

MISS GLAMORA TUDOR!

BY ILIL ARBEL

INTRODUCTION

Ladies and gentlemen, may we present: Miss Glamora Tudor!

While a lady should never adhere too strictly to dates, one fact must be clarified. The events in *Miss Glamora Tudor!* occur in 1954. The story begins in August, a year and two months after the June coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, who (or should we say whom?) we greatly admire for an unusual reason. During the later part of WWII, Her Majesty (then a lovely young princess) not only trained as a second lieutenant in the women's services, but she actually drove and repaired trucks! That shows the British spirit at its best, as we are sure everyone would agree, and truly brings tears to our eyes. But enough of these divagations, and let us go back to the explanation of the dates.

As it occurs in 1954, the book is not strictly a chronological sequel, but rather a leap in time into a period we preferred. In these days of "prequels" (their word, not ours!), this is perfectly normal. Besides, it might allow us further ventures into the delightful Bassetshire Universe at various time points.

Each Thirkell book describes events that have happened a year before publication. The 1955 book is *Enter Sir Robert*, and it involves people who have nothing to do with the cast of characters in this book. Since life continues to roll in Bassetshire even when it is off stage, who is to say that the events in this book did not take place simultaneously with the events described in *Enter Sir Robert*, namely, in 1954? Should our calculations seem wrong to any of our readers, please forgive us. It is easy to make a mistake or two in the pleasant atmosphere of the "Cloud Cuckoo Land," as Angela Thirkell herself described her novels. And is it really all that important? Paraphrasing the words of the immortal Alice, shouldn't we all sometimes believe in six improbable things before breakfast, or at least before tea?

Throughout the original novels, Glamora Tudor is always off stage. We only hear about her latest film and her new handsome

co-star. Yet we have always sensed a delightful and interesting personality just waiting to emerge into the Barseshire scene. So why is she never there in person? We think that the omission may have two reasons. First, it could have been a simple oversight. Second, Glamora does not live in Barseshire, so she can't show up. The solution to either possibility is to find a good reason for Miss Tudor to visit Barseshire! Let her march boldly in, wearing the glamorous New Look, since she must have ordered her clothes in Paris, and the highest heels ever seen in Barseshire. Let her be British, even though we do not agree that she was based on Anna Neagle, and let her bring some interesting friends of whom we have never heard before. So here she is in Glorious Technicolor, and as Miss Jessica Dean would say, let the games begin!

Chapter One

It was unusually early for the phone to ring at nine-thirty in the morning, but Miss M. knew Miss Merriman's voice immediately. Two heads of states would recognize each other on the Red Phone, and these two ladies were no lesser entities than any president or prime minister. Furthermore, Miss M. sensed a tone of panic in the usually calm voice and poised conversation one expected from Miss Merriman.

"I am afraid I am calling very early, Miss M.," said Miss Merriman, "but I must speak with Miss Dean as soon as possible."

"Hello, Merry," said a cheerful voice before Miss M. could answer. "I am not asleep. Despite what the world thinks, actresses are not necessarily lazy."

"Miss Dean, we have a problem at Pomfret Towers. A true emergency," said Miss Merriman.

"What happened, Merry?"

"Well, the Bishop invited Miss Glamora Tudor to open the Fete next week. She had graciously consented, and naturally the whole town is looking forward to it. As you know, she is much admired by the working classes, and being so famous, even some of your own circle is interested in seeing her in person. Suddenly the Bishop, his wife, and quite a few of their servants came down with severe influenza."

"Why don't they postpone the Fete?" asked Jessica.

"No, the Fete must go on, there are so many other participants; everything is arranged – the roundabout, the tea tents, and quite a few performances by the locals. As for Miss Tudor, we cannot reach her even if we tried. She is somewhere in South America, finishing the shooting of her latest film, *Fever in Peru*, which is about the doomed love affair between Simon Bolivar, the Liberator, and a raven-haired Spanish noblewoman who deserts her people to help him during the revolution. I

understand that her dying scene at the end of the film, as she commands Bolivar to leave her body in the jungle and go on to his glorious fate, will be considered the crown of her career to date. She is coming with her new leading man, Hank Granite.”

“Heavens, what a name! An American, I imagine.”

“Of course it is not his real name, Miss Dean. You know how they usually change the names of film stars to fit some glamorous idea. However, he is not an American at all. You may even know him, his name is Edmond Keith. He is a London relation of the Keith family, and Sir Noel Merton introduced him to the Bishop and Miss Tudor while attending a party, I believe. So Mr. Edmond is coming with Miss Tudor for the Fete.”

“What a treat for the populace, having the great Glamora *and* a handsome boy. I imagine he will stay with Lady Merton, but where will Glamora stay? I cannot imagine her getting on too well with Lydia.”

“They will both be staying at Pomfret Towers. It is a most delicate situation, since Mrs. Hermione Rivers is also coming. As soon as she heard that Miss Tudor is opening the Fete, Mrs. Rivers invited herself to Pomfret Towers. She said she had her heart set on meeting Miss Tudor. It seems that Mrs. Rivers thinks she could persuade Miss Tudor to develop one of her books into a film script, and then act in it. It is her newest book, *Send Me No Lilies*. I understand she is bringing the book with her for Miss Tudor.”

“It won’t happen, Merry. Glamora will never consent to play a middle-aged woman. In all her films she has played a girl between twenty and thirty, even though she is now well past the age of discretion... and you know that all of Mrs. Rivers’ heroines are middle-aged women who are having unconsummated affairs with younger men. And even though all of Glamora’s leading men *are* younger, it is not admitted in public. Do you know what the book is about?”

“Yes, I have read it in preparation for seeing Mrs. Rivers. She would naturally expect me to show an interest. The story is about the wife of a horticultural mogul, who is also an Earl and a Member of Parliament. His flowers are shipped all over the

world. She is a beautiful, though reserved woman, who feels that her husband is so involved with all his activities that he has long ceased to pay attention to her deep and delicate feelings. She still loves him, but she is quite unhappy and lonely. One day, at an embassy ball, she meets an incredibly handsome young man of mystery. He won't tell her who he is, but they spend an enchanting evening together, walking by the river. He only reveals that he is boarding the Orient Express on urgent business two days later. She is so intrigued that she decides to board the same train, without telling him. It goes on from there."

"The usual story, then. But it should all be rather amusing. Why are you so worried? Surely Sally can handle these two divas?"

"This is the problem, Miss Dean. Lady Pomfret is away, in Italy, visiting some relatives for the first time in decades. There is a reconciliation going on, so she cannot cut her visit short. Lord Pomfret will have to entertain these two ladies without a hostess! He is too busy and not well enough to do so. I placed a trunk call to Lady Pomfret in Rome, and she suggested that I invite you to be the hostess. She feels that you are the only one who could resolve it."

"I know Glamora slightly," said Jessica, considering. "We have met a few times, mostly at the Wigwam. Yes, she will devour poor Gillie for breakfast, and Hermione will goad her into frenzy with her allusions to age. Yes, I see you really need me. However, I must bring someone with me. A young cousin of Aubrey is on a school holiday which she is spending with us, but Aubrey had to go to Hollywood. A producer is interested in turning some of Aubrey's plays into films. A big studio, but I must confess I forgot the producer's name."

"Why, Miss Dean! This is so kind. We would love to have Mr. Clover's cousin, and I have no words to tell you how grateful I am for your help."

The sun shone brightly on the monstrous building as Jessica and Aubrey's young cousin, Emma Lover, pulled into the

driveway. Lord Pomfret and Miss Merriman came out to welcome them.

“So kind of you to come, Jessica,” said Lord Pomfret. “I don’t know how I would have dealt with this situation without you.”

“Emma and I will love it,” Jessica said cheerfully. “Everyone, meet Miss Emma Lover.” They shook hands with the charming eighteen year old girl, a pretty, slim creature with cloudy dark hair and brilliant dark eyes.

“Now, Gillie, stop worrying and leave everything to me,” said Jessica. “When is she coming?”

“Who, Miss Tudor or Hermione?”

“Both. Or should I say either?”

“Miss Tudor is arriving this afternoon. Mrs. Rivers should arrive tomorrow,” said Miss Merriman. “I will take you to your rooms to get settled, and then we can have lunch.”

“And plan our strategy,” said Jessica, laughing, as they went upstairs.

A huge white car stopped in the driveway, and an extremely handsome, tall young man, boasting blue eyes, black hair, and the square jaw that was de rigueur for all of Glamora Tudor’s leading men, stepped out of it. Elegantly, he handed out a blonde vision in a blue summer suit, wearing shoes whose heels were so high that the other ladies looked at them with suspicion, expecting the gorgeous vision to fall flat on its face. But Glamora Tudor apparently thought nothing of them. She could most likely negotiate them in the jungle, let alone on a smooth driveway. A cloud of delicate, expensive perfume wafted through the air. The orange-red lipstick named “Hibiscus Frenzy” that was produced by a giant American corporation, which Glamora was paid to wear so that every factory and office girl in England and America and possibly Australia who aspired to look like her would buy it, glowed under the sun.

“Jessica, darling, what are you doing here?” shrieked the famous actress. “Do introduce me to this handsome, distinguished gentleman!”

“So nice to see you, Glam, darling. This handsome and distinguished gentleman is your host, Lord Pomfret. Please also meet Miss Merriman, who runs the entire known universe, and Aubrey’s cousin, Emma.”

“Charmed,” twittered the actress. “So pleased to meet all of you.” She eyed the young, lovely Emma with some hostility, and then took Lord Pomfret’s arm, hanging on it rather heavily as evidenced by Lord Pomfret wincing in some pain. “And I want you to meet my leading man, Hank Granite. We had such a marvellous time in the jungles of South America!”

“Please call me Edmond,” said the young man to Emma, who stood behind as the adults walked into the house. “In Barsetshire, I am much better known as Edmond Keith than as Hank Granite. Can you imagine such a name? It’s humiliating.”

“I know, but you have to put up with such things if you want to have a film career,” said Emma calmly.

“But I am not really interested in a film career,” said Edmond. “At least, I am not interested in acting. I had the opportunity when Sir Noel Merton introduced me, much against his better judgment, to the Bishop and Glamora at a party, and she took a liking to me. I just did it for the money. I wanted to finance my own studies – my father is not very wealthy – I want to learn how to write plays. For the stage, primarily, but of course I won’t mind writing scripts for Hollywood, should such an opportunity ever arise.”

“Does Miss Tudor realize that?”

“Who cares? She only makes one film with each leading man. I will be free after *Fever in Peru* is released and all the promotion is over.”

“Are you sure of that? Is it not possible that she would like to retain you for a second film?”

“Well, it never happened before, so I can’t imagine why she would want me again.”

“If you want to write plays, I must introduce you to my cousin, Aubrey Clover,” said Emma.

“I worship your cousin’s plays,” said Edmond. “Style, class, beauty, wit... I can go on forever talking about him. Yes, please,

I would very much like to meet him. And of course, Miss Dean is an incredible actress, and does full justice to his plays. Such talent. Next to her, Glamora is... well, I don't know what she is like, but honestly, I can't stand the woman. On top of everything else, do you know she made great friends with the Bishop's wife? I had to sit with them for an entire evening at the Bishop's hotel. They gave me practically nothing to eat."

"Well, that explains a lot," said Emma. "I have never met the Bishop or his wife, but I understand that she is a Beast."

Tea was served under the trees, the unusually warm weather making it a real pleasure. Miss Merriman felt a deep gratitude to Providence that for once had consented to give the tired English people a real summer. Of course, there were those who complained that it was too hot and dry, but all sensible people appreciated the warmth and the deep blue sky. The nasturtiums that Sally had so cleverly used instead of bedding begonias glowed under the sun, and the Green River, that marvellous grass path created so long ago, meandered beautifully into the distance.

Glamora Tudor came down a little late, making an entrance into the garden. She wore a distinctive red and black New Look dress, which unfortunately emphasized a waist that was no longer the eighteen inch phenomenon, so widely publicized when she played the Southern belle in the film *Lincoln, My Beloved* with her then leading man, Bob Flint, telling the story of beautiful Tara, Abraham Lincoln's estranged love from Atlanta, whose stormy relationship with Lincoln was the real reason behind the Civil War. She probably looks her best under artificial lights, thought Jessica. The bright sunlight shows too many tiny wrinkles. Herself wearing simple though elegant country clothes and flat, good leather shoes, Jessica decided that knowing Glamora Tudor helped one feel better about aging gracefully. Of course it wouldn't happen for many years, but Jessica made a pact with herself that when she got older she would never try to pretend to be an ingénue, nor wear a red orange lipstick.

“Miss Tudor,” said Lord Pomfret, “a relative of mine is coming to stay for a few days, just to meet you.”

“Is that so?” Glamora Tudor looked coy, lowering her long dark eyelashes. “Who is the gentleman?”

“It’s a lady, actually,” said Lord Pomfret. “You may have heard her name. She is the writer, Hermione Rivers.”

“Never heard of her,” said Glamora Tudor, obviously disappointed that it was a mere woman who wished to know her. “I don’t have much time to read books, what with all the *millions* of scripts I am being sent every day.”

“She gets no scripts,” whispered Edmond to Emma. “They are sent to her agent. She would not have a clue which one to choose...” Emma laughed. “Let’s go take a walk in the garden,” she suggested. “May we go for a walk, Cousin Jessica? We have both finished our teas.”

“Certainly,” said Jessica, smiling at the girl’s good manners. “A nice child,” said Miss Tudor, looking suspiciously as the girl was leading her own leading man away.

“Hardly a child,” said Jessica. “At her age I was already on the stage, vamping the audience.”

“But it was different for you, Jessica. You were an *Actress*,” said Miss Tudor peevishly. “We are exposed to the world much earlier than your little country girls...”

“Well,” said Lord Pomfret, “I might as well warn you, Miss Tudor. Mrs. Rivers wants to show you her latest book. She thinks it has the perfect part for you.”

“Oh, they all do,” sighed Glamora and looked at her host through her eyelashes. “They all do. They never let me rest...”

The next day the party was lingering over breakfast, except Glamora, who did not come down at all. According to the housemaid, who was sent down with a message, she preferred to have her breakfast in bed.

“Miss Tudor doesn’t hold with early hours,” said the housemaid in a voice that revealed her deep admiration.

“That is fine,” said Jessica. “We shall see her at lunch, I hope.”

“Yes,” said the housemaid. “And Miss Jessica, she has such a lovely nightgown, purple flowers and lace.”

“Really?” said Emma, interested.

“Yes, miss, and she was putting on that red lipstick. I told Cook, and she said she was set to buy it if they already have it in the Barchester stores.”

“Thank you,” said Jessica, horrified at the thought of Cook wearing the orange-red lipstick. “You can take the tray now.”

“I wonder what she will wear for the Feet,” said the housemaid, as she was leaving with the tray. “Lovely silk I’m sure.”

“She means the Fete,” explained Jessica, noticing Edmond’s perplexed look.

The morning was beautiful, light shimmered on the trees, birds made the usual loud noises, and the scent of suitable flowers filled the air. Nature, gleefully waiting for the opportunity to ruin the Fete with summer storms and high winds, decided to be deceptively gracious for a while.

“Cousin Jessica, Edmond wants to meet Cousin Aubrey,” said Emma. “He is interested in writing plays.”

“Now this is strange,” said Jessica. “Glamora told me that Edmond, or Hank, as she calls him, has his heart set on the cinema, and she is considering breaking her usual rule and getting him a role for a second film with her.”

Edmond became pale with apprehension. “No, I never wanted to make a second film,” he said. “Heaven forbid. I want to be a playwright”

“Well, well,” said Jessica mildly. “Another complication. And look – a car is coming. The biggest complication is arriving – Mrs. Hermione Rivers is sure to be in it. Let the games begin...”

Chapter Two

“I can just see you,” said Mrs. Rivers enthusiastically, “standing on the open air car on the Orient Express, the wind blowing through your dark auburn hair. Nestor Chardonay, still unaware that you have boarded the train, is inside, drinking a glass of sherry before dinner, when he suddenly turns his head and sees you, silhouetted against the pink sunset sky. Of course I will insist on Technicolor, no black and white for this film.”

“But Mrs. Rivers, is there an open air car on the Orient Express?” asked Emma. Mrs. Rivers seemed irritated by the question. “I believe so, but I will check, Miss Lover. I am always careful that My Work is accurate in all its details. Of course, we can always make it an open window.”

“But then she would not be properly silhouetted against the pink sunset sky, Mrs. Rivers.” said Edmond. “The window frame will interfere with the effect you want. If I were writing this scene, I would have her sitting in the dining car, her face lit from below with a single candle, showing its perfect beauty. And perhaps a white carnation or a gardenia in a crystal vase nearby...”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Mrs. Rivers, looking at Edmond with a new interest. “It sounds quite dramatic.”

“I remember a photograph of Marlene Dietrich, just like that, but in black and white... yes, I think it is a very good idea, Edmond,” said Jessica.

“Did you say dark auburn hair?” asked Miss Tudor suddenly. “I only had it once, when I played an Irish heroine. I am not sure auburn goes with my eyes...”

“If you agree to act in the film, Miss Tudor, I will gladly change the auburn hair to any colour you prefer,” said Mrs. Rivers. “At least read the book to help you decide.” Glamora ignored her and examined a perfect fingernail with care.

“The book is fascinating, Mrs. Rivers,” said Miss Merriman hastily, trying to save the situation. “I particularly liked the time they spend in Vienna. I was there, once, with Lady Pomfret, not the current one, but my Lady Edith Pomfret, years ago. Your book evokes the place perfectly.” Mrs. Rivers looked gratified and smiled at Miss Merriman. “I spent a whole day there, Merry, researching the city,” she said. “One wants to be authentic, of course.”

“Have you prepared your speech for tomorrow, Miss Tudor?” asked Lord Pomfret. Glamora smiled at him sweetly, continuing to ignore Mrs. Rivers who was still waiting for her answer. “Yes, of course, it’s the same speech I gave two years ago when I opened a hospital. It’s quite the same thing, really, opening a Fete; I just had to change the names. I also used it last year, in a ceremony connected to the Queen’s coronation.”

As so few people were gathered around the table, the conversation was general, and the silence following this stunning statement became uncomfortable, since even Jessica was at a loss for an answer. Everyone tried to imagine how a hospital speech could be changed into a coronation speech, and then into a fete speech, without much success. Miss Merriman, with her infinite tact, decided to change the subject.

“Miss Lover, I understand you have almost finished school? Would you tell us what are your plans for the future?”

“I am interested in fashion, Miss Merriman. I would love to go to school in Paris, if my parents can arrange it for me.”

“I am sure that between your parents and us, darling, we will manage that,” said Jessica kindly. “Emma has great talents in this direction, we all believe.”

“Why, thank you, Cousin Jessica,” said Emma, a little embarrassed. “I don’t know about talents, but I am so interested in anything that has to do with clothes or costumes. I have thought about costume design for the stage as a possibility, too, but either way I must have the right training if I want to get a good job.”

“She reads all the Madame Koska books,” said Jessica, laughing. “I remember giving her the first one when she was ten. She was always dressing up in my stage clothes.”

“This is true,” said Emma. “I am not much of a reader, but Madame Koska books tell so much about *clothes*, so I can’t put them down.”

“Mrs. Morland will probably be coming to the Fete,” said Lord Pomfret. “Have you ever met her, Miss Lover?”

Emma flushed with joy. “You mean I can meet Mrs. Morland, Lord Pomfret? The authoress of the Madame Koska books? Really?”

“I can’t see why not,” said Lord Pomfret kindly. “She is an old friend.”

“Maybe you could design for the cinema, too,” said Glamora, who had not been listening and obviously followed her own train of thought, if what was going through her mind could be called that. “Sometimes the costumes are stunning. I’ll never forget the dresses that were designed for me for the film about Nefertiti, the Egyptian beauty, and Julius Caesar...”

“I thought Julius Caesar was associated with Cleopatra, Miss Tudor,” said Edmond, surprised.

“Well, yes, Julius Caesar was in love with Cleopatra, too, and I made a film about their romance as well, but this was much earlier in my career, so perhaps he had forgotten Cleopatra by the time he met Nefertiti. I really don’t remember the historical part too well, you have so much to learn when you try to memorize a script, you can’t just sit there and read history. But *The Sun Queen* was about the young Widow Queen Nefertiti, who was bravely trying to rebuild Egypt after the death of her beloved husband, Akhenaton, who worshipped the sun god and had been killed by the priests of the other gods. There was a terrible rebellion and they destroyed many cities. Nefertiti squashes the rebellion with the help of her old friend, Alexander the Great, who then goes off to conquer the rest of the world, and she thinks she will never love another man, and will devote her life to Her Country. And then Julius Caesar comes to Egypt, and he is so handsome and gracious, let’s see, who played him? I

think my leading man was Brett Montague... no, he was in that Italian film... I know, it was Ricardo Flint, at least I am almost sure, and she falls in love with him and together they build all the pyramids of Egypt but then she falls off the Sphinx in a horrible accident and dies. I had such a marvellous dying scene, lying in the sand and telling Julius that the fate of Egypt was in his hands, but he can't live without me and so he commits suicide by letting an adder, which is a kind of a snake, bite his hand, and we die together. Such costumes, Miss Lover, you cannot imagine. I must show you the photographs sometime."

While the rest of the party sat with their mouths slightly open with amazement at this innovative rendition of ancient history, Emma, who was splendidly uneducated since she was attending one of the best schools in London, was thrilled by the thought of the marvellous Egyptian attire. "Oh, please, Miss Tudor, I would so much love to see them!" she said enthusiastically.

"I don't have many here, of course, just one album that I carry everywhere," said Glamora, gratified by the young girl's enthusiasm. "I'll show it to you right after dinner, if you like. Of course there are costumes from other films there as well."

"That is even better," said Emma. "I can't wait."

After dinner, as they were having coffee in the drawing room, Glamora said, "Hank, darling, would you go up to my bedroom and get the album from the top left drawer?" Edmond got up and went to Miss Tudor's bedroom without saying anything.

For some reason, Emma did not like it. Not that what Edmond did or did not do mattered, oh no, certainly not, but thinking that he would possibly be fingering the purple flowers and lace nightgown and other intimate apparel that were probably resting in this top drawer, and which Emma clearly knew were magnificent beyond description, did not please her. Before she could think any further about it, Edmond returned with the album, and handed it to Miss Tudor.

Emma forgot everything in her ecstasy over the costumes. Not only ancient Egyptian garb resided in this precious album,

but everything from antiquity to the modern age, including Biblical, Medieval, Renaissance, Victorian, and some epochs that really could not be pinpointed, even by Emma whose sole interest in history concentrated on clothes. She was particularly enchanted by a form-fitting dress of shiny silk that ended as heavy waves lying on the ground around Glamora's hidden shoes, and topped with a headdress that featured many feathers that were almost as tall as Miss Tudor. The immense jewellery added to the mystique. "This was from *Princess of Neptune*," said Miss Tudor. "One of the two science fiction films I made. The other was *Amazon Tiger Queen of Venus*, but I don't have any of the costumes here. I will show them to you next time we meet, Miss Lover."

The next day, after lunch, the party proposed to go to the Fete. "I will stay here," said Mrs. Rivers. "I have to devote some time to My Work."

"Very well," said Jessica. "A little peace and quiet will probably result in some very exciting scenes, Mrs. Rivers. Where will the spirit lead you this time?"

"To Hollywood," said Mrs. Rivers, smiling. "I have a new idea about the world of films I am simply longing to write..." Glamora shot a glance at her but said nothing. "A middle-aged actress with an illustrious career behind her, but still very lovely and young-looking."

"And a most handsome young actor falls for her?" asked Jessica with a perfectly serious face.

"Yes, how did you guess?" asked Mrs. Rivers, genuinely surprised. "That is exactly what I had in mind."

"Fascinating," said Jessica. "I will make a point of reading it." Glamora smiled at Mrs. Rivers with a complete lack of interest. "How nice," she said, and navigated out of the dining room, holding Lord Pomfret's arm tightly, which by then, after one day of Glamora's tender attachment, began to hurt quite badly. But of course he said nothing at all, and led his guests to the car.

“Since Hermione is not coming,” said Lord Pomfret, “we can easily squash into one car. Edmond, as you are so big, let’s dispense with good manners and place you next to me, while our three slender ladies will fit comfortably enough in the back seat.” Everyone laughed and piled into Lord Pomfret’s not very elegant car.

They arrived quite early, but many visitors were already enjoying themselves by looking at the exhibits of rabbits, chickens, and flowers. There were also displays of peasant embroideries, mostly rather dirty Mixo-Lyidian creations, but also some Greek and Italian, sent by various Barchester expatriates. Glamora immediately swept Edmond away and onto the platform, but Lord Pomfret remained on the ground to arrange a later meeting place with Jessica. They planned to gather at the tea tent.

Suddenly Lord Pomfret put his hand in his pocket and looked unusually dismayed. “Blast this woman,” he said to Jessica. “Who?” asked Jessica, surprised. “Hermione, of course,” said Lord Pomfret furiously. “Merry typed a list of Miss Tudor’s accomplishments for me, to mention when I present her. I don’t remember a single blessed film she made. And yesterday, Hermione borrowed it for a few seconds, she said, just to refresh her memory before discussing her book with Miss Tudor. She never returned it and I forgot.”

Jessica laughed. “Try to remember the current *Fever in Peru* and then mention the one about Nefertiti and Julius Caesar,” she said. “What was the title? Something like *The Widow of Egypt*? No, that sounds awful, it could not be. I know. It was *The Moon Queen*.”

“Moon? In Egypt it was probably the sun, rather,” said Lord Pomfret. “Very likely *The Sun Queen*. I’ll remember that. *Fever in Peru* and *The Sun Queen*.” He kept mumbling the titles to himself as he was approaching the platform.

The crowd gathered in front of the platform and most people sat down. Everyone looked with admiration at Miss Tudor, who was sitting in the middle, between Lord Pomfret and Sir Edmund Pridham. She really did look magnificent in her wonderful New

Look outfit, with a flowing skirt, a short, belted jacket and a soft though tailored blouse, and the women stared at her stockings, which were the exact shade of soft violet-grey as her skirt, as dictated by Monsieur Dior. Edmond sat on the other side of Lord Pomfret, and tried to look charming and hide his embarrassment.

Cook settled herself comfortably on two chairs to better distribute her considerable weight, which she nevertheless carried with extreme lightness and agility. Next to her sat her young niece, named Rita after one of Glamora's rival stars, and the housemaid whose name we have not yet invented and possibly will never have the occasion to do so.

"Did you see her shoes, Rita?" asked the housemaid with reverence. "Such high heels. I would fall down."

"Yes, I seen them," said Rita. "Lovely. I got a book from the libery last week about this great lady and she is wearing such shoes for a ball, and Lord Eastbrook is ever so charming and he tells her how much he admires her shoes."

"And what happens next?" asked the housemaid, holding her breath and obviously hoping for the worst.

"He is seduking her in the conservatory," said Rita. "And then she has a baby and her Cruel Father sends her away in the rain and storm."

"Why would he send her away?" asked the housemaid, surprised. "A baby is nothing. My sister just had her third, and the father had to return to his regiment, to keep Old Staylin in his place, he said. Lovely man."

"The gentry is different," said Rita knowledgeably. "They must be married first."

"But I wanted to know what the lord did in the conservatory," said the housemaid, sticking to the point.

"He gave her diamonds," said Rita. "They always give diamonds to the ladies."

"My sister never got diamonds," said the housemaid. "He did give her some nice stockings, though. Real nylon."

"Then she wasn't rightly seduked," said Rita with conviction. "You must have diamonds for that. Or at least rubies. I read ever so many books about it in the libery so I know."

“That will be quite enough, girls,” said Cook severely. “One would think no one had brought you up properly.” But her words lacked conviction because she was wearing “Hibiscus Frenzy,” the red-orange lipstick which had already come, happily, to the Barchester stores. Besides, she listened to the seduction story with interest. “Rita,” she added thoughtfully, “did the lady change her shoes with them high heels when she was sent away in the rain and storm?”

“Oh, yes, Auntie. They took away her pretty clothes, even the silk dress with no back, and the pearls and the diamonds, and the shoes, and made her wear the housemaid’s clothes,” said Rita sadly. The housemaid naturally took offence, but no one noticed because Lord Pomfret got up to make his introduction.

One look at Lord Pomfret and Jessica knew he had forgotten everything regarding Glamora’s films. He looked helplessly at the audience, and saw, sitting at the front row, two very familiar faces. These were Miss Hampton, meticulously dressed in the perfect light tweeds and her amber cigarette holder dangling from her lips, and the slightly dishevelled Miss Bent, holding the leash of their faithful dog who was hiding under her chair. A smile lit Lord Pomfret’s tired face. He stepped off the stage, walked up to Miss Bent, and asked, “May I borrow your dog for a moment, Miss Bent?” The dog followed him, looking miserable but resigned, and Lord Pomfret picked him up in his arms. The dog leaned his very large head on Lord Pomfret’s arm and went to sleep.

“Ladies and gentlemen, he started. “This wonderful dog has had many names. His name was changed again and again during the war, every time to celebrate someone who was particularly gallant. He was named Benes, Schuschnigg, Zog, Smigly-Rydz, and Mannerheim, among other names, and I remember them so well because I found them so touching at the time. As peace arrived with its own troubles, this dog’s loving owners, Miss Hampton and Miss Bent, felt that no one was gallant anymore. Briefly, they considered calling their dog after the great Mr. Churchill, but they changed their minds because they felt that

England had wronged our great leader, who had done so much for us, to such an extent that even calling their dog after him would not be enough. And so they resolved the quandary by simply naming the dog *Gallant*, and hoping that Gallantry will thus follow into our world. I think it will, and in many ways has already done so. Who can be more gallant than this great actress, Miss Glamora Tudor, who through war and peace, during our most difficult times, has given the English people so much joy? Braving jungle, desert, and mountain, she has opened the past to us in her beautiful films, taken us into the future, and allowed us to escape from our harsh reality whenever we chose to attend the Barchester Cinema. And today, the gallant Miss Tudor has consented to open the Fete for us. Allow me, without further ado, to introduce her to you. Miss Glamora Tudor!”

The crowd roared. Glamora got up, smiling, and approached the podium. She had not listened to Lord Pomfret’s introduction, partly because she was rehearsing her speech, and partly because she never listened much to anyone. This was all to the good since she might have objected to being compared to a dog and to the fact that Lord Pomfret mentioned none of her films by name.

“I am so happy to be here and open the Fete,” said the famous actress. “It is always a joy to be able to make so many people happy and healthy and cure them. I hope this great new institution will be a permanent asset to this pleasant community. I am very interested in such things, since you might know that I have once made a film about the great nurse, Florence Nightingale, called *The Lamp in the Night*, with Hedge Thompson as Edward, the Prince of Wales, who was secretly in love with the great nurse, but was not allowed to marry her because his mother, Queen Victoria, objected. Therefore, I applaud the efforts of everyone involved with the new wonderful enterprise. Let’s have a great Fete, and enjoy ourselves!”

Some of the people, who did not know that Miss Tudor used the same speech at her last appearance, when she had opened a hospital, might have wondered what Florence Nightingale and her romances had to do with the Fete, but most of the audience roared again with even greater appreciation. What Glamora

Tudor said did not really matter. The public adored her all the more; they were so thrilled with their goddess just being there. And we must mention here that “Hibiscus Frenzy” became such a huge success that the American cosmetic firm would eventually hire Glamora to promote their new coloured mascaras, “Blue Enchantment,” “Green Flame,” and “Mists of Violets,” even though this will happen much later and such huge financial transactions are out of the scope of this modest work.

At this moment a figure was seen running toward the platform. Mrs. Hermione Rivers, realizing too late that she had forgotten to return Merry’s list of Miss Tudor’s accomplishments to Lord Pomfret, jumped into her car and drove as fast as she could to the Fete since underneath her silliness and pretence she was a kind hearted woman and did not want to embarrass either Lord Pomfret or Glamora. She was waving it wildly, but to her disappointment she realized that the damage was done and the people were dispersing to see the exhibits, drink tea, and generally enjoy themselves.

“Gillie, I am so very sorry,” she gasped, handing him the list. “It’s perfectly all right, Hermione,” he answered. “Gallant the Brave helped me.” He handed the dog’s leash to Miss Bent. Mrs. Rivers seemed confused, but since no one volunteered any additional explanation, she had to accept it. “Let us all go and have tea,” suggested Jessica with tact, looking at Mrs. Rivers’ flushed face. “We will probably run into many of our friends.”

Edmond, pleased that Glamora forgot to mention him to the crowd, joined Emma with great relief, but for some reason which was not clear to either of them she was not her usual friendly self. Of course, she said to herself, it does not matter at all, not in the least, but it seems a shame that such an intelligent young man should be a slave to the fading charms of Glamora Tudor, who seemed to have no sense at all despite the magnificent costumes. Why did Emma believe that Edmond had succumbed to Glamora’s charms is not clear to us, since he kept coming back to spend as much time as he could with Emma herself and avoided Glamora whenever it was possible to do so. But there is no accounting for what goes on in our minds, over which we

have no control at all. And so they started walking toward the tea tent.

“Lydia, darling!” Jessica suddenly cried, and a beautiful, stately, dark-haired woman turned toward them. Seeing Jessica, Lydia’s face lit with one of her rare and enchanting smiles, and they embraced. Emma was greatly impressed by Lydia’s looks and manners.

“How wonderful to see all of you,” said Lydia. “Edmond, you must come with me and say hello to Noel. We have not seen you for such a long time.”

“Miss Tudor, I would like to present Lady Merton to you. Of course, Lydia, Miss Tudor already knows Noel.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Lydia, shaking hands. “He had told me and I was looking forward to meeting you, Miss Tudor. Noel and I are great admirers of yours.” Which was not exactly true but was the right thing to say, we think. And this just shows how different Lady Noel Merton was from Miss Lydia Keith.

“And this is Miss Emma Lover, Lydia,” said Jessica. “Aubrey’s cousin. Oh, Noel, here you are. Come and meet everyone.”

Emma looked at the tall, graceful, elegant figure and knew at once that she had lost her heart for all eternity. Noel shook her hand kindly, and without paying much attention to the pretty child said something pleasant which Emma could barely hear because of the pounding of her heart. They strolled toward the tea tent, and every moment that passed strengthened her conviction that Noel was the most wonderful, amusing, entertaining, charming, and sophisticated man she had ever met. She fell in love in the most respectful way, of course, and continued to greatly admire Lydia’s august beauty and calm ways. But perhaps, Emma thought timidly, Lydia is too remote, too much like the Goddess Diana, whose toga Emma always found fascinating, to really give the charming and gregarious Noel the kind of attention he needs? Does she succeed in amusing him? Is he happy and well looked after? Life is so complicated, Emma thought, sadly. Though what were the

complications she was thinking about we cannot imagine, and she probably did not know either.

Chapter Three

“We must have someone place two tables together,” said Mrs. Rivers, who had quickly recovered her composure. It was a little difficult to arrange, since the only tables that were of the same height were used for tea urns, plates, and other paraphernalia. However, the lady who ran the tea tent asked the two boys who were her special helpers to put the urns and crockery on some crates and push the two tables together. She then served them a surprisingly good tea and even allowed them to judge for themselves how much sugar and milk they each wanted to use. Suddenly Lord Pomfret noticed an impressive presence, august if somewhat dishevelled, standing not too far away from their tables. Immediately he rose, and with his usual courtesy went to invite Mrs. Morland to join them. She was delighted to do so since she had lost Lord Stoke, who had brought her to the Fete, to a cowman from a village some distance from Barchester. Or, as cook, Rita, and the housemaid would say, a foreigner, and it would not help one bit if they knew how perfectly cow-minded he was, or even the best authority on contagious abortion in his village, because it stood to reason that a foreigner *was* a foreigner.

“How delightful, Mrs. Morland,” said Jessica. “I was hoping to run into you. And I would like you to meet Aubrey’s niece, Miss Emma Lover, who has been reading about Madame Koska since she was ten years old.”

Mrs. Morland, flustered as usual when anyone mentioned her books in public, shook hands kindly with Emma who was speechless with reverence and awe.

“I am very happy that you read my books,” said the famous authoress. “You would not know it, of course, but I really started to write by accident, because my husband died and I had to earn money to educate my four sons. However,” she added with genuine surprise, “why do you like them?”

“Oh, Mrs. Morland, the clothes!” Emma said breathlessly, forgetting her shyness since she was discussing her favourite

subject. "I adore the clothes you write about. I have been dreaming about some of the creations Madame Koska's mannequins wear."

"Yes," said Mrs. Morland thoughtfully, sticking a wayward tortoise shell pin more securely into her hair. "When I started writing, I researched the reading public's taste and found out that the best selling subjects were racing, murder and sport, but that most women preferred reading about clothes to all other subjects. My first secretary, Miss Todd, decided to work for me for this reason, even though she had an offer to work for a real author, Mr. George Knox, who writes scholarly biographies, and whom she later married anyway."

