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Kind Hearts And Coronets

By Robert Hamer

- Evening, Mr. Elliott.

- Good evening.

Brrr.

- Just sign the book, if you will.

- Yes.

- Been keeping you busy, Mr. Elliott?

- Oh, just nicely.

Went up to Manchester on Monday-
a poisoner.

Baby-farmer at Holloway this morning.

Very ordinary crimes, both of them.

This one we've got for you tomorrow
is something special.

Yes, very much so.

Even after all my years
in the profession...

I'm quite looking forward to him.

- Well, I must be getting along.

- Good night, Mr. Elliott.

- Good night.

- Usual cup of tea at 7:00?

Oh, please.

Even my lamented master,
the great Mr. Berry himself...
never had the privilege
of hanging a duke.

Yes.

What a finale to a lifetime
in the public service.

- "Finale"?

- Yes, I intend to retire.

After using the silken rope...

never again be content with hemp.

- Quite. Well, here we are.

- Oh, thank you.

How will he approach it?

I should think

as the calmest you've ever known.

Noblesse oblige, doubtless.

A difficult client can make things
most distressing.

Some of them tend

to be very hysterical.

So inconsiderate.

Well, Colonel, considering
the importance of the occasion...
I shall retire early.
The last execution of a duke in this country
was really badly bungled.
That was in the old days of the ax,
of course.
Yes.
Oh, I - I almost forgot.
Um, you must forgive my ignorance...
but when we meet in the morning...
what is the correct form of address?
- Your Lordship?
- Your Grace.
Your Grace? Oh.
Thank you.
Good morning, Your Grace.
Good morning, Your Grace.
- All right. Sit down.
- Ah, good evening, Colonel. Glass of wine?
Good evening, Your Grace.
Uh, thank you, no.
I, uh - I called to inquire whether
you had any special wishes for breakfast.
Just coffee and a slice of toast, thank you.
Oh, and perhaps a few grapes.
I hate to disappoint
the newspaper-reading public...
but it'll be too early
for the conventional hearty breakfast.
The appointment is at 8:00,
is it not?

At 8:

If I may venture to say so,
I am amazed at your calmness.
Dr. Johnson was, as always, right...
when he observed,
"Depend upon it, sir.
"When a man knows that he's going
to be hanged in a few hours...
it concentrates his mind wonderfully. "
Yes. Well, if there is nothing further
I can do for you -

Nothing. Thank you, Colonel.

We shall have the opportunity of making our adieus in the morning, I presume.

I regret to say, yes.

- Good night, Your Grace.

- Good night, Colonel.

"A brief history

of the events leading thereto...

"written on the eve of his execution...

"by Louis D'Ascoyne Mazzini,

"who ventures to hope

that it may prove not uninteresting...

to those who remain to read it. "

My good man, it is not by my choice

that you keep me company.

If you wish to sleep, pray do me

the courtesy of sleeping quietly.

"With so little time

remaining to complete my story...

"it is difficult to choose

where to begin it.

Perhaps I should begin

at the beginning. "

I was a healthy baby,

born of an English mother and Italian father-

who succumbed to a heart attack

at the moment of first setting eyes on me.

In the circumstances, it will be understood

that I have but slight memory of him.

"The little I know comes from

what Mama told me. "

Your father was a very handsome man.

Mama was the daughter

She eloped with her handsome singer...

and exchanged the medieval splendors

for the modern conveniences

of number 73...

Balacava Avenue, S. W.

They were poor,

but they had five happy and harmonious years...

before my arrival sent Papa

off to join the heavenly choir.

Reduced to even deeper poverty

by my father's death...

Mama swallowed her pride...
and made an effort at reconciliation
with her family.
They did not even reply to her letter.
In order to keep us both alive,
she was reduced...
to the horrible expedient
of taking in a lodger.
For him, she had to perform
the most menial tasks.
She felt that her family had conspired
to cheat me of my birthright...
and I passed
from infancy to childhood...
in an atmosphere
of family history and genealogies.
The dukedom had been bestowed...
by Charles II
on Colonel Henry D'Ascoyne...
for services rendered to His Majesty
during his exile.
Later, for services rendered
to His Majesty...
after his restoration by the duchess...
the title was granted
the unique privilege...
of descending by the female
as well as the male line.
- Louis.
- It was therefore theoretically possible...
that via Mama I might inherit the dukedom.
Mama scraped and saved...
and sent me to the best school
she could afford.
One little incident of my school days
occurs to me as amusing...
in relation to my present situation.
Lionel Holland.
What is the Sixth Commandment?
Come, come now.
Someone else then.
I know, please, Miss Waterman.
Louis Mazzini. Tell him.
- "Thou shalt not kill. "

- Quite right, Louis.
The Sixth Commandment is
"Thou shalt not kill. "
"No, in those days...
"I never had any trouble
with the Sixth Commandment.
As to the seventh, I was hardly of an age
to concern myself with it. "
Although I was old enough
to be in love.
So Sibella enters my story.
Sibella and her brother, Graham,
were my only close friends...
and we grew up together.
In their case, Mama relaxed her objection
to my associating with the local children.
At least their father, Dr. Hallward,
was a professional man.
Louis, we must think very carefully
about your future.
Well, it should be quite easy
to get a job.
Not a job, dear. A career.
I had hoped for Cambridge for you.
The D'Ascoynes always go to Trinity.
And then, perhaps, the diplomatic.
But I'm afraid it's no use
looking as high as that.
However, when you've
passed your examination...
that should equip you for a start
in one of the professions.
People of quite good family go into
the professions nowadays, I understand.
Now, who do we know
who could help us?
We don't really know anyone,
except the family, and they don't know us.
The least we can do
is try once more.
I shall write
to Lord Ascoyne D'Ascoyne.
He can surely do something
in that bank of his.

Bank, Mama? Is that a profession?
This is a private bank, Louis, dear.
They don't pass money over the counter.
The letter was duly dispatched...
and this time we did get an answer.
"Madam, I am instructed
by Lord Ascoyne D'Ascoyne...
"to inform you that he is not aware
of your son's existence...
as a member
of the D'Ascoyne family. "
Signed by his secretary.
It's very stupid of him - of them all -
not to admit your existence...
when one day you might be
It's a very big "might," Mama.
There must be at least 12 people
before me...
to say nothing of the ones
who haven't been born yet.
Stranger things have happened.
I don't wish to be unchristian,
but in view of their attitude...
I could almost wish those 12 people
should all die tomorrow.
All except one, Mama.
Because you must be duchess
It will have to be a job, not a career,
after all, Mama.
I'm afraid so, Louis.
A D'Ascoyne in trade.
Did poor Mama's silly dreaming...
plant in my brain some seed
which was afterwards to grow...
into the most sensational
criminal endeavor of the century?
If so, I was not conscious of it
at the time...
for there were things
of more immediate concern.
Even potential dukes have to eat.
Mr. Perkins,
our lodger for nearly 15 years...
did his best to be helpful.

He was employed as shopwalker
in a local drapery store...
and found employment for me there.
became what was known
as a general assistant at the drapery.
This humiliation continued
for two dispiriting years.
And then one day, Mama,
who had broken her glasses...
and could not afford
to have them mended...
was knocked down by a tram
near Clapham Junction...
and fatally injured.

- Louis.

- Yes, Mama.

I should like to be buried
in the family vault.
Yes, Mama.

I wrote to the duke
informing him of Mama's dying wish.
His reply
was the curtest possible refusal.
Standing by Mama's poor little grave
in that hideous suburban cemetery...
I made an oath that I would revenge
the wrongs her family had done her.
It was no more than
a piece of youthful bravado...
but it was one of those acorns
from which great oaks are destined to grow.
Even then I went so far
as to examine the family tree...
and prune it
to just the living members.
But what could I do to hurt them?
What could I take from them...
except, perhaps, their lives?
I indulged for a moment
in a fantasy of all 12 of them...
being wiped out simultaneously
at a family reunion...
by my unseen hand...
of the penniless boy from Clapham being

miraculously transplanted to his birthright.

