beckoned him closer. And when ch"(B bent over him, it was to hear Leonard say, 'I

luid like to have a talk with you, in private."

Private?"

bar bar Yes. Yes, private. She's

arranged to take them to
theatre on Monday; at least I forced her hand in
coms they'll be leaving here any time after five. Could
contBut make it?" jallyes. Yes, of course."
n"...ey stared at each other for a moment, then
closJI-GO his eyes, Leonard said, 'I'd be
grateful." John could say nothing to this, but if he
had voiced jg" thoughts, he would have said, he
gratitude, rey, is on the other foot; a
visit here is the only light JJB my life
now," to which, in all honesty, he could j bar ave
added, 'When, not only do I see Helen, but also
jitajoy this friendship which has surprisingly grown up
j bar ietween us." There was a time when perhaps
thoughtlessly he might have wished this man dead. But not
bar toy more. The thought of his impending end was iinrul.
He had found Leonard Spears to be not only a
good man, but also a gentleman of the first rank, in
left-brace bar all ways.
bar bar He straightened up, and assuming his
doctor' smanlffler, he said, "Now behave yourself
Do as you're told bar g3tod no attempting to go
outside until the sun starts to behave itself too."
He nodded sharply down at Leonj aid now; and
when there was no response, he turned I
abruptly and walked from the room.
j Helen was in the hall. She seemed to be
waiting g for him, for she had his coat in her hands,
and silently she helped him into it. Then, handing him his
hat and
gloves, she said, "I'm going to the theatre with
Rosie and Robbie on Monday night; I'm,
.i'm being got out of the way." Her voice had a
break in it. "I suppose he's asked you over
because he wants to talk to you in private?"
*Well... yes."
She gathered the front of her dress into her fist
as if she were cold; then, turning to him, she peered
at him through the twilight as she said, 'I don't know
what I'll do when he goes. He is my life.
He has been my life for a long time now. You
understand?"
"Yes. Yes, I understand."
"It wasn't so at first." She swallowed
deeply. "I liked him then, admired him, and he
was a quick escape route. But...b that soon changed.
He...he's a wonderful man."
"Yes. I agree with you."
She turned from him now, muttering, "Why?
Why?"

"Used in this context, that is the hardest word to give an answer to," John said quietly.

Her voice became a slight croak now as she said, "How long do you think he has?"

He paused for a moment before he said, "His... your doctor would surely have given you an indication."

"No, he hasn't. He thinks it would hurt me. Anyway I have eyes. And you know that this is the worst possible climate for him. But he won't budge, he likes this house. He says he wants me to be... settled here," and her head bounced back as she said "When he goes, I too go far away, miles away, across oceans..."

As her voice broke, he put in softly, "Don't! Don't! He'll notice immediately and that'll upset him more.

"I" P"...ment a face on things up till now; go on doing And I can say at this moment, Helen, that there

JB-ONE who hopes or would even pray for his surHN as much as I would."

t this point he happened to glance into the corBut where Bertram Johnson, Leonard's valet-cum-e was hovering. Strange, he thought, but the man Jys seemed to be hovering in his vicinity. He had r taken to the man. He couldn't tell why, for gPntly he was good at his job and was very nec-

Paxy to Leonard.

gEvery bar I must be going," he said now and made a motion

IJ-AKE her hand, although it got no further than a Bon; then he went out into the night and towards F stables where he knew Henry would have his JWS-EVERY and trap ready for hi.

JO-EVERY thing John was to remember about Rosie's edciing day had nothing to do with that happy girl JP1 her groom, but was something his mother had said JI im the previous night.

g bar oth she and Mrs Atldnson had been somewhat

grised to see him back so early. And when he told g" Atkinson that he wasn't going out again and that Kwas sure she'd be glad of an eary night, she thanky took him at his word.

j bar His mother wasn't in bed. hi fact as she said hersen greater-than her legs had taken a holiday and left her substi bar rotes and she had

been walking around most of the day She also insisted that she had no intention of coming until she had heard all his news.

They were settled in the sitting room and she was saying to him, "I was vexed this afternoon because I knew I could have been there, as I've said, I've been on my pins all day. What do you think's given me this relief?"

"Oh, don't be silly." He jerked his head impatiently.

You know you have your good days, and that they are followed by bad ones. She smiled now as she said, Say that again. I

didn't quite get it." He closed his eyes for a moment as he smiled

widely; then she said, Well, go on, tell me. Right from the two of them going up the aisle."

"Oh, I told you that bit when I popped in before the reception." All right then, start from the reception. And so he started from the reception, even bringing in young Mary's appearance, which had pleased Rosie greatly. And he finished on a laugh when he related that the young couple had gone out to examine the kitchen garden once again, in deep twilight'

"It's been a good day then, for all concede? She had stopped here; then, her head slightly bowed, she added, that was the wrong conclusion," and she thumbed now towards the wall, adding quietly, 'She's been on the rampage.

Twice I heard her yelling at the girls. Then Mrs Atkinson had a word with the Niece. He said that the mistress had given Jimmy 0213k slash - ham that's the yard man, isn't it?

Well, she had given him order to clean the carriage, get it ready for outside. And the carriage, you know, is the Niece's business. Anyway, as he said it hadn't been used now for some time, and what's the use of a carriage without a horse." She paused now while staring at him;

then said, I used to love living here. But the way we've tumbled out, I wish I had ever come. And I know, if I hadn't, you wouldn't have been like the ass you are today."

He had got quickly to his feet, saying, We've been

less-than pleased all this. Come on, get yourself to bed." She did not move, but went on, How did you leave

com She patient?"

I Leonard?"
 i bar Yes, Leonard."
 H Well, he's not my patient."
 bar bar "No, I know that, but youre across there enough
 Itaes as if he were." tTooldng down at
 her he said, Mother, he likes
 ompany. And, as I told you, and he has said
 himself, bar heir socalled friends have faded away like
 snow in nshine, apart from one or two. Only one
 does he imd amusing. And not one of them plays
 cards.
 B "I'm I'm not questioning you, John, or
 blaming tu onty L..well I get worried.
 What I saw of him
 5 know he's not long to go and there's going to be a
 great gap in that girls life when he does. But
 what firm going to say won't please you.
 Nevertheless, 111
 bar say it: she's not the kangaroo type; she
 won't ump bar ito somebody else's arms the
 minute that he's gone. @. 'Mother He took two
 steps back from her. Retaly"" The word might have
 been an instant repntmand, but her gaze remained
 steadfast and her voice calm as she said, Tm not
 blind, and I'm your mother. I I remember your telling
 me about that garden party,
 and you could talk of nothing else, and the fat hat she
 was intending to mary a man old enough to be her father, or so
 you thought. And then you purposely didn't go to her
 wedding, and you were like a bear
 I* and.
 ith a sore skull for weeks on end. Oh
 yes, you were * She held up her hand. comRemember
 I had to put ith your moods when you were a boy, the
 Ions si lences when something troubled you and vn,
 ouldn't speak of it. Well, shes something yo
 wouldn't speak about. And now it would seem you'v got
 both on your mind," and she thumbed towards the
 wall.
 I aven't got both on my mind Mother Therell be
 no-one more upset than I'll be when Leonard
 goes Hes become my friend. I...I like him; in
 fact, I more than lie him
 "No doubt, no doubt. I'm glad of that. And
 he's a
 fine man. But that still leaves the question of when he
 goes, what will she do?"
 "rom what I understand from her own lips she's
 going to travel, get away."
 "Oh! Oh, well, although you won't agree

I'll say thank God for that because you're still married and she's your wife's sister. And what's more, you can look at me with your face blazing, but, you know I'm just bringing out into the open what's on your mind. Anyway, you were saying that he wanted to talk to you on Monday night, private. Now I wonder what that'll be about."

"Well, Mother, I can tell you that whatever it is you won't get to know."

"No? Well, that's up to you. But remember the old adage, actions speak louder than words. So now lad if you can bear to touch me, you can give me a heave out of this chair and then leave me to myself; I can manage."

He heaved her up from the chair. Then, when she eventually pulled her arm from his hold, she said 'I can manage. Give me fifteen minutes; that's wish to come and say good night.'

He hobbled on her sticks across the room to the still, and he had not rushed to open it for her as he felt he did, but watched her transfer the right-hand ing stick to the left hand and lean on the two as she pulled the door open. But as she made to go she turned her head over her shoulder and said, 'Thank you very much Doctor, for your help' with a smile on her face now- "and, speaking of barbiturates, as you do most of the day, I would advise you to take a dose in the form of a double Jky, neat."

He stood stiffly, his head bowed. Then he turned at and dropped into the chair he had recently vacated and, leaning his head back, he closed his eyes. He could hear her saying, 'When he goes, I go, far away' miles away' across oceans.' And he knew this is what she meant to do.

Bar *He had heard them laughing about Dashing Daisy. She was apparently one of the few visitors who had and fear of visiting a man dying of tuberculosis. She the widow of a District Commissioner from Africa who, he understood, had caused her husband more trouble than any rebel chieftain or witch-doctor. Bar bar "John had never met her, but now he was about to disprove the experience. He learned from Johnson, who met him in the hall, that Lady Helen and the gang couple had left at six o'clock and that Mrs. Eeman Wheatland had called and was with Sir Ronald in the drawing-room. In the drawing-room, the woman sitting near the

bamboo chaise-logue twisted her body
 round to wards him as Leonard said, 'Oh, hello
 there, John. By the way, this is Mrs Freeman
 Wheatland," but before John could acknowledge the
 introduction the lady cried loudly in a rough-tone
 voice, "Don't be two faced, Leonard.
 Tell him what you usually call me, behind my
 back, of course. Dashing Daisy May, that's
 what he calls me Dashing Daisy May. I was
 stupid enough to tell him that's what Tommy used
 to call me. He... he was my husband. Sit
 down!" Her command was imperious.
 John looked at Leonard. Leonard's face
 was streched with laughter; his own, he knew, was full
 of amazement. He sat down and looked at the
 visitor. . .dashing Daisy. Yes, the title
 seemed to suit her. He could imagine her sitting
 on a horse going hell for leather over the fells.
 She was a gaunt woman, probably sixty. She
 was big-made, al bone; as his mother would say, no
 meat on her, all gristle. Her face looked
 fleshless, yet pixiefied. Yes, that was the word,
 pixiefied. An odd name to put to her looks because,
 taken over all, she was ugly. She had very long
 fingers which looked absolutely fleshless; and then there
 was her body: her shoulders looked broad,
 and likely, when she stood up, he would find she was
 tall, because there seemed a good length of leg under her
 long skirt at least fro her knees down to the
 caps of her sturdy brogues.
 She startled him somewhat by saying, "I've heard
 all about you, you know, and not only rom im," she
 nodded towards Leonard, "but down in the town. They
 have their censors, you know. There's more for
 Ijjhan against you. How do you put up with old
 allis? There's an old shyster if ever there was jpfou
 know, he's got that bad leg of his insured ke sure
 it doesn't get better."
 (js, Leonard, dear?" i bar ve him a
 chance."
 *r head back and her mouth wide open, she
 let roar of a laugh. He noticed, as far as he
 could ttiat she had all her teeth but that some were very
 leloured.
 "disgreater-than
 disJ greater-than and now turned her round bright
 eyes towards him, JB-GO, 'My nanny used
 to say to me when I wouldn't disjl bar iy oats,
 "If you don't ike it you can lump it. jr'll go
 to it before it'll come to you.""

coneaJfffe was smiling as he returned
her gaze. If you *ment like it you could lump it. That
was plain dgh. He turned now to look at
Leonard, who had dislead back into the cushion of the
chair-bed. His

*?""

were closed and his teeth could be seen nipping
ss lower lip.

disbar bar Have you ever been in Africa?"

con.bar Wnat?" The question almost swung John
round in

chair, and he repeated, 'Africa? No. No,
I've

er been to Africa."

bar *Well, in my opinion you haven't missed
much. I all my flesh there, you know. I used to be
round l plump. You wouldn't believe that, would you?"

SS-EVERY did not know whether to say, 'Oh, yes,"
or "Oh,

bar bar They both turned to Leonard now, who still
had his es closed but was saying, 'Tell him
Daisy, about Js disinfectant bath."

"Oh, go on with you. Why should I entertain your
guest and him a doctor?" She turned a quick
glance on John now, saying, "I never had much
room for doctors. Witchdoctors can
beat them any day in the week."

"I have no doubt of that."

"Go on Daisy, tell him about the bat,"
repeated Leonard. I

"Wy? You've heard it all before." bar
I'd like to hear it again."

John was watching her face. Her eyes were on
Leonard now, and he noticed a softness, like a
pale cloud, pass over her dry and wrinkled skin.

And she blinked her round bright eyes for a moment before,
returning to her former manner, she said, 'Well
you've asked for it." Then turning to John again, she
said, "I don't know whether you want to hear this or
not. But it should happen that at one time I was a
spanking lass. That's what they would have called me
up here, a spanking lass. Can you believe that?"

"Oh yes. Yes." He had not hesitated with
this reply, and repeated, "Yes, I could imagine
you being a spanking lass."

As she looked at him now there was cynicism in
her eyes as she said, "Huh! The Colonial
Office weren't alone in breeding their diplomats.

Anyway, there I was being quite happy as the sixth
daughter not counting the four older brothers of a very

busy father and I was the only one unmarried.
But I was in love with a horse, so it didn't
matter..."

When Leonard made a coughing sound in his throat,
she stopped for a moment to glance at him, then went on,
"Then to my mother's dismay and joy
there rode into my life one Thomas
Freeeatland, who was on leave from Africa. Apy
he had gone out as Assistant Commissioner, when his
superior retired, he got the job. He was
young, but that didn't matter, he liked horses,
asked me to go to Africa with him. It was a bit between
Brutus and him. Brutus was my dad had him since
he was a foal. As for Africa,
it was on the map somewhere and that it was said, that there was a
lot of sand, and it was full of lels and sheiks and dung
and flies and some way, I found myself married, and
all I remember that of my wedding day was that my father got
nervous, or nearly so, even before the ceremony, belief
at getting rid of me, and when I woke up the next
morning on a boat in the middle of some "dis knew
I didn't like marriage, and to make matters worse, I
was sea-sick."

John watched Leonard press his hand across his
face he wanted to do the same. His eyes were wet and were
tightly pressed; that was until the next time it
when she said, 'all you've likely dealt with',
Doctor, including ones that have been in a And I'm
sure the expression "being kicked in the s" isn't
new to you. But that's what Africa did right in the
guts. And it was some time before I straighten up,
metaphorically speaking, that
I did not see her put her hand on her stomach, was
wiping his eyes with his handkerchief, and he muttered,
'Oh, Mrs Wheatland,' she reddened with, "Call me
Daisy; I like it better."

"I
He did not call her Daisy, but Leonard was
saying 'Go on Daisy. Go on.' His
She turned to John again, and, her voice serious,
she said, 'Can you imagine being dropped into the
middle of a forest? No path, nothing, and just left there
day after day. Not that the house wasn't comfortable, and the
clearing roundabout good, and there were roads and paths leading
off to this tribe and that tribe. But inside my mind
I was in a forest and, at times was frightened to death.
Especially when poor Tommy had to go on these treks
and I was left alone there. Oh, there were servants
galore. Oh, yes. But only one could speak a
smattering of English. Sometimes we had visitors,

but what did they do? They sat on the verandah and drank, and talked about this head man, or that witch-doctor. That was when I was there. But I've good hearing, and when I was supposedly out of the way, bits of scandal would emerge; this one had left her husband, or a certain lady was being visited by so-and-so. I didn't know then that the certain lady being visited by so-and-so was the woman that Tommy had wanted to marry. But she had turned him down, and to ease his lacerated feelings he had taken leave and come to England and found a girl who was going cheap from the dregs at the bottom of the barrel."

"Oh, no! no!" Leonard had pulled himself up a little in the chair now, and he said again, "No, no; never think that of yourself Daisy. That isn't your character."

"You know nothing about it, Leonard. You've never reached desperation point and been number ten and nobody wanted you. Anyway" her voice was BLOW as she turned back to John- "everybody has had to go through an apprenticeship in life. And those few months were my apprenticeship. And then I have seen people from the leper colony." He nodded now at John, repeating, "Leper colony. I have heard of it, never heard anybody speak of it. Would I now? Would hear such a thing from the few people I had conversation with? The leper was taboo.

But I went beyond the compound. I was out walking sort of main road and there, coming towards me, was this man who looked like a downy old priest: he wore a flat hat and a long black robe. But I'm not being sentimental or ridiculous I say he had the face of an angel. And he was quiet. When he introduced himself as Doctor Jand La-Mode, he laughed and swept his hand down his robe and said that it was hardly a recommendation for his name. That was our first meeting. He began to know who I was. Over the course of the few weeks I met him on that road three times. He always had two carriers with him and they always were loaded down with parcels and boxes. Then one night I said to Tommy, "Do you know that Prank La-Mode?" The name made him sit up straight in his chair, and he said, "What do you know about that Prank La-Mode?"

jationothing, only that I've met him two
 or three
 bar 6." And this made him jump to his feet,
 de-
 lding, "You didn't go there?"
 bar 'Go where?' I asked. "The leper colony,
 of
 Sse" was his reply."
 nn watched her sit back in the chair, and when
 she didn't speak for a moment, he whispered, A
 eper colony?"
 Now she turned her head towards him and, nodding,
 repeated, A leper colony. My husband,
 Tommy, was a phlegmatic kind of man. Perhaps it
 was the lack of passion or any kind of real emotion
 that had lost him his true love. But at that oment I
 was confronted with another Tommy, who was actually
 yelling that I must not go near that man, and I must not go
 near the eper colony.
 I remember thinking, where is the leper colony,
 i anyway? So vehement was he and so altered was his
 whole personality as he went for me that I realised
 he was afraid of the eper colony. He was afraid
 of leprosy. And that did something to me. As for me,
 I thought, I'm not afraid of the leper colony or
 lepers." She pouted her lips nov and
 smiled a sad smile before she went on, "Oh I
 knew nothing about lepers, except that they were
 untouchable people, and once you had leprosy it was a death
 warrant and you were hidden away somewhere. Yet, there was
 that man, Frank LaMode, looking so serene and
 peaceful. Yes, that was the word, peacefl. Ad the
 person I had to live with never looked peaceful,
 nor did any of his acquaintances. They drank
 too much to be peaceful. Whe he yelled, "Do you
 hear me? Do not speak to that man again, and not on your
 life, go to that colony Do you hear me?"..." and
 now she looked towards Leonard, saying, "I can
 still hear him yelling at me Leonard, no matter
 how many times I relate it. A the more he yelled the
 ore defiant I became inside." Her head was
 back agaist the cushion now, her eys turned
 ceilingwards, as she continued "It was a fort-
 1 . left-brace met Frank again, and I said
 to him
 comrj en vould like to visit the colony, your
 yd h aid " m d6ar me! Have you your
 band's nermi107" less-than "n l o; but
 I mean to go there and see
 I myself ith without rmss left-brace orl" And

after a ihThat w "Very well. Can you come
now?

"I have nothing else to do."" She
brought Pin the chair and'lookmg ohn she said
greater-than It was a very strange journey The in rt
to P out into a forest and we
Sed I 't ow for ho long. It
* a n trs and take two abreast
to ow less-than ere the wooden palisades. It
was "in, there * . . * This * J a fort in the
Amencas, you know, i nad imasin . . . , n
k T T less-than iSo ot My first
ntroduction to lep P the Indiai* , ,
was when t gate was was by a man who one finger on
s hand'the rest a buniots And we were passing
tbrough bttle 'PS and everv who cold seemed
to be bsy" is this tlhands And then there were those
greater-than shainbierl Frank their twisted faces
4.c i! ove' ade of bamboo with a number of
lls touse wa' , * * r
ns. And then was the I two omen hsh wome I
coudn be Sit. One less-than rf and robust' the
other had Jks on her han and ans But loth thir
faces the rflection of thatm Frank s, bar
We, I ont o iC0 any more' except
stay te until mye0 told roel had
toget away leke I wouldl Frankiumselfl
me bar to this edge of the and onto the mam road
asaln
* . .

.-----
And there I was met by three of the servants. They
wouldn't come near me, but they dashed away along the
road to inform their master that a leper was approaching,
because that's how they now looked upon me.

"Tommy was waiting for me in the middle of the
compound and he was so full of emotion and rage that he
spluttered; then he ordered me into the bath house, and
I said to him, "Why the bath house?" Such was his
rage he forgot himself and spoke in the vernacular,
yelling, "Get in there and strip off!" Not
undress, strip off."

Now she put her hand up to her face and began
to laugh.

""Why?" I asked him. "Because you're going
to take a bath," he said.

""Oh, is that all?" So away I went into the
bath house and I stripped off, but when I put my
hand into the water and it stung-I don't know exactly
what was in it, but something besides carbolic-but there I was

standing in my bare pelt when he came to the door and the very sight of me like that caused him to close his eyes. It did. It did. Her head was bobbing now. Then he ordered me to get into the bath.

"Not on your life," I said. "That isn't only carbolic. I don't know what you've put in it but I'm not getting into that."