"I think you are a very real author, Mrs. Morland," said Emma shyly. "Your books are much more interesting than any biography. I do not much care for a story about someone who had died hundreds of years ago. I can see Miss Tudor's films if I want history, and at least she wears those wonderful costumes so it's less boring. I just love your books, Mrs. Morland." Naturally, at that, Mrs. Morland flushed and lost a few hairpins, but at this time she was claimed by Lydia, and Noel, who up to this moment was doing his best to carry on a flirtation with Miss Tudor, turned to speak to Emma. Glamora was a disappointment to him, her flirtation technique was heavy-handed, self-centred, and she was utterly lacking in the necessary light-hearted touch as possessed, for example, by his old friend Lavinia Brandon. Therefore, he did not mind talking to the pretty child. They carried on an interesting enough conversation about Aubrey's plays, of which they both were very fond.

For some reason, Edmond felt irritated. What was Noel, who to him seemed to be an older uncle, doing? He was much too charming, much too interested in Emma, and he seemed to look steadily into her eyes! This is ridiculous, thought Edmond. Noel is old enough to be Emma's father, he should not lead the innocent child on like that! But it seemed that Emma not only did not mind, but kept looking back at Noel with admiration, and listened to his amusing conversation with a rapt smile.

Disgusting, thought Edmond. I must put a stop to this before it's too late.

"Emma," he said across the table. "Would you like to take a turn on the roundabout after tea?"

Emma hesitated. She wanted to spend as much time as possible with the object of her admiration, but she also adored the roundabout.

"How I used to love it," said Lydia wistfully. "I always insisted on bagging the ostrich. Now it just makes me sick."

"I'll ride the ostrich for you," said Edmond gallantly. "And Emma can take a horse, or the cock, if she likes."

A strain of roundabout music wafted through the air. "Would you believe," said Lydia to Noel, "they are still playing the same song? Do you remember, Noel? It's 'Farewell, my Bluebell.'" She sighed.

"Yes, my love," said Noel. "And it escaped your attention a little while ago when they played my own favourite, 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee.' I'll never forget how sick I was when you made me and Hilary Grant ride in the swan, and that delightful song went on and on, and you and Delia Brandon rode your birds wildly." Lydia laughed and felt better, for her present life with Noel and the children was far better than the past, whatever nostalgia tries to dictate to us, and it generally succeeds in making us unhappy, for no reason at all.

"I can't bear the roundabout either," said Glamora Tudor to Lydia. "As a young girl in London I used to love it, and my friends and I would ride as long as our money lasted. I suppose one grows out of it as time goes by." As she spoke her eyes grew dreamy, thinking about the young, poor, aspiring actress with nothing but her beauty and her determination to take her into fame and fortune, which despite her lack of education and being not too bright, she had gloriously achieved. And that is something that is worth the respect of all thinking persons, even if we do not admire the films themselves.

After making a very good tea, Edmond and Emma rose and went to the roundabout. Glamora looked after them, her expression blank but a little sad. Since Miss Merriman was not

there, no one seemed to notice, which was probably a good thing.

The roundabout had been working merrily from a very early hour, when Mr. Packer's helpers carried in the ostriches, aeroplane bodies, cocks, horses, swans, and all the other animals, vegetables, and minerals that comprised the bestiary, and attached them to the brightly polished spiral brass poles. It presented a very cheerful sight, and when Mr. Packer poked his head out of his oily machinery to take the money, Emma was delighted to see that the ostrich and the cock, side by side, had no riders and looked just as if they were waiting for Emma and Edmond to ride them into the sunset.

"I much prefer riding a bird," said Emma, "or a horse. I am not too fond of the boats."

"Neither am I," said Edmond, looking at the swan, which was really a kind of a canoe with a swan's head and shoulders growing out of its prow. "I suppose it is meant to be romantic, but I think it looks silly. And away we go!" The music started again, and sounded just as happy and enticing as it did so many years ago when young Lydia Keith was having such a fine time on the roundabout.

"Interesting," said Jessica to no one in particular. Everyone was reading the mail at the breakfast table, except Glamora who, as usual, was having her breakfast in bed.

"What is interesting, Jessica?" asked Lord Pomfret curiously. Even though he had become very friendly with Jessica and Aubrey, he still imagined that the famous actress and the playwright led a mysterious and intriguing life, and to tell the truth, so did Lady Pomfret.

"This is a letter from Aubrey. He has signed a contract with Goldwasser-Mammoth-Guttenberg Studios. I am impressed; working with the great GMG is going to be rather thrilling."

"What are they producing for Mr. Clover?" asked Mrs. Rivers curiously. "And Miss Dean, are you going to be in it?" If she felt a little envious, it did not show at all, much to her credit.

“They will turn his play *Dance We Shall* into a big production musical,” said Jessica, laughing. “I can’t imagine how, but why not? Their largesse is legendary. As for me, no, I won’t be acting in it. They need a real movie star, who is used to such productions. Aubrey can become anything he wants, he is a chameleon, so he would fit in with these film moguls. But I am incurably *The Stage*, to my detriment, I suppose. So Sarah Siddons, little Henry and I will have a marvellous American vacation when Aubrey starts working on the film, and then spend some time in my parents’ house. And another thing. Mr. Goldwasser is coming with Aubrey to England. He has some business here, unrelated to Aubrey and his play.”

“Will he stay with you?” asked Emma, visions of long and interesting conversations with the film mogul already gleaming in her eyes. In the brief moment that had passed between her question and Jessica’s answer, she distinctly heard Mr. Goldwasser, who for some reason looked exactly like Cary Grant, say, “Miss Lover, you must come to Hollywood. I am sure Miss Edith Head would love to hire such a talented young designer as yourself, and even though she may not be working for us right now, she will be thrilled with you. And in addition, I will personally introduce you to the GMG design department. Your future is secure.” Of course Emma would hesitate demurely and explain that she had not as yet completed (or really, even started) her professional training and education, but Mr. Goldwasser would dismiss her scruples, place a trunk call to Mrs. Goldwasser in Hollywood (who looked like Doris Day and was dressed in a long, green chiffon negligee), and arrange to have Emma stay with them at the mansion whenever she came. Her dream was cut short just as she was stepping into the heart-shaped swimming pool, of course made of lavender and green marble, by Jessica’s good-natured laugh. “No, Emma, of course I will offer him hospitality, but I suspect that people like Mr. Goldwasser stay at the best hotels in London,” she said, “but yes, darling, you can meet him if you wish.”

Emma was so thrilled by this new opportunity that she immediately decided to sacrifice not only her deep love and

commitment to Noel Merton, but also her constant and irrational irritation over Edmond's slavish attachment to Miss Tudor. A heavenly romantic thought crossed her mind that as a victim of love's cruelty she would renounce all personal connections and devote her entire life and energy to Her Work. But immediately she thought that this sounded like something Mrs. Rivers would say, so she dismissed it. Though why she thought Mrs. Rivers sacrificed anything to Her Work is not clear to us. Mrs. Rivers dearly loved her children, Julian and Phoebe, constantly meddled with their lives, and liked her husband in a rather detached way, so no one could say that she had renounced anything. Still, having discouraged such thoughts, Emma happily accepted Edmond's offer to take some sandwiches and go for a long walk, promising everyone that they would be back for tea.

Lord Pomfret apologized to the ladies and explained that he had to go to an urgent meeting, but would be back for tea, too. They did not particularly mind, since we all know that ladies, even though they like and respect the gentlemen, are much happier left to themselves, so they can talk about sensible things. However, this time the ladies dispersed to their various occupations as well. Mrs. Rivers disappeared to devote some time to her writing, and Jessica went to her room to answer Aubrey's letter. So when Miss Tudor came down, no one was there to observe her habitual grand entrance other than Miss Merriman, who was peacefully having another cup of tea.

"Everyone had to leave for various obligations, Miss Tudor," she said. "May I offer you a cup of tea?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss Merriman," said Glamora. "I always like a second cup of tea in the morning. I have never acquired a taste for morning coffee, despite my long stays in America, where they take it for granted that you want coffee first thing in the morning. They do have divine breakfasts there, though."

"I quite agree," said Miss Merriman. "Tea in the morning is my preference as well. A cup of coffee is very nice after dinner, though. And speaking of America, Miss Dean has just received very good news from Mr. Clover. He has signed a contract with Goldwasser-Mammoth-Guttenberg, and they are going to

produce a musical based on one of his plays. Also, Mr. Goldwasser himself will be travelling to England with Mr. Clover, for some other business.”

To Miss Merriman’s amazement, Miss Tudor did not show the slightest sign of surprise. “Yes, I know all about it,” said Miss Tudor. “I have had a communiqué from Mr. Goldwasser already and he is thinking of casting me in Mr. Clover’s film, *Dance We Shall*. I know Mr. Goldwasser well, by the way. He produced the two science fiction films I told Miss Lover about.”

“I do wish I had seen them,” said Miss Merriman truthfully. Because strangely enough, Miss Merriman, despite her education, reserve, tact, and breeding, dearly loved science fiction and detective stories in the form of books and films, though unfortunately her busy life had allowed little time for the cinema.

“They may be re-released, I am told,” said Glamora. “And I do hope you will come with us to the premieres in London.”

“How kind of you, Miss Tudor,” said Miss Merriman, surprised to see the actress behaving so pleasantly. But then Miss Tudor was really a simple London girl at heart, and when men were not present and she had no need to vamp anyone, or an opportunity for self-advertising did not present itself, she could be quite human, which Miss Merriman had begun to understand.

“Am I correct that you plan to leave us tomorrow, Miss Tudor?”

“Yes, tomorrow morning, I am afraid.”

“Everyone will miss you, we have enjoyed having you so much,” said Miss Merriman.

“Thank you, Miss Merriman. I will miss all of you too, I had such a charming time. But I do hope to return in the not too far-off future,” said Glamora, “now that I have made such nice new friends here. Lord Pomfret mentioned that the Countess would love to meet me. I certainly am sorry she was in Italy while I visited.”

“What about Mr. Keith? Is he going to London with you?”

“No, he suddenly decided to spend some time with his relations, the Mertons,” said Glamora. “Later he will join me for

the promotions. The studio is expecting to draw large crowds, I hear, and *Fever in Peru* should do very well, I hope. I do wish I could employ him in a second film, Miss Merriman. With Hank's talent and his good looks, I think he could be a great success, but the studios object to any of my leading men starring in more than one film with me. You can't imagine how tiring it is, getting used to a new co-star every time." She sounded genuinely sad and suddenly Miss Merriman wondered if Glamora was more deeply fond of the younger man than anyone suspected. If so, she felt very sorry for the famous actress, remembering a far-off night when she had cried after hearing that young Gillie Foster, of whom she had grown very fond, had become engaged to the eminently suitable Miss Wicklow, the sister of the estate agent. Yes, Glamora's fame and beauty could not change the fact that she was middle-aged and Edmond was young enough to be her son. But such things pass, as Miss Merriman reminded herself, and she quickly regained her composure.

"Where is Hank, by the way?" asked Glamora.

"He went with Miss Lover for a walk," said Miss Merriman.

"Oh," said Glamora thoughtfully. "Yes, of course. He seems to like her very much."

Miss Merriman's kind heart was filled with pity. She now knew her suspicions were correct. "She is a child, Miss Tudor," she said. "I doubt that a sophisticated young man, with such opportunities as you have given him, would take a real interest in a schoolgirl, no matter how charming."

"I hope you are right," said Glamora with an almost inaudible sigh, and added quickly, perhaps too quickly, "I wouldn't want him to attach himself so early and lose his bright future. I take a great interest in his career."

"You are quite right," said Miss Merriman. "I completely agree that becoming attached too early in life is quite detrimental to a young man's career. Well, I had better go and ascertain everything is properly packed for you, Miss Tudor. Would you like to sit in the garden?" Glamora agreed and was comfortably installed in a deck chair and supplied with the latest detective

book by Lisa Bedale, called *The Moonlit Corpse*, and although the book was enthralling, Glamora soon succumbed to the warm day and went to sleep just as Gerry Marston, the famous detective, was about to enter, alone and unarmed, the utterly deserted and horribly quiet carnival grounds where the murderer was sure to lurk during that fateful night.

In the meantime, Emma and Edmond walked briskly over the beautiful countryside. All sorts of flowers and birds, quite appropriate to the pleasant warm August day, enhanced the beauty of the land, and although both Emma and Edmond were completely ignorant about botany or zoology, they tried to recognize the bird calls, without much success.

“I will be staying with Lydia and Noel, starting tomorrow,” said Edmond. “Could you persuade Miss Dean to drive you there and have tea on your way to London?”

Emma’s heart beat faster when Noel’s name was mentioned, but she was very careful not to show it. “I’ll ask Cousin Jessica,” she said. “I am not sure what her plans are, exactly, but I would love to come to tea and see Lady Merton. She is really wonderful.”

“Yes, Lydia is my favourite cousin,” said Edmond, “and Noel is very nice, too. And best of all, I won’t see Miss Tudor for at least two weeks. After that, I only need to meet her for the promotional appearances, and then I am a free man. We must meet in London, Emma, and remember, you promised to introduce me to Mr. Clover. I can’t wait to meet him.”

“I thought you enjoyed Miss Tudor’s company very much,” said Emma. “After all, she is such a beautiful woman, and so elegant.”

“And old enough to be my mother,” said Edmond without a trace of chivalry. “I have nothing to say to her, and yet she keeps wanting to be admired. It’s a strain.”

“Age means nothing,” said Emma, thinking about Noel, who was certainly old enough to be her father. “When you really like someone, you don’t think about such a trivial thing.”

“Perhaps,” said Edmond, “but Miss Tudor can be difficult. She is always... I sometimes wonder if... it’s possible that... ah, well, never mind. In a few weeks all that will not matter, and hopefully she will focus her attentions on her next leading man, whoever the poor fellow may be.”

Miss Tudor came down early to tea, and found Mrs. Rivers already in the garden. “Shall we take a little walk while we are waiting, Miss Tudor?”

“Yes, certainly,” said Glamora. “I do love the country. Such flowers.”

“I must tell you, Miss Tudor,” said Mrs. Rivers pleasantly as they started strolling up the Green River, for once exhibiting the natural charm that so rarely showed among her literary airs and pretensions. “Even though you refuse to do the film from my current novel, I am still grateful to you. Last night I suddenly had an Inspiration, and it’s all thanks to you.”

“Really?” said Miss Tudor with a bored look. “What was the inspiration?”

“I am going to write a novel about a great film actress, who had had an illustrious career for over twenty-five years. She acted with many co-stars, all of them talented and good looking. She is secretly married to a great theatre producer of the London Stage, and she won’t let anyone know about it because she wishes to maintain her status of a romantic lead. They are often separated, so they sadly drift apart...”

Glamora looked at her with a blank expression. “Go on,” she said.

“Well,” said Mrs. Rivers enthusiastically, “even though she still loves her husband, she feels neglected. He is always in the theatre, always working. Then she meets a young actor, who appeals to her so much that she feels he is her true soul mate. The young man is of course madly in love with her, how could he help it? They carry on a lovely romance, meeting secretly at various beautiful spots, walking in the moonlight, sometimes holding hands, but of course always chaste. She almost succumbs to his entreaties to elope with him and start a new life

in some remote country. However, at the last moment the actress realizes how wrong it would be to go on with this relationship. Yes, she loves the actor, but he is too young, and the relationship could not last with happiness for both. Besides, she is really faithful to her husband at heart. She heroically gives up the film she was going to do with the young actor, a film that could have been the crowning glory of her career, and selflessly appoints a young ingénue of great beauty, purity and kindness as his co-star; she knows that the young actress truly loves the actor and such an alliance would be most suitable for both. The scene of renunciation, when the great actress nobly tells her soul mate to try to love the young actress and be good to her forever, should be quite dramatic. Alone, the actress goes on a bittersweet cruise to Tahiti, there to reunite with her husband, who is waiting to have a second honeymoon with the wife he never really stopped loving, all the while her thoughts lingering on her lost love...

“Mrs. Rivers, I had never really refused to work on your book,” Glamora interrupted, her face so utterly white that the red-orange lipstick stood out quite horribly, and two patches of rouge showed right under the perfect cheekbones. “As a matter of fact, I have just decided to do it. Why not send the book to my agent? And tell him I am extremely interested in filming it?”

“Why Miss Tudor, thank you!” exclaimed Mrs. Rivers. “I am more than delighted and very grateful for your change of mind, but what is the matter? You suddenly look very pale! Are you feeling faint? It must be the heat. Come and sit down.”

Glamora followed her, saying nothing, and sat down on the lawn chair, her eyes closed. Mrs. Rivers was puzzled, even mystified, and for once sincerely worried about the actress’s sudden illness, so much so that she did not concentrate on her own unexpected and inexplicable good luck in landing her for the film. She was about to walk to the house and get a glass of water, when luckily the housemaid started bringing the tea and she could quickly pour a reviving cup for Glamora. The actress drank it gratefully, the colour slowly returning to her face, and said, “I imagine you would be willing to work on the script with

our regular script writers? It's important that the dialogue should sound just like the book, for mutual promotion."

"Oh, yes, of course, Miss Tudor. I would love to."

"But won't it take you away from your regular writing, Mrs. Rivers?" asked Glamora.

Surprised at the actress's sudden concern and interest, Mrs. Rivers was truly gratified. "My Other Work will wait, Miss Tudor, while we work on Our New Project. It is going to be A Very Important Film, I believe."

"So you won't have time to concentrate on the new novel you have mentioned, I really don't quite remember now what it was about after being so dizzy suddenly..." said Glamora, eyeing the authoress with what seemed to Mrs. Rivers like suspicion, though she simply could not imagine what was the matter.

"Oh, the one about the great actress and her young soul mate. It will have to wait," said Mrs. Rivers. "Believe me, I will devote all my time to Our New Project, *Send Me No Lilies*. I will enjoy collaborating with you so much."

"We will need to find a new co-star," said Miss Tudor pensively.

"Why not try to have Mr. Keith again?" asked Mrs. Rivers. "He is just right. Nestor Chardonay is about twenty-eight in the book, but I am sure the make-up department can give Mr. Keith these extra few years. The heroine, Lady Fitz-Gardner, is about forty-five and extremely attractive, and of course she does not look her age at all. No one would take her to be forty-five."

Glamora stood up, fury in her face, and was about to say some terrible words when she suddenly seemed to think better of it and sat meekly down again, gazing at her fingernails. Mrs. Rivers, immersed in happy anticipation of the perfect film and the huge box office success, noticed absolutely nothing.

"Perhaps you are right," said Miss Tudor suddenly. "Why should I not have what I want, for a change? I always give in to the studios, but not this time, I am so tired of these endless changes. Yes, I will have Hank in this film, Mrs. Rivers. On your recommendation." At that moment the rest of the party came to the tea table.

“Hank, darling,” said Glamora, looking her perfect self again. “I have marvellous news for you. I have consented to turn Mrs. Rivers’s book into a film, and I will insist that you play the part of Nestor Chardonay.”

Edmond looked at her, horror-stricken, tried to say something, but could not, and just opened and closed his mouth. Emma expected him to protest, to refuse, to talk about his own plans, but Edmond said nothing at all.

“He is overwhelmed with joy,” said Glamora complacently. “That is all right, Hank. You don’t have to thank me. We had such a good time together filming *Fever in Peru* that I simply can’t part from you quite yet.” She smiled at him sweetly. Emma looked at Jessica, who continued drinking her tea peacefully. Jessica felt she had fulfilled her obligations to Lord Pomfret admirably. The two ladies did not kill each other. Glamora even consented to act in Mrs. Rivers’ film version of *Send Me No Lilies*. Jessica did not understand why, though she began to have a vague suspicion that Glamora liked the young actor just a little bit too much and somehow thought he would fit in with this particular project. But there was no harm in such a little platonic affair, really. As for Edmond, what was so bad about getting plenty of money for a second film? And how the whole affair was like one of Mrs. Rivers perpetual themes, the middle-aged actress falling for the young actor, life imitating art... she wondered if Mrs. Rivers would ever write a book about Glamora and Edmond. Probably after *Send Me No Lilies* was completed. Jessica decided she would read it and see how close to life Mrs. Rivers would write. She looked at Emma and winked at her, not knowing that Emma felt completely betrayed.

Chapter Four

“Thank you so much for coming and bringing Edmond,” said Lydia as Jessica, Emma and Edmond were let in by Palmer who, for a change, rather approved of the visitors. But then she liked Edmond, whom she considered one of the family even if he did live in foreign parts, and she had heard so much about Jessica even though she herself never stooped so low as to attend a play. As for Emma, such a sweetly pretty young lady, it stood to reason that there would be opportunities to watch a little romance, dearly loved by Palmer despite her crusty exterior.

Noel was still in London, which temporarily made Emma very unhappy, but not for very long. She enjoyed the excellent tea Lydia provided, ate a great deal of cake, and made plans with Edmond about meeting in London and introducing him to Aubrey as soon as he came back from America.

Edmond enjoyed his two weeks of freedom and once removed from Glamora’s demands, felt as happy as a mouse that had gotten away from a very lovely cobra. He called Emma two or three times, just to make sure that indeed she would remember to mention him to Aubrey. No other reason to call, really, he thought, certainly no need to bother Emma who was probably very busy in London, visiting all the places, whatever they were, where she could see interesting clothes. However, one must be absolutely certain about meeting the important playwright. Why would such a quick business matter give rise to a conversation that lasted twenty minutes each time, we cannot say. Or for that matter, why Edmond didn’t ask Emma what he really wanted to know, namely, if she had seen Noel in London, is another question that merits clarification, but we cannot fathom it.

About two days before the end of Edmond’s visit, Jessica called Lydia with fresh and exciting news. Apparently, everything was moving very fast, Hollywood style. Aubrey had arrived, accompanied by the great Mr. Goldwasser, and the plans began to unfold.

“Can you imagine, Lydia, Mr. Goldwasser consented to film *Send Me No Lilies*; apparently he loves the book, and he plans to film it in England!”

“Why?” asked Lydia. “I thought they always filmed in studios and things, unless they went to some exotic location.”

“The new trend is to film in natural environments, and Mr. Goldwasser knows that our lovely gardens will bring authenticity, since the story takes place in England and Vienna. The conservatories should look English, and unlike American greenhouses, he said. Besides, filming in England will save him a great deal of money; I am not sure why, but he is convinced of that.”

“This is indeed very exciting,” said Lydia. “Do you know which part of England he means to use?”

Jessica burst out laughing. “You will never believe what I am going to tell you; it’s too divine for words. He has already made arrangements with Lady Norton!”

“Mr. Goldwasser knows Lady Norton?” asked Lydia, utterly bewildered. “Where could he possibly have met her?”

“He has never met her. But when Mrs. Rivers heard about his plans to film in England, she immediately recommended her dear friend, who owns gardens and conservatories that would be just perfect, and now Mr. Goldwasser wants to meet her.”

“I say,” said Lydia, her powerful mind sorting all these bits and pieces of information. “I have a wonderful idea. When you are ready to pick up Edmond for the promotions, come here for lunch, bring Mr. Goldwasser and Miss Tudor, and I’ll arrange with Mrs. Rivers and Lady Norton to meet you here. If you come to lunch, Lady Norton can show you her property while it’s still light. And you should bring Aubrey and Emma, of course, just for fun. Noel would love to see everyone.”

“My angel!” said Jessica. “What a glorious plan. We shall do exactly that, and bless you! Let me talk to everyone and we will arrange the exact day with you later. And don’t bother to call Lady Norton and Mrs. Rivers, my love. Mr. Goldwasser’s secretary, whom he has brought with him from America, will take care of all that.”

As the day was dark and the cold rain kept falling, Lydia decided to have lunch in the regular dining room instead of the pleasant garden room which she would have used in warm weather, due to its beautiful French window and easy access to the garden. This decision created a pleasant atmosphere, because every time the garden room was used, the war with Palmer, which had started with the late Mrs. Keith so many years ago, had to be resumed. Palmer resented the garden room and held the opinion that it was not the parlour maid's legitimate province, and this opinion had not changed over the years, despite all the attempts to pacify her, including a service hatch from the kitchen passage and a large and excellent tea trolley with rubber wheels and ball bearings. These were supplied by the late Mrs. Keith, and ignored by Palmer, who had continued to carry heavy trays with the air of a Christian martyr in Ancient Rome, carrying his own cross to the place of execution. Lydia had tried to provide a modern tea trolley with a glass top, but the object only succeeded in drawing a disdainful look, and a comment about how difficult it was to keep glass clean. Therefore, having the lunch in the dining room, and expecting guests that met Palmer's high standards, elevated her mood to such an extent that she had almost smiled, but of course not quite. One knows one's place.

The same huge white car used by Glamora in her previous visit to the county stopped in front of the house, and a great many people were decanted from it. Lydia, who expected Mr. Goldwasser to look like a handsome though mature cowboy, dressed in a Western outfit with a ten gallon hat, metal studs spread over his clothes, and pointed-toe boots too, if possible, was disappointed. Mr. Goldwasser was well below middle height, slightly stout, and when he removed his very plain hat, quite bald as well. But when he looked at the company over his half-rimmed, small spectacles which he wore rather low on his substantial nose they were surprised at the sweetness of the smile and the benign expression. As they joined Mrs. Rivers, Edmond, and Noel in the living room, all the necessary introductions were made.

“So happy to make your acquaintance,” said Mr. Goldwasser in a pleasant bass voice. “So pleased to be in England again. Other than the climate, I simply adore your country.”

Everyone immediately felt that the cold rain was a personal insult to the wealthy mogul, and wondered how Providence could be so crass as to disappoint such a powerful man, who was also so charming. And we must note here that Mr. Goldwasser’s charm and very strong personality were legendary in Hollywood circles, and many deals were made to his advantage because the other party was swept away by his delightful manners, to its own detriment. But that is the stuff moguls are made from.

At that moment, Palmer came in and announced, “Lady Norton!” and quickly withdrew. The Dreadful Dowager, for such is the name by which she was known in the county, glided in like a majestic galleon, corseted, dressed, and decorated to perfection.

“Lady Norton, allow me to introduce Mr. Goldwasser,” said Noel.

“Delighted,” said Lady Norton, looking at Mr. Goldwasser through her face-à-main. With appealing gallantry, Mr. Goldwasser bowed over the great lady’s hand, to her supreme satisfaction.

“I am grateful to you, Lady Norton, for your generous offer,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “It will be a joy to shoot in such an authentic environment. It will make all the difference to the film!”

“I hope you will come after lunch and take a look at the property,” said Lady Norton. “It will give you a preliminary idea of the place’s suitability. But please explain to me, Mr. Goldwasser, how do you film on rainy days? The weather in England is most unpredictable.”

“My dear lady, these days there is no problem shooting a film even on the darkest day,” said Mr. Goldwasser, looking benevolently at Lady Norton over his glasses. “We employ special illumination equipment that can turn night into day, when necessary. Lady Fitz-Gardner and her young man will always be bathed in golden light, which will make Glam’s hair shimmer.”

“Have you decided on Miss Tudor’s hair colour?” asked Mrs. Rivers. “Do you remember, Miss Tudor, you did not like the auburn I had originally written in the book, and of course it’s up to you, Mr. Goldwasser.”

“Bright red,” said Mr. Goldwasser decisively. “Great impact. Auburn is too subdued; it won’t do justice to the passions you express so well in your marvellous book, Mrs. Rivers, which I have so much enjoyed reading. Bright, glowing red, matched with elegant, dark lipstick and the proper clothes, will suit Glam very well; she will have a glittering effect. You shall have the same hair colour Rita uses, darling, but of course you will look a million times prettier than Rita ever could in that colour; she does not have your skin, your eyes. Truly, Mrs. Rivers, you and Miss Tudor are a credit to each other. This will be a film in a million.” It was obvious that Mr. Goldwasser knew how to handle his divas, since the two ladies smiled at each other in the friendliest manner.

“I like that,” said Jessica. “You will look very well in that colour, Miss Tudor.”

“I agree,” said Aubrey, immediately turning into Petronius, Arbiter of Elegance to Emperor Nero. “I think it is an excellent choice.” Emma and Edmond were not so sure, both finding the idea slightly alarming, but neither felt equal to expressing their opinion on Miss Tudor’s hair, for their own respective reasons.

“Everyone, allow me to introduce my secretary,” said Mr. Goldwasser. No one had noticed the quiet figure that stood a little behind, but hearing Mr. Goldwasser’s words, a person stepped out from the shadows. “My new secretary,” repeated Mr. Goldwasser, beaming at him, “Mr. Nestor Bronson Alcott.”

“Nestor?” cried at least three people in unison, the surprise making the whole company forget its manners.

“I am sorry, but it really is my name,” said Mr. Alcott. “An old family name.” He was a tall, well-built young man of about twenty-eight or thirty, with dark hair and a romantically pale face. He wore large tortoise-shell spectacles, a very neat business suit, and his hair was plastered carefully to his head with brilliantine, every hair in place. To complete the picture of a

young and successful American businessman, Mr. Alcott was clutching a briefcase of immense proportions, decorated with brass studs and buckles, or whatever such fittings are called.

“What a bizarre coincidence,” said Mrs. Rivers. “But I see it as a very good omen; when I picked the name Nestor Chardonay for my hero, I thought it was rather an uncommon name, but here you are! How long have you been with Mr. Goldwasser, Mr. Alcott?”

“I find it interesting that no one commented on his other two names,” interrupted Mr. Goldwasser. “He is a distant relation of the great Alcott family.” But most of the people present were not reared on the works of either Bronson Alcott or the well-loved authoress, his daughter Louisa May, so regrettably they did not show much interest in that.

“I just started to work for Mr. Goldwasser before we came to England,” Mr. Alcott answered Mrs. Rivers’ question. “I had applied for the job some time ago, so I was delighted to receive the sudden telephone call. This is a great opportunity for me to study the film industry from close up, as they say.”

“So you have a particular interest in the cinema?” asked Noel.

“Oh yes. I am not quite sure in what capacity I see myself in the future, Sir Noel, but I am thrilled with my current job.” The young man vanished behind his employer, and lunch was announced.

When they gathered around the big table, Emma turned to Edmond, who was sitting on her right side. “I managed to speak to Mr. Goldwasser a great deal in London,” she said happily to Edmond. “He is very kind. He thought my plan of studying in Paris was excellent, and suggested that after I complete my studies, I should write to him and he will arrange an apprenticeship in GMG! Can you imagine?”

“That is wonderful!” said Edmond. “Truly the perfect plan. The great GMG! What a marvellous apprenticeship it will be. I would love to visit you in Paris, while you are studying!”

“That will be lovely,” said Emma. “We will have such fun. And after lunch, you must speak to Aubrey about your plays, now that you have officially met.”

“Indeed I shall if he is not too busy,” said Edmond, a little timidly.

“I will make sure of it,” said Emma.

After lunch, the company sat in the drawing room. Noel handed excellent brandy all around to complement the coffee which Palmer had brought in, looking like a wounded princess gasping her last in the service of her country, but Nestor refused politely.

“Thank you, Sir Noel, but I never touch alcohol, I only drink orange juice when I want to celebrate,” said Nestor. “I find it invigorating.”

“Orange juice?” said Aubrey, amused. “Fancy that! Just like Gussie Fink-Nottle!”

“Who is Gussie Fink-Nottle?” said Nestor. “Never met him.”

“No, no, you could not meet him in person. He is a character from P.G. Wodehouse Jeeves books. He only drank orange juice, and when someone spiked his glass with a lot of whisky or brandy, I don’t remember which, he behaved very strangely and did things completely out of character. It’s very funny.”

“It happened to me, once, when the fraternity fellows spiked my orange juice for a joke. I also behaved out of character,” confessed Nestor.

“What did you do?” asked Edmond curiously.

“I do not remember what I did,” said Nestor, “but I was later told that I flung my jacket and tie away, danced on tables, and apparently I also attempted to dance on the walls like Fred Astaire. Things like that.”

“Do you generally dance well?” asked Mr. Goldwasser.

“Yes, I do dance reasonably well when I have the opportunity, but this was quite different.”

Mr. Goldwasser laughed. “We love P.G. Wodehouse in Hollywood. He wrote for us for years. And on top of that, he happens to be one of my two favourite British authors.”

“Who is the other?” asked Mrs. Rivers curiously, wondering if she knew the lucky favourite personally.

“Mr. Somerset Maugham,” said Mr. Goldwasser reverently. “He simply writes for the cinema, even though of course he does

not know it. The scripts you can write from his plots, the scenes you can shoot directly from his descriptions – there is nothing like that anywhere. But we also have films made about the hero of Mr. Wodehouse, Bertie Wooster. Very good films.”

“If you could call Bertie Wooster a hero, exactly,” said Aubrey. “He is not quite heroic...” with which comment we heartily disagree, remembering the dangerous affair of the stolen cow creamer, and the legendary clash with Mr. Spode over the fate of the elusive Matilda – but our readers must do their own research on the subject, or we would divagate for hours, even if we don’t start commenting on our own deep and abiding love for Mr. Somerset Maugham.

Aubrey looked at Nestor as if appraising him, and suddenly said to Edmond, in a very quiet voice, “Keep this point in mind, my boy. Keep the orange juice in mind. It may come handy someday if you script it properly.” Edmond looked at him in total bewilderment. How orange juice would fit within any of his future plays, he could not tell, but he trusted Aubrey’s sense of drama implicitly, and so decided to think about it as a plot for something or other, and make a point of rereading the Wodehouse books that dealt with the unlucky Gussie Fink-Nottle.

“May I speak to you privately for a minute, Mr. Clover?” Edmond said a little nervously.

“Yes, of course. I understand you are interested in writing plays,” said Aubrey, who had now turned into a benevolent uncle, happy to take his favourite nephew into the family business.

“Very much, sir,” said Edmond nervously. “I wanted so much to discuss it with you. I greatly admire your plays.”

“I am gratified to hear that. Have you completed your university studies?” asked Aubrey.

“Yes, sir, last year.”

“What did you read?”

“Classics,” said Edmond.

“Excellent,” said Aubrey. “I believe that this is the best preparation for a writing career. The thing to do now is simply to

write, and write a great deal. I will be happy to look at your plays, make suggestions, and give you some hints. When I feel that one of the plays is ready for the stage, I'll take it to the right place and introduce you. Have you got some income that will allow you to concentrate on your writing, or would you have to find a job? I may be able to help you if you need one."

"Thank you, sir, you are very kind. But I have made enough money filming *Fever in Peru* to last me through two years, if I am careful. Is this enough time?"

"Yes," said Aubrey. "If you don't write a reasonably decent play in two years, you should discard the notion of being a playwright. But you will write a good play, I am certain of that."

"The only problem is, Mr. Clover, Miss Tudor wants me to act in her next film. If she convinces Mr. Goldwasser, I am doomed. I simply don't know how to extricate myself."

"That is not too terrible a fate," said Aubrey. "You will make more money, which would allow you to live more comfortably while you write, which, believe me, is a very good thing. And how long would the filming take? Four, five months? This is not an obstacle to any of your plans."

"So you don't advise me to make a fuss, Mr. Clover?"

"Certainly not. Miss Tudor wants you for this film, so you must act like a gentleman and comply with her wishes. And anyway, I have an idea that you may be released from this obligation after all."

"Really? How?" asked Edmond curiously.

"Just a hunch, my boy. Just a hunch," said Aubrey mysteriously. "We shall see. And don't worry. Either way, I will help you with your plans. All shall be well." And Aubrey became Nostradamus, the Man Who Could Predict the Future.

Edmond felt immeasurably better after his conversation with Aubrey. He still would rather not do the film, but he realized that he was acting in a silly and childish fashion. So he went happily in search of Emma, to tell her all about it.

In the meantime, Lady Norton and Mr. Goldwasser sat talking about the business part of shooting the film in her conservatories, but since we know nothing about the fees and

contracts for such important deals, we are not prepared to describe them. When all was settled to their satisfaction, and the names of solicitors exchanged, Lady Norton said, "Yes, Mr. Goldwasser. We should drive to my house on your way to London and you can get a preliminary idea of my conservatories. We shall have plenty of light for hours."

"Indeed," said Mr. Goldwasser. "I admire your efficiency and business sense, Lady Norton. You would have done well in Hollywood." Lady Norton seemed to be gratified by the idea, which to the rest of the party seemed only too hilarious, and nodded her head graciously in acknowledgment. "We are going to desert you early, Lady Merton," Mr. Goldwasser continued, turning to Lydia. "But I sincerely hope you will allow me to call on you again."

"We will be delighted to have you whenever you are free," said Lydia, who took a genuine liking to the mogul. "And Miss Tudor, I am counting on seeing you soon, too. I plan to ask Lord and Lady Pomfret for dinner, since Lady Pomfret is looking forward to meeting you."

"That would be lovely," said Glamora. "I was truly sorry to miss her when I stayed at the Towers. Are you also planning to ask Miss Merriman, Lady Merton? She and I have become such good friends." For Glamora sensed, without quite understanding why, the bond of sympathy between Miss Merriman and herself, which was more genuine and kinder than most of her relationships.

"Oh, yes, of course, I will make a point of it," said Lydia.

"Glam told me quite a lot about this marvellous Miss Merriman," said Mr. Goldwasser. "I would love to meet her."

Glamora held Edmond's arm and swept him into the white car, with Mr. Goldwasser and Nestor in her wake, and they drove away, following Lady Norton and her chauffeur in the elegant old black Rolls Royce. Mrs. Rivers left in her own car, since she was well behind with Her Work and needed to devote the rest of the day to it.

Lydia returned to the drawing room, a little let down by the suddenness of her guests' departure, and joined Noel, Jessica, Aubrey and Emma as they were finishing their coffee.

