

MAEVE BRENNAN

(1917-1993)

Short Story

“THE SERVANTS’ DANCE”

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“The Servants’ Dance” is one of Brennan’s Herbert’s Retreat stories about a fictional “bohemian enclave” or “artists’ colony” on the Hudson River, north of New York City. Appearing first in the *New Yorker* magazine, for which Brennan worked, the stories base Herbert’s Retreat on an upscale residential community called Snedens Landing in Palisades, New York State. Over the years, several celebrities have chosen Snedens Landing as their base. Relatively recently, Bill Murray, Bjork, and Angelina Jolie have owned homes there.

In Brennan’s era, many of the residents employed Irish-born women as domestic servants. That fact is the basis for “The Servants’ Dance.” Although she was a member of the artistic and intellectual community that drove up from New York City to spend weekends at Snedens Landing, Maeve Brennan was keenly aware of the Irish maids who made those leisure weekends possible. The author had been born in Dublin, Ireland. Her parents were both Irish revolutionaries during the Easter 1916 Rising, deeply involved in one of the major incidents to occur outside Dublin. In their native county of Wexford in southeastern Ireland, the Brennans were leading members of a rebel force that successfully held a town called Enniscorthy against the British army for several days. As a result of that activity, Brennan’s father, Bob, was sentenced to death. After the execution of Roger Casement, that sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, but ultimately Bob Brennan received an amnesty. Later, he obtained an appointment as, in effect, Ireland’s first ambassador to the United States. That move brought Maeve to America as a teenager. She remained in this country for the rest of her life.

The Servants' Dance

On Saturday morning, Charles Runyon awoke in a mood of rapturous gaiety. This day, this evening, this weekend, promised—no, guaranteed—a triumph so complete, both in secret and in public, that it must surely, Charles felt, become one of the succession of platforms that marked his progress through life, each platform raising him higher, the better to survey the world and the men and women in it. My stage and my actors, he said to himself; my arena. Charles was a literary gentleman whose main interest was the theatre. He lived alone in a single room in an old and famous hotel in the Murray Hill district. He never entertained, having, as he laughingly explained, no facilities for doing so, but he went out a great deal, and had a reputation, undefined but definite, as a wit and an epigrammatist. His weekends were spent at Herbert's Retreat, thirty miles from New York on the east side of the Hudson, and always at Leona Harkey's, where one bedroom was sacred to him.

Now, lying in his narrow, canopied four-poster there, he stretched his stringy little arms and his long stringy neck, and yawned. Then he got out of bed, pattered over to his writing table, and snatched up a large notebook, in which, the night before, as every night, he had recorded his impressions of the evening. The notes had been very enjoyable to write. They were copious and would be memorable. Edward Tarnac, Charles' old enemy, the one member of this river community who had ever been able to get under his skin, had returned to the Retreat after five years' absence, and he had returned a ruined man. Ruined at thirty-eight, Charles thought, with a tender side glance for his own unmarred years, which numbered fifty-four.

He pulled open the curtains. Leona's lawn, starting immediately beneath this window, slanted smoothly down to the river's edge, two hundred yards away. It was a lovely view, a sunny day, a glorious prospect, and still only ten o'clock in the morning. Charles rang for his *café au lait* and sat down in the great chintz-covered armchair that Leona had thoughtfully placed near the window but not so near

that Charles, thinking or reading, could be seen from the garden. He still had his notebook in his hand, and he glanced at a passage here and there.

Bridie (Charles liked to refer to her as "that splendid Irishwoman of Leona's") clumped in with the tray. The glare of pure hatred that was her characteristic expression descended in full force on Charles' silky gray head, but he was indifferent and she was silent, respectfully handing him his orange juice, pouring his coffee and his hot milk (Sye-mull-tane-eussly, Bridie, she said to herself, the coffee and the milk sye-mull-tane-eussly), and departing.

Sipping his coffee, he began to read over his notes, but very soon he set both coffee and notes aside and lay back in his chair, to savor—not the sweetness of this present triumph, because, after all, he had that now, but the bitterness of the long grudge he had cherished against Edward Tarnac. The grudge was partly inexplicable to him, and this intensified it. Edward had been well-to-do, free, charming, happy, handsome, attractive, and athletic, but still, when one came right down to it, how many did not have those qualities? It was the literate, cultured, aloof fellows like himself, the true gentlemen, who were the exception. Indeed, it was curious that Edward had always succeeded so in irritating him, at times beyond endurance.

And then Tarnac had always been so self-confident, so sure that everybody liked him. Why, quite often he had even spoken to Charles as a friend, chatted with him as a friend, completely forgetting the times he had slighted Charles, the gibes, the smart little mockeries that rankled in Charles' mind and glowed there, polished daily until they had the brilliance of jewels. No more, though. This weekend would wipe all that out. Last night was almost enough. Oh, Charles thought, the satisfaction of seeing someone brought down who has been riding high! Well, Tarnac had been thoroughly humiliated, somewhere, somehow, since leaving the Retreat. That much was obvious. The apologetic air of him now, where once he had been so—cocky was the only word for what he had been. He no longer took it for granted that people liked him. Quite the other way around now. Odd, to see him and Lewis Maitland together now. They were bosom friends in the old days, and so much alike that they might have been

brothers, with Edward always shining just a little the brighter. Edward had always patronized Lewis—unconsciously, perhaps, but Lewis had felt it. Charles had seen to that. Now the shoe was on the other foot.

Oh, I'm not the only one enjoying this weekend, Charles thought. Whether Lewis knew it or not, he must have been waiting for the opportunity for years. And then to run into Edward on the street like that was sheer good luck. And apparently Edward was delighted to come up for the weekend. Thinking we'd all be glad to see him. The appalling nerve some people have.

I would never have done that, Charles thought, smiling a grim, happy little smile. I would never have come back. As long as he stayed away, we couldn't be sure what had become of him, no matter what reports we heard. But now! It's an object lesson, he thought, and, suddenly anxious for talk, for the delicious rehashing of last night's scene, he bounded to his feet, dashed into his shower, and emerged, clean and shiny, to select from his wardrobe a pair of brown Bermuda shorts, beautifully cut, and a beige wool shirt. He buttoned the cuffs of the shirt, knotted a beige-and-brown silk scarf carefully around his neck, put on a pair of knee-length beige socks and brown sandals, and, opening a door in the side wall of his room, stepped onto an outdoor staircase that curved to bring him, as he hopped lightly from the bottom step onto the grass, in face with the river.

There was Leona, coming out of the kitchen door, and talking animatedly to Bridie. Her Bermuda shorts were of red linen and her navy-blue wool shirt was open at the throat and rolled to her elbows. She paused to strap on her wristwatch, and then, seeing Charles, she smiled brilliantly and hurried to take his arm.

Leona's lawn was as wide as her house, and its green velvet expanse was unbroken except for two statues—one of a white marble woman, which stood far to the right and about a third of the way down, and another, much nearer the river and on the left, of a gray stone clown who raised his sad grin to the heavens. On each side, the lawn was bounded by a high, dense wall of old trees, old hedge, old thicket, all sorts of old greenery—uncared for now and growing

wild but still putting forth fresh leaves and new shoots—that shielded Leona's domain from the view of the neighboring houses, although their white stone walls, glittering in the sunlight like her own, sometimes showed a flash of brightness through a break in the foliage. The house on the right belonged to Lewis and Dolly Maitland, Leona's closest friends—except, of course, for Charles, who, in addition to being her dearest companion, was her lion, her literary light, and also, although she did not say this, her claim to distinction in the community.

