

"What did you expect?" she said. Her English still retained that delicate accent. "But you have changed."

"How?" he said, one hand lightly on her elbow. They had begun to walk, following the porter with his bags.

"More serious," she said. "You are like the other Americans. In a war you are not serious, you are—how do you say it?—merry. And now in peacetime you are serious."

"A national characteristic," he said. The thought startled him; he had never realized it before. "Like the Irish. Belloc wrote about them: 'The great Gaels of Ireland are the men that God made mad, for all their wars are merry and all their songs are sad.'"

They were in dimness outside the building, and glancing at her face, he saw it was again quiet.

"Here," she said, "we don't seem to do anything very merrily."

"Oh, come, come," he said. Ahead of them the porter waited uncertainly by a cab, but Luisa said she had her own car there and the man followed them to it. Driving toward the lights of the city, Carrington considered that he should ask her to stop somewhere, that he had not kissed her; but then he considered he had only once, anyhow. Or was that his reason for hesitating now? The night wind touched him with surprising softness, and from someplace there came the smell of flowers. His arm came up and rested on the seat just above her back, and when his hand touched her farther shoulder she smiled faintly and rested her head back against his arm while her eyes still held the road.

"I would have liked for you to stay at my house," she said, "but here people do things differently—or at least think differently. They would think it much more serious than if you were to stay there."

"Isn't anyone home?"
"Oh, yes," she said; "my parents, my two brothers. But that is the way it is, so I have reserved a room for you at one of our old-fashioned hotels. We will still see a lot of each other; that is, if you want?"

He started to say, well, wasn't that why he had come here, then realized that curious reticence that had been on him since he had seen her. They were driving on an open stretch of road, the sea on their left, and the wind from it had blown the flower scent away. Carrington felt on what might be called safer ground.

He said, "It will be just as well. I have some business appointments."

He thought her silence peculiar. "Like all Americans," she said, "you are not above combining business with pleasure."

The remark startled him. Vaguely, he had thought to look around here to see if there was a business he might like to enter; an unwillingness to enter the family coal-and-feed business—the largest in his county—had not accounted for it entirely, he knew. Yet now he spoke as though it had been his main purpose in coming here. *Oh, we are a careful lot*, he thought. But at least the others in the family had been more consistent than he.

They were in the city now and Luisa said, "I'll take you to the Hotel Maury and you dress. My family is expecting us for dinner."

"Good," he said, "good."

There was no place to park near the crowded corner on which the hotel stood. She would drive around the block, she said, or come back in twenty minutes.

The hotel was built around a single large patio, illumined by thin yellow light. His



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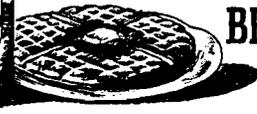


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