"Well, Lydia, what did you think of Mr. Goldwasser and the interesting Mr. Alcott?" asked Aubrey.

"I like Mr. Goldwasser very much," said Lydia, "but Mr. Alcott had little to say for himself, I am afraid. I don't find him particularly interesting."

"He has potential, my love," said Aubrey. "Have you seen films where the girl, who has appeared plain and not too interesting throughout the whole film, suddenly takes off her glasses, shakes out her hair, and instantly turns into a ravishing beauty?"

"Why, yes, I have seen many films like that," said Lydia. "It's a common cliché."

"If you washed out the horrible brilliantine from Alcott's disgustingly slicked-down hair, removed his huge tortoise shell spectacles that make him look like an owl, and changed his unremarkable business suit into something dashing, possibly slightly dishevelled evening wear with his white tie undone, he would be so handsome and romantic that I could cast him as one of my leading men," said Aubrey decisively.

"I think you have something there," said Jessica, closing her eyes and trying to visualize poor Nestor with fluffy hair and no glasses. "Yes, he has a good physique, tall, broad-shouldered, and if indeed you made these changes in his attire... I wonder why he does not do all that and try to be an actor. Do you think he secretly cherishes such an aspiration, all the time trying to hide it under the guise of a businessman?"

Aubrey became mysterious, inscrutable, and all-knowing, but he did not answer directly or even give a hint of his thoughts and plans.

Chapter Five

Leaning elegantly against a palm tree, Lady Fitz-Gardner took a lace-edged handkerchief from her beaded silver purse and touched her lovely eyes, then shut them wearily, the lavender eye shadow quite visible in Glorious Technicolor. The audience would be expected to share her feelings and agree that life was a burden, that it was pointless to be a magnificently beautiful woman, with a title and a fortune and an impressive social circle, and wear silver shoes and a white silk dress cut on the bias and flowing like a dream, if you did not have Love. How could a woman face life when her husband was always busy, always making money, while all she wanted was to dance with him?

Lady Fitz-Gardner was entirely hidden from any curious eyes, except those of the millions who were to see the film, by the lush vegetation of Lady Norton's conservatory; she was subtly lit by a single ray of golden light that shimmered on her brilliant red hair. The light was produced by a natural-looking, high-voltage lamp, if this is the correct scientific term, and it is doubtful that any moon could have ever been so utterly obliging. Suddenly, a soft sound made her turn her head and look through the white gardenias, some of which were expertly created from highly convincing white paper, since, as we all know, gardenias don't always oblige with the right number of flowers even in the best conservatories. She saw a young man standing with his back to her, lighting a cigarette. She heard him sigh softly as he was gazing at a magnificent red rose.

Unable to control her emotions, whatever they were meant to be, Lady Fitz-Gardner stepped from behind the palm and approached the young man. "What is the matter, sir?" she asked tenderly. "I heard you sigh. Are you in pain?"

Slowly, the young man raised his eyes from the red rose and looked at the shimmering white-clad vision. He was incredibly handsome in his impeccable evening clothes, his blue eyes blazing with untold passion, his square jaw held tight. "I have

seen you inside,” he said in a low voice. “No, I am not ill; I am just unhappy at the moment. But it is of no consequence.”

“The pain of the heart and of the mind is worse than any physical pain,” whispered Lady Fitz-Gardner. The script writers unanimously agreed that this profound statement was masterfully crafted by Mrs. Rivers in her book, and were determined to use it verbatim in the film.

“Ah, to be understood is the best way to heal,” said the young man with a charming, tired smile. “Will you dance with me, Lady Fitz-Gardner? They are playing an enchanting waltz.”

“You know my name, sir? You have the advantage of me. I do not know yours.”

“For the moment, it is perhaps best if it remains so. But would you forgo conventions to the extent of a waltz with a stranger?” (And if the reader is curious why Mr. Chardonay should wish to conceal his name at the beginning of his intriguing acquaintance with Lady Fitz-Gardner, we are afraid neither Mrs. Rivers nor the script writers ever bothered to explain, most likely because they assumed the reader would *Understand*).

“I will, sir,” said the lovely creature and wafted into his waiting arms. The music soared and rolled and they started gliding on the smooth shining floor of the conservatory, and... “Ouch!” screamed Glamora as Edmond stepped right on her silver-clad toes. “Hank, how many times did I tell you to keep your feet just a bit further back?”

“So sorry, Miss Tudor,” murmured Edmond, wishing he were dead. “I am just clumsy...”

“My boy, we will have a few rehearsals and one way or another we must teach you how to dance,” said Mr. Goldwasser, who of course was there all along. “There are three dancing sequences in this film, all of them most important to the plot. You must get the hang of it.” Glamora was staring at her shoe, which the abuse committed by a large young man with big feet did not improve.

“I have never been a good dancer,” said Edmond. “I told you right away.”

“We’ll work on it, don’t worry,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Miss Brinton! Would you kindly step over here for a minute?” A tall, angular, grey-haired woman in her early fifties came over. “Yes, Mr. Goldwasser?” she said in a pleasant, husky voice that added a touch of extravagance to her charming American accent.

“Keith, I imagine you do not know that our dear Miss Brinton, who is the best assistant I have ever had, possesses an interesting secret talent? She is an amazing dancer, as good as a professional. She will coach you, won’t you, Miss Brinton?”

“Wonderful,” Edmond said weakly, trying to emerge from his deep gloom.

“Gramophone,” said Miss Brinton without raising her voice. Immediately, a young man in overalls came, staggering under the weight of a gramophone. He put it on a little table, then hooked it up to the electrical outlet. Miss Brinton, used to her power over people, took off her shabby tweed jacket and her sensible flat shoes. “Shoes,” she said to no one in particular. A young woman came running with a pair of high-heeled, bright green shoes. Miss Brinton put them on, and with her brownish tweed skirt and cotton stockings, looked so odd that Edmond almost had the giggles, but he controlled himself.

“Come along, Mr. Keith,” Miss Brinton commanded. “We are going to practice the waltz. Now, one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three...” and she swirled him away to the sweet sound of “Roses from the South.” Edmond became so dizzy with the exercise that his head was swimming, but he shut his eyes and persevered doggedly. This went on reasonably well for a while, and then Edmond somehow got one of his feet tangled with the other, and fell down, dragging Miss Brinton with him.

“It’s quite all right, Mr. Keith,” she said, completely unruffled, and got up, straightening her skirt. “Now, back to work. One-two-three, one-two-three...”

“Yes,” said Mr. Goldwasser with approval. “If you fall off your horse when you are learning to ride, you must get back on it right away so as not to lose your nerve. Miss Brinton knows what she is doing.” Most of the people began to leave the hall,

and Edmond went on dancing valiantly, though without any trace of grace or charm whatsoever.

Mr. Goldwasser turned and saw his secretary staring transfixed at the odd couple dancing away. "Not very good, ah, Alcott?"

"Dreadful," said Mr. Alcott, his voice full of resentment. "To think that Miss Tudor, who is as light on her feet as a dandelion seed, should submit to the horrible style of this incompetent fool."

"Now, Alcott, Keith is far from being a fool," said Mr. Goldwasser tolerantly. "Of course he can't dance, nor is he the perfect fit for the role of Nestor Chardonay in the first place. He is too big, too muscular, attractive but not graceful. He was perfect for the Simon Bolivar part in *Fever in Peru*, but a romantic high society film is not exactly his style. But what can I do? Glamora has a kind of fixation on him, though for the life of me I can't imagine why. She has had many handsome boys as her co-stars, but I have never seen her so smitten with any of them. She nearly blackmailed me into allowing him to do the second film. I had someone else in mind altogether, you know. The usual, an unknown who had never worked with her, and just as good looking as Keith; I envisioned the part acted by someone more of the Cary Grant style of elegance."

"Perhaps she is in love with Keith," said Mr. Alcott, determined to make himself as miserable as possible.

"Nah," said Mr. Goldwasser. "She is not in love with him. But she does find him attractive in some way, there is no doubt of that, and I like to give her what she wants. The important thing is that Glam is always the consummate professional and in the end she would do nothing to jeopardize the film, so we need not worry, Keith or no Keith."

"I would like to break every bone in his body," said Mr. Alcott. Mr. Goldwasser laughed.

"I wouldn't bother," he said. "No point in it. Glamora has vamped and conquered generations of fine-looking boys; it's a hobby with her. And Keith is not encouraging her at all, it's all Glam's doing. I suspect he would love to be released from his

contract. Also, I have a feeling he is much more interested in Mr. Clover's pretty little cousin. Stop fretting, Alcott. All will be well. As we say in Hollywood, I always have a Plan B ready."

"Well, well," said Miss Merriman, looking extremely gratified. "I must say I had not expected that," and she went on reading a letter. Lord and Lady Pomfret, also at the breakfast table, looked at her with anticipation.

"This letter is from Miss Tudor," said Miss Merriman. "When she visited the Towers she promised to send for me to attend the premiere of the revival of one of her science fiction films in London. Apparently it is to take place two weeks from today, and she wants me to come, join her and Mr. Goldwasser for the premiere, and spend the night at their hotel. I would very much wish to go, if it is not inconvenient to you, Lady Pomfret. This is one of the films I particularly wanted to see, it is called *Amazon Tiger Queen of Venus* and it was extremely well received when first introduced. I have read all about it."

"It will not be inconvenient at all, Merry," said Lady Pomfret very kindly. "By all means, go and have a wonderful time."

Lord Pomfret laughed gently. "I cannot reconcile your love of thrilling science fiction and detective films with the rest of your personality and tastes, Merry," he said affectionately.

"To tell the truth, I can't quite explain it myself," said Miss Merriman. "I can't imagine how it started, but there you are."

"Do you know what this film is about?" asked Lady Pomfret curiously.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Miss Merriman. "It is about a descendant of the mythological Greek hero Theseus, and how he met his Amazon wife Hyppolita on another planet."

"I don't understand," said Lord Pomfret. "Theseus and Hyppolita are supposed to have lived thousands of years ago. What are they doing on another planet?"

"I admit, it is somewhat complicated," said Miss Merriman. "Unless you are used to the way science fiction writers treat history or even current events. It is all fodder for things that happen, in their stories, hundreds of years in the future. This

story takes place during the twenty-fifth century, and the hero, Commander Theseus Athanasias, a Greek-American who is not the mythical Theseus but his direct descendant, takes his spaceship to another solar system. I believe it is Alpha-Centauri, since it is used so often, but I am not certain of it; at any rate they also have a planet by the name of Venus, and it is full of jungles. There he meets a beautiful Amazon Warrior Queen, Hyppolita, who is somehow associated with tigers, I am not sure how, and wears magnificent tiger-inspired dresses. She is not related to the old Hyppolita at all, I suspect, just a common coincidence; science fiction films are full of such serendipities. She and her tribe, consisting only of women with absolutely no males present, are threatened by a galactic war, and Theseus is stranded on this planet and has to devise a way to save everyone. He does that with the help of a very large and rather funny robot who can read the minds of the aliens who are behind the war, and eventually all the Amazons fall in love with Theseus' men and the whole tribe goes back to earth to get married."

"Are there enough men on the spaceship for all the Amazons?" asked Lady Pomfret, who was always interested in the practical side of things.

"Oh, yes. I imagine that the script writer would make sure that the number of the Amazons is exactly equal to that of the men on the ship. That is how it is always done in these films."

"Well, I hope you have a good time in London," said Lord Pomfret, resigned to never understanding the plot of the intriguing film and determined not to ask what a robot was, large or small, funny or not. "Is Miss Tudor sending the car to fetch you?"

"Yes," said Miss Merriman. "I must write and let her know I am indeed coming."

Miss Merriman had a wonderful time in London, but since we do not go there ourselves anymore, preferring to stay in Bassetshire, we will not describe it. We will only note that she made friends with Miss Brinton, as they had so much in common, and they both hoped to meet again.

A few weeks later, Lady Pomfret came into the library, where Lord Pomfret was writing letters, in a most excited mood.

“Gillie, Jessica just called. She wants us to join her party for dinner at the White Hart. She and Aubrey are entertaining Miss Tudor, Mr. Goldwasser, his assistant Miss Brinton, and his secretary Mr. Alcott. She wants to show them what she refers to as ‘local colour.’ This will be a nice opportunity for me to meet Glamora Tudor, which I am really looking forward to after all the things Merry told me.” She was flushed and excited, and Lord Pomfret thought that she looked just like Sally Wicklow, the Estate Manager’s young and enthusiastic sister, who had the best hands in the county. Lord Pomfret said to himself that to give Sally the pleasure of meeting Glamora Tudor he would cheerfully give up at least three committees and two agricultural fairs, or even an evening spent on filling out forms sent by Them to struggling land owners.

“And would you believe, Gillie, Mr. Goldwasser asked specifically that we bring Miss Merriman! He seems to have been greatly taken by our Merry, and bores everyone while he talks about her merits, class, refinement, etc. Good old Merry, I think she has made a conquest.”

Lord Pomfret laughed. “I hope so,” he said jokingly, “what an opportunity for our Merry! Can you imagine her as Mrs. Goldwasser, entertaining Hollywood royalties?”

“Yes,” said Lady Pomfret loyally. “Merry can do anything – and do it exceedingly well. If she would like Mr. Goldwasser enough to marry him, she would become the perfect Hollywood hostess.” Lord Pomfret laughed at the notion, but very kindly.

As Lord Pomfret, Lady Pomfret, and Miss Merriman entered the White Hart, Burden, the old headwaiter, was standing in the hall, which we still cannot bring ourselves to call a lounge, though we know that some day we must succumb to the inevitable and use this ghastly word.

“How are you, Burden?” asked Lady Pomfret, who knew everyone in the county.

“Thank you, very well, my lady, except for the leg. The doctors don’t understand my leg. Dr. Ford has been after me to do an X-ray of it. But that is photography, I said to him. I don’t hold with photography, no sir, not at my age.”

Lady Pomfret made the appropriate comments, and Burden continued. “Your party is waiting at the bar, and asked to be told as soon as you came. Allow me to escort you to your table.”

Soon the whole party was sitting at the most coveted of all the tables, a round one situated in a bow window at the far end of the room, where one could see the most beautiful spire in England soaring against the soft, dusty-rose sky.

“What a beautiful view,” said Mr. Goldwasser to Miss Merriman, who was sitting on his right. “I adore English architecture.”

“I am gratified to hear that,” said Miss Merriman, “particularly from an American, since you have such grand and modern architecture in your own country. It is so nice that you also enjoy our old style.”

“Have you ever visited the United States, Miss Merriman?”

“Sadly, no, Mr. Goldwasser. I have had a very busy life, so any visual image I have of America comes from the films, for which I am grateful.”

“But some day you will, I hope,” said Mr. Goldwasser enthusiastically. “I would so much like to show it to you personally. With your taste and culture, I am sure you will be able to appreciate the valiant attempts of a young country.”

“I do not pretend to such high standards, though I am truly grateful for your good opinion, Mr. Goldwasser, but indeed, I am sure I will appreciate the grandeur, the freshness, and the well-known hospitality of your great country.”

“Have you ever read the very amusing book by Mrs. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*? She did not share your views...” said Mr. Goldwasser, smiling.

“I always thought her work was condescending, and her opinions bordering on the vulgar,” said Miss Merriman disdainfully. “They were tainted by her suffering and poverty,

and she did not make the attempt to rise above them. No, I do not like her book.”

“I am happy if I can contribute, in a small way, to your visual image of America,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

“Indeed you have, Mr. Goldwasser. More than you think, since I am very fond of the cinema. I have seen many of the films made by GMG and enjoyed them all. You bring much joy to our country.” Mr. Goldwasser seemed very pleased.

Dinners at the White Hart were celebrated and known to be as good as those offered by many fine London restaurants. The meals were not particularly imaginative, perhaps, since the cooks were not usually foreigners, but nevertheless beautifully cooked and well-served. For the present party, Burden suggested a good clear soup made from real stock, excellent fish fillets, since the fish was brought daily by an arrangement with a fishing village on the coast, served with butter sauce, and a perfect loin of mutton with potatoes and peas. Followed by an elegant pudding and coffee, this was a meal good enough even for visiting dignitaries, and the party was enjoying it, accompanied as it was by just the right wines, chosen personally by Burden.

As they were nine people at the round table, and two women were obliged to sit next to each other, Lady Pomfret was not sorry to find herself next to Miss Tudor.

“I am happy to have made your acquaintance at last, Lady Pomfret” said the actress. “I enjoyed staying at the Towers and I wanted to thank you in person for your hospitality.”

“Everyone enjoyed meeting you, Miss Tudor,” said Lady Pomfret. “And they told me so many interesting things about your visit. It is a great pleasure for me that the plans for your current film have been arranged under my roof.”

Miss Tudor laughed. “I am not so sure Mrs. Rivers liked me very much at first,” she said. “However, this was my fault, since I was not very gracious to her; I must admit she irritated me. But once I consented to do the film after her book, all was well. I am not much of a reader, Lady Pomfret, nor am I, to tell the truth, very highly educated in matters of literature, but I can tell that even though this book is not very good, it would nevertheless

make a perfect base for a successful film. Miss Merriman, whose judgement could not be doubted, said the same thing to Mr. Goldwasser when they first met.”

“I never read Mrs. Rivers’ books these days, Miss Tudor. I read one, years ago, and found it so silly that I simply could not finish it. But since I am not a great reader either, of course I believe you and Mr. Goldwasser and I plan to see the film when it is released. Incidentally, it seems to me that Miss Merriman and Mr. Goldwasser have become quite good friends.” Lady Pomfret looked at them as they were engaged in an animated conversation that seemed to absorb them in each other.

“Yes, indeed, I have made the same observation,” said Miss Tudor, smiling. “Who would have thought? But I do like her immensely myself. She is one in a million; she seems to understand one deeply and yet maintain her distance.” Which was a surprising insight, coming from the very literal Miss Tudor.

In the meantime, Aubrey was talking to Miss Brinton. Jessica could tell that he was studying her voice, her speech, her clothes – absorbing everything about her that could some day be used in a play containing a successful, middle-aged American business woman.

“Tell me, Miss Brinton,” said Aubrey in a low voice. “Do you think Keith will ever learn how to dance properly?” He knew all about the fiasco since Mr. Goldwasser, who felt that Aubrey was a fellow professional who would understand, told him about it confidentially.

“No, Mr. Clover. He is a nice young man, and good looking, but completely lacking in graceful movements or any sense of rhythm,” said Miss Brinton.

“Then what is going to happen with the film? I understand from Mr. Goldwasser that the dancing is a very important part of the story.”

“Yes, particularly the scene in Vienna,” said Miss Brinton. “Lady Fitz-Gardner and Mr. Chardonay are dancing on the shore of the Danube to the far-off sounds of a band playing in a park somewhere. She renounces her love for him and tells him she

must return to her duties and her husband, while he must go on serving his country – he is something of a spy, as you know – and never meet again. They dance throughout the scene, with the close-ups concentrating on their moving faces, which we think will make great impression on the audience.”

“Well, well,” said Aubrey. “That won’t do at all, would it?”

“Miss Tudor simply refuses to accept the truth,” said Miss Brinton. “And Mr. Goldwasser always likes to oblige her.”

“I wish I could help Mr. Goldwasser in this dilemma,” said Aubrey. “I have the beginning of an idea, but it may be quite risky.”

Chapter Six

Miss Merriman put down the receiver, looking thoughtful. After a few seconds of reflection, she returned to the drawing room, where she had been spending a quiet evening with Lady Pomfret until the phone rang.

“Lady Pomfret,” she said, “that was Mr. Goldwasser. He asked me if I could join him tomorrow for lunch at the White Hart, which he really liked when Miss Dean gave us dinner there; he has a request which he would rather express in person.”

“I wonder what he wants,” said Lady Pomfret, and if she privately thought that the great Mr. Goldwasser simply wanted to spend some time with Miss Merriman, whom he clearly admired, she did not even hint at it.

“He sounded rather urgent, quite concerned as a matter of fact. I simply could not refuse such a request for help. And he apologized profusely for the short notice.”

“Not very important among friends,” said Lady Pomfret, who in the last few seconds had already arranged the wedding, gone over her own wardrobe to see if she needed a new dress and decided that yes, she would order one, and already started to miss her friend and helper who was obviously heading toward Hollywood to embark upon a life tinted by Glorious Technicolor. But since Miss Merriman knew nothing of these plans, no harm was done, and she just added that Mr. Goldwasser was sending his car to fetch her.

The next day, Miss Merriman joined Mr. Goldwasser at the White Hart. He was waiting for her at a small table in the most private corner. “I hope you will approve, Miss Merriman; I have ordered our lunch in advance, to save time and have as little interference from the waiters as possible.”

“I most certainly approve,” said Miss Merriman. “As someone who does most of the meal planning and ordering at the Towers, I welcome the opportunity of delegating these responsibilities. Not having to choose for myself is a treat.”

“Also,” said Mr. Goldwasser, “allow me to thank you for accepting my invitation at such short notice. I am aware of your busy schedule.”

“But Mr. Goldwasser, you sounded urgent on the telephone. Naturally I would like to do my best to help you, if I can give assistance in any way.”

“What I have to request may surprise you, Miss Merriman, but I hope you will keep an open mind. Miss Brinton must go back to the United States for a few weeks on a personal matter which she stated was quite urgent.”

“This is most difficult for you, Mr. Goldwasser. I imagine she does a great deal. She had impressed me as intelligent and efficient.”

“Indeed she is, and in addition, she has a definitive understanding of English society which I do not profess to possess. Alcott can do much of her regular work, and he is most willing to step in and help, but there is much that he does not know, being a young man and having had so little exposure to English customs. Of course I could consult Mrs. Rivers on many points, but first, it is not the same as having Miss Brinton by my side. Second, well, Mrs. Rivers may have her own angle on so many subjects; she does not strike me as objective...”

“What about Miss Tudor?” asked Miss Merriman. “After all, she was born and raised in London.”

“Our Glam is one of the best and we all adore her, but she is no judge of such matters. She is extremely literal; she does not see the shades and nuances. Quite shrewd in a business-like manner, yet does not have the grasp of delicate matters and points of etiquette. No, Glam goes her own way, and damn the torpedoes... I need Miss Brinton’s discretion, tact, and knowledge.”

“I can understand that,” said Miss Merriman. “But do tell me, where did Miss Brinton acquire such understanding of English society and customs? I think she told me she was born in Maine?”

Mr. Goldwasser laughed. “When Miss Brinton was an adventurous nineteen-year-old, she left the family home in Bar

Harbour and came to England to take a university course. Each summer during her stay, she earned her living as an exhibition dancer at a seaside resort. That is why she is such a divine dancer, thirty years later. She made many friends here, with whom she keeps up a voluminous correspondence, and she spends a month here with some of them every year."

"Exhibition dancer?" said Miss Merriman incredulously, unable to reconcile the image of the middle-aged, respectable Miss Brinton with the flowing dresses, fluffy petticoats, pirouettes, dips, and spike heels which are somehow universally associated with the profession. Nor could she imagine the imperious, commanding Miss Brinton smiling at and dancing with the resort's customers. But she reminded herself that time changes everything and she knew that she would not lower her very high opinion of Miss Brinton just because she had a slightly unusual past. "Well, well, how interesting. I would have never suspected that," she said quietly.

"She came back to the United States, took an advanced degree in anthropology, taught college and even joined some distinguished expeditions to the Rain Forest in the Amazon where she associated with quite astonishing tribes. I met her a few years ago when she was ready to make another change, and persuaded her to try Hollywood. She became the best assistant I have ever had, and both of us never regretted our decision; she is a remarkable woman. But to return to our main issue, I am lost without her help. Could I persuade you, Miss Merriman, to take a leave of absence from your present employment and join us for a few weeks, acting as my confidential advisor? If you agree, I will personally approach Lord and Lady Pomfret."

If there had been a garden path Miss Merriman would undoubtedly have sat flat down on it, emulating the beloved Aunt Betsy Trotwood, but being in a dining room at the White Hart, she remained seated. However, so shocked was she by this unexpected request that she stared at Mr. Goldwasser, completely losing her composure for the first time in decades.

"You are a person of such class, such taste, such understanding, Miss Merriman, that I know I could rely on you

to resolve any issue that might arise. You will be saving this star-crossed film, which is giving me so much trouble already.”

“This is entirely unexpected,” said Miss Merriman, finally finding her voice. “But I must admit that the idea is extremely appealing. I love the cinema, as you know, Mr. Goldwasser, always have... what an adventure this would be, seeing a film created and shaped. Yes, if you can persuade Lady Pomfret to let me come, I will, and with pleasure!”

Of course, Lady Pomfret did not object to anything that would give Merry pleasure, and no difficulties of any nature arose. In a few days, Miss Merriman was sitting in the huge white car, on her way to Norton Hall.

“I don’t understand, Lady Pomfret. Whatever do you mean, she is working for Mr. Goldwasser?” asked Mr. Choyce, completely at a loss. “Has Miss Merriman decided to leave the Towers?” He picked up his cup and put it down again, visibly agitated.

“No, no, Mr. Choyce. This is not a permanent situation. Mr. Goldwasser admires and respects Miss Merriman’s superior tact and discretion, and her many other sterling qualities, and asked her to act as his advisor while his regular assistant had to take a leave of absence. Just a few weeks, I believe. May I refill your cup?”

Mr. Choyce did not like the idea at all. Of course, if Miss Merriman wanted to rub shoulders with the glamorous people, it was within her rights and he, Mr. Choyce, had nothing to do with it. But really, detaching Miss Merriman like that from her regular employment and comfortable home, taking her away from her friends, honestly, this American mogul was rather bold! Not that it mattered in any way, of course, but Mr. Choyce still did not like the idea, indeed, not at all. Naturally he would never say anything, either at that point or later, and Lady Pomfret, never very sensitive to atmosphere, had not noticed his mood.

“And what happened to his assistant? Why does she take a leave of absence in the middle of the filming?” asked Mr. Choyce somewhat pettishly, but Lady Pomfret simply attributed

his question to his usual kindness and concern for his fellow men in general and Miss Brinton in particular, and told him that she really had no idea and she did not think Mr. Goldwasser even told Miss Merriman. Which was entirely true, and Miss Merriman would have never dreamt of asking such a tactless question. And if our reader is curious as to what was prompting Miss Brinton to take her leave and go to the United States for a few weeks, we must confess that we do not as yet know the answer ourselves and we are quite curious about it too. However, we promise to tell the reader as soon as we find out, which we expect will be as soon as Miss Brinton and Miss Merriman see each other again and renew their friendship.

In the meantime, Mrs. Morland, who liked young people and found Miss Emma Lover to be a delightful such person, decided to invite her to spend a few days at her home at High Rising. Jessica and Aubrey obligingly brought their young cousin on a Monday, a day on which, as we all know, the Cockspur Theatre is closed. They were having a delightful tea in Mrs. Morland's drawing room, which was comfortably though unostentatiously furnished, when the phone rang. Stoker came in and said, "A gentleman wishing to speak to Miss Emma, please," and left abruptly. But this was just her way, and we must note that she approved of Emma's delicate beauty and looked forward to preparing plentiful and delicious meals for the young guest. It was ever so much nicer, Stoker said that same morning to the Milk, to feed young people, since, as it stood to reason, they generally ate much more than their elders. She greatly missed, she added, feeding Master Tony and his friends; no one ate like Master Tony. She had ordered extra rations from the Fish and the Bread, too, and repeated the statement, to which both agreed in a strictly sycophantic fashion, always remembering the lovely elevenses lavishly produced by Stoker at all times.

Emma got up, a little embarrassed by the interruption, and went to the hallway.

"I wonder how Edmond knew she was at your home, Mrs. Morland," said Aubrey.

Jessica laughed. "They talk very often, and she must have given him your telephone number. I apologize, Mrs. Morland."

"Not at all," said that worthy creature. "I like a young romance."

"But all they do is argue," said Jessica. "Each of them highly disapproves of what the other thinks about this wretched film."

"They are very young," said Mrs. Morland thoughtfully. "It really does not matter if they argue at this stage. But should this friendship go on, it could make for a very suitable alliance."

"Indeed," said Aubrey. "And in addition, I am in a position to help advance Edmond's career. But his involvement with Miss Tudor, though entirely innocent, is not helping. I think Emma, who is quite proud, feels slighted by what she calls his 'mooning after' Miss Tudor, even though I told her again and again that he stayed in the film strictly on my advice."

The three shook their heads and smiled ruefully, each thinking his or her own thoughts regarding the silliness of youth, charming and infuriating as it always seems to the older generation.

"And I hear there are so many problems arising with the film," said Mrs. Morland. "I would not like to have anything to do with an enterprise involving both Lady Norton and Mrs. Rivers."

"Yes, they can be quite frightening," said Jessica, "even one at a time. And here they are together. At least they are such good friends, which must help a little."

"They were not always such good friends," said Mrs. Morland in her most sibylline manner.

"Do tell," said Aubrey.

"I suppose there is no harm in telling," said the talented authoress, who like most of us adored a little harmless gossip. "Mrs. Crawley once told me that the Dreadful Dowager had wanted to bring a libel action against Mrs. Rivers for having a character called Lady Norton in a book."

"So what happened?" asked Aubrey.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Morland. "Her son and his wife told her she would only look silly if it got into the courts as she might

have to prove that she wasn't like the one in the book and didn't have very pure love affairs with young men, and once you prove you aren't something, people always say you are."

"And she listened to them?"

"Oh, yes. Do you know that her daughter-in-law, Eleanor Norton, calls her Moggs? Anyone who can call the Dreadful Dowager by such a name is all-powerful."

"So they must have made up," said Jessica.

"Yes, they have, eventually. It's not a good idea to bring libel suits against people," said Mrs. Morland.

Aubrey laughed. "Surely no one had ever done that to you, Mrs. Morland?"

"As a matter of fact, I nearly had a libel action," said Mrs. Morland proudly.

"But why? All your people are clearly fictional, if you don't mind my saying so," said Aubrey.

"Naturally," said Mrs. Morland. "That is the best part about my books. If the people seemed real, no one would be interested in them. When this person threatened with a libel suit, Adrian Coates wanted me to take it into court, but all that sort of thing repugnates me, as Gradka, the Mixo-Lyidian refugee whom you must remember later became the ambassador to England, used to say. And I knew that if I had to stand in the dock I should go Mad."

"So what did you do?" asked Jessica.

"The solicitors said an apology would do," said Mrs. Morland, "so I sent a very nice letter of apology and it all ended there. It's important to be nice to the readers. Not necessarily your friends, but the people who read one's books."

"Mrs. Rivers would say My Public," said Aubrey, laughing.

"Well," said Mrs. Morland with great candour, "Mrs. Rivers really has a Public. At least she gets so many letters. It's wonderful and she sells well, but I can't write books about the Love Life of Middle-Aged Women."

"Heaven forbid that you should," said Jessica. "You must go on writing the books we all love so much."

“I just can’t even if I tried. I can only write the sort of books that I *can* write,” said Mrs. Morland.

“I’ll drink to that,” said Aubrey and sipped his tea.

“Emma, I am going out of my mind,” said Edmond on the phone.

“Is it still these stupid dancing scenes?” asked Emma. “Cousin Aubrey told me about it.”

“Well, yes, you see, Miss Brinton had to go to the United States for a while, and now Miss Tudor is trying to coach me. The production is coming to a standstill just because I can’t dance! Can you imagine how I feel?”

“I think you should resign from this film,” said Emma irritably. “What’s the point? You hate it and I am sure even Miss Tudor herself is annoyed by now.”

“Extremely annoyed,” said Edmond miserably, “but she still won’t let me off.”

“Why can’t you stand up for yourself?” asked Emma, thoroughly angry. “What kind of hold does she have on you?”

“Hold? There is no hold. Mr. Clover told me not to make a fuss and to comply with Miss Tudor’s wishes,” said Edmond. “Do you think I should disoblige your cousin, who is the soul of kindness? I can’t go against everyone’s opinion, particularly since they all want to help me. Be reasonable, Emma.”

But Emma was past being reasonable. “I’ll tell you what I will do,” she said. “It is convenient that I will soon be visiting the Mertons with Cousin Jessica. I’ll consult Noel about the situation for you; he understands everything.”

“Noel?” said Edmond peevishly. “So it’s Christian names now?”

“Well, yes, he asked me to call him by his Christian name, surely I could not refuse,” said Emma in a tone that sounded priggish to Edmond.

“I don’t see what Noel can do,” he said. “I would rather you do not speak to him about the matter.”

“If nothing else, he could give you some dancing lessons,” said Emma a little spitefully. “He dances divinely.”

“How do you know?” demanded Edmond.

“Cousin Jessica took me to the Wigwam, and Noel was there with some friends, so naturally he asked me to dance with him.”

“Well, I hope you had a good time,” said Edmond in a tone that conveyed the exact opposite. “But to be honest with you, Emma, Noel is old enough to be your father, not to mention his being married. Flirting with him the way you do is not very lady-like. I am speaking as a friend, for your own good.”

“Really?” said Emma with a voice as cold as ice. “And following an aging actress like a lapdog from one continent to another is very gentlemanly? Good night, Edmond.” She slammed the receiver down, and then burst into tears, ran into the drawing room and told Mrs. Morland, Jessica and Aubrey that Edmond was a Beast and she never wanted to see him again or even hear his name mentioned. Pressed by her cousins, she repeated much of the conversation, and while the three adults had to suppress the giggles, they comforted her as best they could and eventually she went to bed in an improved mood. She did regret, however, calling Edmond a lapdog, but perhaps he did not hear it; at least she hoped so or else she would have to apologize.

“Aubrey, what do you think of Edmond’s comment about Emma’s flirtation with Noel?” asked Jessica as they were driving back to London.

“Nothing at all, my sweet,” said Aubrey complacently.

“You don’t think Noel is up to his old tricks again?”

“No, Jessica. Emma has just developed a schoolgirl crush on Noel. I noticed it before, but it is of no consequence. He would not be interested in someone that young and unsophisticated. Besides, I believe he learned his lesson after the little affair with Peggy Arbuthnot, or rather Peggy Brandon now. You saved the day when you chastised him.”

“Frankly, I would rather not approach Noel again on such matters, but since this is concerning Emma...”

“He is not encouraging her, Jessica. He is innocent this time, and I suspect he does not even notice that she has a crush on him.”

“So nothing needs to be done?” asked Jessica.

“Nothing at all. She’ll get over it soon enough. I am sure of it.”

Glamora was crying. Not the gentle touch of a lace handkerchief to the eyes, but more like a tantrum, with loud sobbing and the occasional stamping of a foot, quite alarming when the foot is clad in a fashionable shoe made of purple suede with a very high heel.

“Now, Glam, calm down,” said Mr. Goldwasser. He pulled a very clean, large and beautifully folded red bandana handkerchief out of his pocket, looked at it, grinned, and handed it to Glamora. “As we say in Montana,” he added, “there is more than one way to skin a cat.”

Glamora looked up, rather startled, wiped her blotchy face and said, “But Jake, you are not from Montana, you were born and raised in Brooklyn.”

“Ah, yes, maybe so, but can’t you see me in a ten-gallon hat?” said Mr. Goldwasser, and proceeded to imitate John Wayne walking toward his horse, ready to ride into the sunset. Glamora laughed.

“So now that you are calm, do try to be reasonable for a moment,” said Mr. Goldwasser, satisfied with his ingenious performance. “Tell me, Glam, have I ever let you down?”

Glamora looked affectionately at the mogul. In a million years she could not articulate the thoughts that formulated in her mind at that question, since her vocabulary was severely limited, but for the benefit of our readers we would like to articulate them ourselves. The thoughts proceeded on these lines. “No, Jake, you have never let me down. In the heartbreaking world of show business, built on quicksand and stardust, you have been a tower of strength. In a profession where people cheerfully stab their so-called best friends in the back for the sake of a moment of glory or one more insignificant part in an easily forgotten film, your ethics and moral standards never deserted you, and you have always stood by your true friends.” No, Glamora did not know how to translate her feelings into words, so all she could say was,

“No, Jake. You have always been the best of friends.” But knowing Glamora for many years, Mr. Goldwasser understood her meaning and was touched.

“So don’t worry,” he said. “We have plenty of options.”

“But Jake, after all the training with Miss Brinton, Hank still can’t dance. He mastered the waltz to some extent, at least he no longer falls down while tripping on his own feet, but when he tried to do the tango just now I lost control... it was monstrous, and you know how I like the tango. I want it to be perfect.”

“I could release him from his contract, you know, of course paying him handsomely for his sacrifice, and get another leading man within a week.”

“Oh no!” shrieked Glamora. “It will break his heart! Besides, Hank looks so perfect for the part. Did you notice how handsome he was in his evening clothes?”

“Very well. Another option is to get a double just for the dances,” said Mr. Goldwasser mildly. “I can film a professional dancer with a similar body type, and then impose Keith’s face on the close-ups.”

“Now that is brilliant. You are a genius, Jake.”

“So what else is new,” said Mr. Goldwasser and poured a shot of brandy for both of them from a silver flask, beautifully monogrammed, which he always carried in his pocket and refilled as needed. “So it is settled, love. I’ll speak to Keith and ask Alcott to find a professional dancer right away. Just stop worrying and leave everything to me.”