I even speculated

as to how I might contrive it.

But there were

other more urgent problems.

Mama's tiny income came from an annuity

and had died with her.

The problem of how to live

on 25 shillings a week was solved for me...

by an invitation from Dr. Hallward

to lodge with them.

It was galling to accept the status

of a poor relation...

but the certainty of seeing Sibella every day

was too tempting to be refused.

Louis, I'm so glad you accepted.

It was my idea, you know.

- I've brought you something.

- Oh, Louis, you shouldn't have.

You can't possibly afford it.

Oh, what a bother. There's Lionel.

See you at supper.

The next few years

brought many such heartbreaks...

but they also brought promotion-

laces and ribbons

at 30 shillings a week...

fabrics at 32 and six.

Finally, ladies'underwear at 35.

I decided that

if I was to be a draper...

at least I would not be

a suburban draper.

So I migrated to a large modern store which

had just been opened in the West End...

at the gigantic salary

of two pounds a week.

Every lunchtime I went to see

how my inheritance was proceeding.

Sometimes the deaths column

brought good news.

Sometimes

the births column brought bad.

The advent of twin sons to the duke

was a terrible blow.

Fortunately,

an epidemic of diphtheria...

restored the status quo

almost immediately...

and even brought me a bonus

in the shape of the duchess.

That summer

the Hallwards gave a party.

- Good evening, Sibella.

- Hello, Louis.

- You do look nice.

- So do you.

- Doesn't he, Lionel?

- Very.

Emboldened by her kindness to me...

I made a decision

I'd been toying with for some time.

Well, that's the last of them,

thank heaven.

- What an evening.

- I thought it was a very nice evening.

It may have been for you.

It's awful being a woman,

having to dance with a lot of dull men...

laugh at their jokes

while they're treading on your feet.

- I didn't tread on your feet.

- You're not dull.

- And your jokes are funny.

- Thank you.

- Sibella?

- Mm-hmm?

Sibella, will you marry me?

Louis, of course not. Do get up.

You may be half Italian,

but even so...

you do look silly

playing the stage lover like that.

- Oh, I look silly, do I?

- Yes. Very.

Do I still look silly?

Now, will you marry me?

No.

- Why not?
- Because I just said I'd marry Lionel.
- You can't.
- Why not?
Well, he's a clod.
He's not a gentleman.
Listen to who's talking.
Whoever heard of a gentleman
blacking the lodger's boots?
That's a wicked thing to say.
Just because Mama was poor.
Lionel will be very rich one day.
- I might be a duke one day.
- Pigs might fly.
No, I might. Really, I might.
You see, Mama was the daughter-
Oh, yes. I know.
Well, when you are a duke...
you just come and show me your crown,
or whatever it's called...
and then I'll feel awfully silly,
won't I?
Yes, you will.
Anyhow, I'm going to marry Lionel,
and now I'm going to bed.
You will.
If there was a precise moment...
at which my insubstantial dreaming
took on solid purpose...
that was it.
The D'Ascoynes had not only
wronged my mother...
they were the obstacle between me
and all that I wanted.
The more I thought of them,
these people whom I had studied...
until I knew their names and histories
as well as I knew my own...
the more they became monsters
of arrogance and cruelty...
whose only function in the world
was to deprive me of my birthright.
only as Mama had painted it.
To pass in through

that magnificent gateway...
on visitor's day
at a cost of sixpence...
was a humiliating experience...
but I forced myself to undergo it.
I wanted a closer view of the target
at which I had determined to aim.
I little expected to catch
a glimpse of the bull's-eye.
Excuse me, sir.
There were then some eight people
between me and the dukedom...
all seemingly equally out of reach.
It is so difficult to make a neat job
of killing people...
with whom one is not
on friendly terms.
I was almost resigned
to its being an impossibility...
when one afternoon, at a moment when
my thoughts were furthest from the subject...
fate took a hand.
If you've nothing better,
those will have to do.
These London shops
are so far behind Paris.
Parcel them up quickly,
and we'll take them with us.
- Charge them to my account.
- Yes, sir. What is the name?
Mr. Ascoyne D'Ascoyne.
At last, I was face to face with one of them.
This was the son
of Lord Ascoyne D'Ascoyne, the banker...
whose refusal to help me
towards a more dignified career...
had led to my present
ignominious occupation.
What right had this arrogant puppy...
to be standing on the other side
of the counter ordering me about?
In my excitement and anger,
I listened openly to their conversation.
I've booked rooms

at Cruickshanks' at Maidenhead.
We'll go down late
on Friday afternoon.
Are you sure it's safe?
It's the most discreet place.
In fact, anonymous.
Hey, you. Get on with that parcel,
and never mind what we're talking about.
Don't you dare touch me like that!
I'm not interested
in your idiotic conversation.
If you want to add impertinence
to your eavesdropping...
we'll soon see about that.
The upshot was
that I was dismissed on the spot.
I decided to repay him in kind...
by dismissing him with equal
suddenness from this world.
His conversation had told me where I could
probably find the opportunity to kill him.
Dr. Hallward's dispensary
had provided me with a means.
With the week's wages
I had received in lieu of notice...
I invested in suitable apparel
for a weekend at Maidenhead.
It was possible
they might remember me...
but I thought it unlikely...
shop assistants being commonly
regarded as an inferior race...
who never emerged
from the other side of the counter.
I decided
to take the bull by the horns.
Forgive me. I wonder if you could
oblige me with a match.

- Certainly.
- Thank you.
- Haven't we met before somewhere?
- I don't think so.

Funny, 'cause I could have sworn
I knew your face.

- Were you at Monte last year?
- The year before.
Ah, that must be it.
Won't you join me?
Thank you. Not this evening.
We are rather tired.
I deprecated their retiring so early...
but it was hard to blame them...
for weekends, like life, are short.
The next morning,
I waited for them to come down-
and the next afternoon.
They didn't appear the whole day.
Nor the morning after.
I no longer felt sentimental.
The weekend was nearly over,
and I could hardly expect providence...
to offer me
so promising a chance again.
I was in a state of desperation...
and I followed them,
hoping for I knew not what.
I had the poison with me, but they
hadn't even taken a picnic basket.
It was possible, however, that they might
stop somewhere for refreshment.
They did stop shortly afterwards...
but not for that.
Judging by past experience,
they would be there for hours.
The rest followed automatically.
I had fortunately learned to swim
at the Clapham Municipal Baths...
though I never had occasion
to try it underwater.
I had no wish to surface
under their noses...
though I doubt if they would have
noticed me even if I had.
It was beautifully timed.
I was sorry about the girl...
but found some relief in the reflection that
she had presumably, during the weekend...
already undergone

a fate worse than death.
I decided to defer consideration
of where and how I should next strike...
until my nerves
were thoroughly restored.
It must be remembered
that I was very young...
and, furthermore,
I am not naturally callous.
I suddenly conceived a brilliant idea.
I would write a carefully phrased letter
of condolence to old Ascoyne D'Ascoyne.
It would be an agreeable feeling of revenge
for his cruelty to Mama.
And, further, it had not failed to occur to me
that there was, at the moment...
a vacancy in the banking house.
Ascoyne D'Ascoyne duly rose to the bait.
Please be seated, Mr. Mazzini.
How do you do?
My late son.
A great loss.
He was young and foolish...
but I believe had he been spared
until his maturity-
It was my consciousness of that which led me
to presume to tender you my sympathy.
I am glad that you did so.
A loss so tragic serves to put lesser matters
in their proper perspective.
If I remember rightly, Mr. Mazzini...
some years ago
I received a communication...
from your mother.
My late mother.
Hello, Louis.
You look very pleased with yourself.
- So do you.
- I have news.
- So have I.
- What is it?
No, yours first.
Lionel and I have fixed a date
for our wedding, in two months' time.

My congratulations.

No, I should congratulate him.

I compliment you.

- Now yours.

- Nothing as exciting as yours.

I went today to see Lord Ascoyne D'Ascoyne,
my cousin, you know.

