

After a few miles, he was able to park on the beach road. The sun was rising, casting long shadows of the two figures across the shingle as they settled down on a blanket from Carlton's car. They ate in silence, drank coffee from the flask and watched the sea coming in.

"The sea is advancing on us," Carlton said.

"Like a new life rolling in," replied Grace, standing up and kicking off her shoes. Carlton did the same and, with his arm round her shoulder, they tripped to the water's edge. From a house nearby a gramophone was playing dance music.

As the sea washed in over their feet, they danced together to the music. As they danced, they pulled close together and Carlton caressed Grace. On the sea wall, a couple of older women, their shopping bags in their hands, stopped and stared at the couple. Carlton, seeing them, waved a greeting over Grace's shoulder.

"Can I have the next dance?" one of them called, slightly embarrassed, Carlton and Grace walked off, smiling at each other.

When the music had finished, Carlton stood back and said, "Grace, you don't want to go ahead with this crazy search for that canvas Edward, do you?"

Grace looked up in surprise, screwing her eyes against the sun shining off the sea.

"Isn't that why you brought me here?"

"I brought you here to get you away from your father. Now that we're here together, away from him, I thought you might feel differently about us."

"Carlton, I'm grown up enough to know that this thing with Edward is silly but it's there, inside me, and I can't change it." She kissed him softly on his chin. "I do

feel differently about you, of course. I wouldn't be a woman if I didn't. But Edward dominates my mind. Can you understand that? You will always be the best friend I have ever had, but this thing with Edward is different."

In the nearby house, someone had put on some more music. This time, it was a slow waltz. It seemed so exactly to suit her mood that Grace said, "I wonder if whoever lives in the house over there has selected the music deliberately?"

They came together again and danced right to the end of the music, before falling to their knees in the beach. Tired by their dancing and the long journey through the night, they lay back on the blanket and fell asleep in each other's arms. Two hours later, they were awakened by the noisy hooting of a bus.

Carlton looked at his watch. "We'd better get along to see Dusty; I expect she will have finished her breakfast by now. I'll telephone her from the box over there," Carlton said, getting sleepily to his feet and walking off.

On his return, he said, "She's awake, had her breakfast and probably read all of the paper that she ever reads - just the gossip columns - so she's ready for us."

Grace was sitting with her hands round her legs and her head on her knees, looking at the sea.

"I'm almost sorry to be leaving this spot. This is more like where God really is. If my father could bring this into his church, I'd go there willingly."

"Didn't I tell you you needed a God? My religion is the only thing that has kept me sane at times."

As they knocked on the front door of Dusty's mock Tudor house, they could hear noisy music coming from inside. When Dusty came to the door, she

was quite a surprise to Grace. She was large, dressed in blowsy clothes and weighed down with silver bangles and necklaces.

She almost had to shout over the music as she welcomed them in.

"Yes?" she said enquiringly, obviously still waking up from a nap. "Oh, it's you, Carlton, and this must be Grace." She stepped out, embraced Grace and stood back at arm's length looking at her. "You told me she was attractive, Carlton but she's more than that with that lovely, long hair. Come on in." She led them down the corridor and called over her shoulder. "You'll find me untidy I'm afraid, but you won't mind that, will you?"

She pushed open the door at the end of the passage and held it for them to pass through into the lounge. Dusty threw several items of clothing, an empty bottle and a couple of books from the chairs onto the floor and indicated that they should sit down on the leather sofa. Grace, feeling uncomfortable in the company of this unusual woman, sat on the edge of the settee and folded her hands in her lap.

Dusty threw things out of her way onto another armchair, carefully eased herself down and said, "I know you'll think I'm in a mess." She threw her arms out in a melodramatic manner to take in the room. "I must apologise for the muddle. I'll get round to tidying it all up soon. I've got a woman who comes in but I'm sure she is untidier than me, and a greater boozier. Cheap, I'll grant you, but what I save on wages I lose in alcohol. God, she drinks like a fish! I reckon she could drink me under the table." She turned to look at the open door of the drinks cabinet. "I've just had my morning G. & T. I limit myself to just the one before lunch, but if you want one, I'll join you just to keep you company."