I went to grab my clothes, but he was there before me. He didn't touch them, though; he had a stick in his hand with which he whipped them aside. Then what d'you think he did? He started to poke me with the stick." She stopped and covered her face with her hand for a moment before she said, "I can laugh at it. I know: that dignified, pompous individual, poking with a stick. But it had an effect when he poked 'Jua a certain place and I lost my footing and over JJ-SNT with a terrible scream. But I didn't go under, waist-high, and there he was, standing above me, bar mg at me, "Duck your head! Duck your head!" dislfand not duck my head, and I wasn't going to duck child"" head, but instead I thrust out my hands, and you see they are quite large hands, and they were "rays very strong. Horses don't only strengthen your Ittocks but they have the same effect on your hands. Jjtd your arms, too, so when my hands gripped his disuser tops and pulled at them, which action must J bar ve been painful to certain parts of his anatomy, he disbar bar still his footing and the next minute there he was in bath, fully clothed and face down."

Her mouth now opened in a gape as she drew in a "lg breath efore she went on, I... I was stinging Ignd burning in every pore. I started to laugh and when II pulled myself from under him, he, struggling in the Jy water, went down again. And then I was out within seconds he was out too." Her head was n back and when she spluttered, "No swain could i thrown off his clothes quicker to get to his bride did Thomas Freeman Wheatland that night." ihn roared, and Leonard held his ribs tightly and l the tears, ran down his face before he could entreat bar er, Please! Please, Daisy!" bar 'Oh. Oh, I'm sorry, Leonard." bar John was on his feet now, his face still awash with t tears, his mouth wide, and leaning over Leonard, saying, "Are you all right?" "Yes. Yes," Leonard gasped; "just give me a tablet," and he pointed towards the side table.

A minute later, seeing the concern in
Daisy's face, he said, "It's all right,
Daisy. You're...y're a marvel. But now tell
John the rest. That'll quieten us down."
"Sure you're all right?" said John. "Shall
I call Johnson?"

"No. No. A laugh like that is the best
medicine in the world. You should know that a doctor."
He turned to look at the big, gaunt face again
and said, "Go on, Daisy. Finish it."
Sitting back in the chair Daisy put her
forearm under what must have been her withered breasts and heaved
them upwards slightly before, looking at John, she
said, the following day there was a letter on my breakfast
tray. It was to the effect that if I wished to remain
his wife and not be sent home in disgrace, or words
to that effect, then I must promise to obey him, in
all ways-oh yes, he added those words, in all
ways-but mostly I must promise never to go near the
leper colony or to speak with Prank La-Mode
again. He ended by saying that he would be up country for the
next four days and that he would expect my answer
on his return."

There was a pause before she said, "Well, I
wrote him my answer. It was to the effect that, before the
leper incident, I had intended to return
to England, my wish being that he would divorce me, as
I knew our marriage had been a grave
mistake. But now, since my acid bath, or
whatever it was, and by the way" comshe now nodded at
John- "it left me feeling skinned: for weeks
I looked as if I had been boiled,
lifaen my body started to peel it was a very
painocess. Anyway, I said that it was a toss-up
CT I retued to England or went to work in the y
colony, but that after much thought I had deon the latter
course. And I finished the letter gj.-.
the words: "Some people are afraid of the death
"I'll never experience, but die they will some day." so
I went into the leper colony as a helper, and
disness there for seven years."

"bar bar No?" John was shaking his head.
All their faces de sombre now, and Daisy said,
"Yes, and I can Besdy say they were the saddest
yet at the same e the happiest days of my
life. And you know, it
8 very strange, but in the second year there I
began jget parcels of medicine and first-aid
materials from Jople in other districts of whom
I'd previously jwn nothing." jllWhy did you

leave after seven years?" asked John
E" ifly now.

Frank insisted on it. My esh began to drop
off literally. I had been a big woman and I
became 'jm and bone, as you see me now." She
held out her bar faands. "Yet, I never
contracted the disease. It was

S 'What did your husband do about all this?"

H She remained silent for a moment before she said,
jlWhat could he do? He'd lost face, which was an
Hawfiil thing. I was sorry about that because the na*bar
tives talk. He wasn't moved from his
position-I was be glad of that-but he died from malaria
the year after I came back to England. At least,
that's what it was I put down to. But he had never
got on with a certain t tribe and had made an
enemy of the witchdoctor.

And the servants, I understood, said this man had
put a curse on him and prophesied he would die
on a certain day and had sent him word to that effect.
And he did die, so I'm told, on that very day.

It was his assistant who spread the story. But I
don't think it was a story. I realise now that
Tommy was terrified of death and I've always blamed
myself for the words I put on the end of that etter.

Yet, at the time I was suffering bodily
agony from whatever chemical he had put in that bath.
It obviously wasn't really acid or I wouldn't
be here now. But even Frank, who happened to be a
doctor' comshe nodded now at John- "he couldn't
put a name to what might have been mixed in with the
carbolic. Carbolic is bad enough, you know, but I
don't think it would have left me the way it did, or
him. But it was his face and hands that caught it most.
His clothes and the speed with which he got rid of them had
saved him from anything worse, I should imagine."

"You're a wonderful lady, Daisy."

"Now don't you try to soft soap me Sir
Leonard Morton Spears." She turned
towards John, saying under her breath, "You never
get offered a drink in this house, only soft words.
D'you know that?"

At this Leonard laughed and put out his hand and
rang the little bell on the side table, which brought
Johnson into the room, and Leonard said to him,
"You know the tastes of our friends, don't you,
Johnson?" And the man, looking from one to the other,
smiled, but stiffly, as he said, "Port for
madam, and whisky, plain, for the doctor."
"And what about me, Johnson?"

His man now shook his head as he said
 "You may
 Ire a choice, sir, of orange juice,
 apple juice or a
 *'ckcurrant cordial."
 j bar Yes. Yes, you neednt go through the again,
 I'll re the last one. It's got some colour about
 it, any-
 Sy, and one can use one's imagination."
 iien the man had left he roo, John said to
 sy, Do you still ride?"
 *Cfti yes. Yes. I've got a beautiful
 mare. She's
 JB-ED Fanny, for short. She's nine."
 llWell," said John, "if she's Fanny
 for short, what
 r real name?"
 Panackapan."
 llWhat?"
 Tanackapan, Fanny,
 Pan...ack...a...pan."
 llohn was laughing again. hat's a very odd name
 I give a horse."
 "Yes, Yes, but the day I bought her there were a
 ynber of women among the dealers, and one, look bar
 IS-GO at mine as she was led round the ring,
 said, "Oh, llat's a Fanny Fanackapan."
 I'd never heard the exession before and I've never
 heard it since, so I
 Jght her. She was a yearling, and oh, have we enid
 ourselves. She can take a farm gate like a ballet
 cer." tefore the drinks were brought in Daisy looked
 at
 Jard. His eyes were half-closed and, getting
 to her she said, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm
 g to throw off that port in one gulp and get myout of
 this. I've just realised I've left her standing iat
 cold wind. Why don't you have your barns pBade like
 any other sensible man, with fours sides on Stem
 and a door, not just a roof?"
 Leonard opened his eyes and smiled at her,
 saying,
 "Give Fanny my apologies. I'll still the
 wind for her the next time she comes."
 Johnson came into the room with the drinks and as she
 had intimated Daisy threw the drink off in a
 gulp; went to the chair-bed, bent over Leonard and
 said, "Smell my breath; it will do you good." Then,
 her voice dropping, she added, Be a good
 fellow."

His voice was a mere whisper now as he said, 'Come again soon Daisy. Please!'

"I will. I will. Good night, and all the gods be with you." She straightened up now, turned to John and said briefly, "Good night, doctor."

"Good night Daisy. It's been a pleasure."

She made no reply to this but went out of the room, followed by Johnson. And John, about to sit down again, was stayed by Leonard saying, "Bring a chair up near me," and he pointed to the side of the chairbed. And when John had done this, Leonard said, "A remarkable woman."

"Yes, indeed, a very remarkable woman. And one who can laugh at herself."

Every word she said was true, but she didn't go into other details that are more surprising still. She's been through the mill, oh yes; and ground down finely, I can tell you. And she's been a very good friend to us." 'allyes; yes, I should imagine so."

"But now, after all that, how am I going to say what I want to say? It will sound so mundane, but I must say it. And there's not a lot of time left, now is there?"

John made no reply for a moment, and then he said quietly, "It's up to you. The will is a mighty machine:

knows you have an incentive strong enough to % it it'll work for you."

Sonard's head was turned away and his voice was as he said "What d'you think has been working fit weeks past? I have to call on the incentive time I look at her because of what will asjdtly happen to her when the me comes. Of one g I am sure; our socalled friends will all gradufind their way back here. The thread that ran igh Daisy's husband runs through them all. Daisy jrbe the only one besides yourself whom she'll j6 as a real friend. And it is about this I want to VR-OSIE now has a husband and a mother-in-law, a business in which she's very interested, and she I i woman. But Helen...

well, Helen is a man's i wm"

i bar hn looked somewhat startled, for his eyes had

,eaned and his mouth was slightly agape, which ght a smile from Leonard as he said "What ,es you look so surprised? Surely you know there e"...Women who need men's company and men who 'iji women's company, more than they do that of Hr own sex.

Not that they need men, plural, the man ular
I would say. Oh, dear me, I'm putting it very
Brically and badly. And so what I want to say
I better say straight out. Will you continue to be
atandiend? She'Us be a widow, and as you are not her
ior, your visits might cause a little talk. But
would risk that and continue to be her friend, if nothing X
Oh! Oh! comhe screwed up his eyes now and up his
hand- 'Don't protest, don't protest. I w
something and you know something: if I hadn't ae on the
scene when I did, then I would never e got her.
Had you two met earlier, that would
58 Catherine Cookson "backslash
have been that Oh, I knew that. Please!
Please! John, don't look so embarrassed.
I've known it all along. She kept talking about
you after your meeting on that hil; and then you avoided our
wedding. After that she never again mentioned your name. And then
there came the time when she grew to love me. Oh
yes, she grew to love me, so very much. Never as much
as I loved her, but she loved me, and from the mo ment
she loved me she began to talk about you again, although in
an off-hand way. But when you married Beatrice, that
was tha She just couldn't believe it and you went out of her
life completely, and I was very, very happy. But
life plays strange tricks with one.
Anyway, this is something rather difficult that I'm
asking you to do, because you're still married to Beatrice and so
any visits to her sister would not go unnoticed and there
would be talk I'm asking this of you for very sefish
reasons: there is a man I know who will, as soon as
I'm out of the way, make a beeline for her. Not that,
under normal circumstances, she would think about it in
any way, but loneliness is a very strange thing.
I've experienced it, so I know what I'm talking
about. Perhaps you too have waited for the gold and it has
passed you by, so you have taken te dross by way of
comfort. I've learned that out cannot blame people for what they
do shortly after a bereavement. Now, I know Helen
is not of a weak nature and so could be easily
influenced, but I want her to have the right compay. If
you had still been living with Beatrice, I would not have
put this o you. Do you consider it strange that I should
be asking this of you?"" John paused a moment before he
said, 'allyes, in a
Leonard I do. I can only see myself and my
ions as if I were in your shoes. But I'm not as as
you in any way, for I would be jealous of the ght of
anyone like Helen finding solace, any sort
greater-than lace in another man's company. And now

let me omething, Leonard. I was jealous
of you. Oh yes, jealous of you, for a long dme; and
then we met I realised how wise she had been in
her choice. Id never have hoped to live up to your high
ards. I know myself, and over the weeks during our
friendship has grown, my admiration for has grown
too. And I say again, I wouldn't be
enough to act as you're doing now, not in any his
fbu have a very poor opinion of yourself, John. quite
different from that which others have of There are not many who would
have wrecked

* own marriage, as you did through helping Ro
(h no! No!" John shook his head
vigorously. "My Aage was on the rocks before that
But you'e right about us not knowing what goes on in her's
mind especially in a lonely mind, and of results of
that loneliness. Marriage with Beatrice 'ed that to me.
If ever there was a double personin a human being, it
is in her. I can't go into it long before Rosie's
affair our marriage was do. I was already considering a
legal separation." illowing John's statement there
was silence beai them. Then, as if aiming now to dismiss
the ersation, Leonard said hose pills are marvel,
you know' comhe nodded towards the table- put new life
into me." He smiled now, then
added, 'Going back to what we were talmg
about earlier, man's woman, and woman's woman,
you wouldn't think Daisy would fall into the former
category, would you? But she does. With her looks
you would think she was out of the running altogether;
but even at her age she could have a number of men
friends tomorrow. She's had three permanent men in her
life."

John's face showed surprise, and Leond
said, "Oh, yes, you can raise your eyebrows. And
she's known the grand passion. Just once, as she said,
but it has remained with her."

"Well, you do surprise me, Leonard. I
must say you do, for she seems the most unlikely
perso to..."

"Come! come!" said Leonard now somewhat
briskly; "You a doctor and admitting that anything
you hear that is off the beaten track about another's
life should surprise you. Tut! tut! But yes I
can see your point: the first meeting with Daisy can be a
little mind-boggling. Her Tommy divorced her on the
grounds of desertion while she was still in tne P
colony. So she had no monetary support and she
was almost penniless when she returned to Englad was when
she found herself in hospital that she first saw her dear

Stephen, Stephen King, which she doesn't think was his real name. But she understood he visited old people who were without friends. And apparently she was without friends and from the first time they met up, it was done. It was the same with him, I think, from what she says."

"But what about her family? She said she was one of ten."

"Yes, she was one of ten, John, but they were all

married and had children. And were they going to

to meet this weird Aunt Daisy, who had spent many years in a leper colony and was likely contagious?

Without exception, all her family held the IBC view as Tommy had. Odd" somewhere he smiled-

He always thinks of him as Tommy, not Reeman Tate, which sounds too superior a name for him

"As to me he was a fuck of a man. Anyway, to be long story short, and she has kept this part short even while keeping me amused, which is contrary to her intention when she comes here, they lived together and they lived together. For four years they lived together. I asked her why they never argued, and she answered simply, "He never asked. What did they live on? I asked her, because they spent their days helping others. What she did tell Bob was that she felt he was expiating something he'd done when he was young. She even says he might have been in prison for a time. She didn't enquire, she just loved him. But apparently he had enough money to sustain them in ordinary living conditions, and every now and again he would give her so much to keep things going. Where it came from she never knew. His life was a mystery. But that didn't matter her. The only thing that did was, she had him for many long years, long, happy years. And then" somewhere Bob snapped his fingers- "he goes like that. One day he was there, the next he was gone, leaving her

32 enough money for her to carry on for six months and left a note to say he would always love her."

"Good gracious!"

"Yes, that's what I said, John. Good gracious! I pleaded with her if she had heard of him since, and she said

"Never." But what she did say was, he might have gone back to a wife and family in Ireland or somewhere out of the country. Or her earlier thoughts might have been the reason, that he had a criminal record and was living now on the results while expiating that past."

"And she's never heard of him since, in any way; never seen a photograph or anything?"

"No, never, and just as well, I would say, for she wouldn't be living comfortably as she is today if he had stayed with her. For then she wouldn't have met her Mr Anasby...mr Jaes Anasby. out know, I've said this before, John, but her life would fill a book and not just one. Oh no, not one, because the last episode really is fantastic. From how she told me, it should happen that she was glad to get a position as an assistant nurse. You see, she'd had no proper training, although she had nursed in that leper colony. But this day she happened to be late and was hurrying through a side door used by the staff when the door caught the end of her finger and drew her to a dead stop. And she stood holding it and exclaiming what, in ordinary English, would have been "Damn and blast it!" Instead she uttered three words in an African tribal dialect, and then was astounded to hear an immediate response in the same language. She turned to see a man in a wheelchair, flanked by two nurses and being pushed by a man in green livery. She had gaped at him for a moment, then spoke to him in the language again. What next he said was, "What is your name? Who are you?"

'She told him her name and also that she was an assistant nurse there. The latter information seemed Kprise him, and he protested strongly, "What's Colonial Office doing, not using you in some

"How long were you out there?" Oh" she had paused and said "a number of

Is." And then he put his head back and looked at Jtaan in the livery and said, "Give the lady my Mason." And at this the man drew a card from *inner pocket and handed it to her; but she didn't disL at it immediately because she was studyig te in the wheelchair. He was elderly, well into his s'ies, she surmised as she also did mat he was 'eone of importance. Then he said "Will you nd see me?"

then glanced at the card without properly it but said "Yes, sir. I'd be pleased to."

It's

ther long, long story, quite unbelievable, but ym a onth she was well installed in his expensive use as a nursecompanion. Apparently, he had ent much of his life in me area of Africa Daisy

often. He had been married twice,
both wives having died. He seemed to have no close
relatives. She was

That

knew him seven years and gradually knew all his
business and money transactions in which he came
to appear

and appreciate her judgement. When he died she was
only thirty-four and he left her half of his
estate." But John shook his head as he
said, 'Amazing story,

I Well, you should be used to amazing stories in
Hollywood. Nothing like that I can assure you, Leonard.

Al-

Right, here and there, you do get a surprise."

He now said "You've been talking too much; you're
tired" and, John I am a little tired. But in a
strange way,

I am happy that we've come to an understanding. At
least I hope we have." He stared at John now,
but when there was no reply immediately forthcoming from John,
he said quietly, 'Have I asked too much?'"

"No. No. Not at all." But now he held
up his head, "Don't start again. I'm going to ring
for Johnson. I think you'd be wise to have an early
night, because the theatre-goers will certainly not
be back before eleven."

"Oh, I had no intention of waiting up for
them."

Leonard watched John rise and ring the bell;
then he held out his hand, and as John took it he
said simply, thank you." But when his man entered the
room, he said, 'I'm being ordered about in my own
house, Johnson, and I'm not standing any more of it,
so, would you like to see the doctor to the door."

The two men smiled at each other, then went out.

But there was no exchange of words: not even in the hall
after he had helped John into his coat, then opened
the front door, did Johnson say a word.

Nor did he answer John's "Good night";
which caused John to remark to himself, "He's a
stiff-necked fellow, that. And he has no use for
me. That's plain. Well, I can return the
compliment there."

Barbara was paying her weekly Friday visit
to the BB. It was a bright day, the sun was shining and

*main thoroughfare was full of shoppers.

She made sure she did not always visit the same
shop to buy her chocolates. People talked. Oh
people talked. She knew they talked about her

inside and outside the house. So, sometimes she to bar Bd walk as far as the outskirts of the town to a H sweet shop she knew, there to purchase the only Jifor she had in life, she told herself; and they were for her anyway; they must be, because they (ten't putting weight on her.

bar was er tapestry-trimmed felt bag she was now carjfe two pound boxes and one half-pound box of olates. At one time she had always put a pound K on the household order, but not since she had cut bar not on the kitchen requirements. Pour of them bar so, eating their heads off, and his meagre aUow bar to her hardly paid their wages. She was going lo something about that, too. Two doing the gar bar ftg and Needier pottering in the yard What did they do most of their time? Sit in the greenhouse drinking tea. Oh, she knew what went on; she had nothing to do but watch them from the windows.

Today she had waled as far as Brampton Hill, which was almost on the outskirts. But, from the sweet shop thee she had been able to buy only a halfpound box of chocolates. As the shop-keeper had said, they were only asked for pounds at Christmastime.

Seeing a post office reminded her that she hadn't any stamps, and she needed to write to that solicitor again. Oh yes, she should indeed.

She hadn't entered this post office before and was annoyed that there were a number of people waiting to be served When she joined hose waiting for stamps, there were three people before her, and she moved from one foot to the other with impatience. She wasn't accustomed to having to wait to be served.

Her fidgeting moved the bag that she was carrying and it came in contact with the woman in front of her, so causing her to turn and stare at her, and the recognition was instant, especially on Beatrice's part Aiming to step back rom the woman, she pointedly pulled her skirt back as if from contact with her, oly immediately to be admonished by the woman behind saying, "Look what you're doing! I've got a cld here."

When, added to tis, the woman in front of her also muttered something as she moved away after picking up her two penny stamps, Beatrice paused for a second before taking her place. And there, in a high and superior tone she asked for six penny stamps, which

J; (hen placed very carefully in her bag, together y her change, before turning away. yhen she walked into the street and saw the jtoa standing as if waiting for

her, she made to and her, but the hand that came out and grabbed her left-brace made her turn furiously and say, "How dare you! go of my arm this minute!" will," growled Mollie Wallace, 'when I've had ay, and it's this. Who the hell d'you think you j? Trying to show me up in there, pulling your skirt y as if I had the mange. You above all people, fighter of a dirty old bastard who couldn't pay for pleasure. And I'll tell you something else when J" on. That man of yours, he was the means of getme put out, I'm sure of that, 'cos it was him who ght Jackie home. But I'll get me own back on

J- ist you wait. 'full get me own back on the lot . Poverty-stricken buggers that you are." And she released her hold on Beatrice's arm with that caused Beatrice to stagger back against gpost office wal.

Would appear that she had been struck speechless bar Be attack. But it had been only her fear of a scene, eet scene, that had prevented her from raising her

@y and slapping this filthy individua, as she Sbt of her, across the face. But she was deterd to have the last word as she said, "Scum!" betaming away; yet even in this she was forestalled bar Nollie Wallace saying, "And if I was you, missis, iwok out for your own man. Aye, I would that. By A" yes, I wold that." And at this she swung round

32ar arched away, leaving Beatrice with one hand to

r

her throat now, the other clutching the handle of her bag to her waist.