He has a private banking house
in the city.

He offered me employment at once
at five pounds a week...
with excellent prospects
for promotion.

Louis, I'm so glad for you.

- Louis, do you remember?

- What?

Once, in this room...

after my party-

- I kissed you.

- Yes.

And you were horrible to me.

Yes.

I made fun about you
being related to the D'Ascoynes.

I'm sorry.

You'll take it more seriously now?

Yes.

Louis, kiss me...

to show you've forgiven me.

No, it would be wrong.

You're pledged to Lionel.

I behaved like a cad that night.

I like you when you behave
like a cad.

You're a person who must dance
through life, Sibella...

and I hope Lionel won't tread
on your feet too often.

My new employment was humble enough...

but I had to test the rungs of the ladder
before I could climb it.

- Oh.

- Well -

- That's very nice.

- Oh -

The next candidate for
removal seemed to be young Henry D'Ascoyne...
24 years old, recently married...
as yet, without issue.
I had quite an accumulation by now
of D'Ascoyne data...
culled from newspapers
and periodicals...
and I looked through it
for a possible approach to Henry.
I found one.
I bought the necessary equipment,
secondhand...
and bicycled down
the following weekend.
I had studied a couple of photographic
manuals during the week...
and found that, in practice,
the mysteries of the camera...
demand a little more
than ordinary intelligence...
plus the ability to judge
the subject upside-down.
It was thus, indeed,
that I first saw Henry D'Ascoyne.
My method of approach proved
an instantaneous success.
Excuse me.
Isn't that a Thornton Pickard?
Yes. Are you a photographer?
Dabble in it.
Got a Sanger Shepherd.
- A Sanger Shepherd?
- Nice little camera.
Focal plane shutter,
rapid rectilinear and all that.
Look here. Why not come up
to my house, and I'll show it to you?
Well, I'd be most interested.
- My name's D'Ascoyne, by the way.
- Mine is Mazzini.
He seemed a very pleasant fellow...
and I regretted that our acquaintanceship

must be so short.

Had one of the potting sheds
fixed up as a darkroom.

Couldn't have suited better
if it had been built for it.

Had the equipment
sent down from town.

And I must say the results
have been absolutely top-hole.

I'll show you some quarter-plates
I've taken about the village.

There we are.

Absolutely lightproof, except for this.

Everything to hand - developing dishes here,
toning bath here, whole-plate enlarger.

- Perfect.

- Not too bad, is it?

Talking of the village, by the by,
I don't know if you're thinking...
of sending any of your efforts here
to some periodical...

but there's just one thing.

I'm sure you're a good fellow,
or I wouldn't like to ask.

Ask what?

I'd be most grateful if you'd keep back
that last plate you exposed.

- The inn? But it was delightful.

- Yes.

The fact is, my wife has views
about such places...

so I never go in them,
you understand?

Naturally, I wouldn't dream
of embarrassing you.

I knew you were a good fellow.

Suppose we drink on it?

Unless you have views yourself,
of course.

- None.

- Splendid.

What shall it be?

Sherry? Whiskey?

I think a small developer.

The mental picture of his
wife that I had formed from Henry's words...
left me unprepared for the charm
of the woman I was to meet.
She was as tall and slender as a lily
and as beautiful.
My dear, this is Mr. Mazzini.
He has a Thornton Pickard.
Mr. Mazzini, my wife.
I'm no photographer myself,
Mr. Mazzini...
but I share my husband's pleasure
in welcoming a fellow enthusiast.
- You'll take some sherry?
- Well, thank you, I -
My husband and I never touch alcohol,
but we see no reason, on that account...
to enforce our views on our guests.
Glass of sherry, Harwood.
I have some printing frames
out in the sun.
If you don't mind,
I'll just run out and see to them.
Have you been in the neighborhood long,
Mr. Mazzini?
A few hours only.
I was cycling through the village...
and felt compelled to stop
and make a study or two of the inn.
- It looked so charming.
- It does look charming.
But I'm afraid it's, by no means, an influence
for good in the lives of our people here.
The landlord
is a former coachman of ours.
I have spoken to him several times about
the amount of drinking that goes on there...
but he continues to allow it.
It is, after all, I suppose,
his livelihood.
I do not consider he has the right
to make a livelihood...
by exploiting the weaknesses
of his fellow men.

Put as you put it,
it does sound deplorable.

It is deplorable.

Will you excuse me a moment?

Harwood.

I could well understand
Henry's visits to the village inn...
and his stock of refreshments
in the darkroom.

Mrs. D'Ascoyne was beautiful,
but what a prig she was.

I wondered how
to ingratiate myself with her...
and decided to attack on her own ground
and with her own weapons.

I'm afraid we can offer you
only a simple luncheon, Mr. Mazzini.

You are most kind,
but I feel I should not intrude.

- It is no intrusion.

- I'm afraid it is.

- May I explain?

- Please do.

It was only when your husband
told me his name...
that I realized that I'd come by chance
into the most embarrassing situation.

My mother was a member
of the D'Ascoyne family.

She married,
as they thought, beneath her.

And from that day,
they refused to recognize her...
or my existence.

I feel that, although in the circumstances
you might hesitate to say so to my face...
you and your husband would prefer
not to receive me at your table.

Perhaps you would be good enough
to explain matters to your husband for me.

I shall, naturally,
leave the neighborhood at once.

Mr. Mazzini, please sit down.

Oh.

You have exhibited
the most delicate feelings.
I know nothing of the history
to which you refer...
but I have often felt that the attitude
of my husband's family...
has failed to move with the times -
that they think too much
of the rights of nobility...
and too little of its duties.
The very honesty of your behavior
would appear to me to prove them wrong.
Was Lord Tennyson far from the mark

when he wrote:

"Kind hearts are more than coronets...
and simple faith than Norman blood"?
I hope you will stay to luncheon.
Oh, in that case,
I shall be delighted and honored.
My impersonation
of a man of sterling character...
was such a resounding success...
that Mrs. D'Ascoyne invited me to spend
the following Saturday-to-Monday with them.
When I returned to the somewhat
contrasting atmosphere of Clapham...
I found the house in a whirl with preparation
for Sibella's wedding to Lionel...
which was to take place next day.
Before going to bed that evening,
I wandered into the old nursery...
to fetch a book I'd left there.
Penny for them.
Oh, hello, Louis.
You're not looking as radiantly happy as young
females in your situation are supposed to look.
I was just thinking of all the fun
we've had in this room.
- You and I and Graham.
- And Lionel.
Yes, and Lionel.
Oh, Louis, I don't want to marry Lionel!
- Why not?

- He's so dull!

I must admit he exhibits the most
extraordinary capacity for middle age...
that I've ever encountered
in a young man of 24.

However, it's a bit late in the day
to think of that, isn't it?

I know.

That only makes it worse.

- I always told you you should marry me.

- I know.

That makes it worse too.

You look more lovely today
than I've ever seen you.

You're a lucky man, Lionel.

Take my word for it.

I could not help feeling
that even Sibella's capacity for lying...
was going to be taxed to the utmost.

Time had brought me revenge
on Lionel.

And as the Italian proverb says:

"Revenge is a dish which people of taste
prefer to eat cold. "

The following Saturday

I left London in the middle of the night...
and reached Henry's house
just before dawn.

It took a mere three minutes
to substitute petrol...
for the paraffin
in the darkroom lamp.

And I then repaired to a meadow
and took a few hours'sleep...
while awaiting the hour at which
I could reasonably arrive at the house.

The day dragged by
in an agony of suspense for me.

Henry took photograph
after photograph...

but seemed to have no urge whatever
to follow it up with a visit to the darkroom.

Bravo, Edith!