Leona was tall and slim, with a halo of cloudy black hair that swept becomingly around a face crowded with unformed features. Surely, one thought, the nose would grow larger, or the mouth would settle, or a bone would show itself on one cheek, at least. Even the eyes seemed to have been left unfinished. Brown, they should have been a shade lighter or a shade darker. "My mysterious Leona," Charles called her. "Mysterious, dreaming, romantic Leona."

Walking arm in arm to the river, they did not speak, Leona because she was always careful to discover Charles' mood before conversation, and Charles because he didn't want to get to the subject closest his heart before he was comfortably settled in a chair.

From the house, two pairs of eyes watched them. Through the kitchen window, the beady Irish eyes of Bridie followed their movements with malevolent attention, and from the window of the second-floor bedroom he shared with Leona, George Harkey, who had just got out of bed, watched his wife and Charles Runyon with a muffled brown gaze in which curiosity and resentment struggled for supremacy with a very bad hangover.

Charles walked rather stiffly, perhaps because he missed the comforting concealment of a jacket, and from the back his small, shapely figure wagged more than a little. Leona's shorts gave to her slow and sinuous prance a very curious effect, as though with every step she was on the verge of sitting down hard, but she continued fairly upright, flirting her cigarette, until they reached the lawn's edge. There, where the ground fell steeply to the river, Leona's latest improvement was now, after months of talk and effort, ready to be enjoyed. Just below the level of the lawn but well above water level she had built

a wooden deck, six feet wide and running the whole width of the lawn, with a low railing around it. This was not a jetty, for Leona disliked sailing. This was purely a deck. It was painted a very pale blue, and furnished for lounging, with red canvas sling chairs and tables of black wrought iron. It was a delightful spot, private, uncluttered, Leona's realization of the perfect boat, on which she could ride the restless waters of the river while remaining safely anchored not merely to the land but to her own lawn.

"The deck is really charming," Charles said, lowering himself into a chair, but his tone was perfunctory.

"Wasn't it clever of me to have it built so low, so that it doesn't interfere with the view from the house at all. Even from the upstairs windows you simply can't see it, unless you know it's here."

She would have gone on, for the house—the frame and expression of her personality—interested her endlessly, but Charles, with a brisk nod, stopped her. He lit a cigarette, threw away the match, snuggled back in his chair, and looked her straight in the eye. "Well, Leona," he said, "and what do you think of our friend Tarnac now? Quite a revealing evening we had last night, eh?"

They had already discussed the evening at length, and at double length, before they went to bed, but realizing that Charles wanted every detail of it recalled, and herself eager to savor it all again, Leona said, "Oh, Charles, isn't it appalling to see a man so shattered? And in such a short space of time. Why, you know, Charles, I walked into Dolly's living room last night and I simply didn't know him. I actually didn't recognize him. He was standing over by the fireplace with Lewis, and I looked at him, and I looked at Lewis, and I said, 'Where's Edward?'"

"I know, darling, we all heard you."

"And then, of course, I was so overcome when I saw who it was that I simply lost my head."

"I'm afraid you were very cruel, Leona."

"I didn't mean to be cruel. You know I'm never intentionally cruel. Besides, what you said was much, much worse, and you didn't even have my excuse of being flustered. No, you were perfectly cold-

blooded. You waited till we were all settled with our drinks, and everything was all smooth and lovely, and then— Oh, Charles, it was perfectly killing. I'll never forget how funny you looked, peering around the room until Dolly was driven to ask you what was wrong, and you said, 'I'm looking for Edward's pretty girl. Isn't she coming down?'"

She paused to laugh at the recollection, and Charles neighed softly.

"And then Edward said, 'What pretty girl?' and you said, 'Why, surely you're not up here alone, Edward. Why, Edward Tarnac without a pretty girl is only half the picture.'"

"That stung," Charles said with satisfaction.

"You know, Charles, I was quite worried for you. If you'd said that to him five years ago he'd have thrown his drink at you."

"But that was five years ago, wasn't it? And instead of throwing his drink he swallowed it, didn't he? Oh, he's learned what's what, these last few years. He's learned his lesson, all right. And then, of course, your poor George had to put his foot in it."

"Oh, poor George is such a fool, Charles. Not a glimmer of social sense. Instead of letting it drop then, he had to pipe up, 'And why shouldn't he come up alone if he wants to?' And naturally that set you off again."

"Well, really, what could I do? George has such a sagging effect on conversation, don't you think? And of course, being a newcomer, he couldn't be expected to know how things were. Obviously I had to tell him what we all know—that Edward's appearance in solitary, as it were, showed how greatly he had changed."

"And Lewis enjoying it all hugely. Edward always made Lewis look rather dim. Not now, though. Edward's face is so ruined-looking, somehow."

"Positively raddled. Of course, Edward always looked much younger than his age. You know that, Leona. He kept those boyish looks of his a very long time."

"Oh, that was another thing, Charles. Did you have to keep on calling him Boy? Really, I was squirming."

"Don't be a hypocrite, Leona. You know you loved it all. And he

had it coming to him. Of course, when you consider how he was brought up, the youngest son, an adoring mother, a trust fund from that uncle of his—

"Do you know, Charles, I don't believe he has a penny of that money left."

"Well, what would you expect? You remember how he threw money around. That boat, and those silly little racing cars, and that procession of vacant-faced girls, and that endless, exhausting masculinity, constantly being paraded before us—just a show, of course. The psychiatrists know about that. But so wearisome. And terribly bad manners, if you remember."

"Yes, Charles, you have a few scores to settle with him, haven't you, dear?" She stopped, afraid that she had gone too far. Charles would not tolerate familiarity. But he answered her calmly.

"Certainly not. His kind of schoolboy humor never affected me, except to bore me. I do know it used to be impossible to have any good conversation when he was around. Those insufferable interruptions, and— Do you remember his abominable habit of saying 'Now the question direct'?"

" 'Cutting through the grease,' he used to call it."

"Exactly. Exactly. A thoroughly uncivilized mind, if you call it a mind. A man who will express himself in such terms is capable of any *gaucherie*. No sensitivity, no character, no breeding, and of course, now that all that juvenile charm has been drowned in liquor, you can see what he is. It's pitiful, of course." He sat up and glanced, with impatience, toward the green wall of foliage that concealed the Maitlands' house. "Aren't Lewis and Dolly coming over," he asked, "and our beaming friend Edward, for lunch? Aren't they late? It must be after noon."

Leona laughed melodiously. "Charles, Charles," she said in affectionate reproval. "Are you so eager to sharpen your teeth on poor Edward again? They'll be here soon. Lewis is probably mixing his famous whiskey sours. He said he'd bring a jug over. He and Edward will probably need them."

"Dolly, too," Charles said, settling himself comfortably again. "I

fancy she got quite a shock when she saw our returned hero last night. She used to have quite a thing about him, you remember."

"She's trying to forget it now," Leona said.

"Trying to forget what?" Dolly cried, jumping gaily down onto the deck. She was a short, bouncy girl with brown hair, which she had braided into pigtailed. "This thing is divine, Leona. I'm going to lie down flat." She lay down flat on her back, sighing luxuriously in the sun's heat. "The others will be right along," she said. "Lewis is bringing the whiskey sours, or will bring them, after he's had a few himself."

"Where is Edward staying in town? He wouldn't tell me last night," Charles asked.

"That's just it," Dolly said. "He won't say where he's staying. He says he's looking for an apartment." She stopped a moment, then turned to them with a conspiratorial grimace. "Listen," she said. "Don't tell Lewis I told you, but he tried to borrow money last night. A hundred dollars."

"Did Lewis give it to him?" Charles asked sharply.

"Not he. You know Lewis. Lewis never lends money, to anyone."