"I'd prefer coffee," Grace said and Carlton, strangely quiet, nodded that he would also like a coffee.

"Now you've said that, I think I need some too," said Dusty, putting her hand on her forehead. "Rather a heavy night last night, I'm afraid. One of my usual weekend parties, y'know. You've been to one haven't you, Carlton?" Carlton, with a look of disgust on his face, swung his head slowly from side to side. "Only difference was, last night's was a bit wild."

Grace, attempting to bring Carlton into the conversation, looked across at him, surprised to see that he was grimacing.

"Why, what happened?" Grace asked, trying to stop Dusty from seeing the way Carlton was behaving.

"Oh, they all had too much to drink. Not that that's surprising, but this time it was even worse. It was a hot night, you know. Gerald is a literary agent friend of mine - one of those big men, y'know, the sort who makes haystacks feel inferior - and he has a thirst to go with his size. One of his authors had won a literary prize and to show his appreciation to Gerald, he'd given him a crate of whisky. Well, Gerald's a generous man so he insisted on giving everyone here a bottle all to themselves."

"A bottle each, all to themselves! But it's practically poisonous in that quantity isn't it?" Grace asked, "I don't think I've ever tasted it; to me the smell is too unpleasant."

"Stay that way. Vile stuff. And what it does to women couldn't be printed. I'm not easily shocked but I was amazed at the behaviour of some of them, especially those who had always pretended to be ladies."

"Oh," Grace said, apprehensively, wondering what she was about to hear.

Before replying, Dusty looked over at Grace and with raised eyebrows said, "You're the daughter of that pretentious prig Belari aren't you?" and laughing, she added, "Reminds me a bit of you, Carlton."

Carlton ignored her.

"Better to say I was his daughter; I'm free of him now."

"Thank God for that, I wouldn't wish him on my worst enemy, he's such a pompous oaf. I just wondered what his effect will have been on you."

"When I say 'free', that's just what I mean - mentally as well as physically, I never mean to see him again."

"Strong words!" Dusty said, raising her eyebrows. "I hope you mean it; I wouldn't want you to be... well... shocked," she looked over her reading glasses to see how Grace had responded before continuing, "for now, I'll just say that it started with nude bathing and went on from there."

Carlton spoke for the first time, "Really, Dusty, if you must have these sordid parties, you should take more care to keep quiet about them. Even at the party you had when I was here, there was so much noise the neighbours practically lynched you."

"Oh, that doesn't happen any more. Oh, no, no, that's all in the past. I found a way to keep them quiet," she said with a sneaky smile. "I invite them all. And you'd be amazed at how broad-minded they can be. You know, I used to see them at garden parties and such like and they looked as though their dresses were made entirely from respectability fabric. But you find out that respectability is only as deep as the fabric."

"You'll remember Mrs. Downington, Carlton, she lives at the top of the road in that big house; had us over for hymn singing or something like it one evening. A pillar of society, you would have said; that is, if you want your society to be dull and predictable. She was one of those I always thought was a lady. How wrong can you be?" She winked at Carlton knowing how it would provoke him. "I now know what the 'Down' in her name means. She's a beautiful woman, who can blame her with her husband away in the Middle East? It's only to be expected that she would have desires. He's probably got his own harem over there anyway. As I said, beautiful dressed - and even more lovely undressed! The sort of figure I had before the alcohol got to work on my body. One of the men called her a 'rattlesnake'. That was just before he chased her into the sea!"

"Dusty, I wish you wouldn't always talk like that," Carlton said, causing Grace to glance at him with a look of incredulity on her face. "You make it sound as though the only thing in your life is depravity."

Dusty saw Grace looking in wonder at Carlton, and said, "Don't mind him; he's just jealous, dear. Nothing exciting happens in Loriston, does it? I expect, Grace, that's why, like me you wanted to get away from the place." She grinned, "No, I'm wrong. I did once see the paper boy's dog chasing the headmistress's little bitch terrier once - never caught her, though. Should be grateful, I suppose, a public display of sex would have shocked the town's twitching curtains."

Carlton turned his head away and looked out of the window.

