

JAPP. Well, I