

Mrs. Beauwhistle seated at the writing table; she has had her breakfast. Enter Louis down the staircase.

Louis: Good Morning, Aunt.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: Good Morning, Louis.

Louis: Where is Miss Anne?

Mrs. Beauwhistle: She finished her breakfast a moment ago.

Louis: [sits down] I'm glad we are alone, I wanted to ask you_ I wanted to ask you...

Mrs. Beauwhistle: [with an attitude] Whether I could lend you twenty pounds I suppose?

Louis: As a matter of fact, I was only going to ask for fifteen. Perhaps twenty would sound better.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: The answer is the same in either case, and it's no. I could not even lend you five. You see I have had no end of extra expenses just lately...

Louis: My dear aunt, please don't give reasons. A charming woman should always be unreasonable, it's part of her charm. Just say, 'Louis, I love you very much, but I'm damned if I lend you any more money.' I should understand perfectly.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: Well, We'll take it as said. I've just had a letter from Dora Bittholz, to say she is coming on Thursday.

Louis: This next Thursday? I say, that's rather awkward, isn't it?

Mrs. Beauwhistle: Why awkward?

Louis: Jane Anne has only been here six days and she never stays less than a fortnight, even when she's asked for a week. You'll never get her out of the house by Thursday.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: But why should I? She and Dora are good friends, aren't they? They used to be.

Louis: Used to be, yes; that is what makes them such bitter enemies now. Each feels that she has nursed a viper in her bosom. Nothing fans the flame of human resentment so much as the discovery that one's bosom has been utilized as a snake sanatorium.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: But why are they enemies? What have they quarreled about? Some man I suppose.

Louis: No. A hen has come between them.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: A hen! What hen?

Louis: It was a bronze Leghorn or some such exotic breed, and Dora sold it to Jane at a rather exotic price. They both go in for poultry breeding you know.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: If Jane agreed to give the price I don't see what there was to quarrel about _

Louis: Well you see the bird turned out to be an abstainer from the egg habit, and I'm told that the letters which passed between the two women were a revelation as to how much abuse could be gotten onto a sheet of notepaper.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: How ridiculous! Couldn't some of their friends compose the quarrel?

Louis: It would have been rather like composing the storm music of a Wagner opera. Jane was willing to take back some of her most libellous remarks if Dora would take back the hen.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: And wouldn't she ?

Louis: Not her. She said that would be owing herself in the wrong, and you know that Dora would never, under any circumstances, own herself in the wrong. She would as soon think of owning a slum property in Whitechapel as do that.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: It will be a most awkward situation, having them both under my roof at the

same time. Do you suppose they won't speak to one another?

Louis: On the contrary, the difficulty will be to get them to leave off. Their descriptions of each other's conduct and character have hitherto been governed by the fact that only four ounces of plain speaking can be sent through the post for a penny.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: What is to be done? I can't put Dora off, I've already postponed her visit once, and nothing short of a miracle would make Jane leave before her self allotted fortnight is over.

Louis: I shall not be clever, I shall be rich; in sheer gratitude you will say to me, 'Louis, I love you more than ever, and here at the twenty pounds we were speaking about.'

[Jane enters, door, centre.]

Jane: Good Morning, Louis.

Louis: [rising] Good morning, Jane.

Jane: Go on with your breakfast; I've had mine but I'll just have a cup of coffee to keep you company. [Helps herself] Is there any toast left?

Louis: Aunt, would you be a dear and fetch us some?

[Mrs Beauwhistle exits left. Jane seats herself and checks her phone for new emails. Mrs. Beauwhistle enters from left and Jane is helped to toast. She takes 3 pieces.]

Jane: Isn't there any butter?

Mrs. Beauwhistle: Your sleeve is in the butter, Anne.

Jane: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: Jane dear, I see the Mackenzie Hubbard wedding is on Thursday next St. Peter's Eaton Square, such a pretty church for weddings. I suppose you will be wanting to run away from us to attend it. You were always such friends with Louisa Hubbard, it would hardly do for you not to turn up.

Jane: Oh I'm not going to bother to go all the way for a silly wedding, much as I like Louisa; I shall go and stay with her for several weeks after she's come back from her honeymoon.

[Louis grins across at his aunt]. I don't see any honey!

Louis: Your other sleeve's in the honey.

Jane: Bother, so it is.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: [rising] Well, I must leave you and go and do some gardening. Ring for anything you want, Jane.