I began to fear

that he had suddenly taken the pledge.
I think I'll just go and develop these
before tea. Care to come?
I would, indeed, but I have
a slight headache - the sun, I think.
And I'm afraid the chemicals
wouldn't improve it.
Mr. Mazzini and I will have tea
under the tulip tree.
I've always found that
most beneficial for a headache.
I'm afraid Henry
will think me a poor enthusiast.
I sometimes think
that he is too great a one.
In a way, I am to blame for it.
Before we were married,
he had few interests.
He used to spend the greater part
of each day at his club.
I felt that such a life was unhealthy and
persuaded him to live here in the country.
I hoped that perhaps he would interest himself
in the welfare of our tenantry, as I do.
But he became interested in photography
on our honeymoon...
and since then it has become
the major preoccupation of his life.
- Mr. Mazzini.
- Yes.
I hope you will forgive my speaking to you
on a personal matter...
but it worries me that Henry
should spend so much time on his hobby...
that he has little left
for any more useful activity.
Am I right to let him
go on like this?
I could hardly point out
that Henry now had no time left...
for any kind of activity...
so I continued
to discuss his future.
He has never shown any wish

for a career in politics?

- None.

- Nor any other ambitions?

One only- to win a prize

at the Salon Photography in Brussels.

What is it?

They're just burning some leaves

at the bottom of the garden.

But they can't be at this time of year.

- Henry!

- No. You stay here.

Needless to say, I was too late.

The funeral service was held

prior to interment in the family vault.

Mrs. D'Ascoyne,

who had discerned in me...

a man of delicate sensibility

and high purpose...

asked me to accompany her

on the cross-country journey.

"To everything there is a season...

"and a time to every purpose

under the heaven.

A time to be born, and a time to die. "

The occasion

was interesting in that it provided me...

with my first sight

of the D'Ascoynes en masse.

Interesting and somewhat depressing...

for it emphasized

how far I had yet to travel.

There was the duke.

There was my employer,

Lord Ascoyne D'Ascoyne.

There was

Admiral Lord Horatio D'Ascoyne.

There was

General Lord Rufus D'Ascoyne.

There was Lady Agatha D'Ascoyne.

Shh!

And in the pulpit,

talking interminable nonsense...

the Reverend Lord Henry D'Ascoyne.

The life cut short was one...

rich in achievement and promise...
of service to humanity.
The D'Ascoynes
certainly appeared to have accorded...
with the tradition
of the landed gentry...
and sent the fool of the family
into the church.
Well, good-bye, my dear.
- Good-bye.
- No fretting now.
After all, one thing to be said -
we all have to come to it.
Great thing, you know, family vault like ours.
Constant reminder of one's heritage.
Now, take this new cremation nonsense.
Who wants to see his nearest and dearest
put in an incinerator?
I think, sir, Mrs. D'Ascoyne should leave.
The wind is turning cold.
As Mrs. D'Ascoyne thinks best.
Glad we had Cousin Henry
to take the service.
Boring old ass,
but it keeps the thing in the family.
People getting strange ideas these days.
Had a fellow write to me
not so long ago...
wanted to bury his mother here
from Tooting or somewhere.
Start letting strangers in,
the place will be full up.
No room for us, eh?
I privately promised him
that I would make it my business...
to see there was room for him.
Uncle Ethelred
is not the most tactful of men.
I could gladly have struck him.
Thank you for intervening
when you did.
The house will be so empty...
and yet he will be in it everywhere.
I find the thought of life there

hard to face.

Must you stay there?

A new environment -

I must...

for one reason if no other.

They would say I was running away,
that there was truth in all these rumors.

- Rumors?

- In the village.

There's been gossip.

They say that Henry drank in secret.

They even say that

that was the cause of the accident.

I'm sure that Henry would never have
professed one thing and practiced another.

I, too, am sure.

Otherwise,

I think I could not survive.

We have a long way to go.

Try to sleep a little.

Sleep does not come easily.

Please try.

Allow me.

I was conscious that a new obsession...
was about to join the one that I should wear
that Edith D'Ascoyne should wear that
of the duchess beside me.

Her dignity of bearing
at the worst moments of her grief...
had impressed me with the feeling
that here was a woman...

whose quality matched her beauty.

I resolved to embark
upon her courtship...

as soon as a decent period of mourning
should have elapsed.

Sibella? Yes, Sibella was pretty enough
in her suburban way.

And, indeed, there was no reason why we
shouldn't continue to meet on friendly terms.

But her face would have looked
rather out of place under a coronet.

That, sir, is a list of bills
due for redemption this week.

I've marked in red
those asking for renewal.
Aitcheson, yes.
Pole and Carter, I suppose so.
Knollis Limited, oh, no.
Redbank and Holland -
You have a friend there,
have you not?
An acquaintance.
I know Lionel Holland.
Would you say that he's sound?
I wouldn't say not, sir.
Hmm. Thank you.
- Mazzini.
- Yes, sir?
I've watched your progress here
with great care...
and have been gratified to note
that it has fully justified my judgment...
in inviting you into the firm.
In view of that, and in order that you
may be able to adopt a style of living...
befitting a member
of the D'Ascoyne family...
I have decided to appoint you
my private secretary...
at a salary of L500 per annum.
- Sir, I cannot begin to -
- Oh, please do not try.
I had intended that my son
should occupy the position.
I can only say that I will try
to make my occupancy of it...
worthy of his memory.
I left the Hallwards'house...
and took a bachelor apartment
in St. James's.
Clapham no longer held
Sibella's presence to compensate me...
for the tedious journey
between the suburbs and the city.
Anyhow, it would be vastly more
convenient for her to visit me here.
Now, let me have a look

at the beautiful Mrs. Holland.

- No, I think I prefer Miss Hallward.

- So do I.

Louis, it's very wrong of me
to visit you here.

- Why?

- A married woman calling on a bachelor?

A dangerous bachelor...

in his apartment.

I? Dangerous?

These things only become wrong
when people know about them.

This is a very discreet apartment.

That's why I chose it.

So that young women

could call on you in safety?

So that one young woman could.

How did you know she'd want to?

I hoped.

- How did you enjoy your honeymoon?

- Not at all.

Not at all?

Not at all.

- And how was Italy?

- Oh, impossible!

Every time I wanted to go shopping,
Lionel dragged me off to a church...
or picture gallery.

- Said he wanted to improve his mind.

- He has room to do so.

I should reprove you

for saying unkind things about him...
but I can't.

Louis, I think I've married
the most boring man in London.

- In England.

- In Europe!

Oh, the Italian men
are so handsome...

but I could never get away
from Lionel for a moment.

But I was forgetting -you're Italian.
Half.

Louis...

I can speak frankly to you.
Well, if not to me, to whom?
I shall go mad.
Already when he touches me,
I want to scream.
What am I doing?
You know very well.
You're playing with fire.
At least it warms me.
I must go.
Lionel's dining at home tonight.
Where is Lionel dining tomorrow night?
With some business acquaintances.
And where are you dining
tomorrow night?
Here?
Here.
Poor little imprisoned bird.
Well, she was welcome to come
and flutter her wings with me.
I could think of many more
disagreeable ways of killing time...
pending the arrival of the moment...
when the conventional decencies
would permit me...
to make my declaration to Edith.
As to the other undertaking,
I had not forgotten or forgiven...
the boredom of the sermon
at young Henry's funeral...
and I decided to promote
the Reverend Lord Henry D'Ascoyne...
to next place on the list.
I therefore assumed
the garb and character...
of a colonial bishop
spending his vacation...
making a collection of brass rubbings
from country churches.
Good evening, my lord.
It was, for a moment,
a shock to be addressed by my ecclesiastical title...
but I recovered quickly.
Good evening. I was just taking a rubbing

of this most interesting brass.
An ancestress of my dear late wife.
Allow me to introduce myself.

Henry D'Ascoyne,
rector of this parish.

Septimus Wilkinson,
bishop of Matabeleland.

I was spending my vacation taking a cycling
tour around your beautiful country churches.

- Ah! Have you noticed our clerestory?

- Cle -

Ah, exquisite!

- The corbels are very fine.

- Hmm.

Perhaps Your Lordship would permit me
to show you one or two other things...

in which we take a pride.

I should be most interested.

Our most notable features,
of course...

are the D'Ascoyne memorials.

