

Vanes are clamouring to finish that set. Do you mind?

Beryl: All right, I'll go. But I'm in rotten form.

Mrs. M. (shuddering): What a vocabulary! . . . You don't Play, Miss Norwood?

Marion (vaguely): No; I sprained my wrist in that motor smash.

Mrs. A.: Shall we sit under the trees and watch the game, Caroline? Will you come, Marion?

Marion: No, thank you. There's a glare, and my head's aching.

Mrs. A. (fluttering round her): Poor child! You look tired. A little aspirin? No? Then lie on the sofa quietly, and close your eyes. Remember, Wilfrid is due at five o'clock. (They go out.)

Marion (sadly): No need to worry about Wilfrid's coming. He must have had my letter by now. (As she talks she walks restlessly up and down, now picking up an ornament, again looking at a book.) What an afternoon! Why on earth did the girls want to turn out for tennis, to-day of all days? And what an old horror that Mrs. Morton is! How did Beryl ever manage to produce such a mother—at least, that's a bit mixed, but I can't help it. My head feels mixed to-day. . . . If only I could have slipped quietly out, as I had planned! Anyway, I've got to catch my train, if Mrs. Morton, or the devil himself, is calling! (The telephone rings sharply.) Bother that telephone! I suppose I must answer it. (Takes down receiver.) Mrs. Ashmead's house.

What? You? But Wilfrid, haven't you had my letter? Ah, yes, I thought you must have by now. Then what do you want me for? What? A joke? Of course it wasn't a joke. . . I'm exactly what I said—an imposter. I haven't any money or any rich relatives. It's all been lies, lies! But it's over. I cashed my last pound to-day. . . . What am I going to do? I'm going home, of course. . . . Going to what? To marry you? Nonsense, don't try to be funny. . . . Goodness, Wilfrid, don't roar my head off. . . . Not funny, then—chivalrous. Oh, of course you're only doing what a gentleman feels he must do. . . . Oh! Wilfrid, how can you? (Aside.) Gracious, I'd no idea he could swear like that—the darling! (Sternly into receiver.) Don't be so cross, Wilfrid! No, it's no use; I'm not going to take advantage of your generosity and have you ashamed of me in six months. Why, I'm not even what Mrs. Morton would call a lady. . . . What's that? Damn Mrs. Morton. . . . Oh, rather. . . . At least, I mean I'm surprised at you, Wilfrid Ashmead. . . . Talking like this is only making it worse. . . . I tell you, I'm going home, home to the backblocks and the cows. . . . What do I do with them? Why, milk them, of course. . . . And—some day—I'll marry a farmer. . . . What? You a farmer? Oh, don't be silly. . . . I mean a real farmer—the sort that milks cows and wears a grey shirt and dungarees. . . . No, that's the only kind I would ever marry. . . . Now do you see? . . . Good-bye (She bangs on the receiver and buries her face in her hands as the others enter. Nora is a modern girl and charming.)

Mrs. A.: So glad your headache seems better, dear. Were you practising that recitation the Dean asked for?

Marion (quietly): Yes; "The Impostor's Farewell." Did it sound convincing?

Nora: Top-hole. Real sob stuff.

Beryl: You are a ripping actor, Marion.

Marion (bitterly): Almost to the life. Here comes Sally with the tea. (Sally enters with a tray and arranges the tea table. Mrs. A. Pours out. Marion helping as daughter of the house. All drink tea as they talk.) Have Joan and Val gone?

Beryl: Yes, they had to fly. They've got an aunt and uncle coming from the country to-night.

Mrs. A. (to Mrs. M.): I understand that the mother's people are not—not quite—you understand me?

Mrs. A. (kindly): Oh, hardly that, Caroline. These relations live in the Wayback, as the novelists call it. Such a romantic life, I always think!

Mrs. M.: Romantic fiddlesticks, my dear! Don't talk to me about the Wayback! I know all about it. My husband once took me to visit an old servant, a former gardener, who had bought a dairy farm in the backblocks. I cannot think what induced me to go. I shall certainly never forget it.

Beryl (lightly): Poor Mother! They got stuck in the mud and had to stay all night!

Marion (aside): Poor dairy-farmer! (To Mrs. M.): What was it like, Mrs. Morton?

Mrs. M. (with conviction): Terrible! Mud—I could never have believed it possible that such roads existed. As I remarked to Percival, the people who choose to live in such places must be half-wits.

Marion (quietly): Not necessarily.

Many good brains have come from the Wayback.

Nora (laughing): Of course they have. Why, the backblocks farmer is the backbone of the country. At least I'm sure I read that somewhere.

Mrs. M. (crushingly): If so, they should remain invisible, as backbones, despite a recent fashion in evening dresses, were intended to do. . . . Most repulsive people!

Marion: Why exactly repulsive, Mrs. Morton?

Mrs. M.: My dear Miss Norwood, they milked cows. Isn't that enough? They lived in a five-roomed cottage built of corrugated iron; isn't that enough? The men wore curious garments, known, I believe, as dungarees, and the women wore gum-boots and aprons. Surely that is enough?

Marion: And was that all that was wrong with them?

Mrs. M.: You speak, Miss Norwood, with the charming ignorance of the well-to-do and sheltered. Why, it was incredible! There was mud everywhere; and, where there was no mud, there was bush; and, where there was neither mud nor bush, there were cows. An appalling prospect!

Beryl: Well, I think they're rather ripping, the pioneers.

Marion: You're right, Beryl, they are ripping.

Mrs. M.: This ridiculous slang! They were in no sense ripping. They lived hard, narrow, low lives, and they were hard and narrow and low.

Marion: Their lives are hard, certainly, and perhaps narrow; but there is nothing low about either their lives or themselves.

Mrs. A. (placidly): Dear child, what can you possibly know about it? You talk just like those amusing Socialists that go to the Park on Sundays.

Marion (unheeding): It takes courage to live in the backblocks—and vision.

Mrs. M. Possibly. It is the modern custom to endow all the most unpleasant people with "vision"—whatever that may mean. Personally, I have no wish to know them—or their visions.

Marion: And yet, is it such a poor thing—this vision of theirs? You humour and applaud the artist who creates. The pioneer creates, too—it is no small achievement to make a farm from a forest, to wring out an honourable living from the soil. . . . Often the pioneer dies before his dream is fulfilled, but his children carry it on. (All are watching her in surprise at the quiet earnestness of her tone.)

Mrs. M. (acidly): From what one hears of the creatures, the sons usually despise their fathers and their farms, and the daughters rush to the towns and try to forget that they ever saw a cow.

Marion (hit by this): I'm afraid some of them do, Mrs. Morton, and it is very mean of them. But I don't think they do it because they are ashamed of their people. They do it because they are hungry for life, hungry for pleasure.

Nora: And small blame to them!

Marion: Surely it's natural enough to want some fun while you're young?—But to be ashamed of your people—why, that would be horrible! (With sudden resolve.) I'm so glad you talked as you did, Mrs. Morton; if you hadn't, I should have gone without a word, and you'd all have thought it was because I was ashamed, too.

(Continued on page 29.)



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