She had felt angry before, but that creature mentioning her husband in such a suggestive way made her initial anger pale against the rage that was consuming her now. Those people! That woman! How did she know what went on in the house? Oh! Oh! Why was she so stupid! Of course, servants talked. They just had to hint. She would dismiss them, the lot the lot! She swung about now, intending to stalk away, but found that her legs appeared weak and, as was the rest of her body, were trembling. Her mind still on her staff, she cried inwardly that she didn't need them all: two in the kitchen and two in the house, and only her to look after! And three outside. She'd get rid of William Connor. But no, he was the only one

who could see to the topiary; the hedge must be kept clipped, or the garden would look so unkempt, and you couldn't keep up prestige with an unkempt garden... or house.

Oh, dear me! Her head was beginning to buzz again. She was in for that awful feeling which obliged her to lie down. She, who until recently had never taken to reclining in the middle of the day. And when she did lie down, her thoughts would jump all over the place, and all about him. Legal separation, the solicitor had said. Well, he wouldn't get past that. Never! He was her husband and he would remain her husband until he died. But then, what did that woman mean? There was no smoke without fire. But he could do nothing there, for Helen was married. Yes, but to a sick man. And you never got rid of TB, did you? Was her dear John waiting for the man to die? Oh,

he could see him doing that. And then there the carriage trips; she had watched his mother into Helen's carriage. There was never smoke without fire. No; that woman knew something. And woman knew something, others did, too.

she wished she was at home; she must lie. She would get a cab; yes; she must get a cab. took a cab, and when she reached the house went straight up the stairs, taking her bag with her, having removed her coat and hat and she lay down on the bed, but not before she nibbled half a dozen chocolates, hardly giving herself time to swallow one before stuffing another in her mouth until her body stiffened and she was unable to move hand or foot for quite some time. Yet, meanwhile, her brain was active, raging around the instances of her life, until at last the spasm in her body relaxed and with it came the tears, and press-sleep.

was some time later when Frances, knocking on the bedroom door, opened it to enquire if mistress would like a cup of tea, and seeing her had done a number of times lately, lying fast, her mouth partly open and her lips patterned in her indulgence from the chocolate box, she in the door gently, shaking her head as she did it: It would be more satisfying, I should imagine she were to take to the bottle.

out off tonight again to play bridge?"

John turned to his partner and paused for some seconds before he said, "What do you mean, again?"

be
ell, you go over there often, don't you, and pl

bridge?"

't'f once a week is often, then yes, I go often."

"Oh! Once a week."

"Ves, once a week. May I ask what you're gett'g at, boctor?"

Oh! Oh, now, laddie, don't take that tone with l But you see I happen to know Doctor Peters. s lookng after Sir Leonard Spears."

Ves. Yes, he is. And I too happen to know Doct0 Prs, and he is conversant with my visits and ne knovs I'm a friend of the family. Lady Helen is sister-in-law."

"es. Yes, Lady Helen is your sister-in-law. Bn was just enquiring if you were going over tonight

'Why? Is your leg troubling you again?"

octor Cornwallis turned a flushed and angry P to his partner as he replied tersely, No, my

t hurting me. Nor has my tongue got a sting in i

That surprises me."

[lis swift reply, one which was definitely devoid ahe respect due to him, caused the older mans hy eybrows to strain towards his receding hairi. But apparently he could find no words to combat statemen for, after blowing his nose violently, he ed in his revolving chair and applied himself to was papers on his desk, and John gave a wry smile

s said, Good-night, Doctor." Then, walking into adjacent room where the young Doctor Rees was ting the first patient of the evening surgery, he K towards him, saying quietly, Look out'for alls."

e younger man grinned at John and said 'Like were is it?"

bar Yes, like that." fWell, that's nothing new." No. but it might be a bit rougher tonight."

Should I put my oilskins on?" t this, John went out on a low laugh, but it dispeared as he gained the street for inwardly he was Boyed: the old man's words had suggested much e than they had said. Perhaps Doctor Peters had e an innocent remark, because he couldn't imagm being a gossip. He was a very nice fellow her reserved. But the old devil back there always ttwo and one together and made four. He loved rats of scandal and would concoct his own

version men. Unfortunately, in many cases, he was right and naturally would have made him surmise he's on to something here. Well, wasn't he? No! No!

The words came in loud denial. If Helen hadn't been Leonard's wife, he would still have liked the man's company, would have sought it, in fact, not only for the patient's comfort but for his own. There was something very calming about Leonard Spears's personality, which came out in his broad views and his understanding of human nature and tolerance. Bust old Cornwallis! One of his assets was his ability to put a damper on things. A little stir here and there and you had a topic for spicy conversation...

His mother said, "Aren't you going to stay and have a bite to eat? Mrs Atkinson has cooked a nice meal."

"Look, dear" came he bent over her- "if I stay for dinner it'll be another hour or more before I can leave, And Leonard must get to bed early. But he does enjoy that game. I won't be late. I'll be back about nine."

"Oh, don't you hurry back; Mrs Atkinson's here until ten, and as I've told you before, she doesn't mind staying on."

"She won't need to, I'll be back." Then, straightening up, he looked hard at her before he said, "Are you lonely? I mean..."

"I know what you mean. No, I'm not lonely any more. You're here at nights, you're here at dinnertime, you're here at tea-time, so how could I be lonely? No; get yourself away. I want you to have a little relaxation."

He nodded at her; then, his voice low, he said, "We'll have a talk when I come back. I'm wondering if we should stay on here; perhaps I should look out for some place else, because...?"

"No, you won't look for some place else:

I've paid

bar Ebr five years; and I like it here; it suits me. And I don't mind staying.. *and anyway-" her hands

6 out towards him and she said softly, "It would hurt her more if we did. Here, your being in the house, or at least in a part of it" she can still put "it on things; but if we move she'll feel entirely righted.

You know what I mean?"

yes." He nodded at her "suits me But I just

iWe, don't think for " J think for
 yourself y0111 have plenty to o, laddie." And she
 went bar shall him away but he b less-than nt and
 kissed her, before
 Jhen Hannah Worth opd tne oor to him and
 'Good-evening, Doct" he answered,
 "Gooding, Hannah," then inany turned to look
 to bar tes disthe drawing-room doo. and in a moumful
 tone *nah said, "He's been coghing a lot the
 day, DocAnd the mistress can't S him to stay in
 bed." unediately he entered the drawing-room
 John w there could be no bri tbis ight, for the de-
 oration in Leonard was evident. Hello,
 Leonard!" he said at have you been up
 ghting off women." This was hoarse and greater-than and
 Leonard directed his gaze towards where n and
 Daisy were stading together. he only g those two can
 think aout is bed.. .I thought you e going' comhe was
 spalng directly to Daisy, and answered in much the
 l tone. "m going, and I think twice about coining
 ck."
 "Well, before you go, tell John here about your do
 at the Oswalds."
 "I'll do no such thing; I'm off. Don't
 bother seeing me out, Helen. I'll see you in the
 morning... Hello, Doctor! and good
 night."
 he same to you Daisy," he answered, and on this
 she gave a giggle of a laugh and went out.
 'Sit down, John," said Helen, drawing a
 chair nearer to Leonard.
 John sat down and asked Leonard quietly,
 "What have you been up to? Trying to trot about?"
 "Of course. What do you expect?" Then
 turning to Helen, he said, 'Tell John about
 Daisy's soup business... She does me good, that
 woman."
 "Oh dear me!" said Helen; "I couldn't
 tell it as she does. Anyway, to cut a very long
 and funny story as told by Daisy... short: an
 elderiy couple, called Pratt, from the Midlands,
 had moved into old Swift's house on the
 river-it's a lovely place-and of course,
 Gladys Oswald immediately grabbed at them and
 invited them to dinner. But, to her horror, the old
 gentleman slurped his soup-he was apparently
 holding his spoon the wrong way. Added to this, he
 told a risque story about one of his mill girls
 and so caused Ralph Bannister to splutter out his
 food. It was a disastrous occasion, apparently. But

she made the mistake of warning Daisy about them and telling her she meant to pass round this news to her friends.

'It should happen that Daisy had already met the couple and liked them, and she told Gladys so, but she finally put her foot in it by bringing up the dreaded word and asking her how she imagined a leper would eat his soup.'

Helen held out her hands expressively, saying,

"It n't sound a bit funny, does it,

Leonard? but when dislly told it, it was uproarious."

John's reaction was to say, "You can't imagine snobbery up this end of the country; the people a so open and free," only for Helen to put in eldy, "Oh, John! you know nothing about it. For bar tance, apart from everything else, my father was Btter snob." n could have put in here, "And his eldest daughtakes after him."

bar bar nerc was silence for a moment; then Leonard said beeaness keep talking about the awful people when we KO-ULD be telling you of the lovely ones. Tell him, len, about the wedding present."

H'Oh, yes; yes," said Helen, now going to the head flie chair-bed and taking Leonard's hand which she disd close to her chest as she said, "Rosie and Robbie i"...st have thought it strange that we didn't give them jwedding present. Well, you see, the trap wasn't finhed. Leonard had arranged for them to have a pony 'id trap as a wedding present, but Mr Wilson, who 'z making the trap, and is a wonderful craftsma *"...id wheelwright as his people have been for generons, had been confined to bed with a bad bout of j bar SK-MUCHITIS, and wouldn't allow even his son, or his j bar o workmen, to finish it. Anyway, there it was this Jpoming, pulled by a beautiful piebald pony and riven by an absolute radiant couple. You should bar bar greater-than ave seen their faces. Rosie was in tears, and her

12ar bar ough and charming Scot was showing equally warm anotion."

H "Oh, I must go round first thing tomorrow,"

John

said, "But what I am going to do now is to follow Daisy, because the place for you, Sir Leoard Spears, is bed."

Strangely, Leonard made no objection, but he did say, "Would you drop in tomorrow?"

John was on his feet now and answering, "Yes;

but I don't know what time I'll be over."

"Thanks."

The two men looked hard at each other for a moment; then John, putting his hand out towards Helen, said, "Don't move. I can see my way out... Good night."

He was glad to get out of the house, because his throat was full.

At the open barn Henry said, "I'll harness him up again, sir;" and when John said, hanks, Henry, " the man said, 'How is the master Doctor? You never get the truth out of Doctor Peters; only the words "as well as can be expected", and not a word out of Johnson."

"Well, the truth is Henry, he's in a bad way."

"Yes. Yes, I thought that. He'll be a miss. Oh, he'll be a miss. I worked for his cousin, you know Sir rederick, for years; and he was a good boss, but he didn't come up to this one. He treats all the staff lik family, he does.

Oh, he will be missed."

Later, as John made for the annexe he thought of Henry's feeling for his employer, and that if at the end of his life a servant of his could give him such a recommendation, he would feel that his living hadn't been altogether self-centred. But he doubted that would happen. He wasn't made in the same mould as Leonard. And every day he could understand more iamore the extent of Helen's love for the man, and him, she did. And her sorrowing would be great. what hope could he hold in that direction, even te had been free of Beatrice? If he was brave Ugh to tell himself the truth, he would have to say, or none. ie first words his mother uttered when he got in e, "My! you're back early. Well, how did you find ?"

Poorly. Going down hill rapidly." Sow long d'you think he's got?" be was some seconds before he replied, "A few i." oor soul," she said. 'Poor soul."

eonard died at half-past three on the Saturday morning. John had seen him this previous evening, but only for a moment because Doctor Peters was with him, as was Johnson. As he stood by the bed he had been unable to speak but he had taken the long white hand in his and held it for a moment. It was then between gasps that Leonard said, "See you... tomorrow, John," and he had answered, "Yes,

Leonard. Yes, I'll pop in tomorrow."

And as he went to release his hold on the hand and move from the bed, Leonard, looking at him with that penetrating gaze, said, "Thanks, John.

Thanks." And John knew that the thanks wasn't referring to his calling on the morrow, but a final goodbye.

He let Helen in the hall, but he felt unable to speak to her, and she spoke no word to him: they exchanged a look, and then he left the house...

But here he was, again standing in the hall, but facing Rosie now. When she said, "He died at halfpast three, he offered no rejoinder, except to ask, 'How is she?'"

: second time Rosie rubbed a handkerchief a face, then gulped before she said, "Calm, calm.

Since Leonard was seen to, she has a-but it isn't wise. And she hasn't shed a tear; she wouldn't cry; there were some pains that immediately were relieved by tears. I told Rosie, "Tell her I shall call later." .. call later, and the next day, and the next, each occasion found he was slightly nonplussed by her demeanour, for she seemed fully in of herself. As Rosie said quietly to him, Isn't right. She's acting as if every day was an Ifcary day: giving orders to the servants and seeing the undertakers and such. It's strange. The solicitor came and said he would see to things, but she kissed him and told him she could manage.?

Leonard was buried two days later and Helen like the custom that it wasn't suitable for a woman to attend her husband's funeral; moreover, she remained standing by the open grave after the others had moved away. But she still remained dry-eyed, and of course was remarked upon by the mourning people who had attended the funeral and a number had returned to the house, about some of whom she had remarked, "They'll get short shrift from me they've left their visit a little late."

It was she who dared to stand in the hallway and exchange polite messages to those visitors who had earlier been afraid to come near the house, using such excuses as "Lady Spears thanked them for their attendance; but she was sure that they understood she now wanted to be alone. Only one lady dared to press her right to see the bereaved, and to her Daisy spoke more than plainly. Leading her firmly to the door, she pressed her through and onto the step, saying frankly, "Claire, you're years too late. She doesn't want to see you now or at any other time. Am I

making myself plain?" And that lady had rejoined "Yes, as plain as your face," and, comforting herself that she had had the last word, she marched away to her carriage.

Two days after the funeral Rosie returned home. She was not a little perplexed at Helen's reaction to her husband's death and she said as much to John;

also, that Helen seemed to be more at ease with Mrs Wheatland, and she had asked if John didn't think that Mrs Wheatland was a rather strange woman, for at times she never stopped talking, while at others she would sit and not open her mouth. But Helen did not seem to mind her either way.

John understood that Rosie was a little peeved that this strange woman should be more acceptable company to Helen than herself. And he understood the both: Helen would prefer Daisy's company, for Daisy, even when she was being amusing, emanated life, painful life; whereas Rosie had, in a way, regained the joy of living which could not be entirely hidden by the tears of compassion or comforting words, or by the unnatural solemn expression.

Johnson met him in the hall and said, "Her Ladyship is in the drawing-room, sir."

"Thank you, Johnson." Then

John paused for a

moment before he said, "What do you intend to do now? I mean, are you going to look for another position in your own line?" "Oh, that's been all arranged, sir. Her Ladyship has asked me to stay on and look after the establish-

ment while she is away. I'll inform her Ladyship that I'm here, sir."

He had to inform her Ladyship that he was here.

This was the first time he'd had to be announced. But, of course, it had been usually one of the girls who had opened the door to him. He realised now that he had disliked this man: something about him got under his skin. But she had made arrangements and apparently everything was settled, at least with regard to the running of her household. Like Rosie he had been a little slightly piqued.

When Johnson said, "Doctor Falconer, m'lady," he

felt the urge to thrust the man aside.

Helen was sitting on the couch. He walked slowly

into the room towards her, saying as she made

to rise,
 pDon't get up." He did not
 in"...mediately sit down be-
 pftde her, but as he had not previously taken
 off his
 pvercoat and was carrying hat in his hand, he
 OW aid these both on a chair, saying
 ironically,
 Jlallyour butler needs training, adam; he has
 omitted
 o divest me of my outer garments."
 bar bar "Oh." She moved her hea
 slightly. "He's not my
 bar iller, John; quite candidly* comshe gave him
 a wan
 I saale- 'I don't know what to call him."
 bar No? Well, he informed e almost before I
 got
 Iacross the step that you hav arranged for him to be
 in charge of the house whilst you are away... It's
 al arranged then? You're going away?"
 'Sit down, John." She motioned to a chair
 opposite her. And when he was seated, she said,
 "It's all been done in a hurry. I had a letter
 yesterday from Leonard's cousin in Paris. She's the
 old lady; I think he mentioned her to you as
 someone who has never lifted a finger for herself in her
 life. Well, she wrote to me apologising for being
 unable to attend the funeral-she's in her late
 seventies-but expressing a deep wish that I should
 visit her. It's a very nice letter, very moving. And
 so, well, I wrote straight back and accepted
 her invitation because-" she now leaned forward and made a
 motion of appeal with her hand towards him as she said,
 John, I must gt away. I'll.. .i'll
 break down completely if I stay here. It will
 only be for a time."
 'What d'you mean by a time, Helen?"
 She closed her eyes as she said, "I don't
 know. A few months. I... I won't admit his
 loss, John; I can't not while I'm here."
 "So, you're going away to get rid of him, and his
 memory, to wipe him out as if he had never been?"
 He had expected her to deny this vehemently, bt
 she surprised him with her answer. "Yes. Yes,
 something like that, because I can't put up with this pain I
 knew it would be bad. For a long time I had faced
 up to what it would be like, at least, I thought I had;
 but now I'm in this vast... vast emptiness. There
 is nothing or noone I can reach out to."

"Noone?" His words were deeply sad, and she turned her head away from him and drew her lower tly between her teeth before she said, "I... I be you would understand." one changed now as he murmured, "Yes. Yes, bear. Yes, I do. I, too, am feeling the pain of i, but of course it's nothing compared with Ses, I do uderstand." ay back on the couch and, taking a handkerom her cuff, she wiped her lips. There was of tears in her eyes: they were dry and bright y fixed on him now as she said softly, If anyone who could keep me here, it would be hn...and Daisy. The rest' comshe gave a conms lift to her chin- "they flood in daily now i danger of infection is passed. But as I out to dear Gwendoline Fenwick, I wasn't were had contracted it; that it was a very conta[sease, and I could actually see her shrinking ler voluminous gown. Well" comshe nodded- e I'll not be seeing again." betion d'you intend to leave?" bar *Within the next day or two." bar And you're travelling alone?" I'YES. Yes, John." She nodded. 'It's done these Jys, you know." bar *I...I know that." His tone was sharp. But...b I ndered, what about Daisy? S'allyes, I thought about asking her, but her life is ll arranged, with her leper committees and good eds. Now, in no way am I ridiculing those. What's tore, she has never come anywhere near to sugfcsting that she should accompany me. Yet, I know at had she done so I would readily have accepted her company for, as Leonard used to say about her, "She, tightcoer fellow." The sayng goes back to Leonard's Indian corporal; when men had to be chosen for a dangerous mission, he would say, hat one, tight-comer fellow."

John was to remember and to endorse this description of Daisy.

There was a short sience before he said, D'you know Leonard asked me to... well, to be your friend to help you in... in any way you needed me?"

'allyes. Yes, I know." Her words came rapidly now. "Yes, I know, John, and... we""I talk about it some time later. I know I couldn't have a better friend; and he knew that, too. es' comher head was bobbing now- "We'll talk about it later, some time."

She rose quickly to her feet now and he could see she was disturbed, and he said, "Will I be seeing you before you go then?"

"Yes. Yes, of course. It will be another couple of days or so before all arrangements are made."

"And you are leaving Johnson in charge?"

"Yes." Her eyes widened now and there was an appeal in them as she said, "What else can I do? I can't just walk out and expect either you or Daisy to come and keep an eye on the staff. As good as they are, and they are wonderful, they need to have someone in charge, someone who is used to arranging and giving orders." She paused before she added, "He's a little bumptious, I know, and very conscious of his position. I think it is far better to have someone of that nature, one whom you can trust, than the alternative, which is to engage a housekeeper. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I suppose you're right."

"Of course"

"I am,

and now they were facing each other; and now she

she nervously to straighten the narrow hem of the skirt in her hand, and she had brought it into position before she said,

"I'd like to say this to you, John-I've...

I've wanted to say it, but I've just that I'm...I'm so sorry that your marriage, went awry. You... You deserve a better home."

He knew his face was flushed; and it was as if his heart had suddenly taken on the depths of a baritone he uttered "I have a good life with my mother." "Oh, John, I'm...I'm sorry I've spoken about it; I wanted you to..."

His colour was now ebbing from his cheeks and he thrust out his hand towards her and when she saw it he said, "Don't worry,

Helen, I understand. I could say it was my own fault, for my marriage about through my indulgence in drinking."