"Well, Tarnac is down and out, then," Charles said.

"Oh dear. I hope he's not going to start borrowing all around," Leona said. "But I was quite cool with him last night. I doubt if he'd have the nerve to ask me."

"I hope he asks me," Charles said. "I'll give him short shrift. But then I was cool, too, to say the least."

"That's another strange thing," Dolly said. "You know, ordinarily he'd have struck out at you last night. You know how belligerent he used to be. But I got the feeling that everything you and Leona said to him just passed over his head. He didn't seem to care. It was Lewis he was looking to. I suppose he always knew you two disliked him, but apparently he thought of Lewis as a friend."

Charles nodded. "Everyone saw how Lewis felt about Edward—except Edward himself, of course. That blessed obtuseness of his saved him from a lot in those days."

"He tried to settle down to a heart-to-heart talk after you people

left," Dolly said, "but he got to the borrowing part too soon, and Lewis cut him off short."

"Oh, why doesn't he get on the bus and go back to New York!" Leona cried impatiently. "He's ruining the whole weekend."

"Nonsense, my dear," Charles said. "Far from ruining the weekend, he's adding a certain excitement to it. Besides, he'll undoubtedly stick around now in the hope of retrieving himself. Not that he has a chance. He must see that he made a mistake in coming here. He should never have come, that's all."

"Oh, don't think he doesn't know that now!" Dolly cried. "You know how he was last night—almost apologetic. Today he's just morose. I don't think he's said two words all morning. Don't worry, though, Leona. I don't think he'll make any scenes. He's hardly in a position to, after all. And of course he doesn't want Lewis to tell about his attempt to borrow money."

"It's what we were talking about earlier, Leona," Charles said. "What used to pass as—uh, conversational dexterity in our friend would now be sheer bravado. He can no longer meet us on our own ground. He has to pretend not to notice. He's no longer an equal, after all."

"Really, Charles!" Dolly cried. "Aren't you carrying this a little too far? He's broke, of course, and obviously he's been on a long bender, but I think it's nonsense to talk about him not being an equal, and so on. I mean, I think that's silly."

Leona sat up straight. "Dolly," she said, with a nervous glance at Charles, "please remember to whom you are speaking."

Charles, whose face had grown small, dark, and closed, was silent for a moment, while Dolly, confused, cast about for words of apology.

"Don't apologize, Dolly," he said at last. "I may seem silly to you, and of course, you must say what you think. We won't discuss it."

"Yes, of course, Charles," Dolly said, on the verge of tears. "I only thought—"

"Don't think, dear," Charles said. "It does not become you."

"I can't tell you," Dolly said desperately, directing herself at Leona, who was still stiff with outrage, "how glad I was to get away from the house this morning. Susie woke up at six sharp, and screamed

continuously from six-thirty until after eight. I nearly lost my mind."

"Oh, yes, Susie. How old is she now?" Leona asked coldly.

"Four," Dolly said disconsolately. "That was her fourth birthday the other day, Leona. When I had the party."

"I detest children," Charles said. "They're so short."

"Here come Lewis and Edward with the whiskey sours!" Leona cried. "And not a minute too soon, either. We have the glasses all ready here, Lewis. Edward, what do you think of my new sun deck?"

"Great," Edward said with no enthusiasm. "Just great, Leona." He pulled a chair from the group around the table, turned it to face the river, and sat down apart from the company.

"Come now, Edward!" Leona cried, with a smile for the others. "I have to almost twist my neck off if I want to see you. Why don't you come in with the rest of us?"

"I'm all right, thanks," Edward said. He was wearing gray slacks and last night's shirt without a tie.

Edward and Lewis were both tall, both blond, and both strongly built. They both had the same kind of regular, clean-cut, blue-eyed good looks. Lewis's face, bland in his youth, had grown blander. The restlessness that had always characterized Edward had worn his face, and the self-confidence had gone, taking the shine with it. Also, he was suffering from a bad hangover, and looked, generally, perhaps more unhappy than he felt. Lewis at once started to pour the whiskey sours.

"I hear you're looking for an apartment, Edward," Charles said smoothly. "Perhaps I could help you. I hear of things—friends in the theatre going to Hollywood and Rome and such places. What have you in mind? I mean, what price have you in mind?"

Edward gulped the first drink and handed his glass back to Lewis for a refill. "I'm not going to hurry about the apartment," he said. "I want to look around a bit, find what I really want. I'm all right for the time being. And since I know what your next question is going to be, I'll save you the trouble of asking. I'm staying at the Tenley, on Washington Square. Now you know."

"The Tenley!" Dolly cried. "Oh, poor Edward, but that's a terrible old flea bag. Oh, I'm sorry, Edward, I didn't mean anything."

"It's all right, Dolly," Edward said. "It's a flea bag. You're absolutely right."

"I thought they'd torn the Tenley down years ago," Charles murmured. "It was one of the hangouts of my rather rowdy youth."

Lewis kicked impatiently at the table leg. "Not to change the subject, but isn't Bridie bringing the lunch down here? Edward and I were a little ahead on those whiskey sours."

"Which reminds me that I need a drink," Edward said, passing his glass over his shoulder.

"Oh, she's bringing a basket down any minute now," Leona said. "She's rattled, as all the maids are today. They can think of nothing but the ball."

"The ball!" Charles shrieked. "Great heavens, Leona, do you know that I completely forgot the ball. And I thought of nothing else all week. I even brought my embroidered French waistcoat along. I should look superb in the waltzes. I'm going to cut quite a figure, Leona."

"I'm sure you are, darling," Leona said, "and the girls will go wild over you, as usual. They adore waltzing with you, Charles." She turned to Edward. "I suppose you know the maids are having their ball this weekend?" she inquired, smiling. "Tonight's the big night. Or did you remember?"

"I remember the ball," Edward said. "I thought it was always on Saint Patrick's Day."

"It used to be," Dolly said, "but they had too much competition from New York, so they changed it."

"Charles puts us all in the shade," Lewis said, and gazed at them with the air of fascinated and respectful amusement that Charles always inspired in him.

"You did rather well yourself, Lewis," Charles said, pleased. "Last year, some of the policemen were quite jealous."

"Oh, I'll admit I have my little following," Lewis said, grinning.

"Well, of course some of the maids must cherish secret passions," Dolly said. "Poor things. How they must look forward to tonight."

"There's no secret about their collective passion for Charles," Leona said. "Charles maintains that only servants can dance the waltz really

well, Edward. Female servants, that is. He says their souls are clad in caps and streamers. They hold their heads up to keep the caps on, whirl to make the streamers flutter, and so they achieve the perfect posture for the waltz. You see, Charles, how well I remember what you say?"

"Your memory is phenomenal, darling," Charles said, "and quite accurate, too. That is just how I imagine them when I dance. I keep my eyes shut tight, of course, and the hall seems filled with black and white dresses, the full black skirts, the frilly white aprons, and streamers—oh, it's a charming picture. My waistcoat provides the significant, necessary note of color. Can you see it all, as I do now?"

"You should have been a painter, Charles," Dolly said shyly.

"Dolly banal," Charles said, but kindly. "We can always count on you, can't we, dear."

"What are you wearing, Leona?" Dolly asked hastily. "I bought a pair of black net stockings with rhinestones on the insteps. After all, it is sort of a fancy-dress thing for us. And why not give those nice cops something to look at, I thought."

"Very generous of you, darling," Leona said. "I'm wearing the white crêpe, you know. That should get them."

"They were eager enough last year," Lewis said. "I was afraid they'd eat you girls up. The atmosphere got almost primitive."

Leona laughed throatily. "Well, I do think they like us to come," she said.