"Anyhow," he said, turning back and trying to change the subject, "you said you had a room Grace could have."

"I do," replied Dusty, turning to Grace. "It's getting very stuffy in here, my dear. Let's make a move and get a change of air. I'll put the kettle on and we'll have coffee when we get back. Come on, Grace, and bring your case with you. You stay there Carlton, and think pure thoughts! The newspaper is here if you want to read about the world outside Loriston." She threw over the newspaper, which thudded heavily against Carlton's stomach.

Grace followed her out of the room. At the top of the stairs, Dusty turned and said quietly. "We don't get on awfully well, your Carlton and me. We're so different, I wonder if we had different fathers. I know daddy spread himself around but mummy always seemed above that sort of thing. Carlton's more like her and even worse, he's dominated by his religious morality."

"I don't think you may know everything about him. He talks about living a loose life in university." Grace spoke quietly so that Carlton would not hear her as they stood on the landing.

"Talk, my dear, just talk - I invited a few young things round when he came to my do. Quite busy creatures and probably amenable if you follow me," she smiled, "Carlton stayed quiet - never even spoke to them."

She carried along the landing and turned into a large room with an even better view of the sea than from the lounge. Grace saw with a gasp of delight that it had a double bed in which looked straight out over the sea.

"Oh!" Grace exclaimed as she saw the view with the morning sun streaming in, "This is like heaven. I've spent most of my life in the rectory, where every corner has a dark presence. We were surrounded by glowering vegetation which hid any views."

“Good, I’m glad you like it. I had looked out a room over the road where I have a house I’ve just converted. But, now that I’ve met you and can see that you’re not like the normal fuddy-duddy young Loriston girls Carlton seems to prefer, I’m sure this will be better for you.”

“Has he brought girl friends here?”

“God, no, he wouldn’t want them to meet me. I met them at the family home in Loriston. Most of them were apprentice missionaries, I shouldn’t wonder. He’s always gone for that type – sanctimonious – someone he could take to church with him.”

Grace was staring out of the window, “I’ve never seen anything like this, the view is just beautiful.”

Dusty was sitting on the bed, Grace went over to sit beside her and together they looked over the sea to a yacht in the distance, Dusty said, “I’m sorry if it seems I treat Carlton badly. I don’t mean any harm, I just tease him and I’m sure it’s good for him. He’s so inhibited, comes from being a devout churchman but I haven’t had much success with him, he always reacts in that hoity-toity way.”

“Probably because he thinks you don’t like him, you know.”

“Don’t like him? Of course I like him, he’s my brother. But he does need to free his ideas up a bit, don’t you think?”

Grace laughed, “I don’t see him quite like that.”

Now it was Dusty’s turn to laugh. “Oh, I see,” she said, “You and Carlton are ...”

“No we’re not,” Grace interrupted, “Funny what you say about his girl friends, he keeps saying I should go to church while I am here.” She walked back to the window, “he does try it on a bit with me, though?”

"And you don't respond when he tries it on?"

"I think he's nice, but not in that way. He's just not right for me."

"Sad for him; I can see that he's crazy about you."

"Yes, he gets very tiresome and I wish he wouldn't."

"You're like me; you never want anything that comes too easily."

"I've never thought of it like that. No, I don't think that's the reason; there is just something about him which doesn't excite me at all."

"If you ask me, I'd say that it's his sanctimonious nature; comes from spending too much time in prayer – probably got a lot in common with your father, y'know," she said only partly joking. "He's always been very critical of me and the fun time I have, we're almost at two extremes, him with his God and me with my friends and my fondness for alcohol and men. As I said, sometime wonder if our mother spread herself around as well as our father."

Grace, unable to think of a reply, remained silent, looking out at the view.

"Young, attractive girl like you, there must be someone else..." Dusty asked.

Grace took a while to speak as she turned back to dusty and sat against the window sill, "Well... there is, but..."

"But he doesn't love you, is that it? The old story - love unrequited is twice as desirable."

"It's not even as simple as that. There is someone else. But... well, it's not easy to explain."

"Shouldn't be difficult. Someone you met in Loriston? Someone you met on holiday? A married

man, or just someone not available? What else is there, unless he's a ghost or something?"