Indeed it seemed to work, at least at first. The professional was an affected young man who looked well enough and danced beautifully, and the three dance sequences were completed in no time. Edmond was so relieved that he did not have to dance anymore that his deep depression disappeared. He would have been less happy if he had spent some time with Mr. Goldwasser and Mr. Alcott when they viewed the result. It was ludicrous. No matter what they attempted to do, no matter how cleverly the film editors imposed Edmond’s face on the dancing professional, the image had nothing to do with, no resemblance at all, to Edmond’s figure. Yes, the young professional was exactly

Edmond's height and only a little bit lighter, but he looked delicate while Edmond was as solid and as sturdy as a rock.

"We will have to think of something else, Alcott," said Mr. Goldwasser. "This won't do." And for the first time since the beginning of the production, Mr. Alcott thought he caught a note of anxiety in Mr. Goldwasser's voice.

"Plan B, Mr. Goldwasser?" he asked, attempting to lighten the mood.

"No, the dancer was Plan B," said Mr. Goldwasser gloomily. "I must consider Plan C now, and I am not sure I like it, Alcott. Not sure at all."

Chapter Seven

“This was a very good catch, Miss Merriman,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Thank Heaven you noticed the blunder in the way we addressed the Viennese nobleman in the script. How embarrassing it would have been to let such a silly mistake get into the film!”

“This was easy,” said Miss Merriman. “I have lived with the upper classes all my working life, and of course they entertain titled foreigners. I hope I can continue to be of service with more complicated matters.”

“I have no doubt that you will be able to tackle any issue. Are you enjoying your work here?”

“Very much,” said Miss Merriman, laughing. “Who would have imagined me, working for the cinema... I wish Lady Pomfret could see all that.”

“Why not?” said Mr. Goldwasser good-humouredly. “Let’s invite her to see a day in the production, and entertain her for lunch in our makeshift commissary, Hollywood style. I think the shooting of the embassy dinner will amuse her, and there is also an additional sequence by the river which would make any thinking person laugh loudly... though of course our Audience will be crying with deep emotion. If Lord Pomfret is not busy, he can come too, naturally.”

“He is in London now, but I am sure Lady Pomfret would love to come.”

Indeed Lady Pomfret accepted the invitation enthusiastically, and it was arranged to send the car to fetch her. The day before the outing Lady Pomfret called and asked permission to bring Mr. Choyce, who for a reason she could not understand continued to express great interest in Miss Merriman’s new job. Naturally, the invitation was extended to the vicar, and Miss Merriman was delighted by the prospective visit. She was particularly happy to show Lady Pomfret, her friend and employer, how interesting this brief encounter with glory turned out to be. And while she did not understand Mr. Choyce’s

sudden interest in the cinema, she was always happy to oblige an old friend and looked forward to seeing him.

Unfortunately, the day of their visit turned out to be also the day Lady Norton decided to drop in and inspect the production. But such are the ways of Providence and we cannot fathom them, only live with them to the best of our ability. Therefore, rather early in the day, Lady Norton sailed in, looking more than ever like an overly-decorated, old-fashioned cab horse, her face-à-main at hand, ready to scrutinize every detail.

“Hermione!” she bellowed, and Mrs. Rivers, accompanied by the harassed-looking Mr. Alcott, came forward to welcome her great friend.

“How nice of you to drop in, Victoria,” said Mrs. Rivers nervously.

“I came to find out when we are going to Vienna,” said Lady Norton.

“But we have no plans of going to Vienna,” said Mr. Alcott, surprised. “Why should we go there?”

“I understood that the story takes the unfortunate, illicit couple to Vienna,” said Lady Norton. “Is it not so in your book, Hermione?”

“Yes, it is so, and in the script too,” said Mr. Alcott, before Mrs. Rivers had the chance to protest and insist on the purity of the interesting couple. “But we planned to film the walk and the waltz by the shores of the Danube right here on the local river, and then superimpose images that we have in stock.”

“But I understood you wished everything to be authentic,” said Mrs. Rivers. “I thought...” and she stopped, glancing at Lady Norton.

“This won’t do at all,” said Lady Norton. “Mrs. Rivers said you are doing everything authentically, and we will all be taken to Vienna to do the scene. Why did you tell me that, Hermione, if it was not in the plans?”

“Well, Victoria, I assumed they were going to do so,” said Mrs. Rivers miserably. “I really would like to discuss it with Mr. Goldwasser. I will insist on the scene being shot on the shores of the Danube.”

“Indeed,” said Lady Norton imperiously. “I never put up with broken promises. Besides, I am convinced it was part of the contract. Young man,” she turned to Mr. Alcott, “please bring the contracts here immediately.”

“But Lady Norton, the contracts are in London, in a safe,” said Mr. Alcott, “secure in the lawyers’ office. I cannot produce them right now.”

“Don’t be impertinent, please,” said Lady Norton, looking at him through her face-à-main in her most intimidating fashion, making Mr. Alcott quail, which of course was exactly what she had intended, then snapping it shut. “Furthermore, I assume you mean solicitors, or barristers, since we don’t use such derogatory terms here. Lawyers, bah!” Mr. Alcott bit his lips and managed not to lose his temper.

“Where is Mr. Goldwasser?” asked Mrs. Rivers.

“He went with Miss Merriman to Wardrobe, to inspect the new gown that has just arrived for Miss Tudor. He wants to be sure it is appropriate for the Embassy Dinner we are filming today, and it really arrived at the last moment.”

“That is another matter I am not entirely happy with,” said Lady Norton. “What is this woman doing here? She is not a part of this production.”

“Miss Merriman is advising Mr. Goldwasser on points of English etiquette,” said Mr. Alcott, “since Miss Brinton had to go back to America for a short while.”

“I should think my advice would be sufficient,” said Mrs. Rivers. “Don’t you agree, Victoria?”

“As a matter of fact, Hermione, I don’t agree with you wholeheartedly,” said Lady Norton. “I think someone of my rank and experience would be more appropriate to give advice on etiquette. As you know, I was lady-in-waiting to Queen Alexandra, not to mention my husband’s title. You may have developed some wrong ideas about etiquette after spending so many years writing about the love life of middle-aged women. Not entirely proper, I sometimes suspect.”

Mrs. Rivers was about to explode, but happily at this moment, Mr. Goldwasser returned with Miss Merriman, both

quite pleased after having looked at the gown and deciding that it was truly perfect, which could have been expected as it was created by one of the greatest costume designers in Hollywood. Just then, Lady Pomfret and Mr. Choyce emerged from the huge white car, Miss Merriman went to greet them, and soon they joined the group. Mrs. Rivers and Lady Norton were talking at the same time, making considerable noise.

“What is it all about, Alcott?” said Mr. Goldwasser over the din.

“They want to go to Vienna,” said Mr. Alcott resignedly.

“Why?” asked Mr. Goldwasser, surprised at the turn of events.

“Mrs. Rivers feels it is more authentic to film there, and Lady Norton thought it was in our contract,” shouted Mr. Alcott. The ladies went on talking at the top of their voices and neither of them was listening.

“I see,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Ladies, ladies! Please allow me to speak. If both of you wish to go to Vienna, and for these excellent reasons, I will be happy to oblige. Mr. Alcott, would you kindly arrange it?”

“What size will our group be?” asked Mr. Alcott, rising to the occasion.

“Just large enough to film the Last Waltz on the shores of the Danube,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “We should go next week, I think. Make sure about the transport of the proper filming equipment.”

“Will do!” said Mr. Alcott cheerfully, happy to see the resolution of this tense moment.

“On another topic, a friend of mine, who is an avid gardener, mentioned he wanted to read your book, Lady Norton,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

“Which one, Mr. Goldwasser?” Lady Norton asked eagerly. Since both her books were dreadfully dull and could only be published by a vanity publisher, she was not used to such flattery. “Did your friend wish to read *Herbs of Grace* or *Along My Borders*?”

“I think it was *Herbs of Grace*, but why take a chance. You must tell me where I could purchase both books and I will send them to him in Hollywood.”

“I will personally autograph them, Mr. Goldwasser, if you wish,” said the Dreadful Dowager graciously.

“That will really make my friend happy, Lady Norton. Thank you,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

“Hermione,” said Lady Norton majestically. “I apologize.”

“No need, Victoria,” said Mrs. Rivers politely, if somewhat too sweetly for comfort.

“I forgot myself when I said such a dreadful thing and I take it back,” said Lady Norton, even more imperiously. “Of course you are entirely capable of answering any question of etiquette.”

“Such a little matter is of no importance between good friends,” said Mrs. Rivers.

“And I have enjoyed many of your books, Hermione. You write extremely well.”

“Thank you, Victoria. That is gratifying.”

Thus spoke Nation to Nation, and both ladies, arm-in-arm, nodded royally to the group and walked away, to everyone’s relief.

“You handled them admirably,” said Lady Pomfret, who had rather enjoyed the scene. “I should take some lessons in diplomacy from you, Mr. Goldwasser. Asking her for the books was a masterful technique.”

“My dear Lady Pomfret, you are the soul of graciousness,” said Mr. Goldwasser gallantly. “But if you needed any lessons, which of course you don’t, you already have the best instructor by your side. No one can be more diplomatic than our dear Miss Merriman.” He looked with frank admiration at the object of his affection, or at least that was what Mr. Choyce thought as he stood by, never saying a word.

“So what will you do in Vienna?” asked Lady Pomfret.

“We’ll shoot a couple of scenes under Mrs. Rivers’s eye, and entertain Lady Norton lavishly in one of the finer restaurants,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “GMG can easily afford the short trip, and I like to keep the peace as much as possible. Shooting this film is

becoming more difficult than I have expected, but we have saved a great deal of money by doing it here, so I might as well oblige the ladies. Will you come and see the shooting of the Embassy Dinner? It is about to start now.”

He led his guests into Lady Norton’s formal drawing room, an enormous room that had been once used for balls. It was cleared of all the furniture, and instead a long table stood there, taking up almost the entire length of the room. It was set with crystal, silver, gold and shining white linen, and the flowers, in subtle white and yellow arrangements, were breathtaking, and more importantly, did not clash with Glamora’s gown. The food was already on the plates and the wine poured into the glasses. Glamora Tudor stood at the end of the table, gazing at the arrangement without any expression on her perfectly made-up face, and looking absolutely ravishing in her sea-green lace, her red hair up-swept into a high chignon and topped with an emerald-studded tiara. Edmond, equally magnificent in tails, stood by her side.

“I hate green, Hank,” she suddenly said.

“It suits you very well,” said Edmond. “You look very nice.”

“Green does not go with my eyes,” said Glamora. “Ah, never mind. Who cares...”

A large number of extras, most elegantly dressed as well, filed in, settling in their places efficiently and with well-rehearsed speed. Glamora and Edmond sat at one of the long sides of the table, almost in the middle. Everyone started to eat and talk cheerfully.

“Lady Fitz-Gardner,” said Edmond in a deep, hushed voice, “we must talk privately.”

“Must we?” said Lady Fitz-Gardner. “Why, Mr. Chardonay?” She raised her eyes to his, and then lowered them seductively, though of course quite chastely, to her glass.

“I have a matter of great importance to discuss with you,” said Mr. Chardonay. “Will you come with me for a stroll on the shores of the Danube when we are free to leave this dreadfully tedious place?”

Lady Fitz-Gardner looked wearily at the golden plates, masses of flowers, and expensive jewellery worn by her fellow guests. Seeing this Look, the audience would immediately realize that she, too, thought the Embassy Dinner was Dreadfully Tedious. What matters a dish of fresh salmon prepared by an international chef and served after an appetizer of caviar and champagne, each bottle costing more than the average filmgoer's monthly rent of a small flat in London? What value is the strand of the most amazing emeralds on Lady Fitz-Gardner's neck? No, ten minutes of romance by the shores of the Blue Danube were so much more, so much more...

"I will," said Lady Fitz-Gardner. "My husband, as you know, is currently in Milan, on his new Tiger Lilies venture. So I am not needed this evening."

"Not needed?" repeated Mr. Chardonay in a hollow voice, looking passionately into her eyes. "This is a sad and inaccurate statement, Lady Fitz-Gardner, but I must let it pass..." and laying down his fork and the special fish knife with a mother-of-pearl handle, he sipped his wine. He had only toyed with his food, never really eating it, which is what the audience would expect from a love-struck, romantic hero. A healthy appetite would be totally inappropriate.

"Cut!" said Mr. Goldwasser.

"Is this it?" asked Lady Pomfret in disbelief. "You put up this huge display of cutlery, china, flowers, people, and food, for a two-minute conversation?"

"Yes, Lady Pomfret, you have just captured the essence of the Cinema. When you watch the film, you will not want a long scene at a dining table. It will be boring, you have already grasped the idea of what was going on, and you will want to quickly follow the couple's romantic conversation on the shores of the Danube. But the food is not wasted. All these extras, and possibly Glam and Keith, if they feel like it, will devour this very nice meal. And as for us, we will go to the temporary commissary, Hollywood style, that I have set up here and have a wonderful lunch. A little later, we can film the scene by the water."

About two hours later they were at the area that represented the shores of the Danube, watching Glamora and Edmond at work.

“Well, Mr. Chardonay,” said Lady Fitz-Gardner. “There was something you wished to tell me.” Her long sea-green, incredibly expensive lace gown trailed casually on the muddy ground, to Lady Pomfret’s horror, and her satin, emerald-green shoes, while not very suitable for a stroll on the shores of the Danube, were stunning.

“I hesitate, Lady Fitz-Gardner,” said Mr. Chardonay. “But I can no longer resist. I love you more than life itself, and I want you to be my wife.”

“Mr. Chardonay!” exclaimed the magnificent creature, obviously much surprised by his declaration, which she would not, in her purity, have ever expected despite all the time they had spent looking into each other’s eyes throughout the film. “This has never occurred to me... I am a married woman...”

“I know, to my chagrin,” said Mr. Chardonay, covering his eyes with his hand for a moment of private agony. “I cannot bear the thought of someone else having the right to love and cherish you... but we both know that your marriage no longer holds the love you so richly deserve. Your husband is too busy to devote his entire life to you, even though this is what someone like you should expect.... This is what I want to do. I want to devote every minute of my life to your happiness. Leave your husband, Lady Fitz-Gardner, and we will go somewhere far away, where we will never be found.”

Lady Fitz-Gardner pulled out her lace handkerchief from her emerald green satin bag that matched her shoes perfectly and touched her eyes. The close-up would show that this time the eyes were shadowed in delicate green, and every girl in England, the U.S., and Australia will rush to the local stores to buy it, which is why the cosmetic giant who had manufactured it and named it “Mermaid’s Glow” had invested millions in this film. Incidentally, this was not the same cosmetic firm that had sponsored the interesting lipstick, “Hibiscus Frenzy,” already worn all over the known world, but another one, equally large,

and we are divagating again to mention this because it shows so clearly what a great star Glamora Tudor, whom we have grown to like very much as we tell this story despite her obvious silliness, really was, and how much she could influence people's decisions when purchasing either clothes or maquillage. But let's return to our star-crossed and unhappy couple.

"But Mr. Chardonay, we both have duties," she whispered softly. "We cannot give in to our hearts..."

"Oh, my darling Aurora," exclaimed Mr. Chardonay, grasping her hand. "Have I heard correctly? Have you really said 'Our Hearts'? Is your heart mine?"

Assuming that we may refer to Lady Fitz-Gardner as "Aurora" from now on, since it an easier name to either type or write, well, Aurora turned away her beautifully coiffed head and whispered, "Yes, Nestor, my heart is yours. But we cannot, we cannot continue with this madness... our lives belong to other people..."

"No, Aurora. Love is more important than anything in this world. I will yet convince you to learn it and to obey the commands of your heart and soul."

We must note here that this line was another one used verbatim from Mrs. Rivers's book. The head screen writer was a not-so-young girl from New York named Maisie, who had just recently got engaged on top of the Ferris Wheel in Coney Island to her young man, a salesman from the great store Macy's, which they both thought was a very funny coincidence, just as if it were *meant*. Maisie thought this was the most wonderful sentiment she had ever encountered in any book. And yes, we hope that another one of our favourite authors, Mr. William Sydney Porter, better known as O. Henry, would be pleased or at least would not mind that we are introducing this character since he had placed so many girls named Maisie in Coney Island, New York and Macy's; but our Maisie never read about them, preferring a more romantic style of fiction. Of course she was quite susceptible to romance at that special time of her life, but we must realize that Maisie was selected to work on this important script in the first place because it was assumed that she

would reflect, or perhaps represent, the taste of the Great Public on both sides of the ocean. We feel quite sorry for her because of her disappointment at the end of the book, since unlike our readers, she had no idea that all of Mrs. Rivers's middle-aged heroines always went back to their husbands, after preserving their purity throughout the whole affair in the most tiresome way. Maisie had gone so far as to ask Mrs. Rivers if the end could be changed so as to have Aurora and Nestor go away on a slow boat to Tahiti, but we refrain from describing the violent response she got from Mrs. Rivers. We are happy to report that Maisie bore no grudges and enjoyed the romance just the same, crying during much of the writing time, and hoping against hope for a sequel that would correct this situation, possibly after the death of Aurora's husband. Maisie could just see Glamora Tudor wearing a black silk suit and a wide-brimmed black hat, meeting Mr. Chardonay after a memorial service to her husband, exactly a year after his death. The inevitable would happen then, Maisie hoped, and so she mentioned the idea to Mr. Alcott as they were having a quick glass of beer after work. The idea was very well received and Mr. Alcott said he would mention it to Mr. Goldwasser at the earliest opportunity, and promised, should this work out, to make sure Maisie would be chosen again as the head writer.

We ask our readers' forgiveness for these divagations, but we simply can't help ourselves as we feel that we and the readers walk together on the road taken by this modest work, and so we must tell all we know as we go along and have no secrets. At this moment Nestor took Aurora's hand reverently and kissed it. "I shall wait forever," he said. "Time has no meaning for a love as great as mine. Just promise me to try to understand..."

"I will, Nestor. Whatever happens to us, I will cherish this moment for the rest of my life... I do understand." And the camera followed them as they walked toward something or other on the pretend shore, and eventually it will be toward a beautifully superimposed Viennese Medieval Palace, an image supplied by the studios for just this purpose.

Mr. Choyce was not happy. The whole thing felt a little risqué, and while he possessed what he was sure was an open mind, he did not like the idea of an illicit affair, however platonic. More importantly, he did not like to see Miss Merriman, who was the soul of decorum, involved in a situation that exposed her to these mildly immoral doings. Of course he did not feel like interfering; he had no right, but he was hoping that all that would end soon and everyone would go back to their normal lives.

“Mr. Choyce,” he heard someone say and turned to see Miss Merriman by his side. “Have you enjoyed our little excursion into Hollywood?”

“Yes, of course,” said Mr. Choyce. “I did. Most amusing. It’s just that... I don’t know how to explain it... it is not part of our lives, is it?”

“Not in the least,” said Miss Merriman calmly. “No, it is merely a happy little interlude.”

“So you would not consider working for the films on a permanent basis, Miss Merriman?” and having uttered his great fear he felt better.

“Permanent basis has never been mentioned, Mr. Choyce. This is simply a temporary assignment.”

Mr. Choyce felt much happier after this response, until it suddenly occurred to him that his question was not really answered. All she really said was that a position of permanence had not been offered, but she said nothing about her own feelings. Did Miss Merriman want to work in the films on a permanent basis, and was just waiting for the opportunity to arise? Would she go to Hollywood if she were offered a position? And how friendly was she really with Mr. Goldwasser? Mr. Choyce had to admit that Mr. Goldwasser was an agreeable and intelligent man, and that it would not be too surprising if Miss Merriman liked him. He was no villain, no greedy tycoon, no vulgar nouveau riche. He seemed to admire Miss Merriman a great deal, in the most respectful manner of course. But how did Miss Merriman feel about Mr. Goldwasser? Or for that matter, how did she feel about Mr. Choyce?

Chapter Eight

Mr. Choyce sat in his library, thinking very hard about a subject he did not want to think about at all. He pretended to himself that he was writing a sermon, but his cat knew better. “There he goes again,” thought the cat, whose name, even though it has never been mentioned in these chronicles, was Charlemagne, and could not have been any other name, a fact with which I am sure every sensible reader would agree, and perhaps even feel, as we do, that it was the original intention of Someone Else, and perhaps She had just omitted mentioning it by accident. He jumped on Mr. Choyce’s lap, and the vicar petted him, a little too absent-mindedly to suit an ordinary cat’s finer sensibility and complete self-absorption, but Charlemagne, who was not an ordinary cat by any means, understood and bore no grudges. He settled himself on Mr. Choyce’s knees for a short but refreshing nap, much needed before heading to the Tile Club, where only the better sort of the Barsetshire cats were allowed as members. Charlemagne purred, to show his appreciation and emotional support, slept for a few minutes, then jumped off Mr. Choyce’s lap and stretched.

“I am off to the club, Mr. C.,” he expressed himself in the way cats and humans who are strongly bonded communicate with each other, and which cannot be explained to those who don’t have such a close relationship. “Don’t sit up for me, I’ll be late.”

“I never do,” responded Mr. Choyce in the same manner. “I have too much respect for you to do that, Charlemagne. You always have the freedom of your cat-flap door, anyway. Have a nice time at the club.”

Many of the members were already there, and Charlemagne noticed with some disgust that a few of the new members were not quite all that they ought to be. A sign of the times, he thought, resignedly. What with Them giving every Tom, Dick and Harry good government jobs and even a knighthood, well, naturally cat clubs would follow suit... and a little sadly he

turned to talk to his old friend, Miss Katrina, a great lady of high intellect and sophistication. And in case the reader wonders, we must mention that female cats are *always* allowed at the more respectable cat clubs.

“A woman’s name is sacred, and all that,” said Charlemagne, who was a gentleman of the old school, “so I will mention none. But I do want your advice, Miss Katrina. My human, Mr. Choyce, has liked a lady for years, and neither of them is getting any younger, but he would not act. I have devoted some thought to the matter. Knowing her story as I do, from the Towers kitty, I would say that the-lady-who-shall-remain-nameless might be happier and more comfortable in a home of her own. Besides, I like sitting on a lap with a skirt on it, it is much more comfortable than trousers, as you know, and I think he should consider my feelings in addition to his own, since I am The Cat of the House.”

“There is something you are not taking into consideration, despite your high intelligence and knowledge of the world, Mr. Charlemagne,” said Miss Katrina, “I am talking about the issue of money.”

“But I do understand money, Miss Katrina. I was not born yesterday. In this case, there is little to worry about. We cats believe in comfort above all, we always seek the good life, and trust me, Mr. C’s home is extremely comfortable for both man and beast. No reason to think it won’t be comfortable for a lady. And he does earn his living as a vicar.”

“Perhaps Mr. Choyce thinks he is comparatively poor, since he has only that income and no private means,” said Miss Katrina.

“His prospects are good,” said Charlemagne. “He is the sole nephew of a well-to-do, unmarried lady of advanced years. True, she is quite healthy and happy, and Mr. Choyce, who is very fond of his aunt, certainly does not wish for her death which will very likely not happen for some years. But still, there you are, he will inherit eventually.”

“I believe his means are sufficient for his needs, and more important, for yours, Mr. Charlemagne,” said Miss Katrina, “but

his income is small. Therefore, he does not dare to admit to himself fully how much he likes and esteems the lady we are respectfully discussing. She has a good position, and she is well liked by her employers who are also her friends, and until he can offer her a better situation, he won't act."

"Well, I think this is a very silly way to look at things. His own happiness and comfort depend on it, and I see no virtue in trying to be unselfish," said Charlemagne.

"Humans think differently from cats, as you know, Mr. Charlemagne. They pretend to such ridiculous virtues all the time," said Miss Katrina wisely. "But we must join the others, they are calling us." And so they both joined the choir that had started a new song, and the discussion stopped as they concentrated on proper howling. The honour of the Tile Club depended on keeping the neighbourhood awake as long as possible, and cats know how to focus their attention on one subject at a time.

But Mr. Choyce could not stop thinking. In the past, while resigned to keeping away from Miss Merriman, at least he knew she was settled and happy, working for and with her friends and living in a comfortable home, even if not her own, and what's more, he could enjoy her company very often. But here came this whirlwind of change in the guise of a man who had everything to offer – wealth, position, and an interesting and exciting new life – and in addition was intelligent, charming, and extremely likable. Mr. Choyce had to admit to himself that even if he had the temerity to approach Miss Merriman with his own feelings, he had not a chance in the world to win his suit, not while Mr. Goldwasser was in the background. For a moment he toyed with the thought that he, Mr. Choyce, was better looking than Mr. Goldwasser, but he quickly dismissed the idea as unworthy. So he tried to comfort himself that Miss Merriman's happiness was more important than his own, without any success at all. Let's face it, cats may have a point when they criticize us and say that the virtue of selflessness is highly overrated.

The next morning, Miss Tudor and Mr. Goldwasser were sitting in the commissary, having breakfast. Glamora, the consummate professional, never ate her breakfast in bed during production, and was always punctual to a degree, thus disproving the myth that the divas of the cinema were always late. They were going to shoot an important scene that morning, an encounter between Aurora and her husband, which would take place at his grand office in London, represented by the Norton library, a room of elegant proportions and beautiful furniture. Aurora would burst into a board meeting, and demand to speak to her husband, who would be, of course, quite outraged, but nevertheless dismiss all the important people, some of whom travelled all the way from the Netherlands to discuss a lily deal at great trouble and expense, so that he could speak privately to his rather tiresome wife. Sitting far away from each other at the conference table, Aurora would tell her husband that she planned to leave him. Of course we know she would not do so, but the shocked husband, never having read any of Mrs. Rivers's books, would believe her and be horrified and humiliated at the prospect.

"You look marvellous this morning, Glam," said Mr. Goldwasser.

"Thank you, Jake. Do you really like this bright red hair? Isn't it a bit too harsh?"

"For this film, for Aurora, Lady Fitz-Gardner, it is the perfect colour. The red hair is a metaphor for her flamboyant though suppressed character and the central inner storm of her emotions."

"Hah?" said Glamora and sipped her coffee.

"Sorry, Glam, I always forget to adapt my philosophical musings to your practical mind. I meant that red hair is appropriate for passionate and exciting women."

"So you think I am dumb, Jake?" asked Glamora without heat, and bit into a delicious scone.

"Dumb? That may be what you want people to believe, but I know better. You are sharper and shrewder than anyone I ever had to struggle with on the boards or to do my crazy deals with. I

was amazed by your intelligence when I first met you during your audition with me in London. But to answer your original question, for real life, I have another favourite hair colour for you.”

“Which one, Jake? I had so many!”

“Dark auburn, love.”

“Oh, the Irish heroine, our first film together, Jake. Is it just this, nostalgia, or do you really think it suited me best?”

“Yes, with these dark violet eyes of yours and the creamy fair skin... they go very well with the auburn.”

“My so-called creamy skin is beginning to show a whole lot of tiny wrinkles, Jake,” said Glamora with a strange lack of concern or regret, an attitude hardly to be expected of the famous film-star, whose success depended to a large extent on her youthful, or at least ageless, appearance and glowing beauty.

“You are just as beautiful as in those days, when we filmed *The Irish Narcissus*,” said Mr. Goldwasser chivalrously.

“Perhaps, since I have learned so much about makeup and self-care since those days, but it is getting harder and harder to maintain the look,” said Glamora. “It was much easier to be pretty when we were filming *The Irish Narcissus*, but Heavens, how I struggled in the London studios until you showed up in my life, Jake; the good looks did not help much.”

“Nevertheless, my dear, you would have made it without me. It may have taken a little longer, but no more than that. I recognized your talent and your star quality – but if I had not been there, someone else would, eventually. And remember, I never tied you down to our GMG contracts. You made many successful films for other studios.”

“Yes, Jake, but only after working with you and getting a Name. I will forever be grateful to you. And speaking of names, all these years later and I am still wondering how you thought of such a marvellous name for me. Glamora Tudor! This was automatic stardom.”

“Don’t you remember how I got to it? I am sure I told you.”

“No, come to think of it, I was thrilled, but I never questioned it. I was just amazed that you came up with it, Jake.”

“I am show biz, love. Through and through. I have to think of such things all the time. Anyway, when I change names for actors, I first try to stick as close as possible to the original name. And when you came to me with a name like Maura-Gayle Stewart, what could be easier? You know how, when you repeat words in sequence, they start to blend? I kept saying to myself, very quickly, Maura-Gayle-Maura-Gayle-Maura-Gayle-Maura and suddenly it became Gaylemaura. The transition to Glamora was child’s play. As for the surname, I would have kept the Stewart, a perfectly good name for a star, but we already had one Stewart in Hollywood, so I just thought about another British dynasty and Tudor came quickly to mind.”

“Magnificent. I hope I was as useful to you as you were to me, Jake, all these years.”

“Of course you were. We are a good team, love. A very good team,” said Mr. Goldwasser and helped himself placidly to a second scone.

“Yes, we are. But to tell you the truth, Jake, I am getting a little tired of maintaining the glamour, at least once in a while. Sometimes I would like to stop all this madness and start acting, really acting... and be my real age... *don’t tell anyone I said so!*”

“Of course not, Glam. It’s not good for business to tell anyone about your doubts, so we will keep these feelings to ourselves for the moment. But we may think of some solutions for your dilemma. I don’t want you to be unhappy with your life, ever. You know that.”

“What would I do without you managing my career, only the Lord knows,” said Glamora. “Well, time to go to Wardrobe. The deceptively simple suit they are squeezing me into today requires some time and effort, not to mention the subtle makeup and the very plain hairdo that will take a couple of hours to create... and even I have never put on higher heels than those of the shoes they showed me yesterday. What I don’t do to be tall enough for my gigantic leading men... so tedious; my feet already hurt in anticipation. You would think that butter-soft purple suede might be comfortable, but not when the heels make them almost

vertical, if this is the word I am looking for. Well, see you later, Jake.”

Mr. Goldwasser drank his last cup of coffee, musing. It was clear to him that his Glamora was not perfectly happy that morning. If it were a passing whim, no big deal, he thought; she will easily maintain the ageless image for at least ten more years. But if something more permanent was bothering her, he would have to re-evaluate the situation. This was the first time he had ever heard Glamora complain about her shoes. It may be significant, considering she had a shoe collection that could have supplied a small museum, and not a single pair could have been called “sensible.” What would Glam look like in a pair of sensible shoes, Mr. Goldwasser thought idly, something like the shoes that Miss Brinton always wore? No, it was not possible to even imagine it...

The double doors suddenly burst open and Aurora stood in the entrance, her eyes blazing, her face flushed with emotion.

“Aurora!” Lord Arthur jumped to his feet. “What are you doing here? We are in the middle of a most important conference! Some of these gentlemen came all the way from the Netherlands to discuss the lilies contract!”

“You are always in the middle of a most important something-or-other,” said Aurora disdainfully, never giving so much as a glance to the many men who had also jumped to their feet as soon as she stepped into the room. “Kindly dismiss this meeting, Arthur. What I have to say to you is more important than any of your business ventures.” She looked magnificent in a dark purple velvet suit, a small hat made of the same material perched on her beautifully and simply coiffed hair, and the shoes – but we have already described them. Suffice to say that Glamora negotiated these stilt-like contraptions with her usual easy style and no one could have possibly guessed how much they hurt her poor feet. A small bouquet of violets adorned the opening of her white silk blouse, and other than a pair of heavy pearl earrings, diamond engagement ring, and platinum wedding band, she wore no jewellery.

“I am sorry, gentlemen. We must resume our meeting tomorrow,” said Lord Arthur. “I do apologize. Let’s meet again at ten o’clock.” The men filed out of the room, quite obediently and without complaints.

“Well, Aurora?” said Lord Arthur. “You have thoroughly embarrassed me in front of some very important people. I hope you had a good reason.”

Aurora sat down, a good distance from her husband. The huge conference table was meant to be a subtle symbol of how far apart they have drifted, so it was polished to a gleam that no conference table had ever experienced. Maisie, the romantic head script writer, thought about one large flower arrangement in a state of semi-wilting, as a metaphor for the dying marriage, but she was shot down by the research department who claimed that no conference room would ever have even a small vase. Maisie argued that the business was all about flowers, but to no avail. So the table stretched to its polished miles without interruptions.

“Embarrassed you, Arthur? You will be much more embarrassed when I leave you,” said Aurora with a fury that must have disconcerted the husband who was used to her reserve.

“Leave me? Why? Are you mad?”

“I will be following my heart, Arthur. Since you do not have a heart, you will not understand.”

“A lady of your rank and position does not leave a marriage like that. This is unthinkable, shocking.”

“Shocking to what, Arthur? To your feelings, to your love for me, or to your position? I am tired of being alone, neglected, and unloved.” She got up and stared out of the window, her magnificent figure outlined against the bright light.

“I have given you everything, Aurora. A title, great wealth, a life of culture and refinement, a social position that anyone would envy. And I have always treated you with the utmost respect.”

“Respect? Position? It is *Love* I want, Arthur. Love, even if I have to suffer dire poverty as the consequence. I would work my fingers to the bone if I had to help the man I love... Do you think

I married you for your position? I loved you, Arthur, and you have mocked and ignored my love.”

“Is there someone else, Aurora?”

She turned to him with a sudden movement, clutching nervously at the small bunch of violets tucked into her blouse. It fell on the shining surface of the conference table and she ignored it. “Yes, Arthur. There is someone who loves me. His love is pure and noble. He would not mention rank and money to the woman he adores.”

“Very likely he does not have any rank or money to mention, Aurora. He may want some of your money and social position. How utterly dreadful. An affair... my wife having an affair with a worthless adventurer... what a scandal.” He put his head in his hands. “Your infidelity will destroy my position.”

“Don’t cheapen my feelings, Arthur. There is no affair, no infidelity. Nestor and I love each other with all our hearts, but we maintained our purity... our love is like a shining, clear, distant star... Can you understand that? No, you can’t. Goodbye, Arthur, you shall not see me again!” She stalked out of the room. Lord Arthur raised his head, picked up the small bouquet of violets and stared at it. Suddenly he whispered, “Aurora, my love! How could you! Don’t you know how much I adore you?” and brought the violets to his face.

“Cut!” said Mr. Goldwasser.

Glamora returned to the room, carrying her shoes in her hands, and smiled sweetly at the very tall, thin, elegant actor who played the unfortunate Lord Arthur and generally specialized in the parts of British Noblemen even though he really was the son of a greengrocer from Sydney, Australia, and said, “You were as amazing as ever, Peter. You should have been born a lord and a tycoon. You certainly have the Look.” The actor laughed and everyone trailed to the commissary for a much-needed cup of tea.

At the commissary, Mr. Goldwasser steered Glamora away from the crowd and sat with her at a corner table. “Glam, we must talk,” he said.

“Was something wrong with today’s shooting?” asked Glamora, surprised.

“No, it was perfect. Thousands of women will cry when Lord Arthur picks up the violets. Such a nice touch... No, I wanted to talk about a couple of other things. First, our trip to Vienna.”

“So silly and expensive,” said Glamora. “But of course I can see why you must do it, what with Mrs. Rivers and Lady Norton screeching at you... and I rather look forward to the perfect Wiener Schnitzel at Frau Vogl’s restaurant.”

“Expensive? Not a bit of it. The price of a short trip and a couple of days in Austria is nothing compared with the fact that we will have to shoot the whole scene for a second time later, love,” said Mr. Goldwasser placidly.

Glamora looked at him, pale and silent. “Do you mean because of Hank? I think you will find that he has mastered the Waltz. We have been practicing every evening.”

“I know, Glam. I have seen you, dancing every evening.”

“Did you notice how much he improved, then?”

“No, I did not. He may get the hang of the steps, he may learn not to trip on his own feet, but it will never be the exciting, moving experience the audience expects from The Last Waltz. Glam, I have known thousands of actors, and I can tell so much from a single glance at them. Keith is extremely good looking, but he will never be graceful or elegant. He is very large and a bit clumsy, and you know it as well as I do and he freely admits to it. What is it all about, my dear? Why do you insist on this poor boy staying on a job he neither likes nor is suited for? Please explain. You can tell me anything.”

“I can’t, Jake,” said Glamora and wiped her eyes with a napkin. “No, I can’t explain, really. I don’t quite know how to explain it. As usual, I don’t have the right words... I am so sorry...”

“And for once I have no idea how to guess or interpret your feelings. Glam, you have vanquished whole troupes of young men, and I always thought of it as your little hobby and never interfered. Come to think of it, I usually find it rather amusing. But your involvement with Keith is destroying the film.”

“Okay, Jake,” said Glamora, now openly crying. “Give him just this last chance, and if he cannot do *The Last Waltz* the way you want it, I give up. Yes, I give up.”

“Glam, you seem a bit too attached to this boy... I don’t want to see you hurt. You may be missing something here. Even if you find him utterly attractive, for whatever reason, you know it won’t be a good thing to go on like that with a young man. Didn’t you notice that he is rather interested in Clover’s little cousin?”

“Yes, Jake, I did notice. More than noticed, I know it with a certainty. But it’s all part of the same problem... I just don’t know how to explain it to you, Jake. I am never good at explaining thoughts, or feelings. You know that.”

“Okay, love, stop crying,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Either way, no one will be seriously hurt; I simply won’t allow it. Cheer up. We will go to Vienna, and see what we can do, and if it does not work out we will consult before I do anything at all. I promise you I won’t do a thing without your consent, Glam.”