Jane: Thank you, I'm all right.

[Exit Mrs Beauwhistle by french window, right]

Louis: [pushing back his chair] DO you mind my smoking?

Jane: [still eating heartily]: Not at all. [Enter sturridge with tray, left, as if to clear away breakfast things. Place the tray on the side table, back centre, and is about to retire.] Oh, I say, can I

have some more hot milk? This is nearly cold.

[Sturridge takes a jug and exits, left. Louis looks fixedly after him. Seats himself near Jane and stares solemnly at the floor]

Louis: Servants are a bit of nuisance.

Jane: Servants are a nuisance! I should think they are! The trouble I have in getting suited you would hardly believe. But I don't see what you have to complain of your aunt is so wonderfully

lucky in her servants. Sturridge for instance he's been with her for years and I'm sure he's a jewel as butlers go.

Louis: That's just the trouble. It's when servants have been with you for years that they become a serious nuisance. The other sort, the here today and gone tomorrow lot, don't matter you've simply got to replace them. It's the stayers and the jewels that are the real worry.

Jane: But if they give satisfaction

Louis: That doesn't prevent them from giving trouble. As it happens, I was particularly thinking of Sturridge when I made the remark about servants being a nuisance.

Jane: The excellent Sturridge, a nuisance! I can't believe it.

Louis: I know he is excellent and my aunt simply couldn't get along without him. But his very excellence has had an effect on her.

Jane: what effect?

Louis: [seriously] Have you ever considered what it must be like to go on unceasingly wanting the correct thing in the correct manner in the same surroundings for the greater part of a lifetime? To know and ordain and superintend exactly what silver and glass and table linen shall be used and set out on what occasions to have pantry and cellar and plate cupboard under a minute devised and undeviating administration, but have no one to be able to live up to the task of executing it. Living without the one person who could execute it to perfection while being noiseless, impalpable, omnipresent, infallible?

Jane: [with conviction] I should go mad.

Louis: Exactly, mad.

Jane: But Mrs. Beauwhistle hasn't gone mad.

Louis: On most points, she's thoroughly sane and reliable, but at times he is subject to the most obstinate delusions.

Jane: Delusions? What sort of delusions? **[Jane helps herself to more coffee]**

Louis: Unfortunately they usually center around someone staying in the house; that is where awkwardness comes in. For instance, she took it into her head that Matilda Sheringham who was here last summer was the Prophet Elijah.

Jane: The Prophet Elijah! The man who was fed by ravens?

Louis: Yes, it was ravens that particularly impressed Mrs. Beauwhistle's imagination. He was rather offended, it seems, at the idea that Matilda should have her private catering arrangements and he declined to compete with the birds in any way; she would not allow any tea to be sent up to her in the morning and when she waited at the table she passed her over altogether in handing round the dishes. Poor Matilda could scarcely get anything to eat.

Jane: How horrible! How very horrible! Whatever did you do?

Louis: It was judged best for her to cut her visit short. [with emphasis] In case of that kind it was the only thing to be done.

Jane: I should not have done that. [Cuts herself some bread and butters it.] I should have humoured him in some way. I should have said that ravens were moulting. I certainly shouldn't have gone away.

Louis: It's not always wise to humor people when they get these ideas into their heads. There's no knowing to what lengths they might go.

Jane: You don't mean to say Mrs. Beauwhistle might be dangerous?

Louis: One can never be certain. Now and then she gets some idea about a guest which might

take an unfortunate turn. That is what is worrying me at the present moment.

Jane: [excitedly] Why, has she taken some fancy about me?

Louis:[who has taken a putter out of the stand, left, and is polishing it with an oil rag.] He has

Jane:No, really? Who on Earth does he think I am?

Louis:Queen Anne.

Jane: Queen Anne! What an idea! But anyhow there's nothing dangerous about her; she's such a colorless personality. No one should feel very strongly about Queen Anne.

Louis:[sternly] What does posterity chiefly say about her?

Jane:The only thing I can remember about her is the saying 'Queen Anne's dead.

Louis:Exactly. Dead.

Jane:Do you mean that he takes me for the ghost of Queen Anne?

Louis:Ghost? Dear no. Whoever heard of a ghost that came down to breakfast and ate kidneys and toast and honey with a healthy appetite? No, it's the fact of you being so very much alive and flourishing the perplexes and irritates him.