Every member of the family...

to a cadet branch

of which I have the honor to belong...

is buried here in the family vault.

Here you will see

the first duke and his duchess.

The dead watching, as it were,
over the living.

The church is exceptionally
endowed also...

with items of architectural interest.

You will note that our chantry...

displays the crocketed

and finialed ogee...

which marks it

as very early perpendicular.

The bosses to the pendant
are typical.

And I always say...

that my west window...

has all the exuberance of Chaucer...

without, happily...

any of the concomitant crudities

of his period.

Hmm.

At last he did

as I had hoped and invited me to dinner.

The Reverend Lord Henry was not

one of those newfangled parsons...

who carry the principles of their vocation

uncomfortably into private life.

However,

he exhibited a polite interest...

in the progress of the Christian faith

in Matabeleland...

which I was at some difficulty

to satisfy.

The S.P.C.K. have provided us...

with a large number of copies

of the good book...

translated into Matabele.

But as none of the natives can read

even their own language -

- You speak Matabele yourself?

- Not as a native.

It would be most interesting...

to hear a sample of the language.

I'm afraid my Matabele

is a little rusty.

Oh, come, my lord.

Daniel cast into the lions' den,

for example.

Daniel -

It is a colloquial rendering, of course.

Most interesting.

My lord, the port is with you.

Oh.

- How do you find the wine?

- Admirable.

- Cockburn '69.

- Oh.

No finer year,

in my view.

My doctor, though,

is of a different opinion.

And what does he favor?

Abstinence.

Would you care for a cigar?

Thank you.

Yes.

He's continually warning me
about the state of my arteries.

But I say to him...

"What possible harm can there be...

"in one glass of an evening...

or even two?"

What harm, indeed.

- You do not condemn me then?

- Not in the least.

If I may say so...

without disrespect to my superiors...

your visit has

brought me something...

which I could not expect

from any churchman in this country.

I surmised, correctly, as it proved...

that Lord Henry's doctor would assume

that he had succumbed to a surfeit of port...

and would politely ascribe

death to a heart attack.

On my return to London,

I decided to proceed methodically...

with the elimination of

the remaining minor obstacles.

Lady Agatha D'Ascoyne was a pioneer

in the campaign for women's suffrage.

With the inconvenient consequence

that her public appearances...

were invariably made under

the watchful eyes of the metropolitan police.

When she was not making

public appearances...

she was in prison

and still more inaccessible.

- In fact, before I could learn

of a favorable opportunity-

I had to join the movement myself.

Secret plans had been made

for Lady Agatha...

to celebrate her latest

release from Holloway...

by a shower of leaflets over
Whitehall and the West End.

Anchor.

I shot an arrow in the air...

she fell to Earth

in Berkeley Square.

Admiral Lord Horatio D'Ascoyne

presented a more difficult problem.

He scarcely ever set foot ashore...

and I was beginning to feel that this task

was beyond even my ingenuity...

when he was conveniently

involved in a naval disaster...

which arose from a combination

of natural obstinacy...

and a certain confusion of mind-

unfortunate in one of his rank.

Bring her to port.

- Surely you mean starboard, sir.

- Port!

Both ships sank almost immediately...

though, fortunately,

all hands were saved-

save one.

Admiral Lord Horatio,

obstinate to the last...

insisted on going down

with his ship.

General Lord Rufus D'Ascoyne,

on the other hand...

who never tired of demonstrating

how he had fought...

the most calamitous campaign

of the South African War...

was a fairly easy proposition.

At that moment,

the concealed enemy...

emerged from behind the kopje.

I held our guns' fire until

we could see the whites of their eyes.

Then I gave the order. "Fire!"

Boom, boom, boom.

It seemed appropriate

that he who had lived amidst the cannon's roar...

should die explosively.
I therefore concealed
in a pot of caviar...
a simple but powerful
homemade bomb...
and through the post,
I sent the caviar to the general.
I pretended to be deceived by the feint...
and sent our horse to meet it.
At that moment, the concealed enemy
emerged from behind the kopje.
I held our guns' fire...
till we could see
the whites of their eyes.
Used to get a lot of this stuff
in the Crimea.
One thing the Russkies do really well.
Not an atom of him was left.
One could almost believe there was a curse
on our unfortunate family, Mazzini.
Indeed, sir, one could.
I don't know if you realize
how close this series of tragedies...
has brought you
to the succession.
- I had not actually given the matter any thought, sir.
- Then it's time that you did.
Do you not realize that you are
heir presumptive to the dukedom?
That is to say, in the event of
the present duke dying without issue...
I alone intervene
between you and the title.
And I am an old man.
I have never really recovered from
the first of these calamities.
You mean I might become
I mean that you almost
certainly will.
In view of that,
I feel it would be more fitting...
that you should cease to be
an employee here -
- Oh.

- and become instead my partner.
I am most deeply grateful and honored.
If you'll come round here,
I will make everything very clear to you.
Uh, had she lived, your mother, of course,
would have succeeded before you.
One of my first tasks as partner...
was to interview Lionel,
who came cap-
or rather,
silk hat in hand.
To save time, I presume you have called
to ask the renewal of your bill?
The fact is, old boy,
we sold short...
and the market hasn't
dropped as we expected.
I feel entitled
to point out that we here...
regard our function as the encouragement
of constructive investment...
and not the financing
of mere gambling transactions.
Ah -
It would have delighted me to refuse him.
However, a bankrupt Lionel
could hardly have continued...
to support Sibella
in her extravagances...
and I had no wish
to do so myself.
Very well. We will renew...
at three and a half percent.
I judged that
the time was now ripe to make a move...
in the matter
of Edith D'Ascoyne.
It's becoming cold.
Shall we go in?
I know why you shivered just now.
It was not because
you were cold.
No.
I couldn't help remembering.

I know.

But do you try to forget?

- I may sound harsh, but believe me -

- Please.

Not there.

Because it was Henry's chair.

It hasn't been used since that day.

Nothing of his.

Everything is just as he left it -

his writing desk, his clothes.

I cannot bear that

it should be otherwise.

You want this house to be a shrine.

You're wrong.

Shrines are not meant to house the living.

I have always respected you -

your principles, your courage -

above any woman I've ever met.

It is your duty

to yourself and to others -

to Henry even -

to live again

in the present, in the future.

What future is there for me?

I am now going to say

something presumptuous.

You must order me

from your house if you wish.

It is this:

If you should ever feel that

the constant support of a devoted admirer...

would be of assistance to you...

I should be most honored

if you would permit me to...

offer you my hand in marriage.

Mr. Mazzini.

This is a shock.

I'm most touched.

Most grateful, but...

I could not consider

even the possibility of remarrying.

I have spoken too boldly

and too soon.

Please regard what I have said merely
as something to draw upon...
should you ever feel so inclined.
Sibella was waiting for me when I got back.
I was pleased to see her,
for while I never admired Edith...
as much as when
I was with Sibella...
I never longed for Sibella
as much as when I was with Edith.
I'm afraid I'm late.
Have you been bored?

No.
I've been looking into the fire
and thinking.

- What about?

- Oh.

How we used to roast chestnuts
round the other fire...
and what a lot has happened since.
Such as?

How you told me not to marry Lionel
because you might be a duke one day...
and how I laughed at you.
And how I married Lionel.
And now you really nearly are a duke.
We're much better off
as we are, you and I.
It's all very well for you to say that.
You're not married to Lionel.

We see each other
when we want to.

We're not obliged to see each other
when we don't want to.

We don't see each other
as often as I'd like to.

- You've been away the whole weekend.

- I had to go.

- Where?

- To see Mrs. D'Ascoyne...

the widow of that cousin
of mine who was killed.

All your cousins seem to get killed.

I really wouldn't be in the least surprised

if you'd murdered them all.

- Oh.

- How clumsy of me.

- Whatever made you say that?

- Just silliness.

Well, if you promise not to tell anyone,

I'll let you in to my guilty secret.

I did murder them all.

I've suspected it

for a long time.

- What's she like?

- Who?