"I think it's a nice thing for us to do," Dolly said. "I think it's something we *ought* to do," she added virtuously.

"Well, of course, they're honored that we come to their little party," Charles said. "Why, it's positively feudal. And whether they know it or not, that's why they enjoy it."

"Feudal my foot," Edward said. He stood up suddenly, staggered, and was obliged to grab the handrail. "Feudal my foot," he repeated. "You're all itching to go. You wouldn't miss going for the world."

"Well, that's our old Edward," Lewis said unpleasantly.

"I always thought you were a friend of mine, Lewis. Did you know that?" Edward said.

Lewis looked first at Dolly and then into his glass. "Of course I'm your friend, Edward," he said.

"That's just it!" Edward shouted, ludicrous in rage. "You're not my friend! None of you are. You all hate me. I should never have come. I thought there was something here. I thought we were all friends here. Old friends." He seemed about to weep.

"Edward," Leona said. "Edward, darling, you've had quite a lot to drink, and you're sitting in the sun. Please go and lie down. Please, Edward. Do go into the house."

"That's right," Lewis said. "What you need is sleep. You can lie out on Leona's side porch. There's shade there. Can't he, Leona?"

"Of course he can!" Leona cried. "Do you want any of us to go with you, darling? Oh, poor Edward, you've been through such a lot, and—"

"Never mind about all that now, Leona. Never mind what I've been through. I know what you'd like. You've had your spectacle, and you want me to go away quietly, don't you? You'd like that, wouldn't you? You'd like me to get on the bus and go back to New York. But I'm not going back to New York, see? I'm going to stay here till I'm good and ready to go, and I'm going to make this weekend so miserable that you'll remember it for the rest of your days. I'm not leaving. I've no shame. I'll make everything you say about me true—you see if I don't. But don't get your hopes up. I'm not leaving." From the lawn, where he was standing now, he waved his arm at them. "I'll be back," he said, and started his unsteady progress toward the house.

Charles made a disgusted gesture. "I always knew it," he said. "The fellow is a peasant."

Lewis said, "I don't envy him his head when he wakes up about four o'clock this afternoon and remembers all this. Did you know he took a bottle up with him last night, Dolly? He must have been drinking all night."

"Really," Leona said, "I do wish he'd go. I've seen enough of him to last me a very long time."

Charles smiled. "Oh, we may as well see the finish," he said. "Mr. Tarnac seems to have gone through so many metamorphoses since his arrival. First, an almost touching friendliness. Then this morning, mo-

rose silence. Now, a futile aggressiveness that is more pathetic than anything. And tonight, I expect, painful penitence. We'll just have to be nice to him, my dears, but don't get so softhearted that you invite him down again, Lewis—for all our sakes."

They were distracted by a shout. Edward had retraced his steps and was standing only a short distance away from them, balancing himself against the stone clown. "Do you know what you people are?" he shouted. "I just thought—do you know what you are?"

"Oh, God, what now?" Leona whispered. "Charles, what will I do? The servants will hear him!"

Charles stared grimly at the floor of the deck, hoping that by avoiding Edward's eye he would also avoid his attention. The others, too, looked down, praying for silence.

"You're the people who never make mistakes, that's what you are!" Edward bellowed. "Do you hear me? You're the people who never make mistakes! Not a single mistake does a single one of you ever make in your whole lives! That's what I think of you." He turned back up the lawn, and disappeared in the direction of the Maitlands' house.

They all took exaggerated attitudes of relief.

"Goodness," Dolly said. "I couldn't imagine what he was going to say. I was petrified! Is that bad, never to make a mistake? Really, I think Edward must be losing his mind."

Charles smiled benignly at her, and then his gaze continued past her and across the wide river to the opposite side, where the green bank rose solid to the tranquil blue sky. "I must congratulate you again on your deck, Leona," he said. "An excellent idea. Such an educated view, my dear."

"And here at last is Bridie with the food," Lewis said. "I'm hungry enough to eat a horse."

"And poor George, bringing up the rear," Leona said. "As usual."

"I still cannot believe that you're actually married to a credit manager," Charles said. "Not that George isn't a dear, but it seems such an unlikely occupation. Almost exotic."

Leona, who always referred to George as a vice-president of the store where he was employed, turned almost purple with shame, but

she understood that she was being punished for her earlier boldness, and didn't try to defend herself.

At five o'clock that afternoon, jaded with talking about the dance, anxious now only to get on with it, willing even to have it past, so that they could start enjoying the discussion of it, most of the maids at Herbert's Retreat lay down on their beds for an unaccustomed ceremonial nap before getting dressed for the evening. The fine white stone houses, those beside the river and those scattered a little distance from it, were silent—the families departed for cocktails and dinner, the maids, supine, for once acknowledged mistresses of the kingdom they regarded, in any case, as their own.

The kitchens were deserted, but from every kitchen ceiling a freshly pressed dress, a long dress, hung and shivered gently in the mild breeze that stole up at intervals from the river. The maids' dresses were of bright colors—pink, yellow, blue, violet, red, and green—because the girls liked to escape as thoroughly as they could from the grays and black-and-white of their daily uniforms.

Only in Bridie's kitchen was there a black dress to be seen, a matronly taffeta that hung with uncompromising stiffness from the center beam. Not far from the dress, Bridie herself, scorning sleep, sat at her table by the window, stirring one of her eternal cups of strong tea. She had commanded her friend Agnes, who worked for the Gieglers, to join her, and at this moment Agnes sat drooping, with her pale eyes fixed on Leona's lawn and her ears half attentive to Bridie's conversation, which consisted, as usual, of a series of declamatory, denunciatory, and entirely final remarks.

"Naps in the afternoon," she said fiercely, slamming her wet teaspoon on the table. "If they were in their beds at a decent hour at night, when they ought to be sleeping, they wouldn't be looking to lie down at this time of day. What do they want with naps, big strong lassies like them? Cocktails they'll be after next, I suppose. Cocktails with the family, I suppose."

She drew up with a jerk, intrigued by the last picture she had conjured up. Suppose now, she thought, Mr. Harkey, or Mrs. Harkey herself, were to come out here and invite me to sit down for a cocktail

with them. She glanced covertly at Agnes, who was still contemplating the grass.

Bridie went on with her meditations. Well, then, I would sit down with them, she thought—not on one of the comfortable chairs but on an ordinary chair, just to show them that I know as much about good manners as they do, and I'd take a drink, whatever they were having themselves, and I wouldn't be pushy, but neither would I be backward. "Mrs. Harkey," I'd say, "as one woman to another—" "Oh, go on, Bridie," she'd say, smiling a little bit. "Won't you call me Leona? It's ridiculous for us, living along here in the same house year after year, and not being real friends."

This pleasant scene was interrupted by Agnes, who spoke up suddenly in her thin, incurious voice. "Here's Josie. I would've thought she'd be lying down along with the rest of them. I wonder what she's after."

Bridie peered out the window. Josie, the newest maid at the Retreat, and one of the youngest, was crossing the lawn on quick fat legs, coming from the Maitlands' house, where she worked. She was a short, stocky girl, with a pretty face.

"She should have come round by the house," Bridie said. "Mrs. Harkey hates to see anybody using up that lawn of hers. . . . Well, and what brings you here this time of the day, Josie? I thought you'd be asleep like the rest of them."

"I couldn't sleep," Josie said. "I'm too nervous. And I'm all alone there, except for that Mr. Tarnac, and he's up in his room sleeping it off."

Bridie nodded heavily at Agnes. "What was I telling you?" she said. "And where are all the rest of them?" she asked Josie.

"They've all gone off driving somewhere. And then they're taking the child to her grandmother's, so they can go to the dance."