He had hoped to make light of the matter for he was smiling at her; but the next moment her eyelids began to blink and her lips to tremble, so he said quickly, "Please! Please! Don't

distress yourself. Look! Believe me," and now he proceeded to lie again, "my life is just as

I want it. I have made it as it is and I'm content with my handiwork. I am not undisturbed by her, not at all. We don't see each other, but I'm there

is no irritation on either side. Now
 look, I
 am going; I'll pop in tomorrow." He let go of
 her hand now and went to pick up his hat and coat from the
 chair as he said, "And if you're all ready and
 packed, I'll see you to the station. That's if-" he
 was now shrugging his arms into his coat and he repeated,
 "that's if you promise to write to me."
 She swallowed deeply before she said, "Oh,
 yes, John. Yes, I'll write to you."
 "Do you intend to stay in Paris?"
 "Oh, I won't know until I get there and
 meet the old dame, as Leonard used to call
 her."
 "And if you don't like the old dame you'll go
 on?"
 "Yes. Likely I'll go on."
 "Have you any place in mind?"
 "I'd like to go to Italy; Rome. And Austria
 intrigues me."
 "And all on your own?" He sounded anxious
 now:
 looking as she did, she would be a prey to men of
 all types. But, he could do nothing about it.
 His voice sounded quite ordinary as he said,
 "I'll see you tomorrow then?"
 "Yes, John."
 Without further word, he left
 He had a number of calls to make, but as he
 drove into the town he recalled that he had made up
 a bottle of medicine for a bronchial patient, but
 hadn't put it in his bag. And he was surprised when
 he opened the door of his surgery to come face to face
 with Doctor Comwallis.
 "Oh! Oh! I thought you were on your rounds."
 "Yes, I am on my rounds. were you wanting
 something?"
 "Yes, I wanted the loan of that... this." He
 held up 'Jyringe. 'Doctor Rees is
 ham-fisted; he's broken during the last month.
 I'm taking it out of his Bary. I've told him."
 He went to pass John, but then jljpped and, looking
 him fully in the face, he said ad to visit your
 wife early this morning."
 Doctor Comwallis seemed to be waiting for some
 ment, and when none was forthcoming, he said,
 "Did she ever complain of feeling unwell when you
 re..well, living with her?"
 "I wasn't living with her Doctor I was married
 to

Oh well, we wont split
hairs." And there was a disch of anger in his voice as
he said, 'I'm asking
Jdid she have turns, as it is colloquially
put?'" wasn't aware of any "turns",
specially." Veil, I wasn't there when this one
happened, but oked like a fit. And, al I know is,
she was as
Iff as a board when I did get there."
IW-HAT do you mean, "as stiff as a board?"
She's
dead?""

'ationo, she's not dead. But if my diagnosis
is correct, e's suffering from a form of
neurosis, all to do s bar i the mind."
comII-OHN repeated to himself, "All to do with the
ajBnd" The man was explaining neurosis as if
to a

Jan. Nevertheless, he hadn't experienced any
surprise.

Do you know what I think?""
to less-than o Doctor; but I'm sure you will
tell me."

I "Oh-" Doctor Comwallis turned a
red face to-
ds John and retaliated, saying,
"That manner of
" *

yours annoys me, do you know that? Sometimes "m for
you because I know you're hooked up to a woman whose
behaviour seems anything but normal;
but at other times, as now, when you're acting like a
yong whipper-snapper, I'd like to kick you in the...
arse, and not metaphorically speaking either, bad leg
or no bad leg."

John bowed his head and bit on his lip. He had
a great desire to laugh as he watched his superior
tarn his imp into a march as he made for his office.
And after closing his door, he leant back against it and
put his hand over his brow as he repeated to himself,
Metaphorically speaking, bad leg or no bad
leg." He couldn't help it, he liked the old
boy Nosy Parker or not. What had he really come
into this room for? There was nothing he could find in here,
except that which had to do with his profession. And yet be
had been clever enough about the syringe. Oh, he was a
devious old boy.

He now went into his dispensary and picked up the
bottle he had forgotten. He did not, however,
immediately leave, but leaning against the marble slab, he

stared ahead as he muttered quietly to himself, Neurasthenia? Turns? Stiff as a board?" Well, he wasn't surprised. She had likely had what seemed like a fit before the seizure took hold. Unbalanced, he had implied. Oh, he would endorse that; but that wouldn't be neurasthenia. He gazed down at the bottle. How long would he have to remain tied to her? A legal separation was, after all, just a separation. What was he going to do with his life? Was it to be spent every day but one in a week between that room

ww'

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And this little cubby hole? And what was left evenings? Sitting with his mother. No longer there be any visiting. and a tomorrow or the next day he would not even

to glimpse her. France, Italy, Austria. And everywhere men, and she was only human. She knew she was, for she was convinced that her loss would never leave her. But love was, and, like some diseases, it could be cured. A patient be given a new lease of life. And it could easily happen to her if she met up with some athletic smart alec... Oh, for God's sake let

him get out of here and do some work. "5 he was stepping into the passage, the door opened and out stepped... the woman. She looked haggard and bedraggled. He recalled he had seen an item in the paper last week, reporting that he had been charged with soliciting and had been, *bar at the option of a fine of five pounds or ten days of bar ail. She had paid the fine. He thought of her husband today and her son and of the effect on them. He hadn't seen her since the night her husband

8 put her out of the house. Yet, as he looked at her now, he felt sorry for her. She was a pitiable creature. If it had been the demands of her body that, brought her low, then he could couple her with, satrice, for if anyone was crazed with her body's sires, it was his wife.

bar like He stepped back to allow her to pass him and as she did so she turned her face fully towards him, and her heavily painted lips moved into a smile when she said, "Thank you."

The words were simple but he knew their intent wasn't. They had not been said in courtesy, but rather in mockery. He waited some time before following her into the street.

As he lifted the horse's reins from the
iron post he was aware that she was standing watching him,
that enigmatic smile on her face; and as he mounted
the trap her voice taunted him, as she called,
"Happy days Doctor!"

Seven weeks had passed and he'd had three letters
Helen, one from Paris and two from Italy; but it was
a fortnight since the last letter had arrived. Even,
during these weeks he hadn't been entirely in her
company, for Daisy had invited him to her house, and they
had come to know each other very

At this moment, he was sitting in her conservatory and she
was answering a question he had asked although not truthfully:

"Oh, perhaps once a week," she was saying; she could not
say to him "I write letters from her regularly every
week" for Daisy had just said it was two weeks since he
had last written to her.

He put out a hand now and stroked the broad leaf plant
as he said, "Do you think her travelling is agreeable
to her?" "Oh, I don't."

He turned sharply towards her: "all you don't?" ,
not at all. She can't ease her pain or erase
her feelings by jumping from one train to another, from one
to another, one hotel to another. The
only way she will ease herself is to find a
purpose, a purpose for living. An
equivalent of my leper colony." She grinned
at him now. "But as I see it, she is not going
to experience a carbolic bath from which she will emerge at
a jump." The grin had now spread into laughter in
which he joined; and then she added, "But I'm not
worrying about her: something will show her the way she has
to go. It always does if we wait long enough. Some
have to wait longer than others. Like you, John, for
instance."

His head went slightly to the side as if in
enquiry, but he did not ask her what she meant, for
he was slightly startled by her next question: "How
long have you been in love with her?"

Strangely, her directness did not disturb him
as it might have done had it come from someone else.

Daisy was a very perceptive woman, for behind all that
jollity there was a sage. But, nevertheless, the question had
caught him off his guard and he found that he couldn't
look into that rugged face and those knowing eyes. So he
turned his head away from her and gazed up the length
of the beautiful conservatory, only turning to her again
when she said, "YOU needn't worry, it isn't that
evident, except that Leonard knew."

The legs of the basket chair scraped on the

mosaic tiled floor as he twisted around sharply. She was holding up her hand now, saying, "It's all right. Don't get on your hind legs. He never voiced it. But I knew from the way he talked of you, and with affection, let me tell you, yes, with affection, that he was aware of your feelings, and apparently had been, a long time. Even, I think, before he settled here. Now you can answer my question: When was it he fell in love with her?"

He drew in a long breath before looking down at his feet and saying, "The very first time I saw her at her sister's twenty-first birthday party. We spoke for a few minutes because Leonard had just arrived. But not, one afternoon we met on the top of Craig's island, he had fallen asleep in the sun, and when I woke up he was there. She had been sitting watching me. We had a kind of picnic together." He paused, running his fingers through his hair, before he said, from that day onwards I became sick at heart, had to face facts once she was married. And married her sister, I thought I had got Helen under my system." He now turned and nodded emphatically at Daisy, saying, That was the biggest mistake of my life. But we won't go into that."

Silence fell between them and lasted for some seconds before he asked quietly, "How long do you really think she'll stay away?"

"I don't know, John. If she doesn't meet up with her bar bar carbolic bath, she could decide to come home to; 12 at MTOW."

Bar bar bar He did not say, 'Really?' but waited for her to go on and she nodded at him, saying, "There's an undertone still in her letters, well, the ones she sends to me. I don't think her travelling, so far, has eased her feelings very much. You know, she never cried when Leonard went, and there was no sign of tears during the days following. It's a bad sign when people can't cry; their feelings become like a cancer, eating into them. And I shouldn't think that she's given way to any strange bedroom on her journey if she's going to be a long time, John, before she really returns to life. You know, the feeling she had for Leonard was very deep. I don't know what it was like when she first met him. I'm sure she really knew nothing about love then; at least, not the kind of love he had to give. But she soon learned."

She now leaned her head back against the padded

cushion of the wicker chair and stared up at the glass-domed roof as she said, "I used to envy people like Helen who would create such love as she does but I envy them no longer and haven't done for many a year, because such love as you have for her, John is, you must admit, mostly pain. As for me, I didn't catch leprosy, but I did catch a form of love, in my case made up of mixed ingredients. I have substitutes now, such as the feeling one gets from both receiving and giving kindnesses, as well as a feeling of deep affection for a few people. But I must admit, it could have slipped into love where Leonard was concerned. Anyway, will you stay to dinner?"

He had risen sharply to his feet and was looking down on her as he said bluntly, "o! I won't because I know what that means, I'd be stuck for the night, and there would be Mrs Atkinson standing with her hat and coat on waiting for my return. And so, good-night, Mrs Daisy, until we meet again, which in all likelihood could be tomorrow, or the next day," to which she answered simply "Goodnight, John, and thanks."

as a week later. He had just examined a woman in her late fifties and had made up a bottle of medicine for her.

When looking at her across his desk, he said, "you're a stupid woman, Emily Green. Now you go and get yourself straight to bed, and I'll be right there in the morning to see you. Now I'm telling you," as he wagged a finger at her - "forget about your man of yours. He's not half as bad as you are." "Oh! Doctor, don't say that."

"I'm saying it. He has a little silicosis, and most of the men in the mines have to put up with that. But I'm going to talk to you plainly. You have bronchitis all right but it could become something else much more serious if you don't do what I say. Now you stay in his room."

"But who's going to look after him?" "I can look after myself. Your man still has hands and feet, and he can walk down to the bar if he can't get up here." "Oh Doctor! What life has he? I mean..."

I 6

"Never mind, what life has he? What life have you had? Where are your daughters? Can't one of them come along and see to the cooking?"

"They both have families to see to Doctor. And they do; they are good girls; they do pop in."

"Yes. Yes, they pop in so their mother can make them tea and bake their bread for them. Oh, I know

what goes on in your house: I've been visiting it long enough."

He now rose to his feet and more quietly he said, "I'm serious, Emily. Get yourself to bed and stay there. If you don't you're going to end up in hospital, and you could be there for some time. D'you get my meaning?"

Her head drooped as she muttered, "Yes, Doctor."

Yes, he knew she had got his meaning: she had lost a son of twenty-six with tuberculosis and, recently, her youngest, a nine-year-old girl. She pulled herself to her feet and, smiling wearily at him, said, "I'll do what you say Doctor, and let them get on with it. To tell you the truth, I've been saying just that over the past few months, that one of these days I'll let them get on with it."

"Good, Emily. Now it's only a touch and it could be put right. I'll have a talk with your husband when I call in tomorrow. And don't worry about him. It's amazing what men can do when they have to. And you know what they say, a hungry belly trains a cook."

Her smile widened, and then she said, "Thank you, Doctor. Thank you. You are a very good man." After she had left he sat down again and shook

his head. Women and their men. Her man wasn't as bad as she already was. He coughed and let a great play of spitting. There were many with the same disease. He sighed, then pressed on his hand. But when he heard a commotion at the door, he rose to his feet again and was when the door was thrust open to see Daisy there. I won't be a moment, I promise

she was to a waiting patient. "I've just brought a message for the doctor."

"What's the matter?" he demanded of her. "She's back!"

He was silent for a moment, then said, "Helen?"

"We, who else would come back? Has anybody been away? Helen? Yes, of course, Helen." "When?"

"Last night. She came around to me at about eight o'clock in the evening. I couldn't believe it. Walked

in like that." She stepped back from him, saying

"Yes, I thought you would like to know."

"Daisy." His hand went out and he caught her

saying, "Something's brought her back."
es, of course somethig has. But whatever it is,
hasn't told me. Perhaps she'll tell you.

You'll be

left-brace ing her up, I assume?" and she
grinned at him. *I'll call immediately after my
rounds." "Good! But now I must go: that fellow
outside will be. me if I stay a minute longer.

He snorted so much Itearly suggested he should have a
ring through his

lShe pulled open the door and smiled at the
man o was much shorter than herself, and in a sweet
voice said, hank you very much. It was very land of you.
I" greatly obliged."

In answer, the man said in a conciliatory tone,
hat's all right," then watched the odd-looking
woan almost skipping along the corridor, before he
entered the surgery. And there, he made a statement that
John found impossible to answer: Queerlooking
card, that."

He had so many urgent calls upon his tune during
the morning that he did not get to Col Mount until
aroud three o'clock in the afternoon.

Johnson opened the door to him and, after a
moment's pause, said, 'Oh! Good afternoon Doctor.
You... you wish to see Lady Spears?'"

The man's superior manner was too much for Joh
at this moment, and so he said, "Well, Johnson,
I didn't come this far to call on you. Tell me,
where is Lady Spears?'"

The man drew himself up to his full height, and
in an arrogant tone said, "Her ladyship is in
her room."

hen will you kindly tell her she has a visitor?

I'll be in the drawing-room." And with this John
walked across the hall and into the drawing-room He
deliberately left the door open; and when he
reached the fireplace he turned and looked back
into the hall to see Johnson still standing where he had
left him then flounce his shoulders as if in a
huff, as he made his way towards te stairs.

John was annoyed by the man's manner as he had
before; but at the same time he wondered why fai't
laugh at him.

sently he heard Helen's footsteps on the
stairs, ie entered the room and closed the door behind
efore he walked towards her, his arms outied. She
took his hands and smiled at him, sayHow good to see
you, John." found himself speechless for a moment; then
be could do was to repeat her words and say, it's good

to see you, y dear." smiled widely at him, saying, 'Come and sit bar bar wn and start asking me questions.' lShe sat on the couch and he sat on a chair near bar rather, and he said, "I'll have to get my econd wind; IB rather knocked out by surprise. But, all right, I'll bar sgin. Where have you come from?" tParis my starting point."

bar I thought you were to go to Rome, then on to bar Bstria?"

I *I was in Rome and I went on to Austria. Then I bar tured to Paris." o stay with the dame?"

?" 'Oh no! I had thought such characters existed only I novels. But she was painted and powdered every y, with two maids seeing to her constantly."

"How old is she?"

"Oh, about eighty, andwitha razor-shap mind, rling her establishment. She wanted me to stay this her. No, not wanted, demanded that I stay with be she didn't like her secretary's voice; he poor E greater-than ul had to read to her for most of the day. And tet's what she wanted me to take over, and when I

dared to laugh at her she flew into a tantrum. Oh my!"

"You didn't stay on, then, at the house?"

"Oh no! No, thank goodness. I went to a nearby hotel."

"Well, what did you do with yourself?"

"Oh, I did the usual rounds, just like every tourist:

the Louvre, Versailles, the Tuilleries, and of course Notre Dame, and the markets. Oh yes, the markets."

"By yourself?" There was a note of surprise in his voice, and she said, "Yes, sir, by myself, assisted by a very helpful cab driver, whom I hired from one day to the next during my stay, a fortnight. He would suggest what I should see the next day. He was a very nice, helpful man. He called himself my protector, for he couldn't understand me being alone."

"Did you need protection? Although that's a silly thing to ask, really."

"Yes, I did, in a way." She actually laughed now as she said, "There was one particular gentleman who became rather insistent until the day my pro tector, who was waiting for me after one of my educational visits, said to me, "We must hurry,

madam, to the station, otherwise your husband will
 have arrived, and Monsieur is not famous for his
 patience." At least, that's how I roughly
 translated his suburban French. I say
 suburban: he was from what you would call the deep end
 of Paris. But there was nothing he didn't know about
 gentlemen... and, from his conversation, ladies of all
 types, I should imagine." Her smile faded as
 she now remarked, "You know, Leonard didn't
 wish me to go into black,
 Jto have the house in mourning; but I think the east
 might have helped on my jouneys abroad. bar bar
 the way" comshe was smiling again- "I didn't ize
 until my protector and I parted that evening, H
 the name he had given to my husband who was ing off that
 train and not known for his patience that of a well-known
 boxer. bar bar Anyway, that took place the day
 before I left and as sorry to say goodbye to him. You
 know, he l his cab and saw me to the train."
 llWas he a fatherly man?"
 No, Jon, he wasn't. He wasn't much
 older than . I would say in his middle thirties.
 But he had a
 JB-EVERY and five children."
 On. They are a roantic race, the French."
 Yes, they are, John."
 bar bar And now he asked the question: "Are you
 glad to
 back?" bar bar The smile slid from her face
 as she said, "I don't
 Jtow yet. I know only that I had to come."
 J""What do you mean, you had to come?" fi
 "Again, I can't give you a straight answer, but
 anething happened. You mightn't believe his.
 Jagination, you will say, or subconscious desire
 Jupting. But it happened when I was sitting at the
 j--tfle desk in front of the window of my room.
 The ene outside was very pleasant. The hotel was on
 a
 Jroad but the sun was shining on a row of plane and
 there were a lot of people busying about. ything looked bright and
 gay." She ooked fully m now. "I can
 remember thinking: it's a lovely so why don't I
 stay here instead of going on to
 Spain? It was as I pulled my Baedeker
 towards me- I had all but made arrangements, at
 least in my mind that Spain would be my next
 experience-when-" she stopped and looked down at her
 hands clasped tightly in the lap of her brown
 skirt and said, "it was so real: I... I felt

Leonard behind me. I felt that I could
 put my hands up like this" comshe now raised her arms
 quickly above her head- "and touch his face. He often
 used to stand behind me while I sat at the
 dressing-table. But I knew he was there and I felt
 cold from head to foot, until it seemed that his hands
 came on my shoulders, and" comshe paused again- his
 voice was as clear in my bead as if he had spoken
 aloud. "Go home," he said. "No more trailing
 about. You won't forget me by trailing around." And, you
 know-" She blinked her eyes tightly now before
 looking squarely at John and saying, 'allyou know,
 John, I spoke aloud, I mean I answered
 him aloud. I said, "I don't want to forget you.
 I never want to forget you." And he said, "I know,
 dear, and I don't want you to forget me. Tie will
 ease the pain, but only if you go home and... and
 stay there." And then, John, you can believe me that his
 words were definite when he said, "Whatever happen
 to you, stay there." In a way, it was frightening as... as
 if something really was going to happen to me."
 John had hold of her hands now, saying,
 "Nothing's going to happen to you that is in any way
 bad. But I believe what you have said. Such were his
 feelings for you, he was aware of your efforts to escape
 the pain of his loss, and that by doing so you
 e keeping him earthboud; and you know what Ssaying
 is: there are more things in Heaven and J less-than have
 than this world dreams of."
 i bar bar he drew her hands from his now and rose
 from s couch. But he did not move. He watched her
 Sk towards the fireplace and stretch her hand out
 t'grip the mantelpiece and he strained to hear her
 Ssper, "You are quite rigt: there are more hings. was so
 real, I... I turned round expecting to see h
 or his ghost, or someting that would actually JB me that
 he had been there. There was nothing;
 Jm that moment I was filled with the urge to " And
 now she turned towards him, and she "So here I
 am. And, you know, it's so good (ack to see you again, and
 Daisy. You're the . o friends I have, real friends,
 that is. I can myself when I'm with you or Daisy, but
 with noil else; not even with Rosie. No, I can't
 be myself this Rosie. I... I couldn't have told
 Rosie what I've S told you. I love
 Rosie because she is my sister, , nd although she is
 married now I still look on her is someone very young.
 Yet, in a way, she too has
 J through the mill."
 es' comand he nodded- "Oh, ye, she went

igh the mill all right, and she is no
 longer the
 g girl, but the young matron, and I don't hink
 I l be long before her figure will announce she
 ing to be a young mother."
 bar "Really! Really! Oh! that's wonderful."
 H "Yes, and she thinks so, too. And, of
 course,
 diswell, there is no other young married woman,
 to his knowledge, who has ever carried a child: his wife is
 the first who is experiencing this process."
 She smiled now, saying, Oh, I must go and see
 her.
 "She would like that. Yes, she would. You just want
 to pop in. I know you have written to her once or
 twice but, like me, this time yesterday I thought you were in
 Timbuktu, or Borneo, or the Congo or some
 such place."
 She now said quietly, "Would you like some tea?"
 "I would. Yes, I would."
 She pulled on the bell-rope and when Johnson
 opened the door, she said, "We'll have tea,
 Johnson,
 please."
 To John, the man's manner was forbidding, and after the
 door had closed behind him, he said, "I
 must confess, Helen, I can't stand that fellow."
 At this, Helen laughed, saying, Yes, he is
 a bit pompous, isn't he? But he was very
 attentive to Leonard. And, of course, he had
 been in Frederick's service for some time. But not
 all that long, now I come to think of it, because he took
 the place of Beecham who was a lovely old
 butler. Now he had worked for the family since he was
 a boy. Anyway, I have had to rely on him, being
 away so long, and he's looked after everything very
 well. And the accounts are all in order. He
 pratically insisted tat I go through them this morning-"
 her voice dropped now as she said, 'He wanted
 me to see that he bad saved on the housekeeping, which
 I'm sure hasn't pleased Cook, for Mrs
 Dolly Jones likes her food, as they all do.
 And because they work for it and I
 Be. It's been rather a trying moing. And I
 splie it is because of him I was welcomed with open s
 by the staff, inside and out." ell, I'm glad
 to hear I'm not the only one who larently can't stand
 him."
 bar ohnson did not deign to push in the tea
 trolley, I Hannah Worth did, smiling, and

when she said, bar greater-than oddday
Doctor," he answered her, "Good-day, bar
anah. How's life?"