- Mrs. D'Ascoyne.

- Oh, she's, uh, tall, slender-

- Beautiful?

- Yes, I suppose some people would call her beautiful.

- Would you?

- I suppose so. I never really thought about that.

What would you say

if she asked you about me?

I'd say that you were

a perfect combination of imperfections.

I'd say that your nose

was just a little too short...

your mouth just a little too wide...

but that yours was a face

that a man could see in his dreams...

for the whole of his life.

I'd say that you were vain, selfish...

cruel, deceitful.

I'd say that you were adorable.

I'd say that you were... Sibella.

What a pretty speech.

I mean it.

Come and say it to me again.

I'd say your nose

was just a little too short...

and your mouth -yes, your mouth -

just a little too wide.

Shortly afterwards, my employer had a stroke.

There was little

that could be done...

and the doctor gave him a month,

at the most, to live.

I was glad,
after all his kindness to me...
that I should not
have to kill the old man.
Soon the only obstacle
between me and my inheritance...
would be the duke himself.
I could lay no plan
for disposing of him...
as the life he led within those great
stone walls was a closed book to me.
I was gloomily examining
the problem for the hundredth time...
as I awaited one day the expected arrival
of Sibella at my apartments.

- Good afternoon, Mr. Mazzini.

- Mrs. D'Ascoyne.!

I was passing
through St. James's...
and thought I would take
the opportunity to call on you.

Was that wise?

Discreet, I mean?

There are some conventions which must be
governed by individual circumstance.

Surely it is safe for a woman
to visit a man of your reputation.

It is of your reputation
that I'm thinking.

Without being inhospitable, I would be
happier if your visit were not a long one.

I appreciate the scrupulousness
of your motives.

- I have, anyhow, only one important matter to speak of.

- That is?

I have thought a great deal about
what you said at our last meeting...
and I have tried to think
what Henry's wishes would be.

I remember he said to me once...

"You have too much good in you, Edith,
for one man.

I sometimes wish that others
could have a share of it. "

I have reconsidered
the offer you made to me...
thank you again for it,
and accept it gladly.
You rob me of words.
I think, however, we should make
no announcement for three months, at least.
As you think best.
In these, uh, new circumstances...
I think it more than ever desirable
that your unconventional...
though in its purpose delightful,
visit should be cut short.
If your attention as a husband is equal
of your consideration as a friend...
I shall have made
a most fortunate decision.
Do you not think, though, that perhaps
Uncle Ethelred, as head of the family...
should be told at once?
Perhaps so.
Yes, I'll write to him.
Good-bye, Louis.
Good-bye, Edith.
You leave behind you
the happiest man in London.
This was not a piece of news...
which I was looking forward
to breaking to Sibella.
She had no rights in the matter...
but women have a disconcerting ability
to make scenes out of nothing...
and to prove themselves injured
when they themselves are at fault.
Anyhow, I had three months' grace
before I need face that storm.
Have you taken to using
attar of roses?
- No. Why?
- Thought I could smell it.
I met such a beautiful woman
on the stairs just now.
I expect that would be
Mrs. D'Ascoyne.

- What was she doing here?

- She called in to see me.

- What about?

- Business. Family business.

Let me get you a glass of sherry.

A day or so later, I received a letter from Lionel.

He requested an interview with me
at his house on a matter of some delicacy.

I was somewhat perturbed,
for nine times out of 10...

what is referred to
as a matter of some delicacy...

is, in point of fact,
one of extreme indelicacy.

Two days later

I made the tedious journey to Bayswater.

It was typical of Lionel that he should
live on the wrong side of the park.

Hello, old boy. Have a drink.

No, thank you.

Never during the day.

You don't mind if I do?

Keep out the cold.

I was about to remark
on the warmth of the day.

- Just a joke, old boy.

- Ah, yes.

- Sit down, old boy.

- No, thank you. I would rather stand.

A warm day, isn't it?

For the time of the year, I mean.

Distinctly.

It's also a very busy day.

May we proceed to the matter
about which you wished to see me?

Right. A matter of some delicacy,
actually, old boy.

But I said to myself,

"Louis's a sport and a man of the world.

- Always been a sport. "

- Thank you.

Always admired the sporting way in which
you took to Sibella marrying me and not you.

Some fellows would have

taken it very differently.
But "May the best man win,"
you said.
And when I won,
you behaved like a gentleman.
So I thought as...
you being keen on Sibella
at one time...
and you and I are old friends,
I - I'd ask you to help us.
Help you?
I told you some time back
business hasn't been going so well.
Since then, it's gone worse.
I'm bankrupt.
So I say to myself,
"Why not talk to my old pal, Louis Mazzini...
"who we used to have such jolly times with
round the old nursery fire...
roasting chestnuts. "
I'm afraid your memory is deceiving you.
By no stretch of imagination could you and I
be described as ever having been pals.
If I remember correctly, we detested each other
cordially from the first day we met...
with a detestation
which increased with our years.
Always thought of you as a pal.
Always have done.
That's why I said to myself-
It's only fair to warn you that any further expense
of breath on this subject would be a waste.
You know what you're doing?
- Condemning me to death.
- What do you mean?
Only one way out for me:
do away with myself.
If you knew how absurd
these histrionics sounded -
I'm insured. At least the little woman
will be provided for.
- Oh, don't be ridiculous.
- Louis, I appeal to you.
Not for my sake,

but for the sake of the little woman.
Please rise from that absurd position.
All I can say is
I th-think you're a cad.
A selfish cad.
Let me remind you of a little
not-so-ancient history.
When I was a draper's assistant and you
a rich father's son, you showed me no kindness.
Now our positions are reversed,
and you come whining to me for favors.
Draper's assistant.
That's right.
Rotten little counterjumper.
That's all you are.
Very high and mighty now...
but your mother married
an Italian organ-grinder.
- Stand up.
- Huh?
I said stand up.
I will not tolerate hearing
my mother's name on your coarse tongue.
If you take my advice, you'll go
and put your head under a cold tap.
I refuse to demean myself
by fighting with a drunken oaf.
There seemed no point
in prolonging this vulgar brawl...
so I returned to my apartment.
I took a bath and decided to relax
for half an hour...
and efface this disagreeable scene
from my memory.
I was not allowed to relax for long.
Sibella.
Louis, I'm sorry to worry you
when you must be so busy...
but I have a piece
of important news.
Bad news.
I thought you ought to know it at once.
Lionel has found out about us.
About me coming here.

- Really?

- Yes.

Oh.

I had the most dreadful scene
with him last night.

Well, I suppose even Lionel isn't
stupid enough to be deceived forever.

You won't take it so calmly
when you hear.

He's going to start
divorce proceedings.

How very unsophisticated of him.

There's only one possible
way out that I can see.

- And that is?

- Lionel is still in love with me.

My happiness

is all he cares about.

He might do the gentlemanly thing
and let me divorce him.

If?

If I were in a position to explain to him...
that otherwise he will be jeopardizing
the social position not only of the future duke...
but also the future

I see.

You're a clever little thing, Sibella,
but not quite clever enough.

What do you mean?

I mean that not only do I know
that you're blackmailing me -

an ugly word,

but the only appropriate one -

but I also know

that you're bluffing me.

Call my bluff and see.

I will.

Let me explain. It must have seemed to you
that you hold a very strong hand...

but - a very important "but" -

it so happens that I hold a card which

you did not even know to be in the pack.

Who's bluffing now?

It so happens that I was with Lionel

less than an hour ago.
And it was transparently clear
from his demeanor and conversation...
that he had not the faintest suspicion
that you and I had any relationship...
other than that of-
as he would probably put it-
old pals who used to roast chestnuts
together round the jolly old nursery fire.
So, while thanking you
for the honor that you've done me...
I must decline your offer
because I have other arrangements...
which make it impossible for me
to accept it.
Namely?
I'm shortly going to announce
my engagement to Mrs. D'Ascoyne.
May I say that I think
you've behaved despicably?
Has it ever occurred to you, Sibella,
that we serve each other right, you and I?
Would it be asking too much of your manners
to escort me to the door?
I had suspected
that to confide our secret to the duke...
might be an adroit maneuver,
and I was proved correct...
for it produced an invitation for Edith and me
to spend a few days at the castle.
I must confess that I could not suppress
an agreeable sensation of triumph...
as I approached
the castle gateway...
in circumstances so different
from those in which I had last done so.
It was just an informal
little house party.
Our fellow guests were Lady Redpole
and her daughter Maud...
who most suitably resembled
nothing so much as a red poll cow...
and had little more
conversational ability.