"And they didn't ask Mr. Tarnac to go with them?" Bridie asked.

"He wouldn't go. Sure, he's in no fit state to go anywhere. He's been falling-down drunk ever since they got in last night. And the rest of them all making fun of him and all. I don't know what sort of a fellow he is to put up with it. You should have heard them at dinner last night. You should have heard that little Mr. Runyon of yours.

The things he said, I couldn't begin to remember the half of them."

"It's a pity Mr. Tarnac couldn't stay where he was, and not give them the satisfaction of laughing at him," Bridie declared. "The men around here were always envious of him, with his money and his big boat and his racing cars and all. And the women, that used to be throwing themselves at him, are congratulating themselves now that they stayed clear of him. The one here was forever inviting him over. And that Maitland lassie was very sweet on him. Oh, I believe to this day that there was more went on there than anybody'll ever know about. But that little Mr. God—I hate to see him so set up. I hate to see him getting any kind of satisfaction. I heard him last night, himself and Mrs. Harkey talking after they came home. Laughing and carrying on about Mr. Tarnac's clothes and the way he's all broken up, and each of them repeating to the other what they'd said. And then this morning they couldn't wait to start in on it again."

Josie, who had been listening respectfully, turned to Agnes. "Did you know Mr. Tarnac, Agnes?"

"No, he was before my time," Agnes said regretfully. "But Bridie's been telling me all about the big house he had and how he sold it and all. And lost all his money. It's a terrible thing, a man to throw away a fortune like that."

"But still and all," Bridie said, "he's a decent sort of a man, and I always liked him." She almost believed she was telling the truth, but the fact was that when Edward Tarnac lived at the Retreat, he was no more to her than one of a group she hated; it was only in his new role that she liked him. She took the cups and saucers off the table and carried them over to the sink.

Agnes sighed. "What are you wearing to the dance tonight, Josie?" she asked.

"Me ballerina," Josie said. "And me ballerina-type sandals. And I've dyed a pair of stockings to match. Pink. Do you think it'll be all right?"

"Lovely," Agnes said. "Pink is lovely on you, Josie—lovely with your skin."

"That's another thing!" Bridie shouted, splashing noisily among

the dishes. "There'll be Josie in her pink stockings, and you in that green getup of yours, Agnes, and that crew from here'll be there laughing at you behind their hands and making little of you. That's all they come for, to have something to laugh about. They make me sick."

Josie was red with indignation. "What's Mrs. Maitland going out and buying special black net stockings for, then, if she's only coming to laugh? Special stockings that she paid twelve dollars for. She's dying to come to the dance, so she is. She went and spent twelve dollars for special stockings to wear to the dance. What would she do that for if she's only coming to laugh? You're only making it up, Bridie, to stop us from enjoying ourselves."

Bridie, who had abandoned the sink, stared at her in astonishment. "What's that about stockings? Now, Josie, don't start crying. I wasn't trying to stop you from enjoying yourself. I was only thinking *they'd* be trying to stop you enjoying yourself. Now sit down and tell me and Agnes about the stockings Mrs. Maitland bought. Black, did you say they were?"

"Black net," Josie said, subsiding, "with a whole lot of rhinestones here—" She indicated her own chubby instep. "And she went all the way in to some special actresses' shop in New York to get them. I heard her talking to Mrs. Ffrench about them yesterday afternoon when I was waxing the hall. 'Aren't they the sexiest things you ever saw in your life?' Mrs. Maitland says. 'Do you think our visiting policemen will like them?' she says. 'Why, I should think they'd go berserk,' Mrs. Ffrench says, and they both laughed and laughed. 'I don't know why you bother,' Mrs. Ffrench says. 'I think they're a dull collection, myself.' 'Oh, I think they're sweet,' Mrs. Maitland says, 'and very attractive, some of them. Lewis was quite jealous last year. And you know, they're wonderful dancers. I wouldn't miss this for anything.' Well, I was curious, wanting to know what they were talking about, so I went into the living room on the excuse of asking them did they want anything, and there was Mrs. Maitland with the long shorts on her, y'know? And the stockings up against her leg. She put them away quick, but I found them in her drawer this morning,

and I looked at them. And the price was on them, twelve dollars. I'm telling you, wild horses wouldn't keep her from the dance. She's dying to go."

"Well, I declare to God," Bridie said. She sat down at the table again. "What else did they say, Josie?"

"Nothing, except Mrs. Ffrench asked Mrs. Maitland, 'What's Charles going to surprise us with this year?' she says. 'He had such an amusing outfit last year,' she says, 'and the girls made such a fuss over him,' she says. 'Oh, the girls adore Charles,' Mrs. Maitland says, 'and he's like a little child about the dance, he's so excited about it. He pretends not to be, of course,' she says, 'but you know it gets to be a bit of a bore, he can talk of nothing else all day afterwards. You know, Charles is a tiny bit conceited,' she says, 'and he rather fancies himself in the waltz.' And then they went on talking about the party Mrs. Ffrench is giving next Friday. That was in the afternoon, before Mr. Maitland and Mr. Tarnac got here."

"'The girls adore Charles,' " Bridie repeated. "'The girls adore Charles.' Sure they were all laughing their heads off at him, the way he was shaping around on the dance floor with his eyes closed and all. You never saw such a sketch in your life. We were all breaking our hearts laughing at him. And he brought those special little flat patent-leather shoes of his, too. I saw them when I was doing the room this morning. Well, I declare to God. And that one upstairs, Mrs. Harkey—I wonder what she's going to doll herself up in. I declare to God, all the parties and all they have to go to, and they have to take over our little party, too. Wouldn't you know it of them."

"And every time one of the fellows asks one of them to dance, one of us is left sitting!" Josie cried. "Oh, I know there's extra men, and all, but still I don't think it's fair. And all the money they have to spend on themselves and all, and us trying to struggle along on what we make— How can we put up an appearance against them? It's not fair, so it's not." She stood up. "Well," she said, "I'd better be getting home. I have to get ready for the dance, although I haven't much heart for it now."

Bridie folded her arms and leaned on the table. "Wait a minute

now, Josie," she said. "Maybe there's something we can do about all this. What do you say, Agnes?"

"Sure what could we do?" Agnes asked nervously. "You don't want to get into any trouble, now, Bridie."

"No need to get into any trouble," Bridie said. "We could just pass the word around. They only come around to look. That's what Mrs. Harkey said to me. 'We're only going to drop around for a little visit,' she says to me. 'Just for a look. It's such fun to sit and watch.' Well, then, let them look, if that's what they want. We'll boycott them. Very polite, of course, as though we thought they just came to look. As though we didn't think they wanted to dance. Who can make any trouble out of that?"

"I don't want to risk my job," Agnes said.

"No fear of that," Bridie said. "How can you risk your job when they won't know anything about it? They'll just think the fellows are shy, or something."

Josie sniggered. "Oh, God," she said, "there she'll be sitting up there with her black stockings on her, and nobody coming near her!"

Agnes smiled meanly, stood up, and brushed bread crumbs from the front of her skirt. "We'll have to make sure all the girls know about it, Bridie," she said.