IR-NE. Fine, now that we have' comshe glanced
to bar ds Helen- "the mistress back. Oh
by! yes, fine." bar ohnson's back became
straighter, if that was posle, and he spoke now to the
maid, saying, "Leave IH will see to the
pouring."

There's no need, Johnson, thank you." It was
bar ten speaking.

le man seemed to sigh before he turned and with
fcasured tread left the room.

bar so Helen poured out the tea she said, Would you
Sfc to bring your mother over some evening, John? used
to manage the journey in the carriage all
lit F"

fO, she would like that. Yes, you tell us the time and
we'll be here."

Oh make your own time-I don't intend to go ting.
And the only other one I want near me is sy. So
whatever time you're free from surgery, bar that send word
and Henry will be over with the' -- B laughed-
"conveyance."

He could hardly believe he was actually sitting
here drinking tea and munching deli es with
her. Daisy had said it would be a long road before
Helen came alive, but her prent demeanour
suggested to him that she had already started 10 it,
only for him naturally to ask hims 1 what her coming
back to life would affect tilife'because
Beatrice still loomed large; and beyol her'the law

, i He drew together lie last of his patients
had gone.tie

papers on his desk and put m mto afolder anding
up and breathing d @y That's that!" Then he wet
mto the dispen ashedhis hands and stoodf
into the small mirror abov t slnKnowledge as
J- comedUeandsb

[ate, he had lost flesh his W
ie really only thirty-two? If we

If in the street he would guess hs age as to.
en he heard the outer door open a Ins pt-
,rs voice calling, Are you ther less-than have
ed a moment before answering, *

Cornwall had caed : greater-than . Perhaps
only twice before co % using his Christian name:
one ridng him for having seen to t P. SB-DEDFOR
three weeks while he wamho his leg attended But

,d first arrived, within the first
other occasion was when he had commiserated with him over
his estranged marriage. This was after he had been
called to the house to see to Beatrice.

When he strode back into his surgery, it was
to see the doctor seated in the patients' chair.

"Can you spare a minute?" Cornwallis said.

"Yes, of course."

"Well, you'd better sit down," his partner
said, and indicated his chair across the desk.

John sat down and waited.

"D'you know if anyone has it in for yo, besides
your wife?"

It was an odd question. John turned his head one
way and then the other as if thinking before he replied,

"Likely there are a few, but they haven't come to the
surface. Why are you asking?"

"Because of this." The doctor pulled from his
pocket a letter and handed it across the desk.

John saw that the envelope was addressed
to Doctor Cornwallis, and he paused before
extracting the sheet of paper from it. Then his eyes
widened as he read:

Dear Sir,

I think it should be brought to your notice that your
assistant Doctor John Falconer,
is bringing disgrace on your practice and is losing
you patients. He has for some time been causing comment
in the town by his over-frequent visits to a widowed
lady. As is well known, he is a married man.

But to make matters worse and to make the situation
worse in the eyes of decent

Sople, this lady is sister to his wife. It
is known bar some quarters that the lady has tried
to reise him, and that his insistence is causing her

"tress. Moreover, as I said in the beginning,

"Jandr, your practice is going to suffer, for
women lecially will be deterred from being attended
l by an immoral man.

dk Signed, A well-wisher.

JSANDHN peered over the top of the letter at his partner
jIB-OCTOR Cornwallis said That doesn't sound like
bar bar No? No! This is not from Beatrice."

dis.fHave you any idea of who could be in the know
gards your personal life, such as that indicates?"

noddod towards the letter that John had laid on desk,

and it was a full minute before he was Jten an

answer. And then John said, 'I have a lMg

suspicion. But still, you can't pin this kind of Bg on

anyone unless you have pof. I do, howt, agree with you

that this isn't Beatrice's style ail: she
would have it out face to face, probably pubUc."
iallyes, that's how it struck me." Doctor
Comwallis bar Hed himself to his feet now, leant
over, picked up letter from under John's hand, saying,
'One can't Ji much about this, except talk it over
with the lady question. Has she any personal friends in
whom e might have confided?'"

4 Only one, and you know her: Mrs Daisy
Wheatad." *f 'Oh yes. I know Mrs
Wheatland, and you can rule
her out straightaway. And anyway, to my mind, this
is a man's hand. Too clinical, so to speak,
to come from a woman."

"A man's hand. Yes." John was nodding
to himself: he felt certain he knew to whom the hand
belonged. And he was made to ask himself what that man
could hope to achieve more than he had done already.

"Well, now you know where you stand I'd be on your
guard. How is Lady Helen, by the way?'" And
Dr Comwallis gave a short laugh now as he
said, "I'm asking the road I know because I was
talking to Peters last week, and he seems to think
she's under a great strain. Apparently, she's never
given way since she lost her husband, and he thinks
that's bad, and I do, too. Tears are a
saving grace to both body and mind. Bottle them
up and you're asking for trouble. I'm always happier
when I find women crying their eyes out." He
grinned now, saying, "There's a paradox for you.
Medically speaking, tears are good medicine, but you
shouldn't take such medicine for too long. It can
become a habit."

He walked towards the door now, saying,
"I'm being very philosophical this morning, you'll
notice, Doctor."

When John did not reply, the older man
turned sharply towards where he was standing gazing down
at the table, and he said, "Did you hear what I
said? I'm being very philosophical this morning."

Yes. Yes, Doctor, I heard you what you
said, and I endorse your philosophy."

'Good! Good! Well, I must away; but
don't take

usiness too much to heart. If you want my
addon't change the patte of your life. Now, ,
strange, isn't it? I think that the person who His,
that letter has got an axe to grind and if you your time
he'll come to light with the axe in do... Oh, I'd
better go, else I can hear myself g I saw him

fell the tree. And what would that ite?
 My! My!" He went out, pulling the door y
 behind him.
 in remained standing near the desk, telling himhat
 he wouldn't have to bide his dne to find ho had thought up
 that screed. Oh, no! Then Aed towards the door.
 The old fellow was besry decent. He was a
 kindly, thoughtful man at
 a although that was covered with a thick layer fishness up
 nearer the surface. But one could Xggk that. He had
 again called him John. That d he was conceed for him,
 and for that he rateful. Yes, he felt very grateful
 towards him. irugged his shoulders. It was a nervous
 action did not represent the feeling inside him, which
 ne of anger.
 one dne he could open the front door and walk
 t of late he'd been obliged to ring the bell. This
 anoyed him, but he hadn't commented on it. lay, when
 the door was opened, he saw that on was very surprised
 to see him. And when sed by him without a word and made for the
 g-room, throwing his hat on the hall chair as
 l so, Johnson's voice said, 'Her
 ladyship is not ting..."
 3l! nced round on man, saying 7 alio
 adyship is expecting and whom sh
 wio11 e
 that." were to open the wing-room doo, less-than
 IS -- com* flb1 n nf this cteaeafu,, *
 . or *
 . 't. . lVery com"*""6-iuuiHave Q,
 lsws out of the study at the end f t
 is"
 dis.H Hl aslde and waited until she had
 *dor. ig-room. She gave him no
 greetinl
 dtl, he was upset. After closin
 ent te co" g" he hurried towards whereI
 ut jor oi16 n the couch d, taking a seat
 besl
 the as sitti at is it' Helen? What is it,
 my
 she disd,
 he asl't
 her, , John!"!
 Joh iag rapidly and her wordsl
 eyl li said" omeone is maligning us.
 B hesitan me and * * * and I can't bear
 x."...I
 wer6 still was th"...l
 you tms t ...I P *

to
 t litter", on... on the desk."bar
 , in te il to see standing onlyf
 asfl" the door and. his voice like
 H6 feet at him "'t you dare go inI
 a h D me? ont you dare go in
 thu man! with y0" in a minute.'I
 m! I'll sw the letter lying open on thej
 that e stildy" iiediatly he saw that it was
 bar
 In , des arlu li s the one to Doctor
 Corn-be
 bytie
 wn where he had left him. His
 as s , the mouth set in a ght linebbI
 s dedly face bar
 ris time John passed by him without a word, jpgain
 banged the door behind him. w he was sitting with his arm
 around Helen's "'iders while he held the letter in his
 hand and
 It should be brought to your notice that you re ruining the
 career of a certain doctor in this *bar bar "wn.
 His constant visits to you are causing a (candal and his
 partner is greatly troubled by l bar B"...ence effect
 on the practice of this man's behaviour. It would be
 well for all concerned, madam, yfyou
 broke off the association with this person,
 ybr your name is being bandied about like that
 of a light woman. I speak only through concern
 fSm your welfare.
 bar bar Signed, A well-wisher.
 H'My God!"
 jj 'Who would do this, John? We have done nothing
 disong, yet I feel so guilty. All the time I
 feel guilty.
 5 talk to Leonard, and he tells me
 everything's all
 . as it should be. But I can't believe it. Oh,
 John, o lost, and I seem to have gone all
 to pieces I came back. But your career and..."
 "Damn! my career. And this letter means nothing;
 Hoctor Comwallis received a similar one this
 mom-
 bar bar +, obviously from the same man."
 j1 "You... you know who?"
 I "Yes, I know who; and it's going to end,"
 a state-
 bar less-than ent which obviously affected
 Helen further, and
 He almost bounced round on the man, saying, "I

know whom her ladyship is expecting and whom she isn't."

He was about to open the drawing-room door when Helen came out of the study at the end of the orrider. He stood aside and waited until she had entered the drawing-room. She gave him no greeting but he could see that she was upset. After closing the door none too gently, he hurried towards where she was sitting on the couch and, taking a seat beside her, he asked, "What is it, Helen? What is it, my dear?"

"Oh, John! Oh, John!"

Her eyelids were blinking rapidly and her words were hesitant as she said, "Someone is maligning us.

At least, you through me, and... and I can't bear it."

"How d'you know this?"

"The lter."

"What letter?"

"It's in the study, on... on the desk."

He wasn't surprised to see Johnson standing only a few feet away from the door and, his voice like thunder, he barked at him, "Don't you dare go in there, man! D'you hear me? Don't you dare go in that room! I'll deal with you in a minute.

In the study, he saw the letter lying open on this writing desk and immediately he saw that it was written by the same hand as the one to Doctor Cornwallis.

Johnson was standing where he had left him. His face was deadly white, the mouth set in a tight line;

d this time John passed by him without a word, lit again banged the door behind him. Now he was sitting with his arm around Helen's loulders while he held the letter in his hand and

Madam,

It should be brought to your notice that you are ruining the career of a certain doctor in this town. His constant visits to you are causing a scandal and his partner is greatly troubled by the effect on the practice of this man's behaviour. It would be well for all concerned, madam, if you broke off the association with this person, for your name is being bandied about like that of a light woman. I speak only through concern for your welfare.

Signed, A well-wisher.

J'My God!" "Who would do this, John?

We have done nothing

'wrong, yet I feel so guilty. All the time

I feel guilty. talk to Leonard, and he

tells me everything's all right, as it should be. But

I can't believe it. Oh, John, bar
bar disrm so lost, and I seem to have gone all
to pieces I.since I came back. But your career
and..."

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I Doctor Comwallis received a similar one this
mom-

II ing, obviously from the same man." t
'allyou...y know who?'"

"Yes, I know who; and it's going to end," a
states ment which obviously affected Helen further,
and t
i .

her hands went to her throat as she pleaded, "It
won't stop you coming, John, will it?"

"Why ask such a thing! Nothing or no-one will ever
stop me being near you."

"We've done nothing wrong. Nothing. Leonard
told me what I must do, before he died. But I
wouldn't listen, I couldn't listen... John!

John!" His name was erupting from her mouth like an
actual wail: it was high, penetrating, as if
wrenched through agony. And her face was awash, the
tears spurting from her eyes and down her nose, the
saliva running from her mouth. He put his arms
tightly about her and held her closely,
saying, "Cry! That's it, cry, my dear. Cry,
my love."

He had been unaware of the door opening, but he was
aware of the voice saying, "How dare you! sir.
You've upset madam."

He was almost choking himself as he turned and screamed
at the man, "Get out! before I" comhe almost said,
"kill you". And the man backed away, pushing past
the two maids now standing at the open door;
and John yelled at them: "Hannah! Bring
your mistress's smelling salts; and Betty,
fetch me my bag from the trap."

A few minutes later, after he had wafted the
smelling salts under Helen's nose and had made
her swal low a pill, he again turned to Betty,
saying quietly, Make some coffee, Betty,
please. And tell Henry to go for Doctor Peters
and ask him if he would be kind enough to call on her
ladyship as soon as possible."

With the room to themselves, he again put his
fs about Helen as she muttered, "Who... who
tod do such a thing... write those letters?" "HYOU
haven't far to look, my dear, and I think you
"list know it was Johnson."

he drew in a sharp breath before she repeated the ae, "Johnson? No, I hadn't suspected him. But giv' me time to think of it, he's been acting strangely ly. I didn't tell you..."

John: "You have no need to, my dear; and don't talk." I bar She took a handkerchief from her cuff and wiped her eyes, muttering, 'His... his wages are due.' I How do you pay him, half-yearly?" "By the month." I How much?" "A pound a week."

A pound a week, indeed! and all found. He's ea in clover. But the fact that he's paid monthly j bar ses matters. Pay him his month's salary and an beJggded month in lieu of notice."

Jl: "I...I can't bear to see him now."

I: "Well, you have no need; I'll see to him."

Have aa any loose money lying around?"

- here's some in the bureau drawer in the study. he key-" she gulped and had to bring herself forgard on the couch before she could finish, 'It's in yay handbag.'

II: "Now lie back and don't distress yourself. Where f your handbag?" bar bar "In the bedroom."

I: "I'll get Betty to fetch it after she's brought in the bar bar ofree." It was when, later, he had taken the key from Helen's handbag that John noticed Johnson still standing in the hall. He passed by the man without a glance and made for the study.

But he had no sooner disappeared than Johnson rushed into the drawing-room and to Helen who on sight of him, pressed herself tightly back into the corner of the couch. Bending over her, he said "Madam, you must listen to me. The master... the master left you in my keeping. Yes, yes, he did: he told me what I had to do, and to look after yo and..."

As if being imbued with sudden strength, Helen thrust out her hands and pushed him back from her. And now she cried at him, "He... he did nothing of the kind. You... you forget yourself. You were the servant to him and... and you have been to me, nothing more. Please! Please get out! Get out!"

"Madam, you must listen to me. That man will bring you nothing but trouble. I am here to protect you and look after you and..."

He was able only to turn half around before he felt himself gripped by the back of the collar and thrust with such force against the sofa table that it toppled over and the coffee tray with it. The sound smothered Helen's

scream but not those of the two maids and the cook, who were crowding the doorway. And when John's fist went out and caught the man on the side of the head, and Johnson made to retaliate Cook rushed forward and thrust her sturdy body at Johnson, crying, "Don't you dare, mister!"

"It's all right Cook! It's all right. Get out of his way."

The Obsession

John could see that the man was so no fear Him, in fact, that his pose was defiant and to Win two long deep breaths before he could say "Are you ready for your money," he said as he took a leather bag towards him, and when it fell at his feet, Johnson did not immediately pick it up, and John went on, "There's a good fellow! Give me a month in lieu of notice. Now go your little way and get out of this house and don't dare show your face here again. But this little fellow I'll likely have to show yourself in court, because that's where the poison-pen writers find themselves." Then he called to Hannah, "Go and fetch the men, please." Then addressing Johnson he said, "I'll give you exactly ten minutes to your little way. Ten minutes," and he pointed towards the

It was some seconds before Johnson picked up the bag of money, then, without any change in his defiant behaviour, he strode from the room - was John himself feeling dazed.

Cook and Betty were clearing up debris as he said to Helen, "Come along. Come along! Of this and of the study, and silently she obeyed him; but he did hardly get her settled when, a moment later, Hannah entered, saying, "The men are here, doctor," and he said to Helen, "Lie down - less-than-Plus-or-more. and relax"

... will be all over in a few minutes

@. In the hall stood two of the outdoor men

Facing

him, he said, "I'll... I'll tell you

... why

*

"I've sent for you," and of Hannah he asked, "Where's his room? He's had his ten minutes."

But almost as he finished speaking, Johnson emerged through a far door carrying a large case and a small valise. He was wearing a grey suit and an overcoat, and his hat was already on his head. He was once again the butler and, using his imperious tone, he

addressed Arthur Bell and said, "I'll
 need transport to get me into town, Bell."
 "Shut up and get out!" John said grimly,
 here's a horse-bus passing the gates at two
 o'clock. It'll give you time to cool your heels."
 And now he turned to the men, saying, "This man is
 not to be allowed anywhere near this house or grounds again
 on any pretext whatever. And should he, in any
 way, attempt to see the mistress, I instruct you
 to call the police straightaway. In any case,
 I myself will shortly be in touch with them on my own
 account, because this individual is the author of
 poison-pen letters defaming my character."
 Johnson had picked up his cases and when he
 reached the door he swung round, saying, I can have you
 up for tat. You've got to prove it."
 'Oh, I can prove it all right, and I won't
 even have to go to a handwriting expert"
 At the bottom of the shallow steps Johnson
 turned one last furious look on John and his
 words sounded ominous as he growled slowly, "In
 any case, you'll never win... never."
 John stood taut, watching Johnson walking
 down the drive, and he repeated the man's ominous
 words, "You 'll never win... never," and although
 he admitted
 himself they could be true, he had to wonder
 what @t man hoped to get out of the situation he had
 ted.
 Yet why did he ask? A lone widow had come
 to y on him to the extent of leaving her home in his
 pe; and he fancied he had made himself indispense
 to her and so she, naturally and with subtle manBvring
 on his part, would tu to him. It had hapned before: people had
 been put beyond the pale their class by marrying
 servants.
 he nerve of the fellow. No wonder he had seen
 nself as the main object standing in his way.
 Henry's voice came to him, saying, "Dont
 worry, ctor; we'll see to him. And it will be a
 pleasure." As John was about to make his way to the
 study, ok came out of the drawing-room, and he said
 to *, "A pot of strong tea would be very
 acceptable is moment Cook," and when she replied,
 "You'll e it in a minute Doctor," he
 added, "And tell the Is to get the mistress's bed
 ready. That's where "dis should be."
 'allyes; yes, I agree with you Doctor, after
 all this comd'you-do, she's bound to be in a state."
 contion the study, Helen was stll lying, almost crouchin

the leather chair. There was no colour in her
e and, taking a seat beside her, he took her hand,
ing, "It's all over now. He's gone. You
won't be ibied any more. I've had a word with the
staff." She now looked at him and said,
"I...I realise I've n a little afraid of
him for some time. When he de a statement that we should
stop ordering this hat I.. .I felt, well, what
does it matter? he's look-
ing after things, even though I knew there was something not
right and that the staff was unhappy. But I was so
wrapped up in my own misery and guilt and..."
He now pressed his hand against her cheek, saying,
"Listen to me, Helen. Forget about that
word...misery yes, but no guilt. You've nothing
to feel guilty about. Although at the same time, I
understand how you feel, because I'm in the same boat, as
you know. You understand that, don't you, dear?"
She looked at him intently for a moment before she
said, "Yes, John. But... but that hasn't
helped; it has only added to the feeling."
"Now listen to me, Helen. Leonard knew this
would happen; at least, he knew how I felt about
you. I'm sure of that. As for your feelings for him,
he was sure of your love. Oh yes, absolutely
sure of your love for him. But he also
knew the effect his loss would have on you, not only the
loneliness.. disb the aloneness, the feeling that you could
never love again, that you mustn't love again. He knew
all that. We talked very intimately at times, and
he did actually put it into words that I should be near
you, take care of you, even if it was just as a friend.
He knew that my being married couldn't quench my
feelings for you. And as my marriage has been a
failure I have really felt no guilt in loving
you. The guilt I've experienced is connected with
being unable to hide my feelings, and so soon after
Leonard's going. Yet again I say, I feel
sure he knew exactly what would happen, and,
what's more, that he wanted it this way. Believe me,
dear, he wanted it
appen, because of his unselfish, undying love for
jl... Please, please! Don't cry again.
You've cried tigh, any more will make you ill. Ah,
here's "k's beverage." He rose quickly to his
feet and as
tput the tray on the side-table, he said,
"I'll see Betty. Thank you." Then he
added, "Give me bar But minutes so I can gulp
down a cup too, then come k and help your istress

up to bed."

Oh no! No!"

He swung round to Helen, whose head was shaking in protest, and insisted 'all yes, yes. And I should "agree Doctor Peters will be here shortly and that's

just what he'd want to see you."

When Betty left the room, he poured out a cup of and, taking it to Helen, said, "Drink it up. This may not be a cure, but a couple of days rest in bed

Kindly will be."

Two days in bed! No, no, John. I'm all right

"You're not all right, and tomorrow, let me tell you'll feel worse. That spasm of crying burst a jag in your head and the reaction will set in. In any case, every day you must do what Doctor Peters tells you. Well, I'm not sure if I'll be in tomorrow because Jane is near her home."

"Oh yes, yes. Yes, of course."

