

*(KAY enters by the French window.)*

**KAY.** Why can't you come? Ted and I are waiting.

**NEVILLE.** I just came to see if Audrey—

*(KAY interrupts. She takes NEVILLE by the hand and leads him out by the French windows.)*

**KAY.** Oh, bother Audrey. We can get on quite well...

*(Their voices die away as they exit.)*

**ROYDE.** And who is Kay?

**TREVES.** The present Mrs. Nevile Strange.

*(MARY enters from the house carrying some sewing. She holds the door open and LADY TRESSILIAN enters using a walking stick. She is a white-haired, aristocratic looking woman of immense gravitas.)*

*Good morning, Camilla.*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Good morning, Mathew!

*(She sees ROYDE and greets him with great affection.)*

Well, Thomas, so here you are. I'm very glad to see you.

**ROYDE.** *(Shyly.)* Very glad to be here.

*(MARY puts the sewing down and arranges the cushions on the armchair.)*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Tell me all about yourself.

**ROYDE.** *(Mumbling.)* Nothing to tell.

*(LADY TRESSILIAN studies his face.)*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** You look exactly the same as you did at fourteen. That same boiled owl look. And no more conversation now than you had then.

**ROYDE.** Never had the gift of the gab.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Then it's time you learnt. Have some sherry? Mathew? Thomas?

**ROYDE.** Thank you.

*(MARY pours two glasses of sherry. LADY TRESSILIAN indicates the sofa.)*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Then go and sit down. Somebody's got to amuse me by bringing me all the gossip.

*(She sits in the armchair. ROYDE waits politely then takes a seat on the sofa.)*

Why can't you be more like Adrian? I wish you'd known his brother, Mary, a really brilliant young man, witty, amusing – all the things that Thomas isn't. And don't go grinning at me, Thomas Royde, as though I were praising you. I'm scolding you.

**ROYDE.** Adrian was certainly the showman of our family.

*(MARY hands out the sherry.)*

**MARY.** Did he – was he – killed in the war?

**ROYDE.** No, he was killed in a motor accident two years ago.

**MARY.** How dreadful!

**TREVES.** The impossible way young people drive cars nowadays!

*(LADY TRESSILIAN picks up her sewing.)*

**ROYDE.** In his case it was some fault in the steering.

*(ROYDE takes his pipe from his pocket and looks at LADY TRESSILIAN.)*

I'm so sorry, may I?

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** I wouldn't know you without your pipe. But don't think you can just sit back and puff contentedly while you're here. You've got to exert yourself and help.

**ROYDE.** *(Surprised.)* Help?

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** We've got a difficult situation on our hands. Have you been told who's here?

*(MARY takes a glass of sherry to LADY TRESSILIAN.)*

No, no, much too early, pour it back into the decanter.

*(MARY does so.)*

**ROYDE.** Yes, I've just heard.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Well, don't you think it's disgraceful?

**ROYDE.** Well...

**TREVES.** You'll have to be a little more explicit, Camilla.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** I intend to be. When I was a girl such things did not happen. Men had their affairs, naturally, but they did not allow them to break up their married life.

**TREVES.** Regrettable though the modern point of view may be, one has to accept it, Camilla.

*(MARY takes a seat on the arm of the sofa.)*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** That's not the point. We were all delighted when Nevile married Audrey. Such a sweet, gentle girl.

*(She turns to ROYDE.)*

You were all in love with her – you, Adrian and Nevile. Nevile won.

**ROYDE.** Naturally. He always wins.

*(LADY TRESSILIAN looks at him with frustration.)*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Of all the defeatist...

**ROYDE.** I don't blame her, Nevile had everything – good looks, first-class athlete, even had a shot at swimming the channel.

**TREVES.** And all the kudos of that early Everest attempt – never stuck up about it.

**ROYDE.** *Mens sana in corpore sana.*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Sometimes I think that's the only bit of Latin you men ever learn in your expensive education.