The dance began at nine o'clock. At eleven, George Harkey still waited, surrounded by the empty chairs he was holding for Leona, on a dais at one end of the long village hall. His solitary dinner at the village bar-and-grill had been preceded by five very sweet Manhattans, and he was drowsy. He tried, with a monotonous lack of success but nonchalantly all the same, to count the eyelashes of his left eye with the fingers of his right hand and the eyelashes of his right eye with his other set of fingers. Head bent, eyes alternately glazing and wandering, he still could not entirely avoid seeing the feet of the dancers as they galloped past his perch. Underneath him, the dais, which had been built for some pageant, thudded industriously in time with the dancing, and around him the empty chairs rattled. Suddenly the hall darkened slightly. Someone had turned the lights down. To

George, who had just then been gazing intently into the palms of his locked hands, the change seemed tremendous. The music, the laughter, the pounding of feet, and the voices, that formerly had come at him in one bright, enveloping blast of exhausting but familiar sound, now seemed to deepen and at the same time to grow more shrill. It was an ominous alteration. Was he in the same room? Had he, perhaps, slept?

He raised his eyes fearfully and gazed down the length of the hall. Dimly, far away across the sea of jiggling heads, he perceived the glitter of instruments. There was the stage, there were the musicians. In front of the stage stood a bank of the same thick, stiff green shrubbery that sprouted at intervals in tubs along the side walls, separating into chummy groups the empty chairs that had been set aside for tired dancers. Were there any tired dancers? George couldn't tell. The nausea that had been caressing him at intervals all day embraced him without warning, and roughly. He closed his eyes tight and gripped the seat of his chair with both hands, but still, in his horrified vision, the dance floor swung right, swung left, with sickening precision, as though some giant pendulum had control of it, and the dancers, oblivious, whirled giddily on, and he was increasingly aware of the Manhattans and of the two tough pork chops that since suppertime had lain, almost forgotten, inside him.

The wave passed, leaving its victim trembling but not seriously impaired. He opened his eyes, put his hand to his hip pocket, and took out a large silver flask. He unscrewed the top, poured some whiskey into one of the two sticky glasses that some earlier Retreat visitors had left on the chair beside him, and drank. That was better. He hoped no had had noticed him, but it was too late to worry now, and he poured another drink, finished it off, and set the glass on the floor, so carelessly that it turned on its side and rolled dismally under one of the chairs.

He recorked the flask, crossed his legs, and sat back to survey the festivities, with the suave, aloof smile he had often seen Charles Runyon wear. On George's square, earnest face the smile sat awkwardly, but he knew only that he felt tired, and tried to solve the problem by

leering on one side of his face while he rested the muscles of the other side.

At this moment, through the wide entrance door at the side of the hall, he saw Leona enter, pause, and raise her arms in greeting to the merrymakers. She was wearing a sleeveless white crêpe dress that clung to her tall, slender figure, and there were diamonds in her ears. She raised herself on tiptoe, waved to the band, and pranced gracefully to the dais and to George. Behind her, Charles, Dolly, and Lewis followed confidently, their smiles radiating pleasure, camaraderie, and, above all, approval.

Leona tripped up the steps and stood beside George, regarding him with a humorous *moue* that he found peculiarly repellent.

"Well, George, all alone? Poor George has been sitting here all alone," she said to Charles, who had already taken a chair and arranged himself in an attitude.

"Never mind the poor-George stuff," George muttered, but no one heard him.

Dolly plumped herself down beside him. "Where is everybody?" she demanded. "Are we the only people here?"

"The Gieglers were here," George said, "but they left. The Ffrenches left, too, and the Pearsons. Some of the others were here. The Allens, I think. Anyway, they're all gone. But now you're here," he added with an effort.

"George, how do you like my fancy dress?" Dolly asked.

She was wearing her favorite cocktail skirt, of black satin cut in a wide circle, and with it a tight, sleeveless, modestly low jerkin blouse of black-and-white striped satin, that laced at the back with red corset strings. There were towering red heels on her black satin sandals, and a small triangle of rhinestones glittered on each black net instep. Her hair was piled in curls on top of her head and decorated with a bright-red rose.

"You look fine, Dolly," George said. "What do you mean, fancy dress? It's just a dress, isn't it?"

"Well, it's a little costumy, don't you think? Lewis said I looked like a French doll."

"Dolly means it's not quite what one wears," Leona interrupted, leaning across George to twinkle brilliantly at Dolly. "You must excuse George, Dolly. I suspect he's not seeing quite clearly. Didn't you dance at all, George?"

"No one asked me to dance," George said. He stood up. "No one asked Nat Ffrench to dance, either," he said, "or Rita, or the Gieglers, or anybody. Nobody asked anybody to dance. So they left."

"Been to the bar, George?" Lewis asked boisterously. He was in great good humor, and looked large, solid, and secure in his well-cut dark-blue suit.

"I didn't go near the bar," George said. "It's in the room behind the stage. You have to walk right through the dance to get to it."

"That's where it always is," Leona said happily. "Go on, Lewis. You play waiter. I'll have a Scotch-and-water."

"I think I'll leave now," George said. "I'd like some fresh air. I'll go along home, I think."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, George," Leona said. "You're not going to march out the minute I come in. Did you see Bridie?"

"She has a chair down there near the stage, I think," George said. "I really think I'll go now, Leona."

"Sit down, George," Leona said.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, sit down and shut up, George," Charles said.

"All right," George said. "Didn't know I was so popular. But I'll sit at the back here. See, I'll sit here."

He tilted a chair back against the wall and sat down, sleepy but resigned to staying awake. He closed his eyes.

"Isn't this gay?" Leona said. "Well, for goodness' sake, will you look at Edward! I forgot all about him. He's dancing with the Ffrenchs' maid, Eileen something. He didn't come in with us, did he? I thought he stayed in the car."

"He woke up when I was getting out," Dolly said. "I took it for granted he'd gone to the bar."

"Well, I never," Charles said, two or three minutes later. "Our Edward is getting quite a whirl. There he is again, with a different girl."

"The Bennetts' cook," Leona said absently.

"Never you mind, Charles!" Dolly cried gaily. "Wait till the waltzes start. You'll put poor Edward completely in the shade."

"Really, Dolly!" Charles snapped. "This brawl means nothing to me. Be serious, my dear, even if you can't be intelligent. I'm here to observe, not to dance."

"Haw-haw," George said from the back. They all turned to stare at him. He had the flask in the open again.

"George, what on earth! What are you doing with that ridiculous flask?" Leona cried.

"My own flask." George, unperturbed, took another swallow, keeping his eyes fixed on Leona.

"Well, he's a pretty how-de-do," Charles whispered angrily. "You should have let him go home, Leona."

"He'll go in a minute," Leona whispered back. "Let's just ignore him."

"It's bedlam in the bar," Lewis said, returning with their drinks, "but I must say they gave me quick service. They're a nice bunch of fellows, those cops, or whatever they are." He put the loaded tray on the floor of the dais and began to hand drinks around.

"What are they, anyway, Leona?" Charles asked. "It really interests me. It is in the nature of a social phenomenon, you know, this gathering. Who are these imported stalwarts?"

"Policemen, mostly. Firemen, I suppose, too," Leona said. "Who cares, as long as they can dance?"

"The Department of Sanitation is represented, too," Dolly whispered, gazing at a red-faced young man in a white linen jacket, who was dancing with the Gieglers' long-faced Agnes.

"Complete with carnation in lapel," Charles remarked. "My, aren't we chic!"

Leona giggled. "You're both perfectly terrible," she said. "That's a very respectable-looking coat. And a very nice-looking young man, too. I think you should be ashamed of yourselves."

Dolly choked suddenly, and hid her face behind Leona's shoulder. "Leona!" she spluttered. "Will you look at our Josie in the dyed pink stockings. Did you ever see anything like it in your life?"

"Macabre, my dear," Leona murmured. "Poor thing, she must have slaved to get that color. It matches her ears, though."

Charles threw an arm casually over the back of his chair, and his black flannel coat slipped open to show more than a glimpse of the gray-and-rose brocade waistcoat he was wearing.