They seem to want me on hand. Not that Doctor "Wallis wouldn't do a better job, but they've depended for the amateur."

After hastily drinking his cup of tea he said, "I still leave you to the maids now, dear." And then

in a lowered voice, he added, "Not only for your sake but for mine."

He took her hand and pressed it against his cheek for a moment before turning abruptly from her and leaving the room.

In the hall, his departure seemed to rise both Hannah and Betty, because Betty said, "You're going, Doctor?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm going. Betty, I've overstayed my welcome." He smiled at her; then addressing Hannah, he said, "When Doctor Peters comes, would you please tell him that I'll drop in to see him tomorrow?" 'all yes. Yes, I'll do that, . . . He now took his hat from Betty's hand, saying,

"Look after your mistress."

"I'll be in tomorrow. Doctor, won't you?"

It was Hannah asking the question now, and he said, "I don't know yet, Hannah. I've a busy day before me. and I'm expecting a baby which brought a

concerted giggle from the two women, and he said, "Allyes, you might laugh, but I'm a bit worried about it because it's my first. What I mean is, it's a first."

"Oh! Doctor." Betweeny P her handover er mouth. This going out on a lagn. he augured well, until he remebered Johnson s last words: In any case Doctor, you a" wln' i hat's it dear. Come on. That's a girl... Ah, here Jicomes, he...she...or it. My! My! Good girl! Good @r!" As Rosie's body slumped into the bed, John faded the wet yelling infant to the midwife, saying, yle has some lungs on him, proclaiming already that 's a Scot."

H "Oh, my! My!" Annie Macintosh held her arms out Jr her grandson, and the midwife said, "Sponge his bar Every 'I know. I know." Annie's voice now was a shout ad to it she added, "Robbie! Robbie!" bar bar When the door opened almost immediately, Rob-

e rushed into the room, but instead of looking to ards the baby in his mother's arms, he made for hfe bed where Rosie lay, her face covered with sweat gfld smiles. fe He was bending over her now and she put up her *and and stroked his hair as she said, "A boy, Robe. You have a son."

bar so He made no reply. His head drooping, he pressed JN'S face against hers and his arms went about her shoulders and raised her up and held her close. Still he didn't speak, but John did, crying at him, "Put her down; and get by, out of the way; she wants tidying up. And she's had a heavy time. Yet I shouldn't think a first baby has come so easy before. You got off lightly, Mrs Macintosh, d'you know that?"

Rosie now turned her face towards John as she said, "Did I, John? It didn't seem like that to me."

"Well, you can take my word for it. And you, sir:

do you intend to look at your son, or do you want him sent back?"

There was a giggle from the midwife at that; then Annie, moving forward, handed the baby to its father. Robbie stood looking down on the child that was blinking

up at him. Its lips were moving as if it were endeavouring to speak. It had hair, too, quite a large patch across the top of its head.

"Give him to me, dear. What's the matter with you?" His mother took the child from him; and in some amazement watched him hurry from the room. Then she spoke to the midwife who was attending Rosie, saying, "That's nothing unusual. You have to remember, Mrs Macintosh, that your son's just given birth to a baby, and for him it was very hard labour." They were all laughing now, including Rosie; and John said, "You all right, Mrs McQueen?" "Yes, Doctor, I'm all right. Just leave everything to me."

"I'll go and clean up a bit, then," and he left this room to go downstairs and into the kitchen, there to see Robbie scrambling to his feet from where he had

sitting at the table, and when he tued his head y, John went to him and, putting his hand on his ilder, he said, "Don't be ashamed of this mot but keep it close to you, something to rememfdways."

: waited for her so long," Robbie said, 'I never ight it would happen; and now this seems too d to be true."

joo man," said John; 'we both need someg-let's have a coffee with a kick in it." aving washed his hands and arms, he sluiced his ** under the pump over the sink; and as he stood ng himself he realised he was very tired. It had i a hectic twenty-four hours, in which he had ht with that man and seen to his going. Not an r later, he had been called upon to attend a road dent, in which a horse had run amok after being bed in the hind quarters by some young hoolii, and two people had been badly injured. Foling this, he'd had a very full surgery and another with Doctor Comwallis, putting him in the picas to what had transpired at Col Mount. And ugh the older man's advice had been kindly en when he had said, "I'd step carefully, John, i now on," he had nevertheless added, "Don't format Madam Beatrice is still prominently on the ie."

had been almost eight o'clock before he reached ie, and there once again, he'd had to relate all events to his mother and this had visibly dised her. And she had said, "Could it affect your tice?" And his answer to this had been, "What matter if it did? But it's more likely to bring the women in to inspect this Casanova," at which she had

laughed and said, "You're right there."

When he had at last lain down, he'd had time to think about what, to him, had been the main event of the day, which was that Helen had cried; and her tears had brought everything into the open.

Then it seemed he had hardly got to sleep before Robbie came knocking at the door. And now Rosie had a son and Robbie had a son, and Robbie, too, had cried. When would he himself cry? There was no answer to that.

his eatrice marched out of the solicitor's office, telllig herself it was the last time that man would get X in there. If she took any more of his advice, the ad would be dribbled away in quarter acres. This as the second time she had signed away a quarter If an acre to that builder. It didn't matter that it was

bar ugh woodland, it was still land and land was all e had, and she had told him it would be diminished sQuite further.

H When he had come back with, "I'm glad you'll be ble to manage, Mrs Falconer," it was then she had anted to yell, "Why don't you get on to him? He lould be seeing to the upkeep of the house and bar rounds. I've only one gardener now." However, had he done so it would be telling him that she was in bar bar position herself to put this to her husband, be lluse they were living apart; yet at the same time Ufae knew he was already aware of this.

I Her mind was working strangely these days. She bar tooould concentrate on nothing but the fact that her husband was living but an arm's length from her. She knew the room he slept in' at least the two of which he had the choice, the third one being too small. The windows were at the back of the house and looked on to the wood. Alost below them was the low box hedge that separated the annexe garden from the grounds of the house. In this part of the woodland the trees were thickly entwined, but not for the first time had she made her way through them in the dark and looked up at tose two windows, and had only just quelled the desire to throw a brick through them.

She was walking down Northumberland Street when, her temper ebbing away. there came upon her that tired feeling that often preceded an attack, and she almost said aloud, "Oh, nay od! Not here!

Doctor Comwallis had given her pills to take when she felt like this. She had some in her handbag.

She now stopped and, taking P a position at the end of a huge showroom window, she fumbled in her bag, and without taking the small cardboard box from it, she prised open the lid, and in so doing spilt the pills which brought from her no selfcondemnation, only the words, 'It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Take it! Take it!'

She had a job to swallow the pill but this done, she took in a long breath, then turned from the window and continued her walk, telling herself now that she had better get home. B..but what about her shopping?

Oh, yes, yes. There was that good sweet shop. But whereabouts was it?

She found the shop in a side street, its window w with an array of boxs o chocoates and

*

aSien she came out o the shop which hree one-comjti'

pid boxes ofRowntree's chocolates, sh was feelquite pleased with herself. Two pounds had een "inut for some time.

IS-UCH was her feeling of satisfaction that she scur-

Jd now to the saion.

bar he train was full. It would seem that everybody ,ead been shopping in Newcastle. She could never ford a first-class ticket for herself, so she had to "disJtt up with sitting next to people of all types and es, and today was no exception.

Fortunately she had a seat next to the window, and itSo kept her face turned in that direction and tried be close her ears to the buzz and chatter about her. The train was crossing the river between Newcase and Gateshead, and the river hardly showed itself, thick was it covered with ships and vessels of all es and description. She never asked herself where ey might be going, or from where they had come, E"...ier mind was making comparisons between the of travel she was made to endure now and that h had been usual in her grandfather's time, and

Jn for a time while her father was alive. If they ed to do shopping in Newcastle, there had alfs been the carriage.

,. to he gave a little shake of her head as her thoughts ladded, But you were young, very young. It At Gateshead, except for herself and one other bar person the carriage emptied. But just as the train was about to move on the door was pulled open and a woman jumped into the compartment and sat down in the

opposite window seat with a flop. The guard banged the door closed and the train now gathered speed, and as the wheels went clippity-clop, clippityclop, they resounded so loud in Beatrice's head that she felt she wanted to put her hands over her ears as she stared at the newcomer.

The newcomer was staring at her.

Beatrice jerked her head back towards the window. Now the wheels were yelling That woman! That woman! Clippity-clop, clippity-clop. That woman!

She now drew in a shuddering breath and warned herself to keep calm. There were two more stations to go before Fellbum. Her station was High Fellbum, and she prayed that the other passenger would remain in the carriage until then.

At the next station, the woman remained seated.

When the train re-started she kept her face turned to the window, but that was only for a time, when she was aware of the woman adjusting her hat, then gathering her bag and small parcels together. And she knew that she should do the same and get out with her, and wait for another train. Yet she remained stiffly seated, hardly moving a muscle, for somewhere in the back of her mind she knew that once they were alone together, that person opposite would start talking, and she would hear things about him. Strangely it seemed that the creature must hate him as much as she herself did, seeming to blame him for her present condition in life.

It happened just as she had anticipated. The other passenger got off the train, the carriage door banged bar Hpied. The train started, and so did Mollie Wallace,

Jite pleasantly at first, saying, 'unny, the folks one bar Bpets up with when travelling on a train." bar

bar Beatrice kept her attention fixed tightly on the to

bar idow, and the voice continued, "People get talking bar

bar bar trains, especially them that live alone.

I always bar andful sony for lonely people, especially them that ije been done down by their men. I know all about bar Have bar that because I was done down by my man.

But me, jCa never lost for company. Men and me get on, in

Bways we get on. But you, I hear, live the life of I

bar ermit. Like a fortress your place. You

rarely go
U and nobody comes in, except tradesmen.
And
esmen...well! you get the right tradesmen and
ipa don't need any newspapers."
gjlThere was silence for a time; in fact, it went
on
bar 0 long that Beatrice almost turned to the
woman to
e if she might have fallen asleep. But
suddenly her
oice came again, with what another person might
pve recognised as a tinge of sadness, for she was
Jiying, Davey, my bloke, he was a decent
sort of
Jandap. A bit soft, oh aye, a bit soft,
really too soft to
bar again holes with; but at bottom he was a
decent
bar ugh fella. And he was a working man." Now
the
bar "ne changed into almost an attack, for it had
risen
tod was directed across the carriage towards Be-
trice, as the woman went on, 'But your
bloke, with
s education and his career, he's a snot of the first
ater. D'you know that? And as brazen as bloody
bar rass, openly running two houses and
definitely
owing who is master in one, fighting the butler and ,
throwing him out, all because the fella tried
to protect his mistress, your dear sister, when they were
having it off on the couch. She's as bad as him.
Then, having all the staff in and telling them what's
wha."
Beatrice felt she was about to choke.
Involuntarily her hand went to her throat and she could
not stop herself from staring directly at the woman,
glaring at her. And Mollie Wallace bounced her
head at her, as she emphasised, "Tis a fact,
and right from the horse's mouth, the butler himself. You
wonder how I know? Oh, well, I'll tell you.
I get around, but I hadn't to move out of me
lodgings to hear this tale, because me landlady's
daughter is in the kitchen at The Hall and she
keeps her ears open. And it should happen that the
second footman up there was something of a pal of your
dear sister's butler. They met up in the Red
Lion on their time off. And the day your dear husband

battered the fella and smashed up the furniture in doing so they met up again, and the fella told the whole story. Your sister's husband had asked the butler, who was also his valet, to give an eye to his wife. And apparently he hadn't put a tooth in what he was suggesting. He was very suspicious of your dear husband right from the first time they met up. And when there wasn't a day passed that the dear doctor wasn't only on her doorstep, but on her couch, he opened up and told him what he thought. With the result that the big boy kicked him out. Oh, could tell you, the town buzzed when that story got about. And now, they say, he practically lives there. Pops in on his mother now and again, she who's at

: end of your house, but that's about all. And then, t Sunday, I suppose you know, there they were in urch, her being godmother and him being godfar to your other sister's baby. What d'you think y named the baby? John. Now isn't that nice? d then they had a tea-cum-party in that smalltding pig-sty next to you. It's a wonder you didn't greater-than rather the jollification."

Inconsciously Beatrice found herself moving to end of the seat, her fingers, like claws, gripping her whole body expressing clearly her intention,

I only the woman rising abruptly to her feet, say* 'allyou try that on, missis, and you won't be able ee your way out of this carriage," checked the wise. "I've got it in me to get me own back on ebody," the woman added, "and who better than his, who's the spit of your dirty old father, because tell you something now, I had to be hard up ore I would let him near me. He was the filthiest ine that ever walked."

Vt this moment they were both surprised when the n jerked to a halt. And now Mollie Wallace, tugg her tight-waisted coat into place, and pulling hat more firmly on her head, grabbed up her bag m the seat, and her last words were, "From what ie of you, you are your old man's daughter right the core. And it's my skirt I wouldn't let touch i. D'you hear? If it wasn't that I hate his guts, I aid say you're getting all you deserve. In a way i're paying me for what I had to put up with from t unnatural old swine of yours." he door was pulled open, then banged closed

again; but the woman's face appeared again for a moment longer at the window and the hate on it could have been the expression on Beatrice's countenance.

When the train started again she fell back into the corner of the carriage. And now she was holding her face between her hands and actually moaning. She was aware she'd had to sit through that dreadful tirade because she wanted to hear about him, for no word about him ever came her way: she had been above speaking to the servants about him, so all she knew was he lived in the annexe with his mother;

he did his doctoring in the town; and yes, he would visit her; and as that woman had suggested, these visits would be far from futile. But she would never divorce him. Even if she did, she had read up enough about the law to know that they could never marry. She felt she had them in a cleft stick. But this...

filth that the woman had spewed at her: fighting with the butler who had caught them together... Oh God!

She was going to have one of her turns. Oh, no!

No! No! She must hang on. Hang on! Eat some chocolates! Eat some chocolates!

She thrust her hand into the bag and almost tore the lid off a box of chocolates, and when some of them spilt onto the floor, she took no notice;

but, grabbing up two others, she rammed them into her mouth, chewed quickly on them, swallowed them, and repeated the dose.

By the time the train stopped at High Fellbum, she had eaten eight chocolates; and when she left the train she had to rumble in her bag for her return ticket. Outside, she hailed a cab and twenty minutes

later she was entering the house.

Frances met her in the hall and was about to ask, "Have you had a nice day?" when, looking at her face, she said, "Oh, ma'am!" And she took the bag (Frances helped her off with her coat and hat, then said gently, "Come along."

Beatrice allowed herself to be led up the stairs and

into her bedroom. She made straight for the bed and

lay on the edge of it, and as Frances took off her shoes she said, "Lie down for a time, ma'am." But Beatrice did not need any bidding and after Frances had covered her with a rug, she allowed herself to sink into the strange silence that preluded the first feelings which led to oblivion.

John."

"Yes, dear?"

"I must say it; I'm worried."

"What about?"

"It's her." His mother nodded towards the wall.

"She's on the prowl."

"What d'you mean, Mother, on the prowl?"

"Well, it started a couple of weeks ago.

I thought I was dreaming or hearing things. But it was quite

late: you had been upstairs for some time and the girls

next door must have been in bed at least a couple of

hours. The first time it was like a... well, like a dog

scratching at the door. You see, the door is just

along from my bedroom wall. Well, then I heard

the muttering, and I knew it was her. I couldn't hear

what she was saying, but her voice rose and fell:

at times it was as though she were whispering. But for me

to hear it she must have been more than whispering. The

following night I thought perhaps I had previously

been dreaming because there was no sound. But the next

night, there it was again. It starts

bar if she is scratching the door with her nails,

and jring the past two weeks it's happened six

times. e was on again last night. I was in the garden

and (aw the little maid, Mary. She came and leaned er

the hedge and asked me how I was. I said I was

e; and how was she, I asked, and she said

she In't know: all topsy-turvy, that was the

expression used. Apparently Janie Bluett

had given in her tice the day before. She has been

intending to we for some time, but now, according to Mary, e

can't stand things next door any longer. And it pears

Cook is feeling the same; and if she goes e

has promised to take Mary with her. So that's his

situation."

"D'you want to leave here?" ffis mother sighed

before she said, "I never mght I would ever hear myself

say so, because I ved this little house. But I must

admit she's got e scared. I wouldn't believe

she could have gone e this."

e remained thoughtful for a moment before he id, "I

don't suppose I could get you a suitable place

raight away, but one of the big houses on Brampn

Hill has been turned into a nursing home.

Doctor omwallis has a patient there. He

says it's a fine, nfortable place. Would you go

there?"

She paused before she said, "Nursing home?

Well, bar we always said I would never go into a

nursing bar me, but I think I'll be glad to get

out of here, if s only for a shott hile. But it must

be for only a bar ort time because I must
live in a house of some
kind, John, with enough space to hobble about. I
couldn't bear to be tied to the one room all day."
"I know that, dear, I know that. Anyway,
I'll have a talk with the old man in the moing, then go
and see the place for myself. And don't worry,
please, because there's nothing to stop us just packing our
bags and leaving here any minute. Now settle
down. And look, I'll tell you what to do. If you
hear that scraping again, take your stick and knock on
the ceiling." He picked up one of the sticks that were
hooked over the end of the bed and he tried it for length,
saying, "You'll have to stand up. But do that if she
starts. Now settle down. I won't be going up
to bed for the next hour as I have some reading to do. And that
reminds me: I left a number of my medical
books along in the spare room. I must try and have
a word with Frances and see if she'll sneak them down
for me. But I think you're more likely to see young
Mary than I am Frances, so if you can catch her
eye tomorrow over the hedge, give her that mssage, will
you? Ask her if she'll bring the down and put them
outside the door."

"What if I dont see her tomorrow or the next
day?"

Well, that'll be just too bad, because then I'll
open the door, go into the kitchen and if Frances
isn't there, ask one of them to give her a
message."

'And risk running into her?'"

Oh, if she's keeping her visits till the
night-tie, I don't think she'll come along this
end during the day. Still, we'll see. Now settle
down." He bent and kissed her, then went into the
sitting-room, though

* to read. The medical books and magazines
lay jopened on the table and he sat for almost the hour
ndering on the future...

I He was a light sleeper and often found
difficulty j bar getting off to sleep, and tonight was
no exception. was fact, although he felt very tired,
he had been in
8d for over half an hour and was still wide
awake.

J was as he stared into the darkness, his thoughts [elen
and what would be their future, when the ling of glass and
an implement that must have k the brass rail on the
bottom of the bed caused Jun to leap up and to stand
rigid for a moment while

@'liand went out to the side-table to grope
for nes to light the gas. But as he did so he was ed
once more with the sound of more breaking
1 He thrust on his slippers and made his way
to the bar bar roken window, trudging through the glass,
and he eered out of the side pane towards the other
bedigOom window. The light outside seemed much
lighter than that of the bedroom. Then he glimpsed
jhe dark shape of the figure disappearing into the
Ijood.

12ar She was mad, yet wily, for she knew that
he Ipouldn't sleep with drawn curtains and a
drawn blind

6 because they weren't overlooked here, that he r
pulled his blind down or drew the curtains: he
to wake up to the light of the morning.

He now made his way back to the table and the bar
bar Daatches, and as he lit the gas he heard his
mother houting agitatedly, 'John! John!" And
he called

back, "Be there in a minute. It's all right.
It's all right."

He now looked for the implement which had hit the
rail of the bed. And there it was.

He picked it up. It was half a new brick,
the edges sharp. As he examined it he could
see her going through the wood to where they were building the
house on the last quarter acre and picking up this
brick.

He went into the other bedroom, where again he had
to walk over glass. Here he found another
halfbrick, but this time it had been nearer its
target, for it was lying in the middle of the counterpane.
Just another yard, if he had been lying there, and it
would have hit him on the head, which would have been her
intention.

He carried the two bricks downstairs, where he
found his mother standing leaning heavily on her sticks. And
when he held out the bricks towards her, she looked
at him and said, "She's mad! she is, John,
she's mad!"

He put the bricks down, saying, "Come on,
back to bed. I'll lie on the couch. Now, it's
all right, it's all right. Stop trembling." And
at this, she said, "Well, by the feel of your hand,
you're not very steady yourself."

He said nothing to this, but he helped her into bed again.
"I'll make a cup of tea," he said.