- Did you go to the opera this season?

- No.

In the afternoon,

Ethelred invited me to inspect the castle.

It was pleasant to stand

on the battlements...

and know that the acres

which stretched as far as the eye could see...

would soon be mine.

And it amused me to cover much the same

ground as that of my sixpenny tour.

I had never been in a building

so lavishly equipped...

with the instruments

of violent death.

Feel the weight of that.

Our ancestors must have

been fine men, Louis.

They seemed, however, ill-adapted...

to the discreet requirements

of 20th-century homicide.

And the end of the day found my host

still intact and myself still without a plan.

Beautiful woman, Edith.

You're a lucky fellow, Louis.

I never cease to be conscious of that.

- Thank you.

- What do you think of Maud?

Uh, charming girl, though perhaps at times

her conversation is a little, uh, lacking in sparkle.

Dullest woman

I ever met in my life.

Plain too.

But good breeding stock.

Good breeding stock,

the Redpoles.

And they litter a very high

proportion of boys.

Do I gather you to mean -

Spoke to old Lady Redpole

this afternoon.

Only too glad to get the girl

off her hands.

My congratulations.

Duty to the family, really.
And when does the, uh,
union take place?
Very soon.
I'm not growing any younger.
Mightn't get a son the first time.
Quiet wedding, I thought.
Maud's hardly the type
for St. Margaret's.
We shall honeymoon on the Riviera
and then go on to Italy afterwards.
No sense inflicting her
on one's friends.
When she's got a family,
that'll keep her out of the way.
This news threw me into such distress of mind...
that, had I had poison
in my possession...
I would probably have administered it
to Ethelred there and then...
and chanced
the consequent inquiries.
One thing was clear-
If I did not succeed in disposing of him...
during this present visit
to the castle...
I was likely to see the ruin
of my whole campaign.
My best wishes
for a successful outcome.
The next morning
I went out shooting with Ethelred...
or rather,
to watch Ethelred shooting...
for my principles will not allow me
to take a direct part in blood sports.
- Been round the traps this morning, Hoskins?
- Not yet, Your Grace.
Sounds as if we've bagged one there.
Ah. Been losing so much game lately,
we've started setting the mantraps again.
Hoskins is now going to thrash you.
Then he'll let you go.
Let this be a lesson to you

not to poach on my land.

That'll do.

Keep moving them around, Hoskins,
or they'll tell each other where they are.

Yes, Your Grace.

- I thought mantraps were illegal.

- They are.

What happens

if he tells the police?

He comes up before the bench for poaching,
gets six months in jail.

If he keeps his mouth shut,
he just gets a few days in bed.

Which would you choose?

Only way to deal with
these ruffians, I assure you.

Oh. I must have dropped my cigarette case
back there. I'll catch you up.

- Find it?

- Yes, thanks.

Might have another walk round
this afternoon, if you feel like it.

That would be
most pleasant.

After luncheon we went out
to massacre a few more unfortunate birds.

- Listen.

- What is it?

I thought I heard something,
like someone running through the bracken.

Another poaching ruffian!

Come on!

There was someone here. Look.

Blast!

Louis, get me out of this.

Hurry up, man.

- Have you gone mad?

- Be quiet, Ethelred.

I want to talk to you
for a minute.

If you make a noise,
I shall blow your head off at once.

By the time anyone
has heard the shot...

I shall be running back toward the castle,
shouting for help.
I shall say that you
stepped on the trap...
and that your gun went off
accidentally as it fell.
So be quiet.
To spare you as much pain
as possible...
I'll be brief.
When I've finished,
I shall kill you.
You'll be the sixth D'Ascoyne
that I've killed.
You want to know why?
In return for what
the D'Ascoynes did to my mother.
Because she married for love
instead of for rank or money or land...
they condemned her to a life
of poverty and slavery...
in a world with which
they had not equipped her to deal.
You yourself refused
to grant her dying wish...
which was to be buried
When I saw her poor little coffin
slide underground...
saw her exiled in death
as she'd been in life...
I swore to have my revenge
on your intolerable pride.
That revenge
I am just about to complete.
It's clear that you are insane.
Give me that gun at once.
No.
From here, I think, the wound should look
consistent with the story that I shall tell.
Help!
Help! Help!
And so Ethelred...
duly came to his place in the family vault.
There were few D'Ascoynes

left to mourn him...
for the shortest possible period...
having expired of shock on hearing
that he had succeeded to the title.
And so... I became
Fortunately, the ninth duke
had found time before he expired...
to make a will bequeathing to me
his interests in the business.
You may remove that.
A day or two later,
an affecting little feudal ceremony took place...
to welcome me into residence
at the castle.
And I promise you
that my first consideration...
and that of Mrs. D'Ascoyne, who has
done me the honor to consent to be my bride...
will be the welfare of the estate
and of the people who live on it.
God bless you all.
Long live His Grace.!
Long live His Grace.
Pennyman, Your Grace,
from Sprockett's Farm.
Mrs. Pennyman.
My son, Tom,
from Sprockett's Farm.
Mr. Wyvold,
from Sprockett's Farm.
Sprockett's Farm?
No, Your Grace.
From Scotland Yard.
Scotland Yard?
A matter of some delicacy.
Follow me, please.
The blow was so sudden
that I found it hard to collect my thoughts.
Which of them could it be?
Young Ascoyne?
Henry? Ethelred?
The parson?
The general?
Lady Agatha?

Or could it be all of them?

- Now.

- I am.

- I am Detective Inspector Burgoyne...

of the Criminal

Investigation Department.

And I hold a warrant for your arrest

on a charge of murder.

Murder?

Of murdering Mr. Lionel Holland at-

- Murdering whom?

- Mr. Lionel Holland...

at number 242 Connaught Square,

Bayswater...

on the 17th of October last.

Utterly bewildered,

I tried to fathom what series of events...

could conceivably have led

to this not-very-amusing irony.

I could only suppose that Lionel

had actually carried out...

that drunken threat of suicide.

But how then had the blame

fallen on me?

Time alone-and the trial-

would reveal the answer.

Seeing no reason to forego any of

the available privileges of my rank...

I exercised my right to be tried

before the House of Lords.

you, as a peer of England,

are indicted for murder.

How say you, Your Grace?

Are you guilty of the felony with which

you are charged or not guilty?

- Not guilty.

- How will you be tried?

- By God and my peers.

- God send Your Grace a good deliverance.

It shall be the truth, the whole truth

and nothing but the truth...

so help me God.

Mrs. Holland, will you tell

Their Lordships in your own words...

the substance of the conversation
you had with your husband...

the evening before his death?

He told me that Louis -

the prisoner-

was coming to see him the next day
on a rather delicate matter.

Did he indicate

what that matter was?

He had discovered that

the prisoner and I had been -

Had been on terms of intimacy?

- Yes.

- And what was his attitude?

He felt that the correct thing to do...

was to tell him to his face that he intended
to start proceedings for divorce.

From your knowledge of the prisoner...

how would you expect him

to receive that news?

I should expect him

to be very angry.

Now he was heir to a dukedom,

he had no more use for me.

I see. He was trying to discard you.

- Yes.

- Mrs. Holland...

I apologize for submitting you
to this ordeal...

but will you tell Their Lordships
how you found your husband's body?

I came back about half past 4:00.

Their Lordships have no objection
to the witness being seated.

Yes, Mrs. Holland?

I came back about half past 4:00.

I went into my husband's study.

He was lying on the floor...

with a dagger stuck in his chest.