"This dais was a charming thought," he said expansively. "What do they use it for? May queens and things? I adore sitting here, being at once a member of the audience and a player. And yet, not really of either group. The critic's lot is a lonely one, my dears. I feel remote from the rollicking servants, and just as remote, in a different way, from you delightful people. The cold, uncompromising eyes give me no peace. I say it ruefully, I assure you." He sipped his ginger ale and smiled at them complacently.

Lewis made an impatient movement, and Dolly glanced at him warningly. "Well, I wish we'd start dancing," she said. "I'm getting restless, sitting here like this. How do they make chairs this hard?"

"There is something strange about it," Lewis said. "How long have we been here? Twenty minutes? Half an hour?"

"I suppose they're shy," Leona said. "George said none of the Retreat people who came danced."

George, who had been dozing, came to at the sound of his name and sat up, looking around blearily.

"Well, where's the rush, girls?" he inquired. "I thought we were going to be stampeded. What happened to the stag line?"

Leona shot him a venomous glance. Turning to Lewis, she said in a low voice, "Did you notice anything in the bar? I mean, were they friendly and everything?"

"Sure," Lewis said. "They went out of their way to help me get the drinks. They were—well, you know, the same as they always are."

"I'm afraid you girls outsmarted yourselves," Charles said, chortling faintly. "The poor creatures are paralyzed by the splendor of your attire."

Leona turned impulsively to Lewis. "Lewis, why don't you and Dolly start things off by dancing together. Not that I care that much about dancing, but if they're shy—"

"Nothing doing." Lewis said.

"Oh, Leona, we can't do that," Dolly said. "They have to ask us. We can't just jump right into the middle of their dance. After all, we don't really come here to dance. We just come—well, to be nice."

"You're stuck," George said. "It's a boycott. They're on to you, girls."

"That's ridiculous, George!" Leona cried indignantly. "They're dancing with Edward."

George shrugged.

"If it were a boycott," Charles interposed, "we'd know it by their demeanor. They'd giggle or point their fingers or something. These people can't control their emotions. They have to show what they feel. But I can see no evidence of hostility in this assemblage."

"Neither can I!" Leona cried. "Why, they're smiling and friendly and all. There's Bridie waving at me now. They're just shy, incredible though it may seem. Well, who ever would have thought it? It's too bad. Not that it matters, of course."

"I didn't know Edward could even stand up," Dolly said suddenly, "and look at him now. The life of the party."

"The parlormaid's Don Juan," Charles said. "The Scullery sheik."

George emitted a rude crow of mirth. "A rehearsal, by God!" he cried. "Is that what you're going to say to Tarnac tomorrow, Charles? I've always wanted to see you working on those witty sayings of yours. Try some more, Charles. We'll tell you the good ones."

Charles froze into a dark knot of rage. Leona turned pale.

"Shut up, you," Lewis said. "Do you hear me? Shut up. We know Tarnac; you don't."

George wagged a finger at him. "Now, now, Lewis. Just because Tarnac is dancing and you're not. No one asked me to dance, but you don't see me getting all red and angry."

Lewis crouched like a beast on his straight wooden chair. "Come outside," he said. "I'll break your neck for that."

"Break it here," George said with enthusiasm. "Come on, break it. Hit me. Come on, hit me."

"Oh, God!" Leona moaned. "Will you two stop it! Stop this at

once. The servants, Lewis! Have some sense! Oh, Charles, smile as though nothing had happened. Dolly, stop glaring at George that way. Lewis, pull yourself together, please."

Lewis squared around to face the dancers again. Behind him, George grinned.

"All right," Lewis said. "All right. But I won't forget this, Leona."

"How could you, dear?" Leona said soothingly. "And neither will George," she promised, in a different tone.

"Oh, let's go home. Let's get out of here, for heaven's sake!" Dolly said.

"You can't go home that fast," George said. "Maybe it *is* a boycott. Maybe they're not shy at all. Maybe they want to teach you a lesson. Us a lesson, I mean. Us a lesson."

"I couldn't care less!" Dolly cried. "It's all a great bore as far as I'm concerned. Let's you and me go anyway, Lewis."

"Little feelings hurt?" George inquired, and sniggered.

Lewis set his glass carefully on the floor, and then clenched his fist melodramatically. "Listen, little man," he said to George, "my wife's feelings are not hurt. My wife's feelings could never be hurt by a crew of drunken servants and street-sweepers and God knows what."

"Oh, Lewis, old man, I know that," George said, "but do *they* know that?"

"What do I care what they think!"

"Keep your voice down, Lewis," Leona said coldly. "For once, George is right. We have to stay a little while, I'm afraid, deadly though it is. We can't let them think they drove us out. We'll stay a reasonable time, and then go. I still don't think they're doing it on purpose. It would be too silly."

"We'll know tomorrow, anyway," Dolly said, sighing. "Edward will tell us."

"I must say he has a nerve," Leona said. "He hasn't come near us once. After all, Dolly, you are his hostess."

"Edward has reached his proper level, my dear," Charles said. "Look at the pathetic fellow, capering around."

"Utterly smug," Dolly said. "Oh, God," she added. "He heard us talking this morning on the deck, Leona. About the dance, I mean,

and these damned stockings and all. Do you suppose he'll tell them? I really can't bear to think of them laughing at us."

"I don't think he'll say anything," Lewis said. "I don't think he'd go that far."

"I really think we've stayed long enough, don't you, Charles?" Leona said.

"We will not go home, children," Charles said. "I know you girls are disappointed you weren't asked to dance. Lewis and George, too, of course. But we mustn't let our little peeve show. This is much too interesting a scene to miss, and I intend to sit it out. Chins up, now. We're not leaving. Don't look so down, Dolly. There'll be other dances."

"What do you mean there'll be other dances?" Dolly cried furiously. "You're the one who's been making all the fuss about coming to this wretched thing. What about your special waistcoat and your waltzing slippers?"

Charles regarded her with cool amusement. "Leona knows all about that, Dolly," he said. "I have a severely infected foot, which obliges me to wear a pliable shoe. I never had the slightest intention of dancing tonight, but I didn't want to spoil your fun by refusing to come, and in any case the spectacle interests me, and you are making it even more interesting, my dear, with this childish display of temper because the little boys didn't notice your sexy new stockings. Isn't that so, my sweet? Leona, you remember my telling you about my wretched foot?"

"Of course, darling," Leona said. "You should apologize, Dolly."

"Haw, haw, HAW," George said. "He made that all up just now to save his face, such as it is."

"Leave the room at once, George," Leona said.

"Make me," George said. "Go ahead, make me. Make me."

"Make you what?" Charles asked in contempt.

Leona threw Charles a glance of anguish. "Oh, Charles, don't provoke him. Poor George is not himself this evening."

"Poor George," George said, apparently to himself. "Poor George," he said again. He stood up. "POOR GEORGE!" he roared. "POOR, POOR George!"

The nearest dancers hesitated and then went on. George smiled and sat down again.

"I'll kill you for this, George," Leona said.

"I'll do it again, and I'll do worse than that, Leona," George said, "unless you say after me now, 'Nice George.'"

Leona stared at him and then spoke quickly. "Nice George," she said.

"Keep smiling, children," Charles said brightly. "Remember, it's all just a little joke. Don't let them guess there's anything wrong."

"Now, Leona," George said, "say, 'Rich, handsome, *good* George.'"

"Rich, handsome, good George," Leona gabbled.

George looked pleased. "'Popular George?'" he suggested.

"Popular George."

"Good enough," George said. "Now Charlie—'Nice George,' please. If you don't say 'Nice George,' Charlie, I'm coming over there and twist your ears, one to the front, one to the back. 'Nice George.'"