Some minutes later, as he sat by her side
drinking the tea, he said, his has put the finishing

touches to it. Now I don't know where you'll
 be sleeping
 now on, but it certainly won't be here. So
 to BOW, get Mrs Atkinson to pack up all
 our things." "The store cupboard's full and there's
 nearly fifty bottles of wine," she said.
 "If he could have smiled at that moment he would yet:
 there was the housewife speaking. What he JJ-JL,
 and brusquely, was, "Leave the store
 cupboard. Bar people wine... well if you must take
 them, wrap the bottles up in newspapers or odd
 garments or such pack them into cardboard boxes.
 I'll ask Doctor Jmwallis if I can store
 them there."
 Taking the empty cup from her, he said, "Now
 go down and try to get some sleep because you're long
 to need it; tomorrow will be a busy day," and he went from the
 room, he added to himself, "It
 certainly will be for me."
 "Have a cup of tea," said Doctor
 Comwallis. "ationo thanks; I've had six already;
 and I'm sorry to have disturbed you at your
 breakfast." "Oh, I was finished. But
 bricks through your window greater-than will? She means
 business. It looks as though she's
 certainly becoming confused, perhaps even
 degradedbut..."
 "Insane, is my opinion... Could she be
 certified?" "i'Por throwing bricks through your
 windows? Not precisely that, no. She's not insane. But it
 has become clear that she has spasms of discharging
 much nervous energy, which often leads to attacks of
 petit mal. This is what has been happening
 to her." "When did you last see her?"
 "Oh, I was called to attend her about a
 fortnight
 ago. She had been out shopping and had returned in
 a state, so the maid said. And yet I can't really
 be certain in her case, you know; nor, equally, can
 I be dogmatic and say it's hysteria, for there are
 many symptoms of this that she doesn't show. But there
 is certainly nothing I can see that would help
 to certify her. And like all in her state, she's
 wily. If I was bringing in an outside opinion,
 which, as you know, must be done in such cases, after hearing
 her talk they would find it very difficult to put pen
 to paper with regard to her sanity. No, you've got
 to find another way to get release from her. Yet,
 if she won't hear of divorce, I can't suggest
 anything. But wait-" He held up his hand and

wagged his finger at John as if admonishing him, as he said, "Just you hold your hand a minute. There's something in my mind clicking. It's about insanity in marriage. There was a case some years ago-" He now shook his head as he said, "I'll look it up. Yes, I'll look it up. There should be a law book here somewhere. Anyway, you could go to the library. You don't happen to have any books on law, I suppose?" "Strangely, I do. I've got three; one dating back forty years or more. I bought a bundle of books at a sale in my student days, because among them was a medical book I couldn't afford at the time. Yes. Yes, I think there's three. I'll look it up when I get back." "Do that. Now that's a point. Do that, about insanity in marriage." "And look, if you want to look around and find a place for your mother, I'll share your patients with Doctor Rees."

"Thanks very much. I'll be grateful. I was thinking 'ut going to that new place that you talked about . Brampton Hill."

Jh? Oh, there, you'll be out of luck. Yesterday I was visiting, the matron told me they had a g list."

were ai sorry about that, it sounded a good place."

"Where will you yourself go?" "Not back to Mrs Pearson's, I can tell you that for every. Oh, I'll find somewhere, don't worry." "Well, until you do, there's a bed upstairs if you puld like it."

w,

I John did not give any answer to this invitation for moment; but then he said, "That's very kind of you, jactor. And if I can't get fixed up I'll be glad to

f" bar bar "Oh, you won't be putting me to any trouble. But

9Quite might have some restless nights, because when bar more not snoring, and I can snore up to high C, and ,bar nging-" he turned ow and grinned at John, a.jg, "I'm sober when I snore, but when I sing it's a Jtga that I've had my medicine."

John was forced to smile and he came back with, bar Well, if I have a dose of the same medicine, we Jould do a duet, because I'm told I have a good stritone voice."

'Oh, I doubt if that'll ever come about because lou could never carry my medicine. You're not built at

way. But go on, and let me know how you
get i By the way, have you any special visits
to lake?"

I.

j Three, but I can do them on the way.

"Good."

At this they parted and John started on his
furnished-apartment hunting session...

By twelve o'clock he was feeling slightly
desperate for his searching had been fruitless. And so,
as he had been longing to do all morning, he turned
the horse in the direction of Col Mount, and
Helen.

It should happen that Daisy was visiting, and they were
eating a light lunch, and when they pressed him to join
them, he did not refuse as, other than a slice of
toast, he had had nothing to eat all morning.

It was while they were sitting in the drawing-room
taking their coffee that Daisy, looking hard at
John, said, "Something on your mind more than
usual?"

He smiled at her as he said, "What makes
you think that?"

"Because you haven't had a decent shave today."

His hand went to his chin as his eyes widened and he
said, "I've had a shave."

"Yes, here and there. There are two tufts below
your ears that you missed"

As Helen burst out laughing, he too began
to laugh; then he stopped abruptly saying, "It's
a wonder I shaved at all; we had rather a busy
night."

"What d'you mean?" Helen was looking towards
him now enquiringly.

He didn't answer her immediately, but put his cup
down on a side-table, then said flatly, "We
are having to leave the house. My mother's frightened
to death. She only told me yesterday what had been
happening. Beatrice has been scratching on the
door in the dark as well as talking through it. Being
upstairs I

The Obsession 45 fi aven't heard her. But
I heard her all right last night

hen two bricks came through the windows. She
bar (idn't know in which room I was sleeping, but
she

tas taking no chances."

J "Oh, never! Never!" Helen was shaking
her head

jiow. "She must be-" she stopped and he nodded

at
 bar bar er, saying, "Yes, going mad. She
 is mad, I'm sure,
 ad has been for some time."
 H Does Doctor Comwallis know this?"
 'allyes. Yes, of course. But, as he says, it
 would be difficult to prove; he doesn't agree with
 me. AnyjJay, I've been house-hunting again
 all morning. I've comIfest my mother and Mrs
 Atkinson packing. I imag bar ined I would get
 my mother into the new nursing
 Je on Brampton Hill; but Doctor
 Comwallis tells
 there are no vacancies. So I've been doing the
 ds again, but so far without success."
 s Helen put her hand out towards him and was
 it to speak Daisy put in, "I know of two
 places
 , ould have the choice of."
 "Yes?" John's voice was high.
 bar "Yes." Daisy's head was bobbing now.
 "Either at
 ltoy place, or here."
 Yes." Helen and Daisy exchanged glances.
 in Helen said, 'It'll be here. I would love to have
 , John." I "Oh, no; no. That
 would be an imposition. Any-
 to Way, she must have someone to see to her needs and
 she would need at least two rooms." "Look how
 many rooms there are in this house, bar and all empty!
 There are eight bedrooms upstairs."
 i- "But she couldn't go upstairs." This came
 from
 i.
 Daisy. And Hele, her voice unusually
 loud, said, "I know that. I know that. But there is the
 games room that no-one uses now. It would make a
 lovely bedroom. And next to it there is the
 smoke-room, which would make a nice sitting-room.
 And it leads on to the conservatory. She would be in
 nobody's way because the rooms are at the far end of the
 corridor. And I would love to have her here."
 "Oh no." John shook his head now. "I
 don't want you giving up your time."
 "Don't talk daft, man."
 He turned sharply now to Daisy, who went on,
 "She doesn't know what to do with her time. She's
 bored to death. I've tried to introduce her
 to committee work but the look on her face when sitting
 round a table is very off-putting to the others."

"Oh, Daisy, how can you say such a thing? I've kept that silly smile on my face for hours just to please you. And as instructed" comshe bounced her head towards Daisy now- "talked of things I know nothing whatever about, really."
"All right men; you do something that you do know something about, and instruct the staff to prepare those rooms; and I'll give them a hand. As for you, John, get on your way back to your mother and tell her it's all arranged, and to stop worrying. And by the way, where d'you propose to stay?"

"Oh, Doctor Comwallis has offered me a bed until I get fixed up.

'Well. you can get fixed up in my place any day And hat would be nice. Think about it lad. Oh, y" to have a man all to myself. Look, tell old Corn-

lis that you're fixed up. Tell him you've had a oposal, immoral, illicit, or whatever name you'd ft
*ence to put to it, but nevertheless, a proposal.

And, ,
i know' comshe nodded at him- "it isn't every in I'd make that proposal to."

John took two steps towards her and, taking her inkled face between his hands, he said quietly, fl tell you something Daisy, and it's the truth: if

f heart wasn't already given somewhere else, I ild jump at the chance, and seriously.
As he saw the bright eyes glisten for a moment d a tinge of pink diffuse itself over her face, he

dded at her as if in confirmation of his words. And a, turning to Helen, who stood with a soft, know-smile on her face, he said, hanks, my dear.

tat sounds inadequate, but at this moment I cannot I you how relieved I am." bar

And now she asked quietly, What time will I send , *
s carriage for her?"

When he hesitated Daisy put in, It should be after :

rk in case Beatrice spots it. What d'you say, r
in?

"Yes, you're right, Daisy." bar

"Well, whatever time it goes, I'll come

and..." be

"No, no. Please Helen." "He's right," said Daisy; "you want to keep out of it. But I'll go along and give a hand." Thank you, Daisy. Thank you." "So, we'll say about seven o'clock?" "Yes, that'll be fine." He looked from one to the other now and said, "I... I don't know how to thank you. I was at my wits' end when I came in and now I feel—" He stopped and shook his head before muttering, "I'll...I'll be away then."

As he hurried from the room Helen went to follow him, but a gesture from Daisy stopped her. And when the door had closed on him Daisy said softly, "He's better left alone, dear. He's at breaking point."

It was just after six when he returned for the second time to the annexe and was surprised to see his mother sitting fully dressed for outside, and she greeted him rather tartly. "Where on earth have you been? I've not seen you since this afternoon." And he answered her in a similar vein: "Mother, there are sick people out there."

As he sat down beside her the tears began to race down her cheeks, and she said, "Oh, my dear, I am sorry. In spite of the good news I have had a fearful dread on me all day."

"Now don't be silly, dear; our lives are about to change, and for the better."

She squeezed his hand, then said, "Have you had anything to eat?"

"Woman! Woman! Listen to me! I told you earlier I'd lunched with Helen and Daisy. Now Daisy will soon be here. You're dressed, but are you all packed up?"

"Yes; except for the few books Frances promised to bring from upstairs. Mrs Atkinson had to go to the dentist; she was nearly mad with the toothache; she was going to call in on you. You must have been out. I suppose it's being by myself that's made me jittery."

I.

"That'll be Frances," he said, "about the books."

He hurried through the hall, unlocked the door and there was Frances. She had a number of books in her arms and she said, "There's quite a few more, Doca, but I couldn't carry them. Anyway, she's gone that. She must be going for a tramp; she took her 'alking stick with her."

He glanced quickly over the books and realised they were mostly non-medical. He said, "Does she usually go out at this time of night?"

"Yes. Yes, Doctor, she goes for walks round

XggUt."

"Well, come on, I'll go up with you."

They were both now running along the passage, through the main hall and up the stairs and to the (are) room. Then he scooped a number of medical books from a shelf, but in doing so, toppled the rest into the floor. Then turning swiftly, he made for the door, saying, "Bring those, Frances, please."

At the top of the stairs he stopped with the feeling that his heart was leaping through his ribs, so startled as he, for there, coming up towards him was Beatrice.

On the sight of him she paused and blinked her eyes tightly as if she didn't believe what or whom she was seeing. Then very slowly she took the rest of the stairs, lifting each foot firmly from one tread greater-than the other.

When she was about to reach the landing he had to step back, and, like a schoolboy who had been caught in some thieving act, he almost stammered, "I... I was collecting my... my medical books."

"Oh yes, your medical books. I've just come back to collect some chocolates; I was hungry." The smile on her face made him actually shudder. And when she went on, "Something said to me 'Go back, Beatrice. You need energy.' And chocolates make energy. Did you know that, John? Chocolates make energy."

He nodded at her as he sidled round her to the top of the stairhead. He was aware that Frances was standing somewhere to the side of her. Then he turned abruptly and made to walk down the stairs. He had no way of supporting himself for his arms were holding the books.

Later, he could not recall if it was Frances's scream he heard first or his own when the foot landed viciously into the middle of his back. He felt he had leaped into the air and that the books had taken wings, but he did not hear himself scream again as he hit the floor, nor the cry from Frances, nor the gasps of horror from Cook and Janie Bluett.

The screams had brought Catherine Falconer up out of her chair and grabbing her stick, before she hobbled from the annexe into the passage and towards the group of people shouting in the hall.

Frances was yelling, "You kicked him down, ma'am; you kicked him down," and Beatrice was wielding her stick and yelling back, "Shut up! you, before I bring mis across you. He fell! He fell down the stairs."

"Oh, my God!" The words were wrenched from Ursula when she saw her son lying inert, one leg under him, the other at an odd angle. And there as blood seeping from one trouser leg.

"What have you done, woman? What have you done?"

Catherine Falconer was screaming at Beatrice.

"He fell! He fell! He's dead!"

"No! No! He's not dead, ma'am, he's breathing."

"Well, he won't be for long. Stay where you are, woman!" Beatrice now waved her stick towards Annie Blount.

"You're mad! You're mad, woman! Get a doctor. Command you to get a doctor for my son."

"Command! she says. This is my house. My house,

Miss Falconer. Your son was trespassing.

And be careful what you say to me else you'll go the same way. I've had enough of you. Yes, I have, behind our closed door. But it's all over. Oh, yes, it's all over for both of you." Then she actually screamed at Frances, who was aiming to slip past the foot of the stairs, I've told you, woman! You'll get this across out," and she brought the stick within an inch of Frances's face, causing the girl to scream again, You're mad! You're mad! And you kicked him. "out did; you kicked him down the stairs."

When the stick fell viciously across Frances's arm the girl jumped back as she cried out, then hung on Annie Blount.

"Oh, woman! Woman!" cried Mrs Falconer now was leading- "I beg you, send for the doctor," and in

a placating voice Cook added her pleas, Mistress, yes; please, please, let someone go for the doctor."

Beatrice took heed of Cook's plea, but yelled at Mrs Falconer 'shut up! I've told you, or I'll knock you down with your rickety sticks," and she was about to advance on Catherine Falconer when the sound of someone scurrying behind her turned her about, and the sight of Mary Simmons flying down the passage seemed to put her in a quandary for a moment. Then she was yelling again,

hat's it, old woman! Get don on
your rickety knees. He'd be surprised to see
at, wouldn't he? because you've kept him by yor side
for years pretending you couldn't walk. Ncy d
advise you to stay there. And you lot' comshe thst out her
arm towards the three women now hudd together- "the
same applies to you, because it's going to be a long
night. Three o'clock in the mning is when they die,
isn't it? Three o'clock. It" very quiet around
three o'clock. Have you ever ben outside in the middle of the
night at three o'clock? Even the birds don't
rustle, and the rooks are frightened to make a sound.
Did you know that? you know that? Because the world is dead at
tee o'clock in the morning and it takes the dying vth it.
It takes the dying with it. Oh, yes. Yes. So,
ie the old girl, I'm going to sit on the
floor.?...

Mary Simmons was flying up the drive. She'd
have to get help. he'd have to get help. Mr
Macintosh next door. he'd get Mr
Macintosh.

The young girl ow let out a loud scream as a
figure emerged roid the curve of the drive and
al-

K) bumped into he in fact, it caught hod of
her

bar oulder But whn the voice that spoke to her waPeople
*** ft. her gasping breath eased.i * *..

:

What is it? What is if Daisy drew the
shiverinS[*reg]".

bar ri out of the shadow of the trees into a narrow bar
li ?"

bar child of moonli And staring into her face sheFrom -
l What is it was dear?" "p:!

bar *Oh, ma'ain i, shes...she's gone
madPeople

es kied the doctor. Kicked him downstairs
andPeople be

e won't et them send for Doctor Comwallis.

I IH

as going for Macintosh next door. They are all
the hall; she on't let them pass, the cook orl
pybody. She's g a stck.'i bar Have 'It's

all right, my dear. It's all right. You go on d

tell Mr Macitosh to come quickly. But listenp

ly carriage is on the road. Tell the driver

there'sPeople een an accident and Miss Daisy says

he has to go IJ-OD fetch Doctor

Cornwalis. Now, can you remem-bar

H Yes, ma'am. Tell your driver
to fetch Doctors ornwallis and I'll tch...
I'll fetch Robbie, I meant bar rather
Macintosh. I bar hat's it! That's a good girl.
Off you go now.t
I Then Daisy herself actually ran down the
remain-
ler of the driv The annexe door was open. She
did
ttot immediately nter, but paused and listened to aj bar
oice, its soud "g d falling. Then she was
tip-F
eing throug the small hall and to the door that edf
to the corridor Peering along it, she coud just
seea
Dto the hall, w a Swe standing there, its
arms'v
ving. And now she could hear the voice quite"
plainly: 'What are you saying, old woman? You
are making one last request? Oh, people who are going
to die always make one last request. If he could
talk, he would make one last request, wouldn't
he? Oh, yes, he would make one last request,
all right. Your son would make one last request, and
it would be to see his dear Helen. Wouldn't it?
Wouldn't it now? And if he did, he'd
know what I would say." There was a pause here before
the tone rose to almost a scream as it said, "I'd
say that the only way Helen will see you is over your
dead body. That's how she'll see you, over your
dead body."
"He's bleeding, Beatrice. You can see he's
bleeding."
"Oh, yes, dear Mrs Falconer, I can
see he's bleeding, and from the mouth now. And I
expect him to bleed a lot more. Then he'll
suddenly stop bleeding because dead people don't bleed, do
they? Well, I don't think they do. I think
I've read it somewhere that they don't bleed."
"He's not dying; he's not!" Mrs Falconer
protested loudly; "and the blood's coming from his nose,
not his mouth."
"Well, wherever it's coming from it'll soon
stop."
Daisy bent quickly down and slipped off her
shoes. And now she could have been one of the jungle
animals she had become acquainted with in
Africa, so stealthy was her approach.
Her appearing from the passage brought a gasp from the
two women huddled together and from Cook who was now at

John's other side. Then everything happened so quickly.

% There was a mingling of concerted yells before ye actually jumped on Beatrice, her hands going lover her shoulders and under her oxters, and pinning Iber arms. And Beatrice herself let out a scream of pain as she was boe to the floor. She fell flat with jpaisy on top of her, and it was evident that Daisy l bar vas winded, too, because she couldn't speak for a oment. But then she was shouting up at the cook, j'Something to tie her hands and feet! Quickly!"

1 The three women were looking around desperately Hwhen Daisy's voice came at them: 'allyour apron Istraps! Tear them off woman! Your apron straps!" bar Cook pulled off her apron from her well-padded body andwitha twist of her wrist tore the crossed glinen straps from their base. And now Daisy, pulling herself up knelt on Beatrice's thrashing legs, then I cried to the girls, "Tie her wrists together!" And this jdiey did only too willingly, and when Daisy had . strapped them tight with one piece of the linen, she used the other to do the same with her ankles. Now j turning Beatrice onto her back, she stood up gasping, staring down at the mouth opening and shutting as she repeated one word, "You! You! You!" I "Hoist her into the chair." t Cook dragged the trussed figure none too gently towards a carved, bog oak hallchair, and with help t from the girls pulled her up and dropped her into it, i causing Beatrice to emit a groan as her bound hands j hit the back of it, the while Daisy, bending over Mrs I alconer, said, "Come on, my dear, sit up, sit up. It's j all right. We've sent for the doctor."

It must have been the word doctor that brought Beatrice fully back inffconsciousness, for she screamed, "No doctor... no doctor's coming here! No!" She tossed herself backwards and forwards in the chair, and Daisy, looking at Frances who was visibly trembling, said, "Does she take sleeping tablets?" "Yes, ma'am. Yes, she does. She does."

"Go and get them."

This order brought forth another scream from Beatrice.

When within a minute Frances handed the box of sleeping tablets to Daisy, Daisy said, "I

hear she eats chocolates?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, yes, by the boxful. There's an opened box in the drawing-room."

"Fetch it!"

With the chocolates to hand Daisy approached the writhing figure and, bending over her, she said, "Open your mouth, woman," which caused Beatrice only to clamp her jaw tighter together, until Daisy gripped her nose and gave it a twist. And when the mouth opened wide and she thrust in a sleeping tablet, it was immediately spat out back at her. Then taking another tablet from Frances's trembling fingers, Daisy also picked up a chocolate, gave the nose another twist and inserted the two together into the gaping mouth. This time, however, she immediately clamped down hard on the jaws; and after hearing the guttural swallowing, she repeated the process.

Beatrice was now staring at her, and the look in her eyes was so malevolent that Daisy had to turn away, and going to John now, she looked pityingly down on to his twisted body, and her hand went irritably across her mouth. Then, her eyes closing, she cried, "Oh my God!" And she added, "Oh, my dear John. Dear John. What has she done to you?"

"Couldn't...couldn't we straighten him out a bit?" Mrs. Falconer asked brokenly now; and Daisy said, "No, dear. Better leave him until the doctor comes."

"...And he's on his way." Mrs. Catherine Falconer turned an enquiring look on her as if to say, "How could he be...?" And Daisy said, "The little maid, I told her to send my driver, and she's gone for Robbie." It was as if the mention of his name had created Robbie, for there he was hurrying along the passage. But at the entrance to the hall he gazed in amazement from the trussed figure in the chair to the twisted form on the floor. "God in heaven!" he cried. Then Robbie knelt down by John's side. Daisy said, "I...I wouldn't touch him until the doctor comes. He's bleeding profusely, and I don't know where it's coming from." Robbie nodded, then looked down on the pallid face of the man who had been such a friend to him and found himself unable to find words to express his feelings. . . . She kicked him! She

kicked the doctor in the
tback. Yes! she did. Yes! she did;"

Frances's voice twas touching on hysteria, and
Cook first admonished I her then drew the girl
tightly towards her. Looking questioningly at Daisy,
Robbie said, tHe'll have to be taken to hospital.
It'll need the ambulance. Have you sent for one?"

"No. No." Daisy shook her head.

"Oh." He got to his feet; but still looking
down on John, he said, "He can't be left like
that for long. The doctor won't be here for at least
twenty minutes, that's if he's in; I'll go and
see about it." And with this he ran from the hall, and as
he did so there came a weird laugh from the tied
figure in the chair and a drowsy voice said,
"Too late, too late."...