It was a busy day in Barchester and the streets were unusually crowded. As Miss Merriman was hurrying out of Bostock and Plummer, the old-established Ladies Emporium from the 1870s, where the respectable county still did its shopping, she bumped into a gentleman and raised her eyes to apologize.

“Why, Mr. Choyce,” said Miss Merriman. “Please forgive my clumsiness. I don’t know why I am in such a hurry... but how nice to meet you so unexpectedly. I was doing a little shopping before my trip to Vienna.”

“Vienna?” asked Mr. Choyce, rather taken aback. “You are going to Austria? Why?”

“With the Company, of course,” said Miss Merriman rather dashingly. “For reasons of authenticity they want to shoot a certain scene on location in Vienna, and Mr. Goldwasser asked me to come with him, just in case.”

“I see,” said Mr. Choyce. “Well, well, you have been there before, I am sure, but it is a very pleasant city.”

“Yes, I was there with Lady Pomfret, that is, my Lady Edith Pomfret, years ago. I did enjoy the trip. I am rather looking forward to seeing how Vienna changed, if at all. I wonder if Frau Vogl’s restaurant is still there... Lady Pomfret, who generally ate so little, always looked forward to Frau Vogl’s perfect sachertorte. If the restaurant is still there, I will have a slice in her honour.”

“Speaking of cakes, would you have time for a cup of tea, Miss Merriman?” asked Mr. Choyce diffidently.

“Why, yes, Mr. Choyce, I will be delighted. I drove here, so I don’t have to worry about buses or about anyone waiting for me.”

They entered one of the nicer tea shops and settled at a small table for two by the window. Mr. Choyce felt rather awkward, but of course Miss Merriman, the soul of tact, would not permit herself to notice such a thing.

“You look a little different, Miss Merriman,” said Mr. Choyce. “Very nice, as always, but different, and I can’t tell what it is.”

Miss Merriman laughed. “Before I went to do my shopping at Bostock and Plummer, I spent a rather pleasant hour at Maison Tozier, where Miss Dahlia cut and styled my hair in the latest fashion. She said that since I work for Hollywood now, I must be, to use her expression, up-to-date.”

“Very nice, very nice indeed,” said Mr. Choyce.

“I am glad you like it, Mr. Choyce,” said Miss Merriman in her quiet way.

“So how long will you be working with Mr. Goldwasser, Miss Merriman?” asked Mr. Choyce a little too casually, busily and unnecessarily stirring his tea cup with his spoon even though he had not put sugar in it.

“Until Miss Brinton comes back, in a few weeks,” said Miss Merriman, discreetly pushing the sugar bowl toward Mr. Choyce. “She is rather vague about the exact date.”

“I wonder why Mr. Goldwasser puts up with that,” said Mr. Choyce somewhat pettishly, and put two lumps in his tea, this

time forgetting to stir. He sipped the tea and winced at the bitter taste.

“He is a very kind man,” said Miss Merriman, ignoring the little incident. “His relationship with Miss Brinton is one of trust and confidence, and he won’t stand in her way if she needs those few weeks for settling a personal matter. Besides, I am there, doing much of her work, so there are no difficulties.”

“I don’t like it,” said Mr. Choyce, suddenly throwing caution to the winds.

“Don’t like what, Mr. Choyce? Miss Brinton going on a leave of absence? Why?”

“No, Miss Merriman. I don’t grudge Miss Brinton a holiday, or time to attend to her personal concerns. Why should I? What I don’t like is that a person of your character, integrity, and morality, should be involved in this film... in an inferior story of bad taste and vaguely risqué behaviour. I am sorry, I have no right to say these things...”

“We are old friends, Mr. Choyce, and you have the right to express any of your opinions,” said Miss Merriman graciously. “I respect your views both as a friend and as a clergyman. But allow me to assure you, the tone of the film will not affect me, nor will it cause any permanent change, let alone damage, in my life. I am only there for a short while. My duty is at the Towers, and to the Towers I shall return. I could not leave Lord and Lady Pomfret for anything – anything at all – for as long as they want me. I will only leave them when my services are no longer needed.”

Mr. Choyce felt better, and they had a pleasant time. But when Miss Merriman went away in her car, her packages safely stacked on the back seat, he suddenly wondered. Did she mean that if the Pomfrets could dispense with her services, she would then go to Hollywood, after all? Or worse, did she just give him, Mr. Choyce, a royal congé? Did she tell him, in no uncertain terms, that his suit will never meet with success while the Pomfrets needed her? Such behaviour bordered on pointless and purposeless self-sacrifice, an act quite beneath someone as wise and practical as Miss Merriman. He could not believe that this

was what she meant – but neither was he sure. Mr. Choyce was extremely confused, and when he went home, Charlemagne did not like the way he looked. “There he goes again,” thought the wise cat. “I must do something about it. This is becoming ridiculous.”

Chapter Nine

Self-imposed rules should occasionally be broken. If they become sacred and immutable, life turns out to be too regimented, too orderly, and somewhat airless. It is important to bring this issue to the readers' attention because we are about to break one of our own self-imposed rules and head out of Bassetshire, and what's more, not to London, a relatively short trip if you catch the right trains, but to Vienna! This will be an important development because, first, momentous events are about to occur during the GMG trip, and second, because we feel, much like Lady Norton, that after all the talk about the trip to Vienna, it is really part of our own Contract with GMG, though we hope to never express ourselves in the unpleasant manner Lady Norton habitually does.

However, since we do not profess to know Vienna personally, descriptions will be avoided. Unlike Mrs. Rivers, who was called "The Baedeker Bitch" by her publisher, Mr. Johns, because of her detailed descriptions of every city her heroines visit, we refuse to spend one or two days researching a strange town and then pretend to know it well. If Vienna possesses castles, cobblestone-paved medieval alleys, or charming little cafés, which very likely it does in profusion, the reader is respectfully requested to open a guidebook, do her own research, and get a good visual image of the city. Suffice to say that the Company reached Vienna in safety, with all the filming equipment in good order, and settled in a comfortable hotel. They arrived during late afternoon and planned to go to Frau Vogl's famous restaurant for dinner.

Frau Vogl's deceptively homelike and internationally acclaimed restaurant had not changed at all, a fact that gave Miss Merriman great pleasure mixed with a little nostalgia. Frau Vogl came to greet them, and as she spoke perfect, though slightly accented English, they could freely converse. Of course, she was no longer the pretty, slim, dark-haired young woman Miss Merriman remembered, but a middle-aged woman, plump and

extremely attractive, with an unlined face and thick silver hair coiled into a beautiful chignon. She was delighted to see the group, and after a little reminiscing with Miss Merriman and a cheerful reunion with Miss Tudor and Mr. Goldwasser, who were true habitués, she insisted on taking the orders herself, and advising them on the best dishes. We must admit that the company, in the rather uninspired style of English travellers, stuck to the obvious dishes, and the orders were almost equally divided between Wiener schnitzel accompanied by erdäpfel salat, and delicious tafelspitz. The only the exception was Mr. Goldwasser, who ordered a more exotic dish of stuffed pickled pork breast, but they were nevertheless honoured by the distinction. Of course there was always dessert to consider, what with the many pastry sweets, strudels, and tortes.

The food was superb, which made the fact that Edmond only toyed with it, much like the romantic Nestor Chardonay, even stranger than it would have normally been for a young man who usually possessed a hearty appetite. He was rather quiet for someone of his cheerful nature, drank a lot of water, and every so often rubbed his head.

“Are you feeling unwell, Mr. Keith?” asked Miss Merriman, who always noticed everything.

“Perhaps a little,” said Edmond reluctantly. “I had a bad headache on the train and now I feel a little strange... maybe I should drink some tea...”

“I will take you to the hotel immediately, Mr. Keith,” said Miss Merriman so decisively that no mortal young man could have possibly argued. “You will have a good night’s rest, and if you are still unwell in the morning, we shall see.”

Mr. Alcott immediately rose from his seat, and called for his car. He drove Miss Merriman and Edmond, who was almost asleep, to the hotel. Miss Merriman decided to stay there, in case Edmond needed her, and sent her apologies to the company. As they were all quite concerned, they did not linger much after dessert and coffee, and soon returned to the hotel, promising Frau Vogl to return soon.

In the morning, Edmond was clearly very ill. A fatherly doctor arrived, and after examining the patient, explained that Edmond had a rather nasty bout of influenza. Under the circumstances, the doctor thought, it would be best to take him for a few days to a hospital. Edmond was carried away, resigned to his fate and almost delirious with high fever, and was settled in the hospital by the nice doctor and Miss Merriman. When she came back to the hotel, the Company sat down to consult.

“What is to be done?” asked Mrs. Rivers. “After all, the object of the trip was to film *The Last Waltz* authentically.”

“True,” said Miss Tudor nervously. “What shall we do, Jake? We can’t go back until Hank is ready to leave, and we can’t shoot.”

“Well, we can shoot all the scenery around here, and then superimpose it on the *Last Waltz*,” said Mr. Goldwasser soothingly. “Also, we have another important scene I planned to film in Vienna, since we were coming here anyway. I am referring to the scene of the reunion between Lady Fitz-Gardner and Lord Arthur – this is why I asked Peter to come with us.”

“But what about Hank?” asked Miss Tudor anxiously.

“I understand that he will be ready to return to England in about a week. We can contact his parents in London,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

“They are not there, Mr. Goldwasser,” said Miss Merriman. “They went to Belgium. Mr. Keith’s father had some business there, and Mrs. Keith decided to join him and do a little shopping.”

“You know everything,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Thank you, Miss Merriman. So what would you suggest we do about Keith?”

“I suggest we ask his cousin, Lady Merton, to allow him to recuperate in her house in Northbridge,” said Miss Merriman. “You remember having visited her there, don’t you, Mr. Goldwasser?”

“Excellent idea,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Of course I remember my very pleasant visit with Lady Merton; she is a delightful hostess. Would you be so kind, Miss Merriman, as to

telephone her? Lady Merton is an old friend of yours, and I think the news and the request would be better coming from you than from me. But please make sure to tell her that all expenses, including a nurse if she can get one, will be paid by GMG.”

“Thank you, Mr. Goldwasser. I will telephone her immediately. Also, since you so generously offer to cover the expenses, may I suggest to Lady Merton to send the nurse here, to help Mr. Keith on the trip back? He is bound to be very weak after this really bad bout with influenza.”

“Of course, Miss Merriman,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “By all means ask her to send the nurse.”

Miss Merriman went to the lobby to tackle the almost impossible task of calling England. After much wrangling with the Exchange and many delays, lavishly using the power of Mr. Goldwasser and the might of GMG, she finally managed to speak to Lydia.

“The poor boy,” said Lydia. “This film has not been a lucky experience for him. Of course, he must come here, no point whatsoever in alarming his poor mother in Belgium; she is having a much-needed holiday. I’ll arrange for a nurse to come to you as soon as possible. I will try to get Nurse Chiffinch, and if she is busy, one of her friends, Nurse Ward or Nurse Heath, will certainly come.”

And so the filming of the scenery started right away, and Miss Tudor and Peter, the actor who played Lord Arthur, rehearsed their reunion. Everyone tried to visit Edmond, but only Miss Merriman was allowed to see him since he was much too unwell for company. The Head Nurse was not going to allow even her to come in, but Miss Merriman’s quiet authority could not be resisted, and when she told the Head Nurse “I understand he may have no visitors, naturally, but of course I will be permitted to see him,” the Head Nurse, to her own surprise, meekly agreed and even took her to Edmond’s room.

Soon Nurse Chiffinch arrived and with her usual energy and good cheer took matters into her capable hands. She quickly put on her uniform, which as always suited her so much better than her civilian clothes even though she did not know it, marched to

the hospital, and conquered the entire staff with her charm and authority in a few minutes. The Head Nurse offered tea, and while they were having it cosily in the Nurse's station, the two ladies discovered that during the war they had spent a whole week in the same hospital in London, and eternal friendship was re-established. Nurse Chiffinch immediately assumed her position as Edmond's private nurse, pulled out her crochet work, which was a mauve bed jacket for her friend Wardy's newly married niece, and all was well.

"We are ready for the reunion scene," said Mr. Goldwasser to Miss Tudor and Peter. "Let's shoot it tomorrow morning."

"It's not really The Reunion," said Glamora. "What would you call it, Miss Merriman?"

"I would call it a meaningful encounter," said Miss Merriman. "What do you think, Mrs. Rivers?"

"Yes, this is what I would call it. The real Reunion comes much later," said Mrs. Rivers. "But it is a very significant encounter; it influences the resolution a great deal."

"I quite agree," said Miss Merriman. "I am looking forward to the filming."

In the morning, the Company assembled in the designated area in the street, which of course was cordoned off and forbidden to the regular citizens, all of whom were gaping at the proceedings from a distance.

The blue sky was reflected in the blue water. Aurora stood on the ancient bridge, leaning her arms on the iron railing. She was wearing a lavender and grey suit, the colours of resignation, according to the research department who recommended them to the famous dress designer who had intended to use them all along, since everyone knew that lavender and grey were the colours of spiritual, platonic romance. Her shoes were grey patent leather, a lavender lily adorned her lapel, and a delicate lavender chiffon scarf floated around her neck, meant to bring out the famous violet eyes. A light breeze, produced by a hidden fan attached to a small generator, made the long chiffon scarf trail and wave in the air, streaming over half the width of the

little bridge. Strains of music by Zoltán Kodály will be heard here, insistent, mysterious, vaguely Oriental and perhaps a little aggressive in a sensual way, as described by the research department when they insisted that Kodály should be preferred to Aram Khachaturian, who was never interested in the Danube, for Heaven's sake!

"Aurora!" exclaimed Lord Arthur, visibly shaken by seeing his estranged wife in Vienna. "What are you doing here?"

"I am resting and thinking, Arthur," said Aurora sadly.

"That is good," said Lord Arthur, gazing at the ethereal lavender vision.

"And are you here on business, or a conference, Arthur?" asked Aurora, turning her head away slightly to hide her emotions.

"No," said Lord Arthur simply, raising his eyes to the distance. "There are no more business arrangements, no more conferences, Aurora. I have liquidated the company."

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Aurora, whose turn it was to be visibly shaken.

"Will you come and have some tea, and I will explain?" asked Lord Arthur, his handsome, tired face bent toward his wife.

"But of course, Arthur," said Aurora.

"Cut!" said Mr. Goldwasser.

Everyone trailed into the prearranged café, where the filming equipment was installed earlier. The crowd dispersed, disappointed by not being able to see what was going on inside. Glamora and Peter sat at a small wrought iron table.

"Is Mr. Chardonay here with you, Aurora?" asked Lord Arthur.

"No, Arthur. Mr. Chardonay and I do not travel together. You should know that. Yes, he and I love each other with all our hearts – but from afar. There is no affair, Arthur, no infidelity, nothing cheap or vulgar has ever taken place. I respect you too much for such behaviour."

"Yes, Aurora. I do understand and appreciate it. And I see you are still wearing your wedding band."

“I will only remove it at such time when I am no longer your wife, Arthur. But not yet. However, I am anxious to know why you have liquidated the company. Please tell me.”

“When you left, Aurora, I realized that my life had lost all meaning,” said Lord Arthur with engaging, simple candour. “I was no longer interested in my work, my business, or my conferences. I am extremely wealthy already, I said to myself, and now without you, why go on fighting for more deals, more money? I decided that from that moment on, I would attend to my duties at the House of Lords, involve myself in philanthropic and community affairs, and spend the rest of my life in quiet solitude.”

“I am shocked, Arthur. Completely amazed. I never expected that,” said Aurora.

“No, of course not. You have tried, again and again, to show me the right way, and again and again I refused to see it. It is my fault. All is my fault. I blame myself and take full responsibility for my loss. I should have devoted my life to the woman I loved, not to the flower business.”

“Do you still love me, Arthur?” whispered Aurora.

“Yes, with all my heart,” said Lord Arthur. “But I expect nothing. You shall do exactly what you want with your life, and I will accept your decisions and wish you happiness.”

“Arthur, you are so kind, so understanding... I must think...” said Aurora. “This is so unexpected... In a few days, Mr. Chardonay is coming to Vienna. He wants to know his fate, once and for all. Let me be by myself until that time, and ponder the significance of what you have just told me...”

A weary smile trembled on Lord Arthur’s lips. At this moment, the women in the audience would be expected to hesitate in their reaction. Up to this point, which was about three-quarters into the film, the female audience would feel that Aurora should sacrifice all her considerable material comforts, elevated social position, cultured and pleasant life, and follow her heart with young Nestor Chardonay, heading toward the unknown. But the cold and unfeeling husband suddenly proved to be anything but cold and unfeeling, and the women would just

as suddenly notice that he was actually very handsome in his own distinguished way. Not as obviously good looking as young Nestor, of course, but elegant and charming in a more mature way. He was a gentleman as *was* a gentleman, many women would whisper to each other, and he was her lawful husband, and who knows, perhaps young Nestor was a bit of a cad, after all, to go after a respectable married lady and turn her head? We must mention that Wardrobe indeed created some changes in Lord Arthur's look. He was wearing a less formal suit, and his hair was combed in a much more youthful way, though all these changes were so subtle that the audience would not be able to describe them if asked. But they would register them and begin to like Lord Arthur much better than before. What should Aurora do? Who should she turn to?

"Do I still have some hope of regaining your love, Aurora? Could that be?"

"But Arthur, I have never stopped loving you... I love both of you...I am so confused, I need time..." whispered the magnificent creature. "I will telephone you in a few days, I promise..." and she glided out of the café, her very long lavender chiffon scarf trailing gently in the air.

"Cut!" said Mr. Goldwasser.

"Mr. Goldwasser," said Miss Merriman, "there is a small error in this scene. Lady Fitz-Gardner does not know where to telephone her husband; his hotel was never mentioned."

"Good catch, Miss Merriman," said Mr. Goldwasser. "Peter, Glam, everyone! One small correction must be made." Everyone got very busy again.

That evening, after Miss Merriman returned from the hospital with a good report about Edmond, Mr. Goldwasser asked her to come out for a short walk, if she were not too tired.

"I am not tired at all, Mr. Goldwasser," said Miss Merriman. "I have done very little today. By all means, let us go for a walk."

“I wanted to speak to you privately, Miss Merriman, because I have received a letter from Miss Brinton,” said Mr. Goldwasser as they were strolling through the lovely streets.

“Is everything all right with Miss Brinton?” asked Miss Merriman.

“Well, the wedding is off again, but she is fine.”

“Wedding? Whose wedding?” asked Miss Merriman, a little confused.

“Miss Brinton has been engaged to a general in the U.S Army for over twenty years,” said Mr. Goldwasser, laughing. “Whenever the wedding date is imminent, she decides not to go ahead with it, always worrying about her freedom. The general never minded, he was not anxious to marry soon, and he travelled all over the world anyway as part of his duties. But now he is retiring, he wants to settle down, and so he told Miss Brinton that it was now or never. She went to the U.S. fully intending to go ahead with the wedding, and then, one more time, broke it off. Cold feet, I suppose. So she is coming back here in a few days.”

“So you will no longer need my services,” said Miss Merriman with an unexpected pang, for the first time in years thinking of herself rather than of other people.

“On the contrary, I want you to stay on the job – and to make it permanent. I need more than one assistant, there is always plenty of work. And as far as Miss Brinton is concerned, she will eventually marry the general. I think she will continue to work with me, but only on a part-time basis.”

“You really think she will ever marry him, Mr. Goldwasser?”

“Oh, yes, they do care for each other a great deal, and why not? He won’t interfere with anything she wants to do. He really is a very nice, sensible, easy-going man. I have always liked the general very well.”

“Nevertheless, she may be right to decide not to marry,” said Miss Merriman thoughtfully. “It is extremely difficult to get used to a new life, a new husband, when one is past youth.”

“So you don’t believe in marriage for middle-aged people, Miss Merriman?” asked Mr. Goldwasser.

“Sometimes it is very successful, I believe, but one must be very careful in one’s choice. One must be certain that similar interests, similar lifestyles, similar preferences are there.”

“I am not so sure these are the necessary conditions,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Affection, respect, and understanding will go far in helping people to adjust to each other’s differences.”

“No doubt,” said Miss Merriman, “affection is the most important ingredient, but many marriages, despite the good intentions, suffer from the dissimilarity between the parties’ way of life.”

“Well, we must hope all goes well for Miss Brinton,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “But you have not answered me regarding the job.”

“I know,” said Miss Merriman. “I am very grateful to you. It is extremely tempting to just accept, and jump into the new life. But I should not do so, I should not act impulsively. Come to think of it, I am not even sure that I *can* act impulsively... I must think.”

“Naturally,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “I am glad you are not dismissing the idea without consideration.”

“You see, Mr. Goldwasser, my life is so clearly defined, or at least that is what I thought. I assumed I would continue to devote it to the service of my employers... but the allure of what you are offering is strong. I love the cinema, I enjoy my work with you exceedingly... it’s just that it would be so difficult to leave the old friends behind and go to a far away country...” and as she spoke the words “old friends” suddenly Mr. Choyce’s face drifted in front of Miss Merriman’s inner eye. It did so fleetingly, and she could not understand why it happened, since she had so many other old friends in the County. But we think we can explain it, though of course it is up to the reader to agree or disagree with our reasoning.

Therefore, we must stop for a moment and move backwards in time. Our readers may remember the two guardian angels who represented Mrs. Brandon and Canon Joram so successfully in

another book in these chronicles. Any sensible person would agree that if these two delightful people had their guardian angels, why shouldn't Miss Merriman and Mr. Choyce, who were equally pleasant people, possess such a useful connection with their own guardian angels? Of course they would! What the readers may not know, however, is that cats have direct communication with guardian angels, a fact that has been proven aeons ago. We have all seen cats, who at a certain moment sit peacefully in front of the fire, or are giving themselves a nice bath, or are engaged in having a refreshing nap, suddenly jump to attention, stare at something completely invisible to mere humans, and possibly even run to another room as if summoned to a conference. Well, generally they are indeed summoned, though of course quite politely, by the presence of a guardian angel. They also have a channel of communication with the angels, and can request an audience, using something much like a telephone exchange, only different, if we are making ourselves clear.

The reader will surely also recall that Charlemagne, Mr. Choyce's cat, decided something had to be done about his owner's situation. So he invited Miss Merriman's and Mr. Choyce's guardian angels to discuss it, and of course they came promptly, since angels are generally extremely obliging beings, and they respect cats.

"It just can't go on for long," said Charlemagne after the usual greetings.

"Certainly you realize, Mr. Charlemagne," said Miss Merriman's guardian angel, "that there is a new development in this case. To me it seems that Mr. Goldwasser admires her a great deal."

"But I don't know Mr. Goldwasser personally," said Charlemagne. "He is from a distant country, with different tastes and habits. Mr. Choyce would be a much better prospect for Miss Merriman – they have everything in common. If she chooses Mr. Goldwasser, it would be as if I decided to marry a wild cat from the jungle. It just won't do, you know. When I marry, it will be a lady cat from the County, well brought up and

intelligent, slightly adventurous, like me, but not undomesticated!”

“I agree,” said Mr. Choyce’s guardian angel. “Miss Merriman and Mr. Choyce are perfectly suited to each other. Mr. Goldwasser has many good points, but he is a foreigner.”

“So do you have a clue as to what happens in the future?” asked Charlemagne. “I understand angels often do.”

“We are not allowed to peek into the future,” said Miss Merriman’s angel.

“It is strictly forbidden to angels of our rank,” added Mr. Choyce’s angel. “However, I have an idea. Let’s communicate with Mr. Goldwasser’s angel. He is of a higher rank now, I believe, but a very nice fellow, and I have known him for many years. He went to school with us, Samuel, remember him? A chap named Daniel? Always getting in trouble with the authorities? Maybe he has some additional insights into the matter, and perhaps he could peek into the future for us, too.”

They placed a trunk call to Mr. Goldwasser’s angel, or whatever angels do when they wish to communicate with someone far away, and after a very short wait the angel appeared.

“Well, well, well,” he said. “It’s been a while since we were all together in Cloud Nine University, what? Well, introduce me to this distinguished cat, please, fellows. You must remember to mind your manners, you know.” He affected a slight American accent which amused the other two a great deal. Proper introductions were made to Charlemagne, and the conference began, the angels occupying a corner of the ceiling, Charlemagne sitting on a high armoire. The entire issue was placed before Mr. Goldwasser’s angel. He thought for a long time, hovering quietly over the ceiling.

“We hear you have been promoted,” said Mr. Choyce’s angel.

“Yes indeed, old boy,” said Mr. Goldwasser’s angel, and showed them, with justifiable pride, the new insignia attached to his left wing.

“So would you please peek into the future, and let us know how things stand?”

“I am not allowed to divulge such information,” said Mr. Goldwasser’s angel.

“Don’t be such a prig, Daniel,” said Miss Merriman’s angel. “I would not expect it from you...”

“I am far from being a prig, Samuel. Don’t you remember all the trouble I used to get into in Cloud Nine University? But this is serious business. Archangel Michael, who is really a helpful chap, told us when we were promoted that such offences would have us risk demotion,” said Daniel. “However, we are allowed to interpret and help out. So I will check and then give you a hint.” Daniel moved away a little, and seemed to concentrate, looking at the distance. After a few minutes of intense study, he said, “Don’t worry, let things develop in their own way, and I promise that soon you will hear some *very* good news, such news that will please both of you equally. Let’s see. This is 1954, by our humans’ count, right? Hard to keep track sometimes, what with their strange way of relating to Time, so different from ours. I so much prefer counting from The Beginning... Still, expect the good news around their 1956, or at worst, 1957.”

“I feel much better now,” said Charlemagne. “I am a young cat, and I can afford to wait a couple of years. After all, my life is very comfortable just as it is... Thank you so much, angels. You are always so clever and helpful.”

“That is how we view cats,” answered Mr. Choyce’s angel, whose name, in case the reader wonders, was Nathaniel, very politely. “What humans would do without cats, I simply can’t imagine... dogs too, if you will forgive my mentioning them...” As he prepared to depart, Daniel did one more helpful thing. He sent a strong thought over the ether, and it was exactly at that moment that Mr. Choyce’s face drifted before Miss Merriman’s inner eye. This is, perhaps, the way angels generally operate; we do not know. But we believe that when they do their job properly, their humans respond by inner knowledge, thoughts, or feelings, since why else should Miss Merriman think of Mr. Choyce just as Mr. Goldwasser was offering her a dream job?

Nathaniel and Samuel said good-bye to Charlemagne and left on their way home. As they were flying, Samuel said, "I saw you peeking, Nat."

"You did too," said Nathaniel.

"But of course we will never breathe a word about it, Nat."

"Never, Sam. We are responsible fellows."

"Do you think Daniel noticed? If he did, he might tell Archangel Michael, and we will never be promoted..."

"No, no. He did not notice. A.M. will never find out as long as we don't blab."

Archangel Michael, who at the moment was in Barssetshire and of course saw the whole incident, smiled to himself. He should discipline these two boys, he thought, but then again, you were only young once, and these two were not even a thousand years old, and such good boys too. No, he would pretend to have noticed nothing, he decided, and turned to the much more important task of assisting a very small kitten who got herself stuck on a tree. He liked to occasionally do hands-on work, just to keep in practice, despite his extremely high rank. He gave the kitten back to her mother, who was howling under the tree for the whole time, accompanied by her three other very silly children, and said to her, "Madam, your daughter is a fine, smart, adventurous little lady. I am considering a very suitable alliance for her, to a gentleman cat in the clerical line."

"Thank you sir," said the mother, delighted. "That will be ever so nice! How very distinguished for our family!" and she was so pleased that she did not even scold her daughter, and went home, where Cook had already put out the bowls of milk for her best mouser and her children.

Chapter Ten

“A most enjoyable trip,” said Lady Norton to Mr. Goldwasser. They were sitting on the train, safely back in England, on their way to Barsetshire.

“I am delighted you have enjoyed our little outing,” said Mr. Goldwasser, putting down his newspaper and smiling at her over his glasses.

“I have enjoyed it too, Mr. Goldwasser,” said Miss Merriman. “It brought back so many memories.”

“And I am so pleased we managed to return to Frau Vogl, where you finally had the opportunity to eat the sachertorte in honour of your past employer,” said Glamora seriously. “I consider you a great judge of human nature, Miss Merriman. Lady Edith Pomfret must have been quite a lady to be liked so much by you.”

“Yes, she was,” said Miss Merriman quietly. “She certainly was. Thank you, Miss Tudor, for your good opinion of both of us.”

“How are you feeling, Mr. Keith?” asked Mrs. Rivers.

“Oh, we are doing very well,” answered Nurse Chiffinch brightly, as always in the habit of taking over for her patients. “We are recovering extremely fast, since we have such a good strong constitution.”

Edmond, since he was still a little weak, was perfectly happy to let Nurse Chiffinch speak for him and did not resent her interference. He was looking forward to a quiet week or two at the Mertons, and already planned calling Emma as soon as he arrived. Not so much because he wanted to talk to *her*, he reasoned, but because he needed to keep in contact with Mr. Clover, of course. His whole future depended on Mr. Clover, clearly.

Several cars and vans awaited them at the station, and sending the equipment and most of the people further on to Norton Hall, Mr. Goldwasser, Miss Merriman, Miss Tudor, Mrs. Rivers, Mr. Alcott, Edmond, and Nurse Chiffinch went to the

Mertons' house and were warmly welcomed by Lydia. To everyone's pleasant surprise, Jessica, Aubrey, Mrs. Morland, and Emma were having tea in the drawing room.

"How lovely to see you," said Edmond, delighted. "But why are you here?"

"It just so happened that we were taking Emma back to London today, after her visit with Mrs. Morland, and we thought we would drop in on Lydia on our way home, and then when Mrs. Morland told us you were ill, we decided that all of us must meet here and see you," said Jessica. "And Lydia was so kind as to invite us to stay for dinner. Noel is in London, of course."

"It's a pleasure to have you," said Lydia. "And I am so happy to see that Edmond is looking strong."

Fresh tea was brought in for the travellers, and everyone settled to enjoy it.

"Edmond," said Emma, "I am so glad you are even speaking to me. I've been meaning to call you and apologize, but I just couldn't bring myself to do so. I was afraid you would hang up on me."

"Apologize? For what?" said Edmond, genuinely surprised. "And why in the world would I want to hang up on you?"

"Honestly, Edmond. Don't tell me you did not hear me when I said that you were following Miss Tudor like a lapdog from one continent to another. It was a horrible thing to say."

"Oh, that. Nonsense. I forgot all about it, to tell you the truth," said Edmond, a little embarrassed. "I never remember fights and arguments for very long."

"You really are a very good-natured person, Edmond," said Emma penitently. "So you forgive me?"

"Of course. Don't even think about it," said Edmond.

With her usual hospitality, Lydia had no trouble arranging for everyone to stay for dinner. A simple affair, she promised them, no fuss, and with the farm regularly supplying excellent food, she could always manage a few guests. They were delighted to stay, since everyone had plenty to tell, and luckily Nurse Chiffinch allowed Edmond to stay up since he was so much

stronger, and prepared herself to enjoy the dinner party just as if she were a regular guest.

“Miss Lover, I am so pleased to find you here,” said Miss Tudor. “I bought a dress in Vienna which only you would fully appreciate. After all, who else here truly relates to clothes the way you and I do?”

“I do,” said Mr. Goldwasser, Jessica, Aubrey, and Mrs. Morland in unison.

“Ah, but all of you like clothes for specific purposes,” said Miss Tudor, laughing. “Jake sees them as a way to sell a film. Mrs. Morland sees them as a way to sell books – and very nice books, I must add, as you are one of the very few authors I read, Mrs. Morland – and Miss Dean and Mr. Clover see them as a way to enhance their marvellous plays. But Miss Lover and I adore clothes simply for their own sake.”

“Like my former secretary, Mrs. Knox, the *ci-devant* Miss Anne Todd,” said Mrs. Morland, deeply interested in the conversation. “She adores clothes, though you would never know it from looking at her, as she really dresses very simply. As a matter of fact, she took the job, so many years ago, because working on books which had so much material about clothes gave her some relief from her hard life. She was killing herself, looking after her very nice, but also extremely difficult invalid mother. I had to force her to take a salary; she said typing all these descriptions of clothes was too much fun to be considered work.”

“Exactly,” said Glamora, highly gratified by having her meaning so clearly understood by the noted author. “So, Lady Merton, may I take Miss Lover upstairs and show her the dress? She would love it, it’s a complete outfit.”

“Shoes, too?” interrupted Emma eagerly.

“Naturally,” said Glamora, “and matching stockings and costume jewellery.”

Emma jumped to her feet. “May we go up, Lady Merton? I must see this...”

“Of course,” said Lydia. “And, Miss Tudor, would you kindly put it on and model it for us during dinner? We would all love to see it.”

“I would be happy to,” said Glamora. “Come, Miss Lover. My suitcase is in the hallway, let’s take it upstairs...”

“You will need a bedroom that has a full-length mirror,” said Lydia in a business-like fashion, and the three ladies went upstairs.

Installed in the comfortable bedroom, Glamora unpacked the dress and Emma gasped with admiration. The dress was made from bright, sunny yellow silk, lavishly decorated with black beading. An enormous, fluffy, black crinoline-style petticoat, with at least four layers of netting, was clearly meant to show under the dress when worn together. Glamora continued by pulling out a pair of sheer black stockings, and shoes that would make any female heart palpitate. They were deceptively simple pumps, made of utterly luxurious leather, with square, medium-height heels. Each had a black crystal attached to it. Emma became speechless with joy.

“Dancing shoes, really,” said Glamora, “but I just had to have them. Besides, I thought they may come handy somewhere in the film, since there are so many dance sequences in it. Otherwise, even someone like me who is used to ordering expensive clothes, for both films and daily life, would have been embarrassed paying the price they asked for these shoes. But I think they are worth it.”

“Oh, they are, Miss Tudor. I have never seen such shoes. And how about the jewellery?” asked Emma, finding her voice.

“Oh, yes,” said Glamora, and from a silk roll she removed an opera-length necklace of magnificent amber beads.

“This is no costume jewellery,” said Emma reverently. “This is real amber.”

“Well, yes, when I said costume I meant no diamonds or pearls, really,” said Glamora apologetically. “You know I can never express myself properly... it’s a curse. But you are right. This is true Baltic amber, and I will wear it with a pair of classical golden hoop earrings.”

“Perfect,” said Emma. “Simply cannot be better.”

“And now I will put it on,” said Glamora, and in less than five minutes she was completely dressed in the ravishing outfit, accomplishing it with the skill and speed of the professional actress. Emma looked at her with awe. No wonder Edmond was in love with such perfect beauty. She now knew that resignation to this fact was the only choice, and considering that her own heart belonged to Noel Merton, she was determined to always be Edmond’s true friend and comfort him when his hopeless love will make him pine forever. No one could possibly compete with this yellow and black magnificence.

“I can’t decide if it has Mexican or Spanish overtones,” said Emma, the professional designer that lived in her soul making her forget romance very quickly. “But there is more to it. I can’t put my finger on it...”

“Yes, I agree with you that there is a lot of Latin influence, Miss Lover,” said Glamora, considering herself in the full-length mirror. “But I think with a touch of Hungarian Gypsy mixed up in the design.”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Emma. “You are absolutely right!”

“Now, the hair,” said Glamora. “I think maybe I should just simply sweep it up. What do you say?”

“Absolutely,” said Emma. “But you need one flower in your hair to complete the look.”

“If my hair were not so red, I would say a bold red flower, like the carnations Lady Merton has on her dining room table, would have worked, or an orange one, matching the amber,” said Glamora, her head to the side, still contemplating her image. “But such colours will clash with the hair. By the way, I hate this colour. However, I have a very nice black organdie flower...”

“Perfect!” said Emma. “And you know, Miss Tudor, I think you look lovely in any hair colour.”

“Except dark auburn, of course,” said Glamora. She swept up her hair into a simple and elegant knot, and Emma pinned the black flower to it. The consultation being now over with great success, Glamora transferred her comb and handkerchief to a

shiny, beaded black purse and they walked downstairs. The applause from everyone was both loud and heartfelt.

“I have never seen you looking better,” said Mrs. Rivers with sincere admiration. “Miss Tudor, you simply glow in this dress.” Everyone agreed.

After dinner, as they were all sitting in the drawing room, Aubrey turned to Mr. Goldwasser.

“Have things gone well enough with Edmond, Mr. Goldwasser?” he asked.

“No, Mr. Clover, things are not going smoothly at all. We have this issue of dancing, something that Keith is not able to do, but when we hired a professional to cover up for him, it did not go well. The professional just did not look like Keith in the picture. Keith is too big and sturdy, and almost all professional dancers have a slighter build.”

“What will you do?” asked Aubrey sympathetically.

“I am not sure, but I must find a solution, or the film will be lost.”

Aubrey became a mysterious and dark character. The Scarlet Pimpernel, perhaps, ready to defend the aristocracy from the disobedient, destructive mob, represented here by Miss Tudor who would not listen to Mr. Goldwasser. He leaned in Mr. Goldwasser’s direction and spoke conspiratorially in a low, clear stage whisper.

“I know what to do, Mr. Goldwasser. A difficult, risky move, but worth the effort.”