"Nice George," Charles said, sneering. Leona, Lewis, and Dolly, all three turned their gaze uneasily from him.

"Stop making faces, Charlie," George said good-humoredly. "Now all together—'Rich, handsome, witty George, good George, nice George.'"

"Rich, handsome, witty George," they chorused feebly, "nice George, good George."

George took out his flask. "'Pleasant, popular, *able* George.'"

"Pleasant, popular, able George."

In the swollen peace that followed, Leona and Dolly smiled stiffly at one another. "I really never felt so much of a fool in my life," Dolly said.

"We can leave in about an hour, don't you think?" Charles said.

"An hour, Charles, yes, let's say an hour at the most," Leona agreed fervently.

They continued to sit, smiling. Behind them, having tasted heaven, George slept. Before them, the dance went on.

Next morning, Charles awoke as usual at nine-thirty, but he did not immediately open his eyes. He waited, lying very still, breathing

calmly and deeply, until his first impression of uneasiness, of being on guard, had passed into a determined surge of good spirits, and then, to his delighted surprise, into a playful well-being that carried him out of bed and across to the table where his notebook lay. He lifted the book, admiring the neatness—that is, he thought, the dispassionateness—of last night's entries. He had stayed awake almost until dawn, sitting here in silence until his temper was cool enough to let him write as he knew he should write. Now it was all in hand. The day was full of promise. He was going into battle, and his adversaries, meagre enough in their normal state, would all have horrifying hangovers.

"George," he murmured, and read. It was disagreeable stuff, but he absorbed it bravely. George was easy game. George would learn his lesson well. Thinking of the awakening George must at this moment be enduring with Leona, Charles could almost find it in his heart to be sorry for the poor wretch. Edward would squirm, too. That would all be perhaps too easy.

But then came the difficult part, because already, at the memory of the evening, Charles was beginning to rage again. He was churning with rage. He could burn the memory of his own ludicrous part in the whole business from the minds of the others, by turning their derision back on them, but could he forget it himself? Because if he did not forget it, or destroy it, its damage would show, and the others would know for certain that he had been as vulnerable as they to the general humiliation. "They must not know," he said aloud. "It must not show," he said. "Today will prove what I am—a man above all this petty frenzy. I am different from all these people," he told himself angrily. He stood up and strode barefoot around the room.

Suddenly he stopped in the center of the woolly white rug and, gazing down at his untidy bed, clutched his head with both hands. "I simply must remember that I am an observer," he said. The image that had come to him again and again last night as he sat on the dais returned once more: He saw himself before leaving for the dance, posturing in front of this very pier glass, taking the attitudes of the waltz, actually dancing backward with the hand mirror, watching the

swing of his coat and the curve of his trouser legs. "I cannot bear this!" Charles said wildly, and started to catalogue the shame of the others. Dolly's net stockings, he thought, and that absurd rose. Leona's open chagrin. Lewis's deathly embarrassment. And George with his sad little flash of courage. And Tarnac—why, he had enough gibes prepared to keep Tarnac reeling for a year.

Gradually Charles' head grew quiet. He opened the curtains. Another perfect day. It might be yesterday—but he thrust that thought quickly out of sight. He sat in the chintz chair and permitted himself an unusual indulgence: he smoked a cigarette before breaking his fast. Then he rang for Bridie, and when she appeared, he stared at her in amazement, for even he could not ignore the extraordinary violence she brought with her into the room.

She handed him his orange juice and poured the hot milk and coffee. He eyed her curiously as he sipped the orange juice. Her face was actually twitching with some emotion. Something must have upset her last night. He felt he could not bear it if she left the room before he knew what it was.

"A very pleasant party last night, Bridie," he said smoothly. "Very pleasant indeed. The girls looked so pretty in their little best dresses."

"I suppose they did, sir." Bridie hurled herself at the window curtains, and snatched them apart with such force that the whole inside window frame was left naked, ruining Leona's lovely draped effect. Charles frowned in surprise. More here than meets the eye, he thought, and wondered how best to approach this maddened woman.

"Poor dear Mr. Tarnac," he said tentatively. "Pathetic fellow, I'm afraid he's had a bad time these last few years. A pity, really."

"Mr. Tarnac is all right," Bridie said. She stared at him, and it seemed to Charles that for the first time that morning she remembered who he really was. "Oh, Mr. Tarnac's a lovely man," she said spitefully. "The girls all think he's God's gift to the women. They're all head over heels in love with him." She had rehearsed this speech the night before, as she sat watching the dance and watching the watchers on the dais. She got little satisfaction from it now. She wondered if anything would ever happen in the world again that would be awful enough to satisfy her.

Jealousy, Charles thought, with disgust. This laughable monolith fancied herself in love. He picked up his notes, dismissing her. "The girls' opinion is always of immense interest to me. I must tell poor Mr. Tarnac what you said when I see him at lunch."

"You won't see him at lunch, nor at dinner either," Bridie cried, "for he went off back to town with the rest of that crew. They were all mad to get back to the city. The way they drove off, I wouldn't be surprised if the half of them were found dead, and I wouldn't be sorry, either."

"Who went back to the city? What do you mean?"

"Mr. Tarnac went back with all the fellows that were up here for the dance, and a few of the young ones that are working here, too. A lot of use they'll be around here today, if they ever come back here at all."

Charles laughed. Really, it was too good, that sodden fool Tarnac dashing around with a carful of drunken servants.

"And where on earth did these wild young things go, Bridie? To some dance hall, perhaps?"

Bridie took a deep and unsteady breath. "Oh, great God," she said, "when I heard of it! I could have dropped dead, so I could. I could have killed them."

"What did they do, Bridie?"

"Oh, Mr. Runyon, wait till I tell you, I had a nice chair that I sat on the whole evening, between the door where you come into the hall and the door where you go into the bar. Near the stage, I was. A couple of us sat there, and then from time to time other girls would come along and sit with us a minute or two. You know the way it is. And you know the way you talk. The boys would bring me a little drink now and then. Not that I took much, but you know, Mr. Runyon, I'm not accustomed to it. Oh, Mr. Runyon, the things I said. Things I wouldn't want repeated. I won't have a friend in the place when it gets out. I don't know where to go or what to do. I'm nearly mad, thinking about it all night long, and praying to God the records would be broke by the time they got back to town."

"What records, Bridie?"

"The records they made at the dance. Didn't one of the young fel-

lows in the band—a radio mechanic he is, bad luck to him—rig up one of them wire-recording things right behind where I was sitting. Every word I said. If they'd only have given me a hint. But of course nobody knew, only the young fellow himself, the young black-guard, and a couple of his friends that helped him fix it up. Things I wouldn't have repeated for the world—I—”

“And that was why they were in such a hurry to get back to town, to play the records over?”

“Why else. All laughing they were—”

“And Mr. Tarnac was with them, and some of the girls from here?”

“Josie next door, for one. Lazy young lump, she—”

“Bridie, please pay attention. Tell me, did they put recorders anywhere except behind your chair?”

“In the bar, they had one. I wouldn't have minded that, I wasn't in there. And one in the vestibule as you come in, but I hardly stopped there at all. And another one under the platform you and Mrs. Harkey and Mr. Harkey were on. I wasn't near there.”

She stopped suddenly, astounded, listening to what she had just heard her own voice say. And to think that I missed that, she thought, and realized how far she had drifted from her moorings in these last few hours.

“Yes,” she said, “that's right. There was one under where you were sitting, too, Mr. Runyon.”

Staring greedily into his eyes, she saw and recognized what she had never hoped to see again—a chagrin as hot and as bitter as her own.