And those were almost the words that Doctor Comwallis
muttered to himself when, twenty-five minutes later,
he entered the house. And as he gently cut the
trouser leg and small clothes down from the bent
limb, he muttered, "Almighty...!" for now
he was looking at the bones piercing the flesh.

When he heard Mrs Falconer's drawn-out
cry of pain, "O...h!" he said to Daisy,
"Take her away into another room."

As he felt the erratic pulse on the
limp wrist, he made no outward sign but
inwardly he was shaking his head.

He looked up at Daisy now and said, "An
ambulance."

"Robbie... Mr Macintosh... has gone for
one."

The doctor now turned to look at the drooping
figure in the chair and he asked quietly, "How
did that come about?"

And Daisy answered simply, "With some
effort," and her left hand was bearing witness to this for
she knew that, in falling to the floor, she had
sprained it.

As Doctor Comwallis lumbered to his feet his
words were enigmatic: "He's got all the proof
he
needs for his release, but it may be too late
now." It was just five minutes later when the
ambulance
arrived and under orders from Doctor
Cornwallis, the men did not attempt to straihten
the twisted leg as they laid John gently on this
stretcher. I "I'll follow you there," Doctor
Cornwallis said to like'.

them; but before doing so he turned
to Beatrice, p
whose chin was now resting on her breast, then en- S
I quiringly to Daisy, who said, "I've
given her a cou-
pie of sleeping tablets." Bl "Oh,
wise, the best thing. es. Two, you say?" p
"Well, she'll sleep till tomorrow morning, when
bar bar I'll be along to see her; but I won't
be alone. Oh no, II I won't be alone. And
whoever else is here, I want B bar that
girl" comhe pointed to Prances- "to remain as a
bar bar bar witness to what happened," to which
Daisy said, "I'll W * coni bar be here,
too." i He nodded, then said, "Good," before
leaving. bar

When Daisy saw Mary sidling along the
passage bar towards her, she called to her, It's
all right. Everything's all right now, dear." And then
she patted her were shoulder, adding, 'Good girl."

I

Emerging from the drawig-room and seeing her bar
helpmate, Cook said to her, "You did well,
Mary;" I then turning to Daisy, she added,
"We've made the couch ready for her, ma'am."
"Good," said Daisy. he just before I
leave I'll untie her. But what are you going to do
Cook?

"I'm away this very night to my sister's,
ma'am, i be
and I'm taking Mary and Janie with me. We had
His

already decided to leave, and Janie's got herself a
job; she can walk into it tomorrow. That only leaves
Frances."

All attention was now set on Frances, who was
standing shaking her head, and it was Catherine alconer who
put in quietly, 'If you have no other plans,
Frances, I'd be glad of your help: I need
someone with me" comshe now turned to Daisy- "that
is, if Lady Spears will agree to the arrangement
for the time being."

"Oh yes; yes, I can give you her word on
that," Daisy answered immediately. "So that's
settled; and as Cook says, it's the outside
man's day off, and he always makes for his little stable
rooms at the far end of the grounds; so he won't know
anything until tomorrow morning. And neither will she, once
we leave her on the couch; so we can lock up and
go."

Uawn was just breaking when Beatrice came to; but although she remained curled up on the couch for some time, for she was feeling distinctly odd; only gradually did she become aware of her aching head, also of the pain in her body, particularly in her arms and ankles. Slowly, she pulled herself up into a sitting position to discover that she was in the drawingroom and that the gas chandelier was still alight. What had happened?

Then, as if a gate in her mind had suddenly swung open, realisation of all that had taken place came to her, passing like a series of pictures before her eyes, one rapidly falling into the other. She had killed him. Her foot had landed right in the middle of his back. Oh, that had given her a feeling of joy, as had seeing him lying there, his life's blood ebbing away. There returned to her a moment of elation, quickly blotted out by the feeling of that strange creature jumping on her and tying her up. She suddenly put her hand to her mouth, for she could feel the woman stuffing in the chocolates in order to make her swallow the pills. They had been sleeping pills, which is why she had slept so long. But why hadn't Frances taken her upstairs and put out these lights? She pulled herself up from the couch and staggered down the drawing-room and into the hall. Where were they? Where were the servants? Oh, it must be early. Yes, it must be early. But she'd waken them. Yes, she would. She needed a drink; she was dry.

Still walking as though drunk she entered the kitchen, there to be met by a dead fire. She went from the room shouting, "Cook! Cook! Frances!" and when she received no reply, she staggered to their quarters, only to see open doors with the early light revealing empty rooms and here and there a cupboard with drawers left open.

Back in the hall she walked round in a circle, then came to a stop at the foot of the stairs and peered at the polished boards, where large dark patches showed here and there. As she now bent down and ran her fingers over a large patch of the dried blood, she again experienced that ecstatic feeling. She had killed him! Well, she had known she would sometime. He had died in her house. What time they had moved him, she didn't know. But she knew from the look on his face and the way he had been lying with his blood flowing out that his body was wrecked; the body that he wouldn't give to her. And now because she had done it,

they would come and take her away. They would say she was mad. Well, perhaps she was a bit mad. But she wasn't so mad that she would let them have the last word as to what she would do

r*"...1*

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bar with her life. Her life was her own, and this house iwas hers. Oh, yes, this house was hers. But what would happen when she was dead? Because he "wouldn't inherit now, would he? Oh no. But her sister could. Oh, yes. Yes, Dearest Helen could. The very thought sent her running into the drawing-room again and there, throwing herself onto the couch, she ,ybeat her hands into the cushions, yelling aloud, 'Oh, Ino! No! Never! Never!' For what would she do with

aSS-II! rielen would take a delight in selling all this lovely jiTT-NFTFE and then the house; or turning it into flats @. for common people; or... or...

,1 She was on her feet again, running now from one bar "iHave)" to another: the dining-room, the study, the bil bar ard-room, the smoke-room that had been her fait ther's room, and sacrosanct. And she repeated to herself, the smoke-room, the smoke-room, as she ran up bar the stairs and into her bedroom, where she stood bar panting as she held on to the rail at the foot of the

* bed. She was sweating. Her body wanted release, it I wanted to be free. Free. She tore off her clothes until S she reached her whalebone corsets and, looking sf

I down on them, she said, "After, after; do the shutters f first."

bar She now ran down the stairs and, starting in the drawing-room, she tugged hard to release the shutI ters that were packed and pressed close against the I side of the deep bay window. They hadn't been I drawn into place for years, and she was panting heavily by the time she had covered the three wint dows. It took her a full half hour to go through the rest of the ground floor of the house. The only windows without shutters were those in the kitchen; and with the exception of one, these were barred on the outside.

Only the cracks in the shutters let in the early morning daylight; the whole of the downstairs was dark, except for the drawing-room where the gaslight was still glowing.

She now sat on the third step of the stairs and, as a child might have done, she hugged her knees as if she had succeeded in doing something clever. And then she started to laugh; but the sound was not of childish laughter, for she was yelling in her head that she was going to fool them, fool them all, especially her. She would never get this house, her beautiful house, her child. And it had always been her child: when she was very young the house had been her doll's house; in her 'teens, through her mother's death, her goal had been achieved, and from then she had tended it with pride. This house was hers and would always remain hers. It would never belong to her sister, whom she had disliked in her 'teens, then hated in her womanhood.

She now got to her feet, then stepped down into the hall. She felt gay, she wanted to dance. She had been dancing on and off of late. The bedroom restricted her, but here there was plenty of room. Not yet though. Not yet. There was something she must do. She now ran into the kitchen. They kept paraffin somewhere. Yes; yes, in the boot-room; it had been kept there following a gas leak, when they'd had to

(light the lamps.

j The can was full and heavy, but she managed to

I carry it into the kitchen and to heave it up onto the i bar table. And there, she grabbed two wide-mouth brass bar jugs from the mantelpiece and filled them from the " can. Then, as gaily as if she had been carrying jugs to of ale, she hurried into the drawing-room and sprinkled the paraffin over the curtains, moving from one t window to another. This done, she did the same on t the couch and chairs. She dealt similarly with the other rooms, not forgetting the annexe. Oh, she were. sprayed the annexe well.

I The last jug of paraffin she used on the stairs and J on the bedroom curtains. disi Had she locked all the doors? Yes. t It was still not fully daylight when, downstairs bar again, she made a number of torches from tightly bar rolled paper, and now, starting with the annexe, she t went tripping from one room to another, setting them alight.

I Lastly, amid the strange patterns of flames and f smoke she ran up the stairs and into her bedroom. less-than There she tore off her corsets and her chemise, then bar her shoes and stockings. And now flinging her arms @. above her head,

she pranced round the room. Of a sudden she stopped in front of the cheval mirror and put out her hand towards her reflection, crying, "It's a good body, a young body, but he didn't want it, did he? I should have given it away to someone else.

"Just as Mrs Wallace did." Strangely at this moment she was feeling no animosity towards that woman, rather a feeling of sorrowful envy. And she didn't want to be put away like Aunt Ally. She put her hands above her head and started to sway as in a dancing movement; then she was overtaken by a fit of coughing, and she whimpered, "I'm cold; I must put on my dressing-gown."

She was making for the foot of the bed on which her dressing-gown lay when the whole house was rocked by an explosion. She was lifted off her feet and flung flat onto the floor under the window.

By the time Robbie returned with the fire brigade, the house was ablaze from end to end, with Rosie and torn Needier standing helplessly by. Crying bitterly, Rosie rushed to the fire chief as he jumped down from the engine and she cried, "My... my sister, she... she must be in there. Please! Please!"

"All right! miss. All right!" He tamed and gazed at the house, then shook his head. "We'll do what we can."

It was the following day, as the house smoldered, that the body of Mrs Beatrice Falconer was found beneath the window of her bedroom. She was lying across a number of charred beams.

The newspapers used big headlines to report the tragedy of husband and wife. The reporter, waxing eloquent, also revealed that while the house was burning Dr Falconer himself was lying at death's door in a hospital.

Helen and Rosie stood by Beatrice's grave. Although they were both dry-eyed, they were full of pity for Beatrice and the way she had died. But that she had planned her own death was now evident. As Dr Comwallis had said, the love of her life had been the house, and she had taken it with her; but not before she had, as she imagined, killed her husband. The evidence given by the four staff had verified this fact, together with that of Mrs Freeman Wheatland, who had apparently had to wrestle with Beatrice to bring her under control.

As they both turned from the grave, Helen put

her arms around Rosie's shoulders, for she knew that this young girl, or woman that she was now, had more reason to hate Beatrice than had she.

Beatrice had heartlessly aimed to ruin her life, and in the process had changed the course of that of the man who might now have been her own husband. Yet there was no-one happier than Rosie now, with her lovely baby and the doting affection of Robbie.

Outside the churchyard they stopped and looked at each other and Helen said, "I...I must get back to the hospital."

"Robbie says he's fully conscious now."

"Yes; yes, he is."

"I'll look in tonight," said Rosie; and

Helen answered, "Yes, do that, dear. Do that."

And they turned together and joined the mourners gathered at the door of the church.

Dr Comwallis was standing near John's bedside and he was not talking to him, or with him, but at him.

"Now you can hear what I'm saying, laddie, so take it in. You're all right, as I've told you.

Your back was unscathed. Badly bruised, yes, but no bones were broken. You were lucky. By God! you were lucky. Your leg is smashed, but after they have operated again, it'll likely be all right. The other leg is healing fine. Now you listen

to me." He bent closer to John, his voice soft and insistent now: "You've got to make a stand. You know as well as I do what I mean. In

seventy-five cases out of a hundred, you can make your mind up to go or stay. Now you've got a lot to stay for. There's that girl out there, that woman, that lady becoming ill herself because of you. You understand what I'm saying? You must, because your head's all right. You were concussed, but no serious damage was done. But this dead-pan attitude isn't good enough. You've got the idea into your head that you won't walk again, haven't you? Well, you'll walk all right. Oh, it'll take weeks, perhaps months, but you'll walk.

And anyway, I want you back on the job. Young Rees is all right, but

he's not you. And I didn't realise that you were more

popular than I am: all those people coming in and asking for a rundown on your condition. I'm very jealous of my practice and my patients, but there they are in streams. So, do as I say. You'll make a J: stand and if my latest piece of news doesn't do the J trick, nothing will." His voice dropped lower still. "I've been into it and so has my

solicitor. A law has recently been passed enabling a man to marry his left-brace deceased wife's sister, so everything could be plain bar sailing that way."

John's eyelids fluttered. He felt they were gummed. He looked at this man, this dear friend, but said nothing. Matters were not registering properly in his mind. Vaguely he recalled someone telling him that she had burned the house down and that she had died with it. But he hadn't seemed to be able to take it in, because there she was, as she had been bar since he had come round, standing at the top of the lttTT-ANNIGTITIGITT-IBILSITL be; in his back. As long as he lived, which woudn' be very long, he would feel that foot in his hack. But be now Dr Cornwallis had been saying thai she was . dead, and the house was dad, and he was free. But Histo what was h fire for? Not to liv like this. a cripple,

at best in a whcelchair and a burden on Helen.

Oh ., no. She'd had one sick man and she wasn" going to . have another through him. Dr Cornwallis had just , been saying it was up to him: he could either stay

Daisy looked across the hospital bed towards Helen and asked, "Did you know that they can cure ingrowing toe nails with cigar bands?"

Helen closed her eyes and bit on her lip, lowered her head and as she did so she squeezed John's hand. And it was he who replied, "No; I've never heard that one, Daisy."

"Well, nor had I until I was sitting on the upper deck of one of those new-fangled electric trams. There were two women sitting in front of me and one was telling the other about the cigar band."

"Yes," said John, with a tremble in his voice, "and what happened to the cigar band? What about the cigar band Daisy?"

"Well, I'll give you it word for word, it's true, honestly. One said to the other, "Eeh! that ingrowing big toenail of mine's nearly driven me mad," and the other one said, "Well, I told you, you should go and see one of those foot men about it." "And pay them half a crown?" said the first one; "not on your life. But I'm going to try May Thorpe's reffl-

bar edy. She says it works. All you've got to do is to W, t" cut the toenail straight across-not fancy round, you "will. know-just straight across.

Then, you take a piece of cigar
band, just a little piece, and it must be a bar bar bar
cigar band, because there must be something in it bar be
that helps, like nicotine or something. You cut a
tiny bit of that and you wedge it under the edge of the
bar nail, where you've cut it square across
like." Listen. bar right-brace bar Listen,"
Daisy broke in now; "it's true, I'm
telling dis**." bar you. Listen, as she said, you
cut the nail right across, then you take a small bit
of a cigar band and press it under the nail
between that and the flesh. And I then, quite candidly, I
nearly burst out laughing myself because the
other one said, "Then you set light bar to your big
toe."
As the bed shook, John pleaded, 'Daisy!
Daisy! Please!'
bar That isn't making it up. Believe me that's
what happened. bar bar tt"...ful
*, y i pened. It[*reg]
It was Helen now, tears running down her face,
gU;
bar who said, "But how do all these funny things
always seem to happen to you Daisy? They never happen
to me or bar bar But j anyone else I know."
IN I "Well, you don't listen.
That's the point, you must :
j listen." bar . :;;
John laid his head back on the pillow and
closed his eyes. For all the side-blessings
in this world bar Daisy was one. It was she who had,
over the painful last months, brought some lightness
into the situation. bar And strangely, too, some days
when the pain had been excruciating, the touch of her
hand had brought him some relief; in fact, this dear
individual, besides
being a laugh-maker, possessed, in some strange
way, the power of a healer.
"I must be off. There's a lot to be seen to.
I'm attending a wedding tomorrow."
"A wedding? Do I know them?"
Daisy paused, then screwed up her eyes before
saying, "Well, not really. No, not really;" and
looking across at Helen, she said, "I'll be
back for you in half an hour. And mind, I'm not
coming in here again; just be at the gate. He takes up
too much of your time" as she nodded towards the bed without
looking at John- "and you've got other things
to do."
At this Helen smiled, saying, "Yes, dear,

"I've other things to do, especially today."

As Daisy went out laughing, John looked at Helen and asked, "What do you have to do especially today?" His eyes were soft on her.

She did not return his gaze, but looked down at the hand she was holding; then, bringing it to her chest and pressing it there, she said quietly, "Prepare for the wedding."

"The wedding? The one Daisy was talking about?"

"Yes, the same one."

"D'you know the couple?"

"Yes. Yes, I know the couple."

As she continued to avert her gaze, he said,

"What is it? Something fishy here. Oh, don't tell me" as he drew his chin in- "Don't tell me old Comwallis has proposed to Mrs Newton."

She lifted her head quickly, "Doctor Comwallis

and Mrs Newton? No; no. I didn't know they were even friendly."

"Oh, they've been friendly for years; at least, they meet once a week for cards and wine. She can put it back as much as he can."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"Well, if it isn't him, who is it?"

Now looking him straight in the face, Helen said, "No, John, not Doctor Comwallis, but another doctor. Y."

"More...m...me? What on earth are you talking about, Helen?"

She was now pressing him back into the pillows, her hand on his shoulder, saying, "Don't excite yourself, please. Listen to me. I've waited long enough, and let's face facts, you could be in here another three months or more before you're on your feet and able to walk down an aisle. So it has been arranged." She now smacked his shoulder, saying, "Be quiet and let me speak. I've listened to your protests on this matter long enough. It has been arranged that we're to be married tomorrow in the hospital chapel. Haven't you noticed there's an air of excitement among the nurses? It's been going on all week. They've been petting you and pampering you; they even got you the barber twice yesterday because you were grumbling about your growth." She now tapped his chin.

"No! Helen. No way. Seriously, this business, Helen, no way am I having it.

You've already seen to one invalid in your home; I'm determined you're not having another. I'll take you to the altar-oh! so gladly-but only when I can walk out of here in some fashion."

She suddenly sat down, then demanded, "Why not?" And he answered, "You don't need me to go into why not. First of all, I know I'm stronger, and I know it might sound ungrateful, but sometimes I'm sorry they kept me alive."

"Oh John; that's an awful thing to say, and to me, knowing how I feel."

"I'm sorry, dear." He took hold of her hand now. "But look at me" comhe motioned down the bed- "let's face it, dear, I'll never walk straight again. That leg was so fractured, it's the biggest mystery to me how they saved it. But having saved it, it's not going to be much use. I'll never be able to put much pressure on it. I'll have to use crutches at first, and then hopefully, sticks. And sticks will be with me for the rest of my life. Beatrice did a good job on me. I can imagine she enjoyed it."

Helen pulled her hand away from his, saying, "Oh, I hate to hear you feeling sorry for yourself."

"I'm not feeling sorry for myself; although, I seem to be stressing I have enough to be sorry for. But I am not feeling sorry for myself; I am simply stating facts."

"And you're not going to marry me tomorrow?" He closed his eyes tightly and his voice sounded like a whimper as he said, "Oh, Helen. Helen."

There was silence between them for some moments before she said, "Everyone's looking forward to it, particularly your mother, and, of course Daisy."

He had his head down as he muttered, "I loved you before. I feel I've always loved you, but I never thought I could love you as much as I do at this moment." When he lifted his head his eyes were moist, but his hands were firm as he gripped hers, saying, "Oh, Helen. Helen."

When she bent over him he held her tightly, and their kiss was long and hard. Then, pushing her aside, he said, "How on earth am I going to get into a church like this?"

"That's all been seen to, sir. Every last detail. You'll be in a long basketchair."

"Good Lord! Going to our wedding in a

basketchair." He was biting tightly on his lip now, his head shaking from side to side, and then he said softly, "You know something? You're the most wonderful woman in the world. No, not a woman, a girl, a girl who sat by my side on the top of Craig's Tor and let me sleep, then drank warm beer with me before suddenly walking out of my life, leaving me devastated."

Again there was silence between them because neither of them at this moment wanted to dwell on Leonard.

Presently, Helen said brightly, "And there'll be another surprise for somebody tomorrow."

"Who?"

"Rosie and Robbie" "Surprise for them What do you mean?" "The land. Well, it didn't legally pass on to you. Doctor Comwallis had already started proceedings, before the fire, to have the marriage annulled, so the property did not pass legally on to you, but came to us three girls; and Marion was agreeable to my suggestion that we legally pass it all over to Robbie. He'll have nearly fifty acres now. Rosie's in her seventh heaven." "No!"

"Yes." She was nodding at him. "Oh, Helen, that's a wonderful thing to do. He always wanted a farm. He'll make a wonderful farmer." And when his arms came out again to her, she said, "You're ore excited about that than you are about marrying every."

And to this he rplied flatly, "Yes. Yes, you're quite right, I'm much more excited about that." They were holding each other again. Then, taking her face between his hands, he said, "D'you know what I'm realising now?" and at this she shook her head, and he went on softly, "Well, I know now that until this moment I've never been really happy in my life. My work has given me what they call satisfaction, and yet at the same time, boredom and frustration. But now I know that come what may we shall spend our lives together. Tomorrow will seal it, but it is already accomplished in my mind. Thank you, my dearest, dearest Helen."

She cupped his face with her hands, and looking into his eyes she said, "Do you know something? You're a lovely man."

At this, there was a joy in him that surpassed even the feeling of love he had for her, for he was recalling the night when he had left Henry with the thought that he doubted if anyone would say of him, after his death, what Henry had implied about Leonard.

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