"Not a ghost, Dusty. But you are not too far off."

"Not a ghost! I should hope not," Dusty said, frowning. "I'm sorry dear but I'm completely lost."

Grace stood up, walked to the window and stood looking at the view.

"You're an artist, Dusty - you paint portraits, Carlton says?"

Dusty nodded, "I do paint, not often these days but, when I do, even I can see that it is pretty good, although I say so myself. Why, what's the connection?"

"Do you ever get attached to the people you paint?" Grace asked, turning to look intently at the sea outside the window.

"Well, yes, I suppose I do; I do have a passionate nature. I think all people with an artistic temperament are that way. Sometimes I get quite emotional about them." She frowned, "But I still don't get it. What are you saying?"

"I have a painting of a young man, I brought it with me." She turned back to Dusty, framed by the light from the window, which made her hair glow. "As soon as I saw it, he lived for me; he was real, not just a painting," She pursed her lips, "he has dominated my thoughts ever since I saw his portrait."

"Mm," Dusty grunted, and shook her head, "I've heard of it happening but I would never have thought it of you - you're not the type I wouldn't have said," still shaking her head, she said. "Have you seen him - do you know that this fellow even exists?"

"I don't. I haven't any proof, if that's what you mean, but, sometimes you just know these things.

That's the way it is with me. I just know him and know the sort of person he is."

"Do you know the name of this amazing man, or even where he lives?"

"I don't really know anything for sure if I'm honest with myself," Grace shrugged. "The only thing I do know about him is that he probably lives in France and that his name is Edward. I think about him all the time. Whenever I sleep, I dream, and whenever I dream, I dream about him," she shrugged her shoulders, perhaps I'm going crazy Carlton says I am."

"Go and get the painting for me. I must see this young man."

Carlton was slumped in the chair asleep as Grace picked up her bag and took it upstairs. She took out the painting and passed it over to Dusty who stood up and took it to the window. After staring at it intently for a few seconds, she said, "He certainly is gorgeous... though a bit pale and unhealthy looking for my taste. But love is love; nothing can stop its madness."

"So you do think I'm mad, like Carlton does."

"Only as mad as any woman who is in love with a man. Whether in a painting, or wonderful and naked in your bedroom, it's just the same chemistry, whoever it is and whatever the situation." She held up the painting to look at it again. "No, I don't think you are crazy at all..." Her eyes scanned round the room as though sub-consciously checking that no one was listening. Then she looked askance at Grace and, with a thoughtful smile, said, "You see me sitting here, a fat middle-aged, disillusioned frump, but I wasn't always like this. I told you I have a passionate nature. Well, when I was young, I was a 'heedless romantic' as they say." She nodded to herself as her memory took her

back to her youth. "And what you are going through, happened to me when I was about your age."

"A painting, you mean?"

"Not a painting, no but I fell in love vicariously."

"Your husband?" Grace asked.

"No, Grace, not my husband, certainly not him. He looked like a bull mastiff even in the early days when I first met him, it was his personality which attracted me, not his looks. It was a long time before I met George that my passion, the sort that you have, was kindled. It so overtook me that I have never experienced a feeling like it, either before or since, certainly not with George." She smiled at the memory. "With me it was a film actor." She stood up, went to her room which was across the corridor, opened a drawer in the dressing table and took out an envelope which she passed to Grace. "I was given the photograph of him by a friend. It's in that envelope. Open it, it will say something about me that I still keep it, but every time I take it out of the envelope, even now after so many years, I get a thrill."

Grace opened the envelope and looked at the image, wondering what to say when Dusty continued.

"You'll see in the photograph that he is an incredibly handsome man, you'll know what I mean about the emotional states we women get in. I did them all; I was weak at the knees, I couldn't eat – worried my mother stiff – I just sat staring at things, anything, it didn't matter what it was because I never saw them. I would go to bed and the nights would pass, but I couldn't sleep."

She turned to look at Grace, framed in silhouette against the strong light from the window. "So, yes, don't feel silly; I know just how you feel. Love is

supposed to be a time of happiness. For me it was almost the reverse, for me it was like an illness.”