One last question,

Mrs. Holland.

Had your husband ever, at any time,
threatened suicide?

- Never.

- Thank you, Mrs. Holland.

My client craves

Their Lordships' permission...

to cross-examine

the witness himself.

Their Lordships grant their permission.

Mrs. Holland, you understand

the meaning of being on oath?

Of course.

You realize that a life may depend upon

the truthfulness of your evidence?

Yes.

I put it to you that your story

of your conversation with your husband...

on the night before his death

is a complete fabrication.

It is not.

I put it to you

that your husband committed suicide.

He would never have done that

without leaving a message for me.

Can you swear that he did not?

The police searched the room

very thoroughly.

They didn't find anything.

I suggest that your evidence is a tissue of lies

dictated by motives of revenge.

It is not.

It is not.

I presume that the prisoner has some

purpose in these submissions...

other than that of

distressing the witness.

My purpose, my lord,

is to determine the truth.

That, Your Grace,

is the whole purpose of this assembly.

...the whole truth and nothing but the truth,

so help me God.

- I am.

When and where did you become

the wife of the accused?

Yesterday morning, in Pentonville Prison.

I wanted to publish irrevocably

before the whole world...
my faith in his innocence.
I wanted to show
by my marriage...
that though he was led astray,
as I believe...
by that innate kindness
and courtesy of his...
which made it so hard for him to rebuff
the advances of a woman...
I nevertheless
regard him as a man...
to whom I can happily entrust
the remainder of my life.
I am not alone
in these opinions of him.
My late husband, Henry,
and his late Uncle Ethelred, the eighth duke -
both unfortunately
unable to testify today.
These and other members of the D'Ascoyne family,
had they been alive...
would, I know, have echoed
every word that I have said.
Thank you, Your Grace.
The deceased was a client
of the banking house...
- of which you are chairman and managing director.
- He was.
In the normal course
of business transactions...
- he would have come to see you at your office.
- Yes.
- Instead of which, he asked you to go to his house.
- Yes.
- He invited you to his house to discuss business.
- Yes.
And you ask Their Lordships
to believe that?
- Yes.
- In the course of this, uh, business discussion...
he burst into tears, fell on his knees
and threatened suicide.
- Yes.

- Is that usual in business discussions?
- Not usual. No.
- But it happened on this occasion.
- Yes.
- And you ask Their Lordships to believe that?
- Yes.
- Then this, uh, business discussion...

became so heated

that blows were exchanged...

- and he made a murderous attack on you.

- Yes.

- Is that usual in business discussion?

- No.

- But it happened on this occasion.

- Yes.

- And you ask Their Lordships to believe that?

- Yes.

Very well.

You've heard of cases of a jealous husband
and his wife's lover coming to blows?

- Yes.

- Frequently?

It is one of the clichs of the cheaper kind of fiction.

I put it to you that,

in this case, it happened...

not in fiction,

but in fact.

- I put it to you that it did not.

- I put it to you further...

that being unaware at that time

of your future wife's forgiving nature...

you assumed that if you were

cited in a divorce suit...

it would ruin your chances

of making this advantageous match...

with a wealthy and beautiful woman.

No. Not at all.

- Still, you were proposing to discard Mrs. Holland.

- No.

Even though you were

about to be married to the other lady?

I must confess to feeling

quite intrigued as to their decision.

My lords, the question

for Your Lordships is this:
Is the prisoner guilty...
of the felony whereof
he stands indicted...
or not guilty?
Guilty, upon mine honor.
Guilty, upon mine honor.
Guilty, upon mine honor.
I considered it both seemly and touching
that my dear wife should visit me...
as she did this morning,
to make her farewells.
Your arrival, on the other hand,
appears to me unseemly...
and tasteless in the extreme.
I couldn't bear my last sight of you
to be that look of hatred you gave me...
as you went out from the trial.
In view of the fact that your evidence
had put the rope round my neck...
you could hardly expect
a glance of warm affection.
- Isn't there any hope?
- What hope could there be?
I was only thinking.
That question you asked at the trial...
about Lionel leaving
a suicide note.
Suppose he did?
Suppose that one were found...
even now,
this last evening?
- It would savor of a miracle.
- Miracles can happen.
Miracles could happen.
I see.
Oh. Strange, isn't it,
how things turn out?
Now, if you had married me,
instead of Edith -
Or you had married me,
instead of Lionel.
He would still be alive, and you wouldn't be
going to be hanged tomorrow morning.

Unless, of course, you've murdered somebody else.

- All of which is rather beside the point, isn't it?

- Is it?

Do you remember

in the old days...

how we used to play

eeny, meeny, miny, mo?

- Catch a nigger by his toe.

- If he hollers, let him go. Out goes he.

Quite a lot of little niggers have gone out,

haven't they, one way or another?

And every one of them a D'Ascoyne.

Mmm. We do seem to be

a very short-lived family.

Of course, Edith is only

a D'Ascoyne by marriage...

so I suppose

her prospects are better.

Except for a miracle.

Like the other one

we were talking about.

So there it was.

She would find the suicide note...

if I, in return,

would murder Edith.

So we now have two miracles

in mind, do we?

Yes.

I wonder if they are, in any way,

dependent on each other?

I suppose perhaps they might be.

What do you think?

Time's up.

What do you think?

Poor Edith. I'm afraid all this is going

to take years off her life.

- Au revoir, Louis.

- Au revoir.

What could I do but accept?

After all, I could

always decide afterwards...

which of these two little niggers

would finally have to go.

Dear Edith.

Captivating Sibella.
How different they were,
and how well I knew each of them.
"Or so I thought.
"But the night has gone by
and nothing has happened.
"It is now but a few minutes to 8:00.
"And I realize that Sibella
came yesterday merely to tantalize...
"to raise my hopes
in order to dash them again.
"How unlike me
not to have guessed.
But, after all,
how very like Sibella. "
Already?
I'll tell you who time gallops withal.
"With a thief to the gallows.
"For though he tread
as softly as foot can fall...
he thinks himself too soon there. "
If you have any last instructions -
I think, Colonel, it only remains
to thank you for your many kindnesses.
Won't you introduce our friend?
Mr. Elliott,
Good morning, Your Grace.
This won't take a moment.
First, if Your Grace
will pardon the liberty...
I should like to read
some verses...
composed by myself for use
on these melancholy occasions.
- Your Grace permits?
- With pleasure.
"My friend, reflect" -
Oh. Oh. Pardon.
"Your Grace, reflect.
"While yet of
mortal breath some span...
"however short, is left to thee...
"how brief the total span
twixt birth and death...

"how long thy coming
tenure of eternity.
Your Grace, prepare" -
- Colonel.
- Hmm?

Your Grace,
I am happy to inform you...
that a telephone communication
has just been received from the Home Office.
A note has been found,
undoubtedly in Mr. Holland's handwriting...
expressing his intention
to commit suicide.
It is a miracle.
Yes. It is like a miracle.

Pending receipt
of further instructions...
I will try to make you
reasonably comfortable in my quarters.

- Good morning.
- Good morning, Your Grace, sir.
I assure you I have never been
more happy to be relieved of an official duty.
Poor Elliott.

If he had not insisted
on reading that abominable poem...
he would have had me neatly dangling at the end
of his rope before the news arrived.

- Huh.
- He was so looking forward to it.

I understand, Your Grace,
from the men on duty outside...
that a large crowd
awaits your leaving.
Having robbed them
of the pleasure of my death...
the least I can do
is to let them see me alive.
Including, by the way,
not only Her Grace, the duchess...
but also Mrs. Holland.

Oh.
How does the song go?
"How happy could I be with either...

were tother dear charmer away. "

- Oh.

- Well, good-bye.

Good-bye, Your Grace.

"How happy could I be with either...

were tother dear charmer away. "

- Your Grace.

- Yes?

I represent the magazine Titbits...

by whom I'm commissioned

to approach you...

for the publication rights

of your memoirs.

My memoirs?

Oh, my memoirs.

My memoirs.