**TREVES.** My dear Camilla, you must allow for its being invariably quoted by one's housemaster whenever he is slightly embarrassed.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Mary, I wish you wouldn't sit on the arms of chairs, you know how much I dislike it.

**MARY.** Sorry, Camilla.

*(She quickly sits on the sofa.)*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Now where was I?

**MARY.** You were saying that Audrey married Nevile.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Oh, yes. Well, Audrey married Nevile and we were all delighted. Mortimer was particularly pleased, wasn't he, Mathew?

**TREVES.** Yes, yes.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** And they were very happy together until this creature, Kay, came along. How Nevile could leave Audrey for a girl like Kay, I simply cannot imagine.

**TREVES.** I can – I've seen it happen so often.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Kay is quite the wrong wife for Nevile – no background.

**TREVES.** But a singularly attractive young woman.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Bad stock. Her mother was notorious all over the Riviera.

**ROYDE.** What for?

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Never you mind. What an upbringing for a girl. Kay made a dead set at Nevile from the moment they met, and never rested until she got him to leave Audrey and go off with her. I blame Kay entirely for the whole thing.

**TREVES** *(Amused.)* I'm sure you do. You're very fond of Nevile.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Nevile's a fool. Breaking up his marriage for a silly infatuation. It nearly broke poor Audrey's heart.

*(She turns to ROYDE.)*

She went to your mother at the vicarage and practically had a nervous breakdown.

**ROYDE.** Er – yes – I know.

**TREVES.** When the divorce went through, Nevile married Kay.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** If I had been true to my principles I should have refused to receive them here.

**TREVES.** If one sticks too rigidly to one's principles, one would hardly see anybody.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** You're very cynical, Mathew, but it's quite true. I've accepted Kay as Nevile's wife, though I shall never really like her. But I must say, I was dumbfounded and very much upset, wasn't I, Mary?

**MARY.** Yes, you were, Camilla.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** When Nevile wrote asking if he could come home with Kay, under the pretext, if you please, that it would be nice if Audrey and Kay could be friends. *(Scornfully.)* Friends! I said I couldn't entertain such a suggestion for a moment, and that it would be very painful for Audrey.

**TREVES.** And what did he say to that?

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** He replied that he had already consulted Audrey and she thought it a good idea.

**TREVES.** And did Audrey think it a good idea?

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Apparently, yes.

*(She tosses a knot of silk to MARY.)*

Unravel that.

**MARY.** Well, she said she did. Quite firmly.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** But Audrey is obviously embarrassed and unhappy. If you ask me, it's just Nevile being like Henry the Eighth.

**ROYDE.** Henry the Eighth?

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Conscience. Nevile feels guilty about Audrey and is trying to justify himself.

*(MARY rises and puts the silk in the work-basket.)*

Oh! I don't understand any of this modern nonsense.

*(She turns to MARY.)*

Do you?

**MARY.** In a way.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** And you, Thomas?

**ROYDE.** Understand Audrey – but I don't understand Nevile. It's not like Nevile.

**TREVES.** I agree. Not like Nevile at all, to go looking for trouble.

**MARY.** Perhaps it was Audrey's suggestion.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** Oh, no. Nevile says it was entirely his idea.

**MARY.** Perhaps he thinks it was.

*(TREVES looks curiously at MARY.)*

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** What a fool the boy is, bringing two women together who are both in love with him.

*(ROYDE shifts uncomfortably.)*

Audrey has behaved perfectly, but Nevile himself has paid far too much attention to her, and as a result Kay has become jealous, and she has no kind of self-control. It is all most embarrassing.

*(She turns to TREVES.)*

Isn't it?

*(TREVES is gazing towards the French windows and does not hear.)*

Mathew?

**TREVES.** There is undeniably a certain tension...

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** I'm glad you admit it.

*(There is a knock on the door leading to the house.)*

Who's that?

**MARY.** Mrs. Barrett, I expect, wanting to know about something.

**LADY TRESSILIAN.** *(Irritably.)* I wish you could teach these women that they only knock on bedroom doors.

*(MARY exits into the house.)*