“You have an idea, Mr. Clover? Please tell me!” said Mr. Goldwasser, intrigued by Aubrey’s new image, which he, as a producer, was able to appreciate to the full.

“Mr. Goldwasser, do you remember what Alcott told us about his drinking exclusively orange juice?” asked Aubrey, looking seriously into Mr. Goldwasser’s eyes. “He mentioned that he had danced on tables when his drink was spiked with an alcoholic drink. If you give this boy enough brandy, he will prance and

cavort. Perhaps he is good. And I have said from the beginning that he can be extremely good looking if he just relaxes a little.”

“The orange juice... yes...” said Mr. Goldwasser pensively. “I see what you mean. Mr. Clover, you are a playwright in a million. We will orchestrate this thing properly. I will go and get Keith to do the job.”

“Yes,” said Aubrey. “Only the young would have enough courage to do such a thing.” Mr. Goldwasser got up and approached Edmond, who was having a peaceful cup of coffee, unaware of the coming ordeal.

“Keith, come with me,” said Mr. Goldwasser imperiously. Edmond followed him back into the dining room.

“My boy,” said Mr. Goldwasser, “Mr. Clover has found the perfect solution. I know how much you want out of this wretched film. If my plan succeeds, I will pay you quite handsomely to release you from your contract, and you can go in peace and learn your real trade, writing plays.”

“This is very generous of you, Mr. Goldwasser. But what can we do?”

“We don’t have to go far. We shall recruit Alcott.”

“Alcott?”

“Why not? All the leading men that have worked with Glamora were unknown. Alcott is a good dancer, he adores Glamora, and he would kill to be in a film. I know that even though he is not aware that I know.”

“But Miss Tudor is not fond of him,” said Edmond hesitantly. “And for some reason she thinks she likes me, Heaven knows why. Would she be willing to make the exchange?”

“Not without a plan, but I know exactly what to do. If this little prig would just once remove his obnoxious jacket and tie, and wash some of that disgusting brilliantine or whatever he uses from his hair, he would be quite good looking. And if he dances beautifully on tables or even just on the floor, Glamora will be enchanted with him and perhaps lose her ridiculous fixation on you.”

“It’s possible,” said Edmond cautiously. “But dangerous.”

“Not in the least. Easy as pie, my boy. Just spike his orange juice with all the brandy in this bottle.” He took his beautiful silver flask from his pocket and handed it to Edmond.

“Me? Spike his drink? But...” Edmond said. “What if...”

“No ifs or buts, my boy. This is the time for decisive action. I know how much you don’t want to do this film, and I think you are right. This is not your type of film, and truthfully, you don’t want to act at all. Yes, you were good in *Fever in Peru*, but this is different. So just get on with the job. In America, we are efficient.”

“But he may become ill!” said Edmond weakly.

“He did not become ill when his friends spiked his orange juice some years ago, remember? He danced on tables. Go on, Keith, put the flask in your pocket, and fulfil your mission. You are about to save the film.”

Edmond returned to the drawing room, and to his surprise found that everyone had gone out into the garden except Mr. Alcott. He was bent over in his seat, his head in his hands.

“I hate you, Keith,” he said without passion. “I really hate you.”

“Why?” said Edmond, surprised. “What have I done?”

“Nothing. It’s her. Miss Tudor, I mean. I worship the ground she walks on, and here she is, totally fixated on you.”

“But it’s not my fault, Alcott. Really, I would rather she did not like me. It’s so embarrassing.”

“I don’t believe you; she is a Goddess. I took the job with Mr. Goldwasser because I wanted to become an actor, and I thought he could help me if he liked me. But then I met Miss Tudor, and I lost my heart.”

“But you still want to be an actor?”

“Yes, of course I do. I want to act with Her. My head is spinning, Keith, I just can’t think.”

“My friend, this is the time for orange juice,” said Edmond authoritatively. “I am going to the kitchen to get you some. You need to drink orange juice and think clearly.”

With great luck Edmond found some orange juice in the kitchen, took Mr. Goldwasser’s flask out of his pocket, and

poured a generous amount of brandy into the jar. He then took two glasses, and filled one of them with water for himself.

“There you go, Alcott,” he said, pouring the spiked orange juice and handing it to Mr. Alcott. “Drink up.”

“You are a pal after all,” said Mr. Alcott. “Thanks! Cheers!” and he drained the glass with one gulp.

“This is an amazingly tasty orange juice,” he said, surprised, examining his glass. “I had no idea orange juice tasted differently in England!”

“Everything does,” said Edmond and poured another glass for the unsuspecting Mr. Alcott, who sipped this one with more patience. “Marvellous,” said Mr. Alcott. “This was a glorious idea, Keith. It’s amazing what orange juice can do for you – I am feeling so much better already. As a matter of fact, I am not in the least depressed anymore. I am happy, I am powerful, and I want to find Glamora and sweep her off her feet. I want to waltz. Put a waltz record on the gramophone, Keith.” He took off his glasses, flung his jacket on a nearby armchair and loosened his tie, then passed his two hands through his hair, fluffing it and messing up the sticky arrangement in a most becoming way.

Edmond obeyed, and put a record on the gramophone. At that moment, the party came in from the garden, and stood still, with their mouths slightly open, when they saw Mr. Alcott starting to dance. He twirled, he glided, he turned around. The King of Waltz from Vienna himself would have been proud to behold this performance. Mr. Alcott leapt on the table, and he leapt off the table, all with the grace of a professional. His eyes suddenly focused on the observers, and he danced toward them and took Glamora in his arms. “Dance with me, my Goddess!” he cried passionately, and Glamora, as light on her feet as he was, started gliding with him across the room. Edmond changed records to a tango. Mr. Alcott removed a red carnation from the vase on the table and put it between his teeth. This was the kind of tango that took the breath of the spectators away. Glamora and Mr. Alcott glided on the floor like drops of oil, every movement electrified. And when Mr. Alcott dipped Glamora so that she bent back, practically doubled over, which description we hope our

intelligent readers immediately visualize and understand clearly, and simultaneously, Glamora lifted one perfect leg almost vertically, the group was compelled to applaud.

“We can never duplicate such a tango in our film, unfortunately,” said Mr Goldwasser, who was enjoying the spectacle tremendously. “Lady Fitz-Gardner could never do anything so risqué.”

“But... but...” said Mrs. Rivers, who was stunned by the display, “it was utterly magnificent... the audience would adore it...”

“Aurora Fitz-Gardner is a respectable married woman, Mrs. Rivers,” said Mr Goldwasser. “A pure and chaste one, with a living husband.”

“Yes, I know,” said Mrs. Rivers miserably, “that is what I always attempt to convey... but maybe one should move on with the times... Do you remember, when Maisie, the head screen writer, talked about a sequel... where Lady Fitz-Gardner is free to pursue her love of Nestor Chardonay...”

“But you really ticked her off, Mrs. Rivers, remember? You practically had me dismiss her.”

“I do remember, Mr. Goldwasser, but I think I was, perhaps, a bit hasty. You must forgive me if I make a mistake; the cinema is a new world for me...”

“Bravo, Mrs. Rivers. You are a woman of great intelligence and flexibility of mind. I will send a telegram to Maisie, then, to prepare herself for more work. She will be delighted – she really set her heart on a sequel. What do you say, Glam? One more film? A sequel? With a happy ending?” he called to the dancing Glamora. She waved back cheerfully and cried back, “Anything you say, Jake. I’ll be happy to work with you again, Mrs. Rivers.” She went on dancing gloriously with Mr. Alcott.

Mr. Goldwasser looked at them benevolently. “She will still vamp them when she is ninety years old,” he said to Aubrey. “What a girl.” The dancers floated into the garden, and hovered like fireflies on the lawn. Edmond changed records to a rumba, and Mr. Alcott flung his carnation playfully at the group, then whirled Glamora as they went on dancing elegantly on the grass.

“Let’s see what she says when she comes back from the garden,” said Aubrey to Mr. Goldwasser. “If I were writing this scene, she would immediately have *The Talk* with Edmond, while still flushed from the dance. But this is your scene and you know best. From one professional to another, you have scripted this situation exceedingly well, Mr. Goldwasser.”

“Thank you, Mr. Clover. I am honoured by your good opinion,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “And what would I have done without your suggestion, I don’t know. I think she will indeed speak to Keith. And you were right, Alcott is suddenly quite good looking.”

The dancers swirled back into the room. Suddenly, Mr. Alcott stopped. “I feel a little strange,” he said. Letting Glamora go rather abruptly, so that she staggered a little, laughing, he curled up like a puppy in an armchair and immediately went to sleep.

“I have never seen such dancing in my life,” said Aubrey, becoming a casting director.

“Neither have I,” said Mr. Goldwasser with great sincerity. “Glam, darling, this boy dances like a professional.”

“Yes,” said Miss Tudor, looking at the sleeping Mr. Alcott with great affection. “I have never had such a dancing partner. And look at him; who would have thought he could be so attractive! Why, this young man is star quality!”

It was now or never, Edmond felt. “Miss Tudor,” he said, rising to the occasion, “may I be honest with you?”

“Of course, Hank,” said Glamora. “Always, I hope.”

“Let’s face it, Miss Tudor. I could never dance like that, you tried and tried and I simply could not do it. Miss Brinton tried and I still could not do it. The professional did not work out. Things are at a standstill, which is very bad for the film and for Mr. Goldwasser. And here is a man who is not only a better dancer, but also very handsome and pleasant. In addition, he wants very badly to be an actor, and he wants to act with *you* more than anything in the world. Miss Tudor, I want to renounce my position with *Send Me No Lilies* and hand it over to Alcott. He was meant to be Nestor Chardonay.”

“My darling Hank,” said Glamora, tears in her eyes. “This is the kind of generosity that is seldom encountered in our profession. Are you sure?”

“Yes, Miss Tudor. I am absolutely sure. Why, even his name is really Nestor! This must have been a message! It was meant!”

“Oh, Hank,” said Glamora. “I am speechless with admiration.”

“I am just sorry that you will have to re-shoot all the scenes I have already done,” said Edmond. “I feel terrible about having wasted your time and money, Mr. Goldwasser.”

“Nothing was wasted, my boy,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “You and Alcott are exactly the same size. I will impose his face on your figure. Yes, I know it did not work with the dancer, but it’s different with Alcott. He is not a delicate flower like that dancer, but a very sturdy boy, just like you. It’s a bit of a miracle that he is so light on his feet, considering his size. Here, pull him up and make him stand. He can go on sleeping, it does not matter. I just want to prove a point.”

Aubrey and Edmond, with a combined effort, pulled the sleeping Mr. Alcott up from his chair. He opened his eyes, smiled seraphically, and went back to sleep, standing up.

“Here, Keith, turn him around and have Mr. Clover support him. Then, stand back to back with Alcott.”

The whole group had to admit that there was not an inch difference between the two. Same height, same breadth of shoulders, everything matched as if Edmond and Mr. Alcott were identical twins.

“You are a genius, Jake,” said Glamora.

“So what else is new,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Let’s all have a drink to celebrate the new turn of events.” He pulled out his silver flask, then smiled. “Of course, it’s empty, it all went into the orange juice... ah, here is a nice bottle of something or other... may I, Lady Merton? The new arrangement will be great for both of you, Keith. Alcott will have his heart’s desire, which is to be a film star. Yes, I knew that was what he wanted all along, of course. I can read you boys like a book. You, Keith, will be released from the film and I will pay you very

handsomely for your heroic sacrifice. This money, on top of the loot you made as Simon Bolivar in *Fever in Peru*, will allow you to live very comfortably while you train under Mr. Clover. No, don't argue, my boy, you deserve every bit of the money. With what you had to go through with the dancing, and with Glam vamping you... you have earned it."

"Vamping Hank?" asked Glamora, surprised. "Are you mad, Jake? Hank was like a son to me. I kept thinking that if I had ever had a son, he would have looked and behaved just like Hank. So sweet, so innocent. Did you think I was flirting with you, Hank?"

"Well, yes, a little bit, Miss Tudor," said Edmond, very embarrassed, his face turning crimson.

"It was all my fault," said Emma. "I thought you did and I told him so, Miss Tudor. I don't know how to apologize enough."

"I must have a terrible reputation," said Glamora without heat. "I hope it didn't bother either of you in any significant way. I liked you so much from the start, Miss Lover, and we both love clothes. Come to think of it, if I ever had a daughter, I would have liked her to be like you. If my behaviour annoyed you, I hope I can compensate by my future plans for your designs."

"Oh, Miss Tudor," said Emma. "Do you really want me to work with you? I have never felt so honoured in my life."

"Of course I do; we will have a grand time working together. But Jake, didn't you notice that I have treated Hank differently from all the other boys? And I was so hoping to advance his career. I never cared about the other boys' careers."

"Alcott suspected you were in love with Keith, as a basis for the difference in the way you treated him," said Mr. Goldwasser. "My dear girl, you have vamped and conquered a legion of boys. Who would have thought you have discovered your maternal instincts all of a sudden? I hope you are not offended by all that, I know you don't take any of the boys seriously."

Glamora laughed. "You can never tell how I will treat our dear Mr. Alcott in the future – did you see the way he dances the

tango? Have you ever seen such passion? And the way his hair fell over his eyes? Watch out, everyone!”

“What a woman,” said Mr. Goldwasser to no one in particular, and raised his glass. “I am so proud of you, Glam.” But deep down at heart he was still a little concerned. Yes, his plan was a total success, the film would now work out perfectly, and for the moment Glam seemed very happy with this new development. But all this talk about people being like her sons or her daughters worried him. Did Glamora really start to feel her age? Was she becoming truly discontented with her work and her life? He would have to look into it.

Emma, too, had a few uncomfortable thoughts. She finally believed that Glamora did not deliberately flirt with Edmond. But that did not mean that he did not love Glamora deeply anyway, did it? An unrequited love was even more devastating, more binding than a love rewarded! Everyone knew that, or at least in the films Emma saw it was made very clear. So what did Edmond really feel? And for that matter, why did she care about it, since she was so deeply committed to her love for Noel Merton?

Chapter Eleven

“**B**ut, but, but, Mr. Clover,” Edmond stammered, “shouldn’t it be the goal of a young playwright to explore, and then expose, the seamy side of life? To show the drama, the poverty, the sadness of everything? To become one with the great mass of suffering people and be their champion?”

“No,” said Aubrey calmly, lighting a cigarette. “The goal of a young playwright is to write good plays.”

“But the subject matter! It’s important, isn’t it? I am not sure I understand,” said Edmond, despairing of life.

“It’s simple, Edmond. When it comes to comedy, you are a natural. I can’t believe how good the comedy you showed me last time we met, really was. I could get it staged now, except that I think that if you practise a little further the plays will be even better, and since you can afford to wait, why rush? You have a genius for the humorous. I was astonished by the quality of your comedy; it was solid, tight, and highly entertaining. I read parts of it to Jessica and she laughed through it and demanded to read the whole thing, and then laughed some more. And here you go and get bogged down with this so-called drama. Maudlin, sentimental tripe, that’s what it is; I am angry with you.”

“So what am I to do?”

“Isn’t it as clear as day? Stick to comedy.”

“But writing comedy is so easy, Mr. Clover. I don’t feel I am doing real work...”

“I see. When something is easy, it seems inadequate to you, right?” Aubrey drew on his cigarette and laughed. “How trite, how silly. I assume you believe the myth that real authors panic as they struggle with the blank white paper, battle with the concepts that elude them, and so on... They say so because it makes them look interesting, that is all. Moreover, Edmond, what do you know about the inner turmoil of an insane woman who is fighting with her desire to commit a horrible murder of an entire family of total strangers?”

“But I tried to get under her skin, express her pain. Besides, what about my own pain? Shouldn’t I drown it in my writing?”

“What pain? Seems to me your life is very easy and pleasant, what with the money you got from Mr. Goldwasser, and the lovely little flat we found for you, and all these new and interesting friends. Altogether, I believe you are leading a fabulous new life. Ah, to be a young writer in London...”

“Yes, it’s true, I do enjoy myself tremendously in London. But there are things, nevertheless... I am sure there are... let me see... I must be hurting over something or other... What about Emma? I really like her and I am convinced she does not like me and she is in love with Noel. That is some kind of pain, isn’t it?”

“Such drivel does not count as pain, my boy. And getting under the skin of a woman is certainly not easy for someone like you who does not understand women at all even when they are not lunatics. If you understood them, you would know that Emma’s ‘eternal love’ for Noel is a mere childish infatuation with an interesting and successful mature man who is leading an exciting life, a crush that will play itself out in a few months or even a few weeks in Paris.”

“Do you really think so, Mr. Clover?”

“Yes, I do; girls always fall for the unattainable, but it does not last. As a playwright, I would say that the script of your life calls for your eventually marrying Emma and living happily ever after. At any rate, this has little to do with your work. So stick to comedy. Tell me the truth, doesn’t it cheer you up when you write it?”

“Oh, yes, I find myself smiling half the time, and I can work very long hours,” said Edmond.

“But not when you write drama, right?”

“I must admit I get so bored with the drama, that I go out a lot and take long walks, or telephone my friends,” confessed Edmond, looking rather sheepish.

“Case closed. Don’t throw this play out, though. Keep it in a drawer. It is so awful as a drama that perhaps some day you can turn it into a hilarious piece, something on the lines of a satire. The final scene, when the murderess’s body floats on the

Thames, her face pale, her hands folded on her chest, and a garland of garbage hanging on her long hair to differentiate and at the same time compare her to Ophelia, made me burst out laughing. It can be used some day.”

“Actually, this comes as a relief,” admitted Edmond.

“I will never understand why people think authors have to suffer to write. Of course, the authors create this myth to make themselves look important, but let’s face it, unless writing is a pleasure, why do it? There are many other ways to make a living,” said Aubrey. “I adore writing my plays. And by the way, mine are all comedies, you know.”

“True,” said Edmond, a little surprised by having overlooked this important fact. “I never thought of that. And I do greatly admire them.”

“Thank you,” said Aubrey, laughing. “So have you heard from Emma lately?”

“Yes, I got a letter yesterday. Emma is very good about correspondence,” said Edmond. “She is very happy living with the Boulle family, and she is looking forward to starting her studies. I think she will do very well.”

“This Boulle family keeps coming back into our lives ever since that fateful summer when they stayed near Lady Graham,” said Aubrey. “I met them then, and I will never forget the girl, Ursule, a fat, silly thing who ate and giggled and giggled and ate and never did anything else.”

“Apparently Ursule is now a lovely middle-aged Parisian, well married, beautifully dressed and charming, according to Emma,” said Edmond, laughing.

“You have to hand it to these French ladies,” said Aubrey. “They always eventually learn how to dress. Yes, Emma is happy. We got a letter too, and I think sending her to Paris was the right thing to do. She did not mention Noel Merton even once, incidentally, but talked quite a bit about a young man named Gaston who works at one of the great fashion houses and who took her to a fashion show there.”

“Yes, she mentioned Gaston to me too. But I don’t think I have to be concerned about him, Mr. Clover. He won’t be interested in Emma. He, well, he has other interests.”

“I see,” said Aubrey with a noncommittal expression. “Let’s join Jessica and have some tea, Edmond. I am glad we will now stick to what we do best.”

Clearly we have allowed ourselves a little trip again, this time to London, but since we all know the Clovers’ wonderful apartment which their landlord has allowed them to convert into a spacious two-floor luxury dwelling, we don’t feel too strained about having left Barchester for a short visit with them. We can safely leave Edmond there, drinking tea with Jessica, Aubrey and Miss M., and talking about Emma and her adventures in Paris. But now we must return to Bassetshire and to Norton Hall, where *Send Me No Lilies* is moving on merrily with Mr. Alcott enjoying every minute of his part as Nestor Chardonay, playing against his Goddess and providing Mr. Goldwasser with infinite amusement. At that moment he was waiting for his friend Maisie at the train station, since she was summoned by Mr. Goldwasser to work with Mrs. Rivers on the preliminaries for the sequel. He saw her coming out and waved, and Maisie waved back, strode toward him, and suddenly stopped in her tracks.

“Heavens to Betsy! Nestor Alcott, how did you become so gorgeous all of a sudden?” she screamed.

“Why, thanks awfully, Maise,” said Nestor, embarrassed by this heartfelt cry that made half the people at the station turn to look at him. “They did all sorts of things to me...”

“But can you see without your glasses?”

“I never needed them. I only wore them so I would look like a serious young businessman,” said Nestor.

“A disguise,” said Maisie, always delighted with romance and intrigue. “Of course you don’t need subterfuge anymore, now that you are a *Star*! But tell me, what did they do to you, other than take away your glasses?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute, let’s just get into my car and go.”

They piled the two suitcases that Maisie brought with her onto the back seat, and drove away. "Well?" said Maisie. "I am dying of curiosity."

"They washed off the brilliantine, gave me a new haircut, and made me wear more fashionable clothes which seem to fit better, or so they said at Wardrobe. Then they made me tan a bit. They said I was too pale, since Nestor Chardonay is supposed to spend a lot of time on the Riviera, not stuck in some office."

"Tan? In England? How? The sun is never out here!"

"They have this special lamp... you smear some stuff on your face, I have no idea what it is, and then sit in front of the lamp for about fifteen minutes each day, and it looks as if you went to the beach," explained Nestor.

"I would love to try it myself," said Maisie enviously. "The tan makes your eyes such a clear green, Nes. The women will be raving about them in the theatres. But what did Her Nibs say about it all?"

"Come on, Maise. Don't use these horrible British expressions. And about Miss Tudor, too... She said the changes were very becoming, and she seems to like working with me, particularly the dancing parts, but she is not the way she was with Keith; I have a feeling she is still thinking about him. I don't care what anyone says to the contrary, I believe she is in love with Keith."

"What if she is? You'll have to get over this crush," said Maisie. "It's not good for you to pine for a person who does not love you back. Still, love is never forever, anyway, so you will get over it soon enough."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," said Maisie in the most unconvincing manner.

"Come on, Maise," said Nestor. "Let's stop somewhere and have a glass of beer and you can tell me about things. We must stick together among all these Brits, you know. They are great, but still, a bit different from us."

"Miss Brinton is the only one I know who can really bridge the gap and understand both sides of the ocean," said Maisie.

“What about the Boss?”

“Mr. Goldwasser does not have to adapt, you know. People rather adapt to him.” Which was very observant of Maisie, we think.

“You are in a pensive mood, Maise,” said Nestor over the beers which, while not as cold as he was used to them in America, still were pretty good, he thought. “Now come out with the story.”

“Well, Nes, I don’t know if I should tell you, it’s indiscreet to tell, but since you have always been a real pal...” said Maisie hesitantly.

“Fire away, Maise,” said Nestor encouragingly. “I will try to help. Is it something to do with Mrs. Rivers? Are you worried about working with her? She is a horrible person, I can’t stand her, but I think after all that happened she will treat you well enough.”

“Oh, no. Believe it or not, we get along famously most of the time, and when she loses her temper and becomes The Queen, I just ignore her. No, it’s what’s going on back home.”

“Your fiancé?”

“Yes. He is two-timing me, Nes.”

“Are you sure?”

“I confronted him and he did not deny it. You see, he is fed up with my work and my travels, and he prefers someone close to home, right there in New York. So there is this girl who works with him at Macy’s, and who has been making eyes at him for a long time. She is really pretty, much better looking than me.”

“Maise,” said Nestor seriously, “he is not worth it. You deserve better than a Macy’s travelling salesman anyway, a smart girl like you, honestly.”

“Smart? What men want is pretty, Nes. Not smart. Look how you fell for Miss Tudor. It’s not her brain you are in love with.”

“Miss Tudor is a different story, she is not just pretty. She is a star, a Goddess,” said Nestor reverently. “But about you. You know what? You are the way I was before they turned me into a film star. You wear the wrong clothes, the wrong shoes, the

wrong hair, everything. You are so engrossed in your work you never even bother to put on lipstick. If you changed all that, you would be swell.”

“Skinny old me?”

“You are neither old nor skinny, Maise. You have an excellent figure, and you have good legs, too, when you get into a nice skirt rather than wearing your eternal trousers. I’ll tell you what; I’ll speak to Miss Merriman. She was telling people about this beauty parlour they have in Barchester, a ridiculous name you won’t believe, let me see.... Yes, Maison Tozier, I think. They have a woman there, a Miss Dahlia, who is so good with face and hair that even Miss Tudor goes to her occasionally. Hollywood quality, Miss Tudor said. Yes, we must get you to Miss Dahlia.”

“So Miss Merriman is still with us?” asked Maisie.

“Oh, yes,” said Nestor. “Terrific woman. She can do anything.”

“Even make me into a beauty?”

“No doubt,” said Nestor.

“And Miss Brinton does not mind her being here?”

“Miss Brinton is coming back tomorrow,” said Nestor. “We’ll find out. But I really don’t think she minds at all. They became such good friends, and what with the possible marriage, it all works out very well.”

As brusque and efficient as ever, Miss Brinton got off the train and looked around her. Immediately, two young men materialized silently to collect her luggage and take it to an awaiting car. She, of course, expected nothing less as service due to her, but seeing Miss Merriman waiting in the car, and coming out to welcome her, was an unanticipated pleasure.

“I am so happy to see you again, Miss Merriman. You must tell me everything I have missed,” she said graciously after they shook hands cordially and got into the car.

“You know about the exchange of stars, of course, which is the most startling event to have happened to this film,” said Miss Merriman.

“Yes, I understood Mr. Keith was very ill, to a point of needing a private nurse and a hospital stay, and then he resigned his part to Mr. Alcott’s superior dancing,” said Miss Brinton. “At least this is what was conveyed to me. I never would wish such a nice young man any ill luck, but perhaps this influenza attack, if it really was the major factor in his decision, was the best thing that could have happened to the film and to everyone involved.”

“The facts are right, Miss Brinton, but not the implications. The influenza had nothing to do with his decision, and he desperately wanted out of the film. So there he was in the Mertons’ home, with Sister Chiffinch, or as they call her, Chiffy, but he was already perfectly well when the events took place.”

“So they call this nurse, Sister Chiffinch, by the nickname ‘Chiffy,’” said Miss Brinton thoughtfully.

“They do. And her friends, two other delightful nurses with whom she shares an apartment, are known as ‘Wardy’ and ‘Heathy’ if I am not mistaken,” said Miss Merriman. “The three of them have taken care of just about everyone in the County; births, deaths, illnesses, injuries, they have done it all.”

“And they call you ‘Merry,’ I noticed, at least your close friends do. This is something so peculiar to the English people, making a nickname from your surname. Do you know what my English friends call me?”

“Let me guess,” said Miss Merriman, laughing. “They call you ‘Brinty,’ don’t they?”

“Indeed they do. And the funny thing is, I have a perfectly good nickname in America, but my friends here just won’t use it. Tell me, what is wrong with calling me Meg? I am Margaret, of course.”

“Nothing is wrong with calling you Meg,” said Miss Merriman. “A very pleasant nickname. It’s just one of our strange customs.”

“Ah, well, one must be tolerant of foreign customs,” said Miss Brinton. “So go on, please. What did Mr. Keith do, exactly?”

“He helped Mr. Clover and Mr. Goldwasser in an elaborate ruse of putting brandy in Mr. Alcott’s orange juice; they took the

idea from a P.G. Wodehouse novel, where the young man involved is a teetotaller, like Mr. Alcott. In the novel, the young man just made a fool of himself at some prize-giving at a school, but Mr. Alcott seems to react to brandy by dancing very beautifully, and indeed he danced with Miss Tudor under the influence of the drink. To be fair, the dancing was superb. The tango that they performed was extraordinary... but I don't know how to describe it, really, without using words you and I don't approve of. At any rate, it went so well, that when Mr. Keith told Miss Tudor he wanted to resign his part, she agreed. I have no idea if she guessed that this was contrived or not."

"Excellent," said Miss Brinton. "I did not like Miss Tudor's attachment to Mr. Keith. It really worried me, and I hope this will resolve it. I want her to be happy... do you know, Miss Merriman, Miss Tudor has a reputation of being silly, difficult, and imperious, but it's not her true character; we all love her."

"I have noticed that, Miss Brinton. As a matter of fact, I have come to like Miss Tudor very much."

"That is good, since I have heard that Mr. Goldwasser offered you a permanent job. I will be thrilled if you take it. Working with you is a pleasure."

"Thank you so much, Miss Brinton," said Miss Merriman with genuine gratitude. It was heart-warming to see that Miss Brinton was completely free from any professional jealousy or possessiveness. "That is most kind. I am not sure, as yet, what to do."

"We have a few more weeks to finish the film," said Miss Brinton. "Plenty of time to consider the options, and Mr. Goldwasser would never rush you."

"He is a very considerate employer," said Miss Merriman. "Unusually so. But on another matter, should I congratulate you on a special subject yet?"

"Thank you, but not quite yet... The general and I are still negotiating the deal," said Miss Brinton, laughing. "You know, Miss Merriman, I simply have cold feet. The general will never cause me an hour of unhappiness voluntarily, and if we marry, he would put up with my work, come with me on some of my

trips, and always be flexible. But marriage! At my age! I should have married him ten years ago. It would have been easier then.”

“I can understand your hesitation,” said Miss Merriman. “But something tells me that a happy ending will still occur.” The two ladies laughed, and the car entered the grounds of Norton Hall.

Chapter Twelve

“I am boarding a ship to Tahiti next week, Aurora,” said Lord Arthur. They were still in Vienna, in another café, which was created in the Nortons’ garden.

“Tahiti?” whispered Aurora. “So far away... why?”

“I think Polynesia, with its simplicity and calm atmosphere, will do me good,” said Lord Arthur. “However, I must tell you the rest of my plan, and what I have decided to do.” He pulled a slim folder out of his breast pocket, and handed it to her. She took it with an obviously reluctant air. “Are these divorce papers, Arthur?”

“No, dear. I will never initiate an attempt to part from you, and as I have been saying, I will always abide by your decisions. No, this is a ticket for another ship that goes to Tahiti in three weeks. Keep it. If you decide to stay with Mr. Chardonay, throw it away and receive my blessings in advance. If you decide to come back to me, and make me the happiest man on earth, just board the ship and come. I’ll be there.”

Aurora looked at her husband with awe. In close-up, her big violet eyes showed extremely painful emotions. Then, what the audience was waiting for took place – a glowing tear swelled in each eye but never fell, thus leaving the mascara unsullied – which was one of Glamora Tudor’s most celebrated tricks of the trade. The audience wondered if Lord Arthur noticed. Of course, he could not do anything about it, but did he see the tears?

“Goodbye, Aurora, and may God bless you,” said Lord Arthur with great simplicity. He got up and left, his tall figure looking almost military in its stance, showing his self-control and steadfastness to the millions of sobbing women in the audience. Most of them would now root openly for Lord Arthur, still feeling very sorry, of course, for Mr. Chardonay. What will the poor, harassed lady decide? Only those who had read the book would know, but even they would not be sure of the outcome. After all, in the films, endings were changed so often by the script writers.

“Cut!” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Great job, everyone. Let’s all go and have something to eat. I’m starving!” Most of the people left the room, except Mrs. Rivers and Miss Brinton, who lingered for a minute.

“This is almost the end of the film,” said Mrs. Rivers to Miss Brinton. “I still find it amazing that you do not film in sequence, and that we still have to do quite a few scenes in the middle.”

“Ah, well, that’s the way the cinema works,” said Miss Brinton. “It’s different from the way they do theatre. Quite confusing, I admit, but I am used to it.”

“Whatever you do, I must admit you do very well,” said Mrs. Rivers. “I feel My Work comes alive when I watch the actors.”

“You may become addicted,” smiled Miss Brinton. “I can’t tell you, Mrs. Rivers, how many authors do. They begin to feel that unless a book is filmed, it is not complete.”

“I can understand that,” said Mrs. Rivers. “I hope I have more self-confidence, but yes, there is something very special in seeing your story right in front of your eyes, rather than in front of your inner eye. I truly enjoy the experience. Moreover, some films are better than the books they were based on. I could name quite a few.”

“I was very pleased to hear that you have consented to work on a sequel,” said Miss Brinton. “I look forward to a perfect script. My only question is, would you enjoy it without having written a book first?”

“I think I would,” said Mrs. Rivers. “A new experience. And if we go to the United States at some point, and I can get a first-hand look at Hollywood, that, too, will be quite valuable to me. After all, I am still considering the book about a great actress, though it must wait, of course.”

“What is the book about, exactly?” asked Miss Brinton.

“A middle-aged actress, very beautiful and successful, married to a hugely popular London theatre producer, and who is encountering serious problems in her private life,” said Mrs. Rivers. “She falls in love with a handsome young man, an actor who is certain to become a star himself some day.”

“Sounds fascinating,” said Miss Brinton. “Maybe we could persuade Miss Tudor and Mr. Goldwasser to look at the possibility.”

“Oh, I hope so,” said Mrs. Rivers enthusiastically.

“Just be sure it’s all fictional,” said Miss Brinton. “You don’t want a lawsuit on your hands. Some of the stars are touchy on such subjects, and may pounce on you when you least expect it. But if Mr. Goldwasser agrees to do it, he would take care of all that.”

“And naturally I will be careful as to what I write, just as you say, Miss Brinton.” They turned to leave the room.

Neither of the ladies noticed that Miss Tudor, who sat at the end of the room, changing into comfortable shoes, was listening to their conversation, and so no one saw her changing expression; had they looked, they would have detected dismay, perhaps even fear. She did not make her presence known, and quietly left the room.

Ten minutes later, Miss Merriman entered the library, remembering she had left some papers there the night before. She stopped in surprise.

“Whatever is the matter, Miss Tudor?” asked Miss Merriman, suspecting the worst, a nervous breakdown. Glamora was sitting at the huge conference table in the library, her head leaning on her arms which were crossed on the table. She lifted her head wearily and looked at Miss Merriman. Her face was haggard, strained, and pale.

“I am tired, Merry,” she said, using that name for the first time. “So tired. Exhausted, really.”

“Come along, Miss Tudor,” said Miss Merriman with quiet authority. “Let’s go to your room, and I’ll set you up with a nice hot water bottle and a cup of tea. We don’t want *anyone* to see you like that.”

Glamora got up obediently, and followed Miss Merriman to her own room. Miss Merriman immediately called the kitchen. While waiting, she quickly settled Glamora on her bed, and soon a kitchen maid brought up the tray, put it on a bedside table, and upset some hot water on it.

“Ow!” said the maid. “And I’d arranged it all ever so nice. I’ll go down and get a clorth.”

“No need, Lizzy,” said Miss Merriman, who knew most of the staff by their Christian names. “I’ll take care of it, I have some cloths here, and Miss Tudor needs to rest, she has a slight cold. You can go home now, it’s quite late.”

“Thanks so much, Miss Merriman,” said Lizzy gratefully. “I’ll be along tomorrow as usual. Ta-ta, Miss Tudor.”

“Service is getting worse and worse in England,” said Miss Merriman, quite unmoved. “I wonder if some day I’ll start calling this object ‘a clorth.’ A grim thought, but I expect I will.” She tucked the hot water bottle at Glamora’s feet and served her a cup of tea.

“No wonder Jake admires you so much, Merry,” said Glamora. “Do you mind if I call you by that name? I noticed that your close friends call you that, and I want to feel that I am one of them.”

“By all means call me Merry,” said Miss Merriman pleasantly. “It will give me pleasure. But you must allow me to continue calling you Miss Tudor. I have completely lost the ability to use Christian names during the years of my work as a companion and secretary.”

“Of course,” said Glamora. “Anything you say. How did you become so wise?”

“Years of looking after other people create an efficient way of thinking. I am not that wise – it’s just that I have had so many opportunities to observe the ways people act and behave.”

“Jake thinks you are the most intelligent woman he has ever met,” said Glamora. “He thinks you are even smarter than Miss Brinton.”

“We won’t tell her that,” said Miss Merriman, laughing. “Do you think she will marry the general in the end, Miss Tudor?”

“Oh, yes, I do. When one is lucky enough to find a man who truly loves her, she would be crazy to lose him. Such men, men who remain faithful to you like the general is to Miss Brinton, are rare.”

“So you agree with Mr. Goldwasser that middle-aged marriages may be successful? We had a discussion about it when he told me about Miss Brinton and the general.”

“Really? How interesting,” said Glamora. “And are you sure, Merry, that he referred to Miss Brinton and the general?”

“Why, yes, who else could he think about? All the married friends we have in common have been married since their youth,” said Miss Merriman. “Yes, we were discussing Miss Brinton and the general.”

“Perhaps,” said Glamora. “What exactly did he say?”

“You see, I said that at middle age one must be very careful of one’s choice of a spouse, and must be sure of similar lifestyles and way of thinking, and he disagreed and claimed that affection and respect may resolve most difficulties.”

“I think you may have made a mistake as to whom he was referring,” said Glamora. Miss Merriman looked at her, not comprehending, and suddenly a horrible suspicion crossed her mind.

“My dear Miss Tudor, surely you don’t imagine...”

“It’s okay, Merry. I don’t have much imagination anyway, but even if something like that happened, who could blame Jake? You have no idea how nice you are, how attractive, how pleasant.”

“Why thank you, Miss Tudor. But this simply can’t be!”

“You know, Merry, Jake is so intelligent, he is close to genius, people say. I sometimes wonder why he even spends ten minutes in my company.”

“Miss Tudor! I can’t bear to hear you say it!”

“Well, such a state of mind is common among so-called stars. We always worry about our image. My entire persona was created by Jake. I am his creature, like this Dr. Frankenstein and his creature... he even gave me my name. I was Maura Gayle Stewart. He used a tongue twister, like children do. Try saying Maura-Gayle-Maura-Gayle-Maura-Gayle-Maura and you end up with Gaylemaura. He immediately saw the possibilities.”

“And you don’t have to explain the Tudor part,” said Miss Merriman, intrigued. “Obviously he moved from one royal house to another...”

“You see how clever you are? He had to explain it to me. I never guessed. But then I never read any history. I am totally uneducated.”

“But Miss Tudor, you have educated yourself as the years went by. And what’s more important, I have been watching you very closely during the filming. You are not only a beautiful star, Miss Tudor. You are a magnificent, consummate actress. Even if, God forbid, your looks were lost, you could still light up the screen with your talent and personality.”

“Do you really think so, Merry? This is something I never stop thinking about. Acting, real acting. Even my silly roles mean so much to me. You see, I have a problem. I can’t express abstract thoughts very well. Do you remember how I spoke at the opening of the Fete? I meant to simply use the same format that I used when opening the hospital, and just apply it to the Fete. I had it all planned out, but then I suddenly started talking about the film I did about Florence Nightingale... So stupid. That is what happens to me. I become silly, I say things I don’t mean to say, though of course people don’t really care, they just want to look at me. Maybe it’s a condition, like those people who suddenly start cursing and screaming without any provocation or control. When I think and talk about concrete matters, like now, I am fine. But if I have to express a complex thought, I simply can’t... but when I act, I feel that I express myself perfectly, even if it is a frivolous thing like these science fiction films we both like.”

“Yes, Miss Tudor, I do understand. It may be a condition, because underneath the glamour you are a very intelligent woman with great practicality and sense. But even if it is a condition, so what? You have found the perfect medium through which you express yourself so beautifully.”

“It may have something to do with learning to change my way of speaking,” said Glamora, musing. “I was pure Cockney, and I have taught myself to speak like the upper classes. I

remember someone taking me to see *Pygmalion*, a little after I became a star. Everyone was enjoying themselves, laughing, except me. I was crying throughout the play. What I would not have given for having someone like Professor Higgins train me... I had to do it all by myself. And there she was, this idiotic girl, Eliza, objecting to his imperious ways. I would have thanked him every hour and never minded the bullying... Anyway, what I speak is not really my language, so maybe this is the problem. I just don't know."

"Whatever it is, you have made a great success of your life, Miss Tudor. And as for what you said about Mr. Goldwasser, wondering why he would like to spend time with you, this is nonsense. Everyone who knows you admires, respects, and even loves you, Miss Tudor."

"I will try to listen to you, Merry. I have such faith in your judgment. But if I am to think about real acting, I must get better educated. And this is another problem. It's not as if I could just go to school; every newspaper in three continents would make fun of me."

"I have a better idea," said Miss Merriman. "We can start you on a course of reading."

"But reading what? How do I begin?"

"I know a young woman who may be very helpful," said Miss Merriman. "Her name is Anne Dale. She was a sickly child, and only attended school sporadically. When she was seventeen years old, she became healthier, but by then she was completely uneducated. Her parents arranged for her to be tutored by Miss Bunting, the best governess that I have ever known. Miss Bunting prepared a course of systematic reading that set the young woman on a life-long love of learning, and made her truly well-educated. Mrs. Dale received a much better education than any school could have given her."

"Do you think, then, that I could get in touch with Miss Bunting?"

"No, sadly Miss Bunting passed away during the war. But knowing Mrs. Dale, I am sure she kept the lists of books and the notes and everything else Miss Bunting gave her. She adored

Miss Bunting, and mourned her passing, and she would very likely feel that her own children would benefit from Miss Bunting's teaching. Yes, I will write to Mrs. Dale. All will be well."

"You are a genius, Merry," said Miss Tudor, and suddenly laughed. "When I say that to Jake, he always answers, 'So what else is new' but of course you would never say that."

"No, never," said Miss Merriman, smiling. "Unlike Mr. Goldwasser, I am not a genius... But now you must sleep, Miss Tudor. I think you are simply undergoing a crisis. Not a terribly bad one, but still, it's harrowing. Rest now, and we will discuss it further later, and make all sorts of plans."

"Thank you Merry," said Glamora, her eyes closing with fatigue. "Thank you so much... this is a lovely plan already... I adore reading a good story and it all sounds like something so utterly doable..."

Miss Merriman quietly got up and went to the door. She stood there for a minute before leaving the room, looking with pity and affection at the gorgeous bird of paradise, under whose glorious gold and crimson plumage hid a very courageous little sparrow.

Chapter Thirteen

“Aurora, I must know my fate,” said Mr. Chardonay, passing his hand over his handsome face to hide his emotions. They were standing at a short distance from a blue screen, eventually to be replaced by the image of the Danube. The floor was covered with linoleum that had cobblestones painted on it, totally flat to permit dancing. The trompe-l’oeil was perfect, and the cobblestones looked entirely realistic and three-dimensional. The faint strains of the Blue Danube began to be heard, growing stronger very slowly, as if approaching from a very great distance.

“Nestor, my dear, I might as well say it right away; I cannot go with you,” said Aurora in a shaky voice. “My duty is elsewhere, and I have to follow it.”

“How can you turn your back on our love?” asked Nestor Chardonay, his green eyes almost phosphorescent in the faux twilight. Aurora sighed. “I must help my husband in his duties as a member of the House of Lords, and devote the rest of my time to community and civic affairs. I have to sit on philanthropic committees, and entertain many dignitaries. All that is not as exciting as the life you and I could have had, but if I leave my husband, he would suffer severe political consequences. Our hopeless love was madness, Nestor, sheer madness...”

“And are political consequences more important than the human heart, Aurora?”

Aurora was silent for a minute, her head bent. Then she raised it and the camera moved closer to show the sincerity and honour in the big violet eyes. “Perhaps not,” she said quietly and with great dignity, “but *England* is. If I leave Arthur he would not be able to serve England as he was born to do, and as I committed myself to do when I married him. And you too, Nestor. You have your own important duties to our country. Can you turn your back on England?”

“England...” said Mr. Chardonay, and bent his own head reverently. “England, indeed, must always come first, whatever

personal sacrifice one must make. You are right, Aurora, and I accept your heroic decision. I will always admire you for making it for both of us; you have more courage than I do. I shall never love another woman, of course, my heart will remain forever yours, but our sacrifice is needed.” He stood quietly, his head still bowed, and the sound of the waltz became strong and demanding.

Suddenly, he lifted his head, noticing the music, and smiled ruefully. “Will you dance one last waltz with me, Aurora? In memory of our first?” Without a word, Aurora glided into his arms and they danced together for the last time. The camera moved over their faces, advancing and retreating, and finally the music faded and darkness fell.

“Cut!” said Mr. Goldwasser. “Move on to the boat scene for the credits, Glam.”

A quick change of clothes, and Aurora was standing on a deck of a ship, which was constructed at some distance from a regular screen with an image of the sea projected on it. The suit she changed into was light, ethereal blue – the colour of hope – which would cheer the sobbing audience a little, and a striped yellow and white awning illuminated her with an aura of celestial golden haze, a stunning effect that was achieved by a strong light projected behind the awning. A white gauzy scarf waved in the warm breeze; the audience would almost smell the salt-laden, invigorating air. After a few seconds, the sight of land with a strong impression of palm trees appeared on the screen, which the audience knew was romantic Tahiti, where Aurora was to meet Lord Arthur. Suddenly, a dazzling smile broke on Aurora’s lips. A smile full of wisdom, love, and resignation, but not unhappy, not unhappy at all. The handsome, tall figure of a man appeared on the approaching beach, and they waved to each other; Aurora threw a kiss in his direction, and he returned it. The credits would be rolling freely at that moment, and the audience would be supremely satisfied with the outcome of the film. The admirable Lady Fitz-Gardner maintained her virtue, proved her loyalty to England and her sense of honour, and would soon be in the arms of the man who truly loved her

through all the terrible trouble she had gone through in this film, having to face the harrowing choice of a life of luxury with a titled, rich, and loving husband, who also happened to be quite attractive, or a wild adventure with a devastatingly handsome young man with almost supernatural green eyes. Life treated the poor, noble lady cruelly for a while, but all came to a good end. And the audience would leave the cinema and enjoy a good cuppa or a glass of beer and discuss Aurora's future children, charitable activities, and certain happiness, and poor Nestor's loveless and forlorn fate without his Goddess, before returning, just a little bit out of sorts, to their own mundane and often harsh reality. But such are our lives, and all of the great actress's loyal admirers would retain the pleasant assurance that there will soon be another film starring Miss Glamora Tudor and the handsome young man of the moment. Some things you could rely on, thank goodness, even in this uncertain world.

“I thought it would be more pleasant to have our meeting here, rather than in the conference room,” said Lady Norton as she ushered Mr. Goldwasser into the inner sanctum of her own sitting room, which he had never seen before. It could have been extremely elegant, due to its perfect proportions, valuable antique furniture, and lovely view, but it was marred by an overflow of Victorian and Edwardian bric-a-brac that covered every available surface, though we must admit they were exceptionally well-dusted – Lady Norton's servants were not encouraged to be idle. She was also quite lavishly decorated, wearing an elaborate dress, many pieces of day jewellery, and her face-à-main in readiness, hanging by a golden chain on her ample bosom. Most alarming was the new way she had arranged her hair. It was piled very high on her head, making her look even larger than usual. Her appearance would have intimidated a lesser man, but Mr. Goldwasser, in his infinite understanding of human nature, realized immediately that she had taken all this trouble merely to please her visitor, and so he said gallantly, “You are always so considerate, Lady Norton, forever thinking of other people's comfort. Indeed, it will be better to discuss our

plans in the privacy of your beautiful sitting room.” Lady Norton inclined her head graciously, her mound of hair shaking in a rather threatening fashion, and offered him a seat on a sofa that was so overcrowded with embroidered and firmly stuffed cushions that there was no space left for him. So he removed one cushion, admired the heavy stump-work which must have been done at least seventy years before, and sat down, piling the cushion on one of its companions, this one sporting a rather startling tapestry work, depicting a wooden-looking knight on his horse, fighting a small and stylized dragon, all three participants looking quite bored with the whole thing.

“Well, Mr. Goldwasser,” she said as she offered him a glass of pale, straw-coloured, well-chilled wine and a tray of canapés covered with Gentleman’s Relish. “I understand that we are here to discuss the sequel! How exciting. Mrs. Rivers is extremely gratified.”

“Yes, we have launched into it already,” said Mr. Goldwasser, tasting the wine and pretending to nibble on the canapé, which he loathed. “Mrs. Rivers is closeted with Miss Brinton and Maisie, working on the script. Excellent sherry, Lady Norton. Is this Fino?”

“Indeed it is, Mr. Goldwasser, straight from Spain. I hope it’s light and dry enough to please you before luncheon.”

“Extremely so, Lady Norton. Delightful and most refreshing.”

“And where is Miss Merriman?” asked Lady Norton. “Isn’t she advising you on the script?”

“She will not be working on the sequel,” said Mr. Goldwasser with a bland expression, and sipped his wine.

“Has she not accepted the position you offered her, Mr. Goldwasser?”

“No, I am afraid Miss Merriman has declined my offer, Lady Norton. She will not take a permanent job with GMG.”

“Really? This is hard to believe! A dependent, paid companion – how shockingly ungrateful! I would have thought it was an excellent opportunity for someone like her.”

“She has explained her reasons, and I respect them, though I must admit I am disappointed. You know, Lady Norton, people rarely, if ever, refuse my job offers. I am placed in the happy position of being able to give them a better job at a higher salary than their own situation. It took someone like Miss Merriman, with her quiet and very English integrity, to be the first person to do so in many years. With her clear and precise thinking, the high income did not sway her from her reasoning... Ah, well. One must move on, one must go beyond the disappointments in this life. So, do you know why we want to extend our stay? Your home will become the estate inherited by Lady Fitz-Gardner after her husband, Lord Arthur, is killed.”

“How is he killed, Mr. Goldwasser? I must admit I was following the plot of *Send Me No Lilies* with interest, and I am looking forward to the sequel.”

“He is killed saving a golden-haired young child who is about to be run over by a car.”

“What a touching, original idea,” said Lady Norton, who, surprisingly, had never read any of the many books or attended one of the films that have used this very same ploy.

“Of course, your estate will be necessary only for the first half of the film. After meeting Nestor Chardonay again at the memorial service to Lord Arthur, Aurora moves to London, where we finish the story. Do you remember the tango danced by Miss Tudor and Mr. Alcott? I have already got in touch with the Wigwam, through Miss Jessica Dean, who seems to be a habitu  of this London nightclub. Well, they will perform the tango when the Wigwam is empty and dark, with only a couple of waiters clearing up, and the tired band playing just for them; it will seem to be the small hours of the night. I suspect it may become the climax of the film, but we will leave these decisions to Mrs. Rivers and Maisie. They know what the public likes.”

“Charming, charming,” said Lady Norton, who luckily did not witness the original tango and would have been utterly scandalized had she been present. In her mind’s eye she saw a sedate and elegant couple dancing decorously, probably wearing appropriate evening clothes, not the daring, yellow and black

gypsy dress with black stockings, or Nestor's highly suggestive, dishevelled tie and shirt, all of which Mr. Goldwasser had already made up his mind to duplicate for the film.

"After Lord Arthur's death, Aurora will donate the entire estate to a London orphanage, where the golden-haired child saved by Lord Arthur lives in dire poverty. The orphanage will move there, be forever well-provided for, and the saintly teachers and beautiful children all live happily ever after. Aurora will stay for some time at the estate, before moving to London, and care for the children like a mother. We will have a few images of the children playing happily among the flowers, with your permission, but we will make sure they are extremely careful."

"That is magnificent, Mr. Goldwasser. What a wonderful story. I must congratulate Mrs. Rivers and Maisie on their originality and good taste."

"Well, we hope this is what our audience will feel," said Mr. Goldwasser. And in case the readers are wondering, yes, Mr. Goldwasser knew perfectly well how trite, tired, and ridiculous were the plots he used for his films, but quite happily continued to produce the very lucrative "tripe" as he referred to them. However, let us make it clear that we do not hold his cynicism against him one bit. Before making judgments, the reader must remember that Mr. Goldwasser made millions of viewers happy, viewers who were too tired, too busy, and too harassed to want to be educated by a so-called "serious" film, and just wanted to be entertained. And on top of giving them wonderful entertainment that allowed them to escape from their often difficult lives, he supplied good employment and support to thousands of people during his illustrious career, being a man of integrity and honour. So we think we should all hold Mr. Goldwasser in high esteem.

At that point Lady Norton and Mr. Goldwasser launched into technical details regarding the contract, which we will not reproduce here since we still don't understand such deals and probably never will. Plans were made to call the various

solicitors, and all was accomplished to both parties' complete satisfaction.

"Well, my dear Lady Norton, I will now stop taking so much of your valuable time, and go tell my people that all is arranged. They will be delighted with the news; incidentally, your new hairdo is extremely becoming, if I may mention that." Lady Norton, who did not use her face-à-main even once during this conversation, shook Mr. Goldwasser's hand cordially and he went downstairs, leaving her to gloat over the great sum of money which would soon be paid to her, and planning to spend it on a specialized new conservatory devoted entirely to extremely exotic and most repulsive cacti and succulents; she might even consider writing a new garden book about the subject, she mused happily.

Mr. Goldwasser made his way to the commissary, where he knew the staff would be assembled at that time. He stood in the middle of the room and told them the good news. Everyone cheered, and as they turned back to their lunches, he joined Glamora and Maisie who were just finishing their lunch, and seemingly talking about something of importance.

"Jake, Maisie and I were discussing *Bleak House*," said Glamora, removing a cigarette from a slender gold case and offering some to Maisie and Mr. Goldwasser. "We think you might consider this book for a future project. The drama Dickens manages to convey... I was thrilled with the character of Lady Dedlock."

Mr. Goldwasser, who was about to light Glamora's cigarette, froze in mid-action, his hand in the air, holding the lighter. "What did you say, Glam?" he asked hesitantly.

"Miss Tudor is absolutely right," said Maisie. "Though I am even more in favour of *Great Expectations*."

"Yes, indeed, Miss Havisham," said Glamora, taking the lighter from Mr. Goldwasser's hand and lighting the cigarettes all around. "Yes, such strong images, such deep feelings, the rage due to the perceived or real abandonment, the possessiveness of all things past... you are right, Maisie. It is a better part for a good actress. Both books are magnificent. I am

reading *Martin Chuzzlewit* now, incidentally. Marvellous book, but no parts for a mature actress in it that I can think of. Still, I am quite enjoying it, and after all I may read simply for recreation, if I feel like it.”

Mr. Goldwasser sat down and looked around him helplessly, much like a man discovering that he is no longer on Earth, but on the planet Mars, and surrounded by people who look like old friends, but are really dangerous aliens pretending to be those people. And yes, we know that we owe this tiny interim plot to Mr. Ray Bradbury, but why not use it if that was what Mr. Goldwasser felt? We could not produce a better scenario ourselves. Miss Merriman, who was sitting at a nearby table and having lunch with Miss Brinton, heard the entire conversation and smiled to herself.

“How many books by Dickens have you read, Glam?” asked Mr. Goldwasser.

“Five,” said Glamora casually. “My favourite up to this point is *David Copperfield*, because of the authenticity lent to it by the autobiographical overtones. *Little Dorrit*, however, has such morbid fascination... I can’t stop thinking about Mrs. Clennam, in her self-imposed, dark prison, which is really a metaphor for her suffering, guilt-ridden soul ... Well, I must nip to Miss Dahlia, Jake. The bright red hair is not as shiny as it should be, it needs a little rinse. Come along, Maisie, she will be waiting for both of us.” They left and Mr. Goldwasser looked around him, catching Miss Merriman’s eye. Miss Brinton had just left to take care of one of her many urgent duties, and Miss Merriman was sipping her coffee.

“Okay, Miss Merriman, come and have your coffee with me while I eat, and explain to me what happened here. I feel I was whisked to another universe. Glam discussing Dickens? What next?”

“Thackeray, I believe, is next, Mr. Goldwasser, *Vanity Fair*, to be exact. Miss Tudor has already gone through all of Jane Austen and, I believe, some of Charlotte Bronte,” said Miss Merriman with apparent innocence. “She loved *Jane Eyre*, but no parts there either.”

“I see,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “There is a plot evolving around me, isn’t there? And you hatched it, right?”

“Miss Tudor told me that she was unhappy about her lack of formal education, and would like to study literature, poetry, and history. Naturally school is out of the question, so I put her in touch with the right people, Mr. and Mrs. Dale, old friends of mine.”

“And is Glam happy doing it?” asked Mr. Goldwasser anxiously.

“Very happy. She adores a good story, and she is reading through the classics with unbelievable speed. Her memory and retention are excellent, after all these years of studying her parts, and she has good taste and strong understanding, especially when she reads the more dramatic style of literature. She then discusses each book with Mrs. Dale. When she starts reading history, it will be Mr. Dale who will oblige. It can be continued through correspondence, when Miss Tudor goes back to America.”

“That was an inspired thing to do, Miss Merriman. Not only it will make Glam happy, it may pave the way to a future change in her career goals...”

“Precisely, Mr. Goldwasser. This was the intention.”

“I was so worried about Glam. She was showing signs of depression, thinking about the passage of time. How did you reach this solution?”

“I listened to her, very carefully, when she told me about her problem. Miss Tudor has difficulty expressing complex thoughts, probably based on past experience that has given her some form of emotional inhibition. I thought that steering her into her own milieu, where she feels at home – the story, the drama, the acting part – might resolve some of it. Literature, like the films, frees her and liberates her thoughts and mode of expression. It worked even better than I expected.”

“Miss Merriman, you are a genius,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

“So what else is new?” said Miss Merriman nonchalantly, glancing at the mogul in a way that in any other woman would have seemed flirtatious, but of course no one could possibly

suspect Miss Merriman of *that*. He looked at her, puzzled by her response, then suddenly realized she was imitating his own catch phrase, and burst out laughing.

“What will I do without you, Miss Merriman? I can’t bear the thought that you are leaving me. Forgive me, I don’t mean to press you, and I respect your explanation and your integrity, but I will miss you so much.”

“Mr. Goldwasser, even though I cannot stay with GMG, please know that you can always call on me if you need me,” said Miss Merriman. “I know it’s not the same as working together day by day, but even across the ocean, we can remain good friends, and I will always wish to help you and Miss Tudor.”

“Thank you, Miss Merriman, for everything. And you are right – we will not let a mere ocean stand in the way of our friendship.”

Miss Dahlia was ready for Miss Tudor, who only needed a quick rinse and set, and then turned her attention to the more arduous task of transforming Maisie. A facial, followed by discreet and elegant makeup, and a good haircut that showed the softness of Maisie’s shining brown hair and displayed its curls to perfection, left Maisie looking extremely charming – though most people would not have been able to put their finger on what the changes were, exactly, except for the very pretty shade of lipstick that enhanced Maisie’s brunette colours perfectly. That mission accomplished successfully, they stopped at Bostock and Plummer, and Maisie came out wearing clothes that certainly were not flashy or extravagant, but fitted so well that the whole world would wonder why it neither appreciated her good figure before, nor noticed her unexceptionable legs, clad in pretty nylon stockings and elegant country shoes. They got into the giant white car that always followed Glamora like a puppy, and returned to Norton Hall, with Maisie almost bursting with gratitude and happiness, constantly pulling out her new hand mirror to admire herself.

Nestor Alcott came to the door to look at the beautiful evening sky as they pulled into the driveway. Stepping forward to open the door for his Goddess, and standing aside to let the two ladies get out of the car, he suddenly stopped and stared, then started laughing. "You did it, Maisie! You look gorgeous!" Glamora laughed. "Go have a glass of cold American beer, children," she said with utmost good nature. "Tell Nes all about our adventure, Maisie." She glided into the house, pleased with her day's work and happy to get away from Nestor, whose devotion rather wearied her. He was so different from Hank, whom she truly missed... such a charming young man, Hank, so much more depth to him than to this silly, smitten Nestor Alcott... Suddenly she thought, did she like Hank so much simply because he was *not* smitten with her? Hard to tell. Things may change now, though, she thought, looking back to see the two young people who were deep in conversation. She would have been less happy if she had heard them.

"She called me Nes, Maise! She had never done that before, ever, she always calls me Mr. Alcott!"

"She was in a very good mood; she liked our adventure," said Maisie. "Snap out of it, Nes, and try to pay some attention to *me*. After all, I did go through all that trouble because of your advice, so you might as well show some enthusiasm."

"Sorry, Maise. You're looking swell. I knew you would!" said Nestor apologetically.

"Do you like the clothes, and the shoes?"

"Love them. But it's your face which is most important, you simply glow. You must keep the lipstick, it really does something for you."

"I will. I bought three of them," said Maisie complacently.

"Let's go and get some dinner, and you can tell me what they put you through. We must compare notes."

After a pleasant dinner and a detailed report of her transformation, Maisie was sipping her coffee quietly, and suddenly said, "I am going to write to my fiancé tonight, Nes."

"I thought you were mad at him because of this girl," said Nestor.

“I am going to formally release him from our engagement, and let him get on with his life.”

“Wow! Really? Are you sure?”

“Perfectly sure. We have drifted apart, we no longer follow the same road. There is no point in prolonging this agony.”

“Good for you, Maise. You can do better than this two-timing scoundrel.”

“I can’t say I blame him, to be quite fair. Things change, people change... He is not really a scoundrel, he just no longer loves me. But I have changed too, considerably so, and not just in my looks. I think it’s all for the best – and thank you for standing by me.”

“What are friends for? Look how you are trying to help me get over my situation with Miss Tudor... Don’t think I don’t appreciate it.”

“I think everything will improve now, somehow. What with the sequel, which means more work for both of us, and soon going back to the States, life will be fun. I am looking forward to the sequel.”

“Me too,” said Nestor, getting up to bring more coffee and cake for both of them. “Don’t forget to reapply the lipstick, Maise, after dinner. You really look marvellous. I can tell that many fellows are going to fall for you, now that you are free and so good-looking!”

In the meantime, Miss Merriman was on her way to Mr. Choyce’s house. They had not met for a while, and this was a pleasant occasion.

“Miss Merriman, I am so glad you have consented to come to tea,” said Mr. Choyce. “I wanted to hear all the news.”

“Nothing unusual happened,” said Miss Merriman quietly. “The film is now almost over, and I shall be returning to Pomfret Towers very soon.”

Mr. Choyce’s hand trembled slightly as he stirred his tea, but naturally Miss Merriman would never notice such a thing. She sipped her own tea calmly.

“So you are not going to America with GMG?” asked Mr. Choyce.

“No, I am not. Mr. Goldwasser offered me a permanent job, and Miss Brinton was extremely kind and supportive, but I have declined, though I was most grateful.”

“May I ask why did you decline, Miss Merriman,” Mr. Choyce asked a little diffidently, “or would it be impertinent on my part to do so?”

“Of course you may ask,” said Miss Merriman. “You have the privilege of an old friend to ask whatever you wish to know. I have to admit the offer was tempting. As you must know, Mr. Choyce, service is no inheritance, and the salary Mr. Goldwasser so generously intended to give me would have secured me a very comfortable retirement. Besides, I truly enjoyed the work, and I liked Mr. Goldwasser and Miss Brinton very much.”

“And Mr. Goldwasser liked you, Miss Merriman. I am sure of it.”

“Indeed I hope so. Well, he had to, since otherwise, he would not have offered me the job. But I do not fit there, Mr. Choyce. My place is here, among my old friends, my employers, my regular work. In Hollywood, I would always have been a stranger.”

“What you said just now about service being no inheritance makes me extremely concerned. Is there a reason to believe that you will not be comfortable when the time comes for retirement?”

“I should be all right, but in a rather limited fashion. Lady Edith Pomfret left me a generous legacy, and so did Lady Emily. But times have changed, money is not what it used to be, so the legacies won’t stretch very far. And I have no real home to retire to, Mr. Choyce. My sister, who is my only relative, is not particularly interested in me.”

“Her loss, Miss Merriman. Her loss indeed,” said Mr. Choyce gallantly. Miss Merriman smiled.

“I imagine I would be able to live in one of those places that rent rooms to ladies in somewhat reduced circumstances,” she said. “This would not be too bad.”

“But not good enough for someone like you! Someone, well, I don’t quite know how to express myself on this topic. However, I think life will turn out a little differently, if I have influence at all. I am very happy you are not going to Hollywood, Miss Merriman, for many reasons. I wish I could say more, but I am not privileged, as yet, to do so. Some day, when I am better situated, will you permit me to return to this conversation?”

Miss Merriman sat quietly, gazing at her cup for a little while, thinking. “I don’t know about secretaries and companions,” she finally said. “We give our all, we work so hard, and then one day we find we have aged and our employers need another person, a stronger, younger one... Yes, Mr. Choyce. Someday, when you feel it is the right time, I would like you to return to this conversation. But not quite yet – I understand that – not quite yet.”

“Miss Merriman, you are a lady like no other,” said Mr. Choyce. “You do not seem to hold my circumstances against me.”

“Not at all, Mr. Choyce, and I know exactly what is holding you back from pursuing this conversation. This issue would not have been a deterrent to any decision I would have had to make, but I know it matters a great deal to you, and I will always respect your opinion. And there is no rush; I still have my own duties to perform.”

“I have no words to express my relief, Miss Merriman. I was so certain that you would soon announce your move to America. But, happily, you are not going, and life can go on as it was, at least for a while, with a view to a better future, I hope. With your permission, I will consider this an understanding, if a very slight one. If you agree to that, I will be most grateful.”

“Thank you, Mr. Choyce. Yes, I think an understanding is a good word,” said Miss Merriman. “But old friends always understand each other best, don’t they? That is the joy in dwelling among them.”

“Miss Merriman, will you do me the honour of coming with me, at your convenience, to tea with my aunt? She would be

delighted to make your acquaintance, and I would feel less, I don't know how to put it, perhaps the word I am searching for is guilty..."

"I would love to visit Miss Choyce. It will be a great pleasure," said Miss Merriman. "And the word 'guilt' has nothing to do with anything you should feel. I know how much you love your aunt, Mr. Choyce."

"Thank you, thank you for everything, Miss Merriman."

"And now I must leave," said Miss Merriman. "It has been a delightful tea, Mr. Choyce. Do come soon and visit us at the Towers, Lord and Lady Pomfret always enjoy your visits, and so do I, but you know that, of course."

"I will, I will, Miss Merriman. I hope that our discussion today will at least grant me the right to see you more often."

The guardian angels, hovering on the ceiling, looked at each other with triumph and joy. "Well, well," said Samuel, who, the reader will surely remember, was Miss Merriman's guardian angel. "So Daniel knew what he was talking about..."

"Indeed," said Nathaniel, Mr. Choyce's guardian angel. "I do like your person very much, Sam. She is delightful, quite the right sort."

"And I like yours, Nat. We will all get on very well when the time comes."

"We should go now and tell Mr. Charlemagne," said Samuel. "I noticed he was not present. Where is he?"

"He is visiting young Miss Molly, the daughter of Cook's Kitty," said Nat. "He seems to spend a great deal of time with her these days, and a most charming cat she is; you should meet her. Would you believe, she is the only cat he told about the cat door Mr. Choyce had constructed for him? Generally he keeps it a deep secret. Yes, let's go tell him. He will be very pleased."

Chapter Fourteen

“Gillie, do you know what I would like to do?” asked Lady Pomfret. “You are going to laugh at me, but I am longing to have a real house party and invite the GMG people. The whole thing started here with the meeting of Mrs. Rivers and Miss Tudor, and I would like to give the group a nice party in honour of finishing the film.”

“But Sally, do we have enough space, and enough help, for such ambitious entertaining?” asked Lord Pomfret a little anxiously.

“Since it is the weekend, I can borrow some space from Amalgamated Vedge in the Towers, perhaps use their conference room as a dining room, and I am sure I can get any number of women from the village who would be only too happy to oblige. Everyone misses the big old parties.”

“I know what you have in mind, Sally,” said Lord Pomfret. “Something like the weekend we spent with my uncle before we got engaged.”

“Exactly,” said Lady Pomfret. “I can borrow a good butler from someone, and it will be such fun, like the old days. And of course we have Merry back, so all should be well.”

“But Sally, do we have the time? We are so busy...”

“Let’s make the time, Gillie. Just once in a while, we should do something we truly enjoy. Life has become so busy; I sometimes feel it is almost grim.” At that, Lord Pomfret immediately gave way, for seeing Sally unhappy about anything was intolerable to him.

“Who will you invite?”

“Why, a really large party,” said Lady Pomfret enthusiastically. “Everyone who was connected with the film. Mrs. Rivers, Miss Tudor, Mr. Goldwasser, Miss Brinton, Edmond Keith, Jessica and Aubrey, Emma, if she can take a short holiday from her studies in Paris, Mr. Alcott... am I missing anyone?”

“Yes, my dear. You have forgotten the Mertons.”

“Of course, how could I? Naturally I will ask them.”

“And how about Mrs. Morland? She is always such a pleasant guest.”

“Excellent idea, Gillie. That really gives us the perfect number of guests. What fun!” And with that, Lady Pomfret went to the big business part of the Towers to see if some rooms could be arranged. And since we know and like so well the people who occupy the Towers, especially Mr. Adams, we are certain that they will make no difficulty at all, and Lady Pomfret will have her exciting house party.

A few days later the phone rang at Pomfret Towers, and Lady Pomfret, who was writing letters in the library, answered it herself.

“Lady Pomfret? This is Miss Brinton. I am calling to discuss a small change in plans. I have to go to America, rather suddenly. May I have your permission to send Miss Robinson in my place?”

“Of course,” said Lady Pomfret. “But who *is* Miss Robinson?”

“Oh, I am sorry, I should have explained. Miss Maisie Robinson is our chief script writer, who came recently from America to work on the sequel with Mrs. Rivers. She is longing to meet you.”

“Certainly! I would have invited her had I known she existed. She is most welcome. But Miss Brinton, is everything all right with you? I don’t mean to pry, but this sudden trip to America sounds serious.”

There was a short silence followed by an embarrassed laugh on the other side. “I am getting married, Lady Pomfret. Miss Tudor convinced me that I will lose neither independence nor the capacity for work, not with the type of man the general is. She adores the general.”

“Let me add my advice, then,” said Lady Pomfret. “No, you will lose nothing if you marry the right man, but you will acquire more responsibilities and additional work. That is what happened

to me, but I never regretted my decision to marry. Nothing can give you such a sense of love and support as a good marriage.”

“Thank you for your advice, Lady Pomfret. With all my heart. This time, I am going through with it; no more last minute cancellations. And after a short honeymoon in the Lake District, it’s back to work. The general will enjoy meeting all of you.”

“And we will love meeting him. Please convey my warmest congratulations to him.”

Everyone else accepted. The Mertons and Mrs. Morland had to leave after Saturday’s dinner rather than stay until after Sunday’s tea, since they had various engagements they could not cancel. However, Mrs. Morland promised to bring the butler, borrowed from her friend and neighbour Lord Crosse, and between Merry and the butler, there was a certainty of success. As Lady Pomfret walked over the house, checking the rooms and making sure all was comfortable, her thoughts kept returning to the past with mild nostalgia. She felt as if the years were shedding away and she was young Sally Wicklow who got engaged to Gillie during that far off, adventure-filled weekend they spent at Pomfret Towers as the guests of old Lord Pomfret. She smiled to herself when she remembered how domineering and unpleasant Mrs. Rivers was during that visit. Ah, well, the menacing Baedeker Bitch, as her publisher used to call her behind her back, and probably still did, had mellowed a little, even if most people still found her rather difficult. Lady Pomfret suddenly remembered, with amusement, how hard Mrs. Rivers had tried to have her own beautiful daughter, Phoebe, marry Gillie. It all happened so long ago, before the war changed everything and everyone. Dear Phoebe was now happily married, and as for Gillie and herself, they were almost an old married couple... Ah, well. She gave herself a little mental shake and decided to enjoy the present in her own uncomplicated and practical way.

The Clovers, Edmond, and Emma, who had driven down together from London, arrived before the rest of the party. Mrs.

Rivers, Nestor, and Maisie came in the huge white car, and Mr. Goldwasser drove a smaller car, accompanied by Glamora.

“What a beautiful day,” said Glamora. “Unusually blue sky. I am very happy these days, Jake.”

“And I am happy to see you happy, Glam. This course of reading suggested by Miss Merriman is doing you a lot good, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it does, Jake. I feel liberated, let out of a cage. I can speak with such ease...”

“It was her most brilliant idea,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “And she had so many of them. What an unusual person she is.”

“You like Miss Merriman a great deal, don’t you, Jake?” asked Glamora placidly.

“Oh yes, I was highly impressed by her when you introduced me, and now, after working with her, I truly admire her.”

“I feel the same, Jake. She is one in a million. She understands *everything*.”

“Yes, such a subtle mind, and yet capable of perfectly clear thinking,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

“And she is quite attractive,” said Glamora thoughtfully. “Not in our flashy Hollywood style, but in her own quiet, very English, and lady-like fashion.”

“Well, yes, I suppose so,” said Mr. Goldwasser casually.

“Actually, very attractive,” said Glamora, musing. “She is unaware of it and probably never gave such matters much thought, but she has a very elegant figure and her face is not only pretty, but has some quality which I still don’t have the exact words to describe. Do you know what I want to say, Jake? You usually do.”

“Yes, I know exactly what you want to say. You mean that she looks intellectual, spiritual, and high-thinking,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

“Yes, Jake, you do like her a lot,” said Glamora. “It’s a long time since I have seen you pay so much attention to a woman.”

“Surely you don’t imagine, Glam...” said Mr. Goldwasser, somewhat startled.

“That’s all right, Jake. A little harmless romance won’t hurt either of you or anyone else. You would never allow anyone to suffer, not if you can help it. And I can see why you would find a lady of Miss Merriman’s calibre hard to resist.”

“No, Glam, it’s nothing like that,” said Mr. Goldwasser a little sheepishly. “Really, it’s not...” Glamora laughed.

As they arrived at the Towers, they saw Edmond, standing outside, and he helped Glamora out of her car. Glamora Tudor was probably the only woman in existence who knew how to get gracefully out of a car, a talent most women would envy. One perfect leg followed the other in a smooth motion, and the butterfly-like vision emerged elegantly from her temporary cocoon. “Hank, darling!” she said, hugging her favourite leading man. “How are you? And how is the playwriting going?”

“Excellent, Miss Tudor,” said Edmond, who once freed from the film and not having to face the menace of dancing, no longer felt awkward with Glamora and treated her like an old friend – which was indeed what she had always meant to be. “Mr. Clover, though, should be the one to tell you about it.”

Aubrey, advancing toward them with Jessica, smiled at Glamora. “So good to see you, Glam,” he said. “Yes, our boy here is doing extremely well; the theatre is in his blood. Someday he will write a script for you, and you will do each other credit.”

“And Miss Lover will create the costumes,” said Glamora, smiling at Emma who came from the garden, which even in autumn looked charming. “But here are Lady Pomfret and Merry! We must go in.”

“Wait just one minute,” said Jessica. “I believe this is Mrs. Morland’s car.”

Indeed it was, and Mrs. Morland, delighted to have been invited to share this charming occasion, came out of the car, losing half her hairpins in the process and certainly not looking as elegant as Glamora as she did so. But there was no shortage of gallant men who immediately came to the rescue, and everyone entered the house, Mrs. Morland working, en route, on sticking the pins back where they belonged.

As they gathered in the drawing room, Edmond found himself sitting next to Nestor, who was noticeably quiet. “So how did the film go, Alcott?” he asked, curiously.

“Very well,” said Nestor gloomily. “We are to have a sequel.”

“Yes, I heard about that,” said Edmond. “Remarkable. What is the name of the sequel?”

“It’s called, tentatively, *Let Your Hearts Tango*,” said Nestor. Edmond silently thanked his stars for releasing him just in time from another film that required dancing. However, he did not mention that to Alcott, of course, but said, “Do you know that you are going to be the first man ever to make a second film with Miss Tudor? She must like you very much.”

“I don’t know about that. She still talks about you, Keith. She has never forgotten you.”

“Why should she forget me? She felt I was like a son to her.”

“A son, your age? What nonsense. Look at her.”

“I think you are forgetting that Miss Tudor has been a great star since the early thirties... but age is not important here. It’s the feelings that matter. She wanted to mentor me and advance my career, but you are the one with whom she is making a second film. The only one, ever; possibly the last one, too.”

“Maybe you are right,” said Nestor, his jealousy abating. “You have always been a pal, Keith. I am sorry.”

“So why don’t you introduce me to this very attractive young lady who has just come into this room?” asked Edmond.

“What attractive young lady? Oh, you mean Maisie. Right, you have never met her. Sorry. Maisie, this is Edmond Keith, I told you about him, he is the fellow who had the part of Nestor Chardonay before me; you must have seen him in *Fever in Peru*. Keith, Miss Robinson is our chief screen writer. She had created the script for *Send Me No Lilies* and now she and Mrs. Rivers are working on the script for *Let Your Hearts Tango*.”

“I am changing the name,” said Maisie decisively. “Not passionate enough. I heard you are a playwright, Mr. Keith. Would you have a better idea for a name for such a film?”

“I am very pleased to meet you, Miss Robinson,” said Edmond, looking with open admiration at her low-keyed beauty and subtle elegance. “Let me think about a good name. I’ll keep in touch and let you know.”

“Good!” said Maisie. “We writers must stick together. I liked you very much as Simon Bolivar, Mr. Keith. If you are as good a writer as you are an actor, you will go far.”

“Thank you, Miss Robinson,” said Edmond, gratified. “I have to admit to preferring writing, but I did have fun doing *Fever in Peru*.”

“If you ever come to Hollywood, Mr. Keith, by all means look me up,” said Maisie in her friendly and open American fashion. She did not mean anything beyond good camaraderie, but Emma, who was sitting next to Noel Merton and boring him by gushing about Paris, particularly the glory of the couture houses, saw the way Edmond looked at Maisie and did not like it at all. Not that it mattered, of course, Edmond was free to flirt with anyone he wanted, but she did not think it was seemly for him to show such interest in a total stranger. What about his love for Miss Tudor? She did not like that, either, but no, this was not right, though Emma could not tell exactly what it was that bothered her. As for herself, she was not very successful; Noel, for some reason, did not seem interested in her at all. He barely listened to the fascinating stories she told him, and as soon as she turned her head, he managed to escape and move on to another chair, next to Mrs. Morland. Emma looked at him, stunned by his desertion.

“Sir Noel, I am afraid you have hurt the feelings of this young lady,” said the famous authoress, always a good judge of human behaviour, as she saw Emma’s stricken face.

“Emma? Why?”

“I think she did not appreciate your abrupt way of deserting her. She likes you very much, Sir Noel.”

“She is a child, Mrs. Morland. There is a limit to how long one can listen to the valueless prattling of a child...”

He never meant to hurt Emma, but unfortunately, she overheard the conversation, and the blood rushed to her face in

terrible embarrassment. But this was not the end. Oblivious to her presence, Noel went on talking.

“I can’t win, Mrs. Morland,” he said in what seemed to Emma to be a most unpleasant mocking tone. “When I do flirt with women, someone always chastises me, even though it is done with total innocence. And when I don’t want to flirt with someone, who is really a boring adolescent, I am chastised again! What am I to do?”

Emma got up and left the room with all the dignity she could muster, then ran up to her own room and flung herself on the bed, sobbing. No one seemed to have noticed, and after a short period she felt a little calmer, though infinitely sad. So, Noel thought she was a boring child. Very well, she would not bore him anymore. She would never love again, of course, but this relationship was over for good. Life seemed bleak, grim, and without much purpose.

As she lay on the bed, recovering from her crying, Emma started imagining a beautiful, bittersweet scene. Someone would knock on the door, and she would say “*entrez, s’il vous plait,*” in French, which for some reason sounded more sophisticated than “come in, please” in plain English. Noel would come in, wearing full evening dress complete with a cape lined with silk and holding a top hat. Emma would be dressed in a white, flowing velvet robe and silver slippers decorated with white feathers, and the bed would turn into a *Recamier* sofa. She added a note that her hair must be done in a low chignon, with a pearl pin stuck in it. Satisfied with her appearance in the daydream, she returned to Noel. He would look penitent, distraught, and unhappy. He would sit by her sofa and beg her forgiveness, explaining that his rude behaviour was a subterfuge, since he was torn between his adoration of Emma and his loyalty to Lydia. Emma would be magnanimous. She would explain to Noel that there was nothing to forgive, that she admired and loved Lady Merton, and that her feelings for Noel were only warm friendship and high esteem. The tiresome and maudlin dialogue would go on for a while, too long and boring to weary our readers with, and they would part as good friends. Just as Noel was leaning over to kiss Emma’s

hand, most respectfully, there was a real knock on the door. Emma froze, aghast. What if it were actually Noel? The last thing on earth she wanted was a real scene with Noel; she hoped to avoid him as much as possible for the rest of her life. Conquering her discomfort, she got up and opened the door, since she was a very polite young woman and could not bring herself to do what she really wanted, which was to scream, “Go away!”

To her indescribable relief she saw Mrs. Morland at the door, smiling with her usual mixture of benevolence and vagueness that was so well-known to all her friends.

“May I come in?” asked the famous authoress.

“Of course, Mrs. Morland! Please do come in and sit down.” Mrs. Morland sat on the comfortable armchair Emma offered her, looked affectionately at Emma, and said. “I noticed, my dear, that you seemed a little unhappy in the drawing room, and then left abruptly. So I thought I would take advantage of my position of an old friend and see if you were all right. I hope I am not invading your privacy.”

“Oh, no, I am always happy to see you, Mrs. Morland. Thank you for being so kind.”

“Would you like to tell an old woman what was bothering you?”

“Yes, very much,” said Emma, “but dear Mrs. Morland, please don’t call yourself an old woman. Someone like you will never be old, not even when you are ninety...”

“Still some time until that birthday occurs,” said Mrs. Morland, laughing. “Thank you for the kind thought. So what was the problem?”

“It was Noel,” said Emma. “He was rude to me.”

“I suspected that. You see, my dear, Sir Noel is a very nice man. He is pleasant, amusing, and sophisticated, and in addition, his great success gives him a magical aura of importance. But he is not, how should I put it, not... very substantial. His attention flies from thing to thing, person to person, except of course, when his work is concerned. He is easily bored by what other people might find very interesting. It’s just his nature.”

“There is no doubt that I bored him. I was telling him about my adventures in Paris, and I thought that would be interesting to him, since he knows Paris so well.”

“I would find your adventures interesting, and so would many other people here. But with Sir Noel, you just can’t tell. He is unpredictable. At his age, he should be steadier and more considerate, but somehow he is not.”

“Maybe he never quite finished growing up,” said Emma with a sudden flash of insight. “Lady Merton is different; she is like a rock, so reliable.”

“Oh yes, Lady Merton is an exceptional person, and how she puts up with Sir Noel, I will never know. There was one summer when he behaved very badly... but never mind that, it is in the past. Are you very unhappy about all that?”

“Strangely, not anymore. I think talking about it with you helped. I did like Noel a little bit too much, but somehow it has just evaporated.”

“Good,” said Mrs. Morland. “So it should. Evaporate, I mean. I predict that all sorts of wonderful things will happen now, since your mind is free of this burden.”

“Mrs. Morland, do you think I was very silly?”

“Not at all,” said Mrs. Morland. “It was very natural, and now it is over and done with. Let’s comb our hair, go downstairs, and never give this matter another thought.”

“I liked what you said about Noel not being very substantial,” said Emma. “What a great word.” Mrs. Morland laughed, though very kindly, and they went downstairs.

On Saturday morning, Emma woke up extremely early. She knew everyone must be still asleep, but unable to go back to sleep herself, she decided to get up and walk in the garden until breakfast. Tiptoeing out of the house, so as not to disturb her friends, she enjoyed the beauty of the garden until she had to admit to herself that she was very, very hungry. At this time, she thought, Cook might be up, preparing breakfast. Emma knew Cook from her previous visit, and did not think it would be a problem to get a cup of tea and some toast. She had no idea

where the kitchen was located, but with the unerring homing instinct of the not-quite-grown-up when a search for food is concerned, she found it within minutes. Cheerful sounds of conversation and clinking china came from the partially open door, so she just walked in.

“Miss Emma!” exclaimed Cook, who was having her before-breakfast tea with the housemaid. “So early! Good morning to you, just the same.”

“Good morning,” said Emma. “Yes, I could not sleep, and I am famished. Could I persuade you to give me some tea and toast?”

“Tea and toast!” exclaimed Cook, scandalized by such an idea. “Young bodies need *food*. I am frying some kippers on the stove, and here is some bread and dripping. I baked the bread myself, so I know it’s good. None of these nasty vitamins in my bread... and here is a boiled egg to start with.”

“Thanks, Cook,” said Emma gratefully. “What a lovely breakfast. Do you know, in Paris all you can get is coffee and croissants; by lunchtime, I am starving.”

Cook shook her head disdainfully. “Yes, I know, Miss Emma. I was in France three years ago, to visit my sister who is married to a French airman, of all things. Don’t you go marry a Frenchie, we told her, they always stray. But she said it don’t mean a thing with French men... well, I would have given him a piece of my mind... but blood is thicker than water, and I went for a visit and she tooked me to a hotel for breakfast just after I arrived.”

“What happened?” Emma asked curiously.

“Well, they tried to give me croysents for breakfast! Croysents are *pastry*, I told them, and no one can tell me they is not. Pastry for breakfast, I ask you, with no eggs, no bacon, no ham, no kippers... you can just picture what I said, and they did find me a proper egg or two. No wonder them Frenchies are so small and weak. I reckon that’s why they lose wars, and we win them. It’s the food, Miss Emma; it’s all in the food. Here is some nice India tea, Miss Emma. I don’t hold with this China tea the gentry likes. It doesn’t draw nice and black like India tea.” She

put the plate with the bread and dripping, and a beautifully cooked kipper, before Emma. "And after that, don't forget to try this jam. I made it from our own strawberries. Or there is honey if you prefer."

"Cook," said the housemaid, who until that moment was absorbed in her own quite substantial before-breakfast tea. "Won't you please read Miss Emma's tea leaves?"

"Now don't be an impertinent girl," said Cook, visibly gratified by the suggestion.

"Oh, no, Cook, I am not being impertinent at all, it's just that you read better than anyone. Miss Emma, Cook is teaching me how to read tea leaves."

"Yes, please, Cook, could you?" pleaded Emma.

"Very well, if Miss Emma would like me to," said Cook sanctimoniously.

"I would love it," said Emma, who adored such doings and wanted to know everything about her future, now that her preoccupation with Noel was over and her future was a blank slate. Noel's removal from her thoughts left a certain hole in her mind, a strange little emptiness, which she did not like and wanted to fill up as quickly as possible.

"Well, let me have your cup, Miss Emma, if you are quite finished drinking," said Cook, and gazed into the cup. "Come and look too," she said to the housemaid. "Let's see what you find out."

The housemaid looked earnestly into the cup. "Why, I see an ocean voyage, Cook, it's as clear as day!"

"Very good," said Cook, pleased by her student's advancement.

"Does it say where I am going?" asked Emma, secretly hoping to hear something about Hollywood.

"America," said the housemaid. But since she did not know the names of any other continents, and did not want to send such a nice girl like Emma to India, which the housemaid heard was having some troubles, that was really the only option.

“And I see early marrying for you, Miss Emma,” said Cook, resuming her position in the limelight. “Yes, a tall, dark, and handsome young man. I can’t tell if he is English or American.”

Tall, dark and handsome, Emma mused. Well, that was Edmond all over, of course, but since he had decided to devote his life to Miss Tudor, it probably meant she would meet a good looking American of that description on the ship, on her way to Hollywood. Images of Rock Hudson came into her mind. Yes, someone like that wouldn’t be too bad... She smiled. “Thank you! That sounds like a very nice future!”

“You are very welcome, Miss,” said the housemaid, and added virtuously, “I must go and start work.” Cook nodded approval and she left. Emma, pleased with her morning activities, thanked Cook again for the nice breakfast and the reading, and strolled back into the hall.

She entered the dining room, where she found Mrs. Rivers and Maisie drinking coffee while waiting for breakfast. They were having a heated argument and after nodding at her simply ignored her presence, which was fine with Emma who was slightly afraid of Mrs. Rivers. She sat quietly down and listened.

“But my dear Miss Robinson,” said Mrs. Rivers in a scandalized tone of voice. “They are not married! Not even engaged! And it has only been one year since Lord Arthur’s death! Could Lady Fitz-Gardner really bring herself to behave like *that*? And what would the public think?”

“Mrs. Rivers, you know times have changed. If you don’t show a little passion in your love scenes, the audience simply will not believe it’s true love. Remember how much you liked that tango?”

“Well yes, the tango was extraordinary...”

“It was not merely the dancing technique, Mrs. Rivers, that attracted your attention. You are a sophisticated lady, a woman of the world... you know that the feelings and desires influenced you when you watched the tango; it had to touch the heart of anyone watching.”

“Yes, but still, Miss Robinson, you really think a respectable woman could do that sort of thing *in public*?”

“They are only kissing in this scene, Mrs. Rivers, if you think about it...”

“Yes, but the way they do it... She would not let him do *that*...”

Lord and Lady Pomfret, Jessica, Aubrey, Mr. Goldwasser, and Glamora walked in, breakfast came with them, and the argument subsided.

“I heard some of their fighting,” said Mr. Goldwasser to Emma privately. “The eternal war between the generations. Who do you think is going to win, Miss Lover?”

“I think Maisie will win in the end... But Mr. Goldwasser, I wish you would call me Emma. It’s very nice and grown up to be called Miss Lover, but you are so much like Mrs. Morland... I asked her to call me Emma a long time ago.”

“Of course,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “And do you think you can be bold and American enough to call me Jake? You will have to start adapting to our ways, you know.”

“I’ll try, but it may take some time. Calling important people by their Christian names does not come naturally to English girls. But why would I have to adjust to the American ways?”

“Because, my dear, I can see your future. It will be shared between designing for the stage in England, and the cinema in the United States.”

“Really?” said Emma, trembling with excitement, thinking about Cook’s tea leaves that had predicted just such a surprise.

“If not for any other reason, did you not notice that Glam adores you?”

“She was always very kind to me,” said Emma breathlessly.

“Remember how she felt that Edmond Keith was like a son to her? She would love to mentor and help someone, but a young woman would be much more appropriate. A fascinating woman like Glam should have had a daughter... but such are our lives; no one can have everything. Once she likes someone, Emma, she would go to great lengths to help them.”

“And you really think she likes me? I so much admire Miss Tudor, I always have. Such an honour...”

“Oh, yes, she was very open about it with me. She wants you to finish your studies in Paris, and then start working on some films with her. She knows that you will also want to do the stage – and she will respect that – but you won’t need her for that, of course, since you have Clover and Miss Dean. They will make sure of your future on this side of the ocean, and Glam and I will take care of a GMG career.”

“Mr. Goldwasser, I am about to cry,” said Emma. “I simply can’t believe my good fortune.”

“She is very good, Mr. Goldwasser,” said Jessica. “I know something about clothes and costumes. I saw Emma’s latest work from Paris, and indeed, the improvement is amazing. Didn’t you think so, Aubrey?”

“Indeed I do. I feel so responsible and important, bringing out both Edmond and Emma into the limelight.” And Aubrey turned into a benevolent Tsar, conferring favours on his people.

“I have no doubt of it,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “I know she is good. And as for young Keith, he might also think about Hollywood. Why not bring him with you, Clover, when you come to work on *Dance We Shall*? Bring both youngsters; let them look at Hollywood a bit, get an idea.”

Emma held her breath, waiting for Aubrey to answer. She could think of nothing she would want more... Images of grandeur beyond description, trips through the huge studios, visits to great mansions, meeting every film star she had ever admired, all passed before her eyes. Would Aubrey agree? Was such happiness possible? No, he would say she was not ready before doing a course in Italy, or that Edmond must put up a show in London first, or that...

“Great idea,” Aubrey said calmly, as if all this was just normal business. “We will do exactly that. Excellent training for both of them, I completely agree. Emma, there is a journey in your future...” And he turned this time into Nostradamus, but Emma, bursting with happiness, did not notice the new persona, to Aubrey’s chagrin.

Chapter Fifteen

As planned, the Mertons and Mrs. Morland left after Saturday's dinner. Emma was sorry to lose Mrs. Morland, but relieved to see the last of Noel. Not that he had the slightest idea of her discomfort, but it was better not to think of him ever again.

Following Sunday's lunch, the guests spread out, some to sit in the drawing room and chat, some to make sure their belongings were packed properly, since they planned to leave after tea. After checking the drawers in her room to make sure nothing was left behind, Emma went downstairs and strolled into the garden. She was a little sad, a common state of mind when a pleasant house party comes to its end, and unusually tired. She tried to cheer herself up with the thought of the very exciting future that awaited her, but for some reason she was restless, and did not look forward to her regular routine, even though she enjoyed her stay in Paris very much. The weather stopped cooperating, and a cool wind rose, not really cold, but unpleasant enough to send her back into the house. Passing by the library window on her way in, she stopped for a moment to adjust the buckle of her belt which had become loose. Voices heard from inside attracted her attention.

"Jake, this is giving us no other option," she heard Glamora's voice.

"I don't know about that, Glam," said Mr. Goldwasser. "We may think of something."

"I can't see what it could be, Jake," said Glamora.

Not realizing that she was eavesdropping, since what could these two say secretly, Emma went on fussing with the obstinate buckle.

"But Glam, my dear, there must be something we could do... what you suggest may be just too difficult for us to live with..."

Emma looked into the window, amazed by the tension in the usually cheerful mogul's voice. Mr. Goldwasser and Glamora

stood close to each other, with Glamora's head resting on his shoulder. Emma suspected Glamora was crying.

"But anyway, I cannot tolerate this situation anymore. The secrecy, the subterfuge... it is killing me."

In a flash, Emma understood it all. Mr. Goldwasser was a married man, and estranged from a nasty, domineering, difficult Hollywood wife! He loved Glamora Tudor, and she loved him, and quite possibly they were having an affair! Glamora could no longer tolerate the agony of deceit, or perhaps the wife had found out about it and sent her lawyers, who demanded that they separate. Obviously, Glamora was going to obey and be torn away from her true love...

"But what will the public say when they find out?" said Mr. Goldwasser. "Would you be able to tolerate their reaction? You know how they treat such matters, I don't have to tell you."

"Yes, Jake, I will have to," said Glamora.

Of course, thought Emma. The public would find out about the affair, unless Glamora and Mr. Goldwasser obeyed Mrs. Goldwasser's demands, and would think Glamora was a terrible, designing woman, taking someone else's husband like that, using her great beauty and her feminine wiles... but Glamora was not like that at all, thought Emma. Not that Emma exactly approved of affairs; on principle she considered them immoral, but Glamora and Mr. Goldwasser were such thoroughly good people... Emma simply could not tolerate seeing them suffer. She glanced into the window again and saw Glamora, standing very still in Mr. Goldwasser's arms. Somehow, they looked different from the usual. Emma, whose eye for clothes and appearance in general was always open, no matter what the circumstances, noticed it immediately; Glamora did not tower over Mr. Goldwasser the way she usually did. She was still taller, which was evident when they were holding each other, but not as tall as usual. Her eyes darted to Glamora's feet, and she saw that Glamora wore flat-heeled shoes! True, they were the most expensive, beautiful, elegant "ballet" flats, the current fashion everywhere, but still, they were *flats*. The incredibly high heels, Glamora's trade mark, were gone. Emma knew

instinctively that this was a terrible omen. Glamora has given up, has surrendered... Extremely disturbed, Emma quietly moved away from the window. What should she do? Immediately, Edmond's love for Glamora came into her mind. Edmond would be horribly upset... should she tell him, or keep the awful secret to herself? No, she could not do that. He must know, honesty and kindness demanded that. But it would be sure to break his heart. What should she do? She went further into the garden to think about it privately, to make a decision. Unfortunately, she saw Edmond standing by the vegetable plot, eating green peas in a meditative fashion. He looked up and saw Emma. "Would you like some peas?" he asked. "They are awfully good." Emma dismissed the pea offer and plunged into the ordeal.

"Edmond, I have something terrible to tell you," she said timidly. "I am not sure how to say it, though."

"Well, just tell me," said Edmond. "Can't be all that bad that I won't be able to stand it. I did not see anyone getting a telegram declaring death and destruction. Of course, Mr. Goldwasser got the usual two or three daily telegrams, but that is business as usual."

Emma did not answer.

"Listen, Emma," said Edmond. "You can't come and make such a dramatic announcement and then not tell me what it was all about."

"You are right," said Emma decisively. "I might as well simply tell you what I saw, and let you draw the proper conclusions. I was passing by the library window, and there was Mr. Goldwasser, kissing Miss Tudor."

"That's it?" asked Edmond, seemingly amazed at her reaction. "What of it? Why should he not kiss her if he wants to? They have known each other for years!"

"I don't mean kissing her like a friend, Edmond. It was a real kiss, if you know what I mean."

"Well, good for them. Maybe they have decided, after all these years, that they love each other. Why not? Such things happen. And they have so much in common, they can have a wonderful life together."

Emma looked at him, her mouth slightly open. She was so utterly shocked by his cavalier and unemotional attitude to the horrendous revelation about his beloved that she forgot her usual reserve. "I thought you were in love with her," she said bluntly.

"In love with Miss Tudor? How often have I told you she was old enough to be my mother and that she irritated me with her flirtation? She always wants to have the boys who act with her fall in love with her. Platonic, of course. Sometimes she succeeds, sometimes not; I guess it's like a hobby with her, and good promotion for the films. Of course Mr. Goldwasser wouldn't care even if they are now having their own romance, he must know that she is really the soul of loyalty. She is, you know. I may not be her greatest admirer, but I do recognize that she is a thoroughly good woman. But why did you think I was in love with her?"

"Well, you were always hanging around her, I suppose, and then she really is very beautiful... and a big star, too..."

"You are a goose, Emma. If you had any sense, which you don't, you would have known a long time ago that it was you I was in love with from the first day I met you. Why did I have to fall for a silly person when I am so wonderful, smart, and well educated, I will never know."

"Oh, Edmond," said Emma. "I never guessed. This is all too heavenly!" and she rubbed her face against his shoulder in the nicest manner, and they both laughed.

"We will be the greatest success on both stage and cinema when we finish our studies and get married," said Edmond after a very satisfactory embrace. "You will design all the costumes to everything I will ever write and produce."

"What fun," said Emma. "You will visit me in Paris, won't you?"

"All the time. And you will visit me in London, and when we are done with our studies, we shall get married immediately and set to work!"

"How lovely," said Emma. "I can't wait."

"There is just one thing," said Edmond hesitantly. "I thought you cared so much about Noel..."

“Noel? Oh, no. I like him very much, of course, he is a very nice man, but the really wonderful person in that family is Lady Merton. He may be quite sophisticated and interesting, and he has an aura of great success, but he is not, well, not very substantial, if you know what I mean.”

“Well,” said Edmond, rather amazed at Emma’s insight, maturity, and sudden literary way of speaking which she had never expressed before, and never will again, unless she would memorize, in the future, more of Mrs. Morland’s ruminations. “I am not sure I do understand, but it does not matter. I am happy you don’t care about him, that is all.”

“I only care about you,” said Emma, which settled the matter once and for all.

Entering the drawing room, Emma and Edmond found Lord and Lady Pomfret, Jessica, Aubrey, Maisie and Nestor sitting there. They looked at each other, wondering if this was the right time to tell the news about their engagement. There was no need to do so, since one look at their happy faces made the situation very clear to everyone in the room, except Lord Pomfret who rarely paid attention to such details. Aubrey assumed the persona of the doddering old father, much like King Lear, giving up a beloved daughter to a relative stranger. “So,” he said with considerable and very effective gloom, which of course he did not feel at all, “I see that you have news for us.”

“How did you know, Cousin Aubrey?” asked Emma with some surprise.

“It’s quite visible, my love,” said Jessica, getting up to kiss her cousin-in-law and Edmond.

“Congratulations,” said Lady Pomfret warmly. “I am so happy your engagement happened here! Such fun!”

“Indeed,” said Lord Pomfret, who now realized what was going on and was torn away from his gentle detachment. “This memorable occasion calls for a bottle of the best champagne.” He rang for the temporary butler and when this impressive person appeared, requested the champagne and a set of glasses. The butler left the room, and Lady Pomfret said, “Now, expect congratulations from the entire staff.”

“But Lord Pomfret did not tell him,” said Edmond. “How would he know the champagne is not required for celebrating the finalizing of the film?”

“He knows,” said Lady Pomfret. “They always do.” Soon the butler came back with the champagne, cleared his throat discreetly, and said, “If I may congratulate you, Mr. Edmond and Miss Emma, on behalf of the staff...” Fortunately, Mrs. Rivers came in, followed by Miss Merriman, and distracted everyone before they started laughing at the quick fulfilment of Lady Pomfret’s prediction. Emma and Edmond thanked the butler, and he poured champagne for everyone.

At that moment, just as everyone was raising their glasses, Mr. Goldwasser and Glamora walked in. Glamora was hanging heavily on Mr. Goldwasser’s arm, holding tight, something she rarely inflicted on the mogul, reserving the ordeal for the men she flirted with.

Before Lord Pomfret could ask them if they would like to join in the congratulations and have a glass of champagne, Mr. Goldwasser raised his hand. “Excuse me, everyone, I must ask for your attention,” he said, looking as if something momentous was on his mind. Glamora seemed extremely tense, with a worried look on her face.

“I have something to tell you,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “My wife has communicated her wishes to me today, and I plan to comply. Our lives are about to be drastically changed.”

Emma heart bled for the unhappy couple. She looked at Glamora and there was no doubt, tears were swelling in the large violet eyes. Real tears.

The room was dramatically silent. Miss Merriman raised her head, with a startled look on her face. A wife? Mr. Goldwasser was *married*? His behaviour never indicated that, never...

“Therefore, I have an announcement!” declared the mogul. “Mrs. Goldwasser and I have made a tremendous business decision.”

“I had no idea that Mrs. Goldwasser even existed,” said Lady Pomfret, goaded into such a blunt statement by the sight of the glamorous actress holding on to Mr. Goldwasser while he was

talking about his wife, probably sitting at the moment in their Hollywood mansion. "Where is she?"

"You are looking at her," said Mr. Goldwasser. "Glam and I have been married for over twenty years, but of course we had to keep it quiet because Glam had to have an imaginary affair with every leading man, for promotional reasons. Not that she did not enjoy it," he added, looking at his wife with great affection and tolerance. "She is a born vamp and flirt, but she is getting tired of all that and she wants to drop the youthful image and start sinking her teeth into real, serious, middle-aged roles. So there is no reason for us to hide our married state anymore. We are coming clean."

The whole company was so stunned by this second revelation that they remained silent for a long moment. Miss Merriman nearly lost her regular equilibrium and simply stared at the mogul and his wife. Did she suspect, after all, that he liked her, Miss Merriman, with a little more than friendship, and was about to express it, some day? Did she feel slightly betrayed by Glamora's secrecy, since Miss Merriman helped her to become the new woman she now was? We will never know. Many thoughts darted through Miss Merriman's mind, all in a flash, but the last one was the honest and open face of Mr. Choyce. He would never conceal anything, have secret plans, or indulge in any form of subterfuge... not Mr. Choyce, not ever. The thought of their understanding and possibly their future happiness made her the first to recover, and she said, "I have no idea if etiquette calls for official congratulations under the circumstances, but I am very happy to hear this news." And indeed she was. The only unpleasant sensation left was that she felt a little foolish, having been taken in by the ruse. But Miss Merriman never bore grudges; she was above such feelings, and she went over and hugged Glamora.

For the first time in film history, the public, or, at least, a small representation of it, saw two tears fall out of Glamora Tudor's large violet eyes, like two precious diamonds tumbling out of velvet boxes. She dabbed at them with an embroidered Swiss handkerchief, leaving her mascara miraculously intact,

and said, "Thank you, my dear Merry. It was so hard not to tell you after all you have done for me... And I am so happy..."

"But Miss Tudor, oh sorry, Mrs. Goldwasser," said Emma, "what about *costumes*? This is very important, isn't it? If you make serious films, like Shakespeare and things, you will not wear these incredible costumes anymore! The whole world loves your costumes!"

"You will design spectacular costumes for my parts in Shakespeare, my dear Emma," said Glamora. "Medieval, Renaissance, Ancient Greece, Rome, though to tell the truth, I don't really know as yet which play occurs in which era, even though I am reading *Macbeth* now... I'll have to start reading history if I want to do these types of roles, on top of my current literature studies. And you can also design some elegant and discreet suits and gowns for my future roles as a mother, a villain, a pillar of the community, and eventually – can you imagine – maybe grandmothers' roles! We shall work together on many films. And really, the time has come for such a change. I don't want to be the laughing stock of the industry; I would much prefer to be a huge success in my new image."

"You will be," said Nestor fervently. "There will never be anyone quite like you, Miss Tudor, no matter what role you take." Mr. Goldwasser laughed indulgently and patted the shoulder of the love-struck young man. "Mrs. Goldwasser, my boy. Mrs. Goldwasser. Miss Tudor is gone."

"We'll snap him out of this ridiculous state of mind, Mr. Goldwasser," said Maisie with some determination. "Don't you worry about it, Mrs. Goldwasser, he won't annoy you anymore. Nes, pull yourself together and face the facts like a man. We have a sequel to do and we don't want pathetic love-struck calves interfering with the huge success I am expecting. You can be a great star, or you can be a silly boy. Not both."

"Now, Maise," said Nestor meekly. "It's not what you think. I just mean that I admire her so much... Mrs. Goldwasser is a great actress, you know..."

"Stick to that, my boy, and all will be well," said Maisie. "But no more gushing and moaning after the moon. Maudlin and

silly scripts, yes, that is my trade, and I love them and cry over them and enjoy them thoroughly. But in real life, there is no excuse for such behaviour.”

“Good work, Maisie,” said Mr. Goldwasser, amused and looking forward to more fun on this front as time went by.

“What hair colour will you choose for your new image, Mrs. Goldwasser?” asked Emma curiously.

Glamora laughed. “Dark auburn, of course! It is my natural colour. I will allow it to become gradually streaked in white, in the most elegant fashion.”

“Auburn?” cried Mrs. Rivers. “So why did you say when we just started that you only had it once, when playing an Irish heroine, and that you were not sure it went with your eyes?”

“I have said many silly things in my time, Mrs. Rivers. At that conversation, I just wanted to be contrary. Nevertheless, I was telling the truth. From a very early age, I only had the natural auburn in that one film, the first I did with Jake. In all the other films I kept changing it; as everyone knows, I had everything from flaxen blonde to jet black.”

“This is all so difficult to absorb,” said Mrs. Rivers. “How you managed to keep your secret is beyond belief. It was brilliant, Mrs. Goldwasser.”

“I feel as if I am living inside one of your novels, Mrs. Rivers,” said Lady Pomfret. “So exciting!” Lord Pomfret looked at her affectionately; yes, this weekend had made Sally very happy. It was worth all the trouble, he thought, even dealing with the annoying butler, to see her flushed cheeks and gleaming eyes.

“Indeed, such a secret could have a plot in it for a good novel,” said Mrs. Rivers. “Very complex, though.”

“I paid a high price for it, emotionally... For example, you may not remember, Mrs. Rivers, but try to go back to the day when I consented to turn *Send Me No Lilies* into a film,” said Glamora.

“Yes, we were walking in the Towers’ garden,” said Mrs. Rivers. “I remember you were suddenly ill, very pale and dizzy. I was very concerned.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Rivers. I appreciate your kindness,” said Glamora, “but I was not ill, I was terrified.”

“Of what?” asked Mrs. Rivers, surprised.

“You were describing your next book to me, and mentioned that I inspired it; it was the story of a middle-aged actress falling for a young man...”

“Oh, yes, I do remember,” said Mrs. Rivers. “But it was nothing to worry someone like you, Mrs. Goldwasser! All the young men are falling in love with you, not the other way around! You are above such trifles!”

“The young man was not the real issue, Mrs. Rivers. You mentioned, almost in passing, that the actress was married to a big producer of the London stage, and had to keep her marriage secret so that her youthful and romantic image would be maintained. Since this was exactly what Jake and I had to do, I suspected that you knew my secret, and I believed, to my eternal shame, that you were blackmailing me into doing the film. I was so horrified of the thought of discovery that I accepted the offer at once, without much thinking.”

“My dear Mrs. Goldwasser! I will never forgive myself for giving you such a fright,” said Mrs. Rivers. “I had not the slightest idea of your marriage.”

“And I will never forgive myself for suspecting you of blackmail,” said Glamora penitently. “In our profession, we so often turn suspicious, almost mean... So at least we must forgive each other, and be happy that all that did happen, because we made many wonderful new friends and are creating two lovely films which I am sure will be a great success.”

“Amen,” said Mr. Goldwasser.

Miss Merriman looked compassionately at Mrs. Rivers, who was sitting next to her. The two of them were the ones most affected by the deception, and while Miss Merriman was quite able to cope, Mrs. Rivers seemed taken aback, almost shocked.

“Nothing is as it seems in our strange world, Mrs. Rivers,” said Miss Merriman quietly. “You have successfully created many aspects of reality in your work. I have always tried to observe, to understand, to be a student of reality. And yet,

neither of us saw what was in front of us all this time. And it will happen again and again.”

“I feel foolish,” said Mrs. Rivers honestly.

“There is no need to dwell on that,” said Miss Merriman. “If we had penetrated their disguise, they would have been very unhappy, perhaps even humiliated. It is better this way, Mrs. Rivers. The two of us, who had always aimed to serve, protect, and support in our different ways, can accept that.”

“Serve? I have served? How?” asked Mrs. Rivers, surprised.

“In the highest and most valued way. You have always served your Public, Mrs. Rivers. They came first. And in my humble way, I served the people I worked for.”

“Miss Merriman, the way you always see the big picture is wonderful. Thank you for making me feel better, and you are absolutely right.”

Lord Pomfret poured out two more glasses. “Will you both have a glass of champagne?” asked Lord Pomfret to Glamora and Mr. Goldwasser. “Emma and Edmond have just announced their engagement, and now we can celebrate both occasions.”

“Yes indeed,” said Glamora happily, accepting her glass. “I am delighted beyond words, my darling Emma and Hank. To see two people I love make such a happy decision is a joy.”

“How delightful,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “When Clover brings you to Hollywood, we will have the biggest and most lavish party imaginable for you. Won’t we, Glam?”

“Indeed,” said Glamora. “We will do it by the pool, on the great lawn. Space for hundreds of people and you will meet everyone.”

“Is it a heart-shaped pool?” asked Emma, suddenly remembering her old daydream, when she imagined herself visiting Mr. Goldwasser’s mansion.

“No, it’s shaped like a great big clover,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “With four leaves, for luck.”

“Oh, thank you,” said Aubrey. “I never expected such honour... a pool made after me!” Everyone laughed and drank their champagne.

“So *Dance We Shall* will be the last film of the old kind?” asked Jessica.

“Yes,” said Mr. Goldwasser. “We will complete the sequel to *Send Me No Lilies*, and then we will go back to America and film *Dance We Shall*. After that, we will announce Glam’s retirement, and when people beg her not to do so, we will disclose the real plans. And of course in between we will have a wonderful vacation, maybe a cruise to some tropical paradise. I know! What we need is a second honeymoon, now that the world is going to find out that we are married. It will make headlines.”

“How exciting – life imitating art so perfectly,” said Mrs. Rivers enthusiastically, looking at Glamora and Mr. Goldwasser with sincere admiration. “Just like Lady Fitz-Gardner and her husband, going to Tahiti...” and none of the company had the heart to say, “and every other middle-aged couple in your novels, dear Mrs. Rivers,” because they were much too kind to say that and also, in spite of her silliness and pretensions, after all the time they spent together and the work they shared, they had begun to like Mrs. Rivers very much, surprising as our readers may find such a statement – but we firmly stand behind it!