Jane:[anxiously] Irritates her?

Louis:Yes. All her life has been accustomed to look on Queen Anne as the personification of everything that is dead and done with 'as dead as Queen Anne' you know, and now she has to fill your glass bat lunch and dinner and listen to your accounts of that gay time you had at Dublin Horse Show, and naturally he feels that there is something scandalously wrong somewhere.

Jane:[with increased anxiety] But she wouldn't be downright hostile to me on that account, would he? Not violent?

Louis:[carelessly] I didn't get really alarmed about it till last night when she was bringing in the coffee. I caught him scowling at you with a very threatening look and muttering things about you.

Jane:what things?

Louis:That you ought to be dead long ago and that someone should see to it, and that if no one else did he would [cheerfully] that's why I mentioned the matter to you.

Jane:That is awful! Your aunt must be told about it at once.

Louis:My aunt must not hear a word about it. It would upset her dreadfully. She relies on Sturridge for everything.

Jane:But she might kill me at any moment!

Louis: Not at any moment; she's busy with gardening all afternoon.

Jane:What a frightful situation to be in, with a mad hostess dangling over one's head.

Louis:Of course it's only a temporary madness; perhaps if you were to cut your visit short and come to us sometime later in the year she might have forgotten all about Queen Anne.

Jane:Nothing would induce me to cut short my visit. You must keep a sharp look out on Mrs. Beauwhistle and be ready to intervene if he gets violent. Probably we are both exaggerating things a bit. [Rising] I must go and write some letters in the morning room. Mind keep an eye on the lady.

[Exit door, right centre]

Louis:[savagely] Quel type!

[Enter Mrs. Beauwhistle by french window, right]

Mrs Beauwhistle:Can't find my gardening gloves anywhere. I suppose they are where I left

them; it's a way my things have.

[Rummages in drawer of table, back centre.] They are. [Produces gloves from drawer] And how is your miracle doing, Louis?

Louis:Rotten! I've invented all sorts of excellent reasons for simulating the migration instinct in that woman, but you might as well try to drive away an attack of indigestion by talking to it.

Mrs. Beauwhistle:Poor Louis! I'm afraid Jane's staying powers are superior to any amount of hustling that you can bring to bear. [Enter sturridge, left; he begins cleaning breakfast things] I could have told you from the first that you were engaged on a wild goose chase.

Louis:chase! You can't chase a thing that refuses to budge. One of the first condition of the chase is that the thing you are chasing should run away,

Mrs. Beauwhistle:[laughing] That's a condition that Jane will never fulfil.

[Louis continues cleaning golf club, then suddenly stops and looks reflectively at Mrs. Beauwhistle for a second]

Louis:Where is Miss Anne anyways?

Mrs. Beauwhistle:In the morning room, I believe, writing letters.

Louis:You see that old basket hilted sword on the wall?

Sturridge:This big one? [Points to sword]

Louis:Miss Martlet mentioned she wants to copy the inscription on its blade. Could you please take it to her? my hands are all over oil.

Mrs. Beauwhistle: I suppose I can do it, alright. [Turns to the wall where sword is hanging]

Louis:Take it without the sheath, it will be less trouble.

[Mrs. Beauwhistle sighs and draws the blade, which is broad and bright, and exits by door, centre. Louis stands back under the shadow of the staircase. Enter Jane door, right centre, at full run, screams: ' Louis! Louis! Where are you?' grabs the train timetable and rushes upstairs at top speed. Enter Sturridge door, right centre, sword in hand. Louis steps forward.]

Mrs. Beauwhistle: Good Heavens! Jane just slipped out of the room as I came in; I don't think she saw me coming. Seemed in a bit of a hurry.

Louis:Perhaps she has a train to catch. Never mind you can put the sword back. I'll copy out the inscriptions for her myself later.

[Mrs. Beauwhistle returns the sword to its place and leaves.

After cleaning the putter, Louis exited the staircase. Enter Mrs Beauwhistle by the window, right. She has a letter in her hand. She looks in at the door, right centre, returns and calls: 'LouisLouis!' Sound of a motor is heard, Louis rushes in by the door, left.]

Louis:[Excitedly] How much did you say you'd lend me if I got rid of Jane Anne?

Mrs. Beauwhistle:We needn't get rid of her. Dora has just written to say she can't come this month.

[Louis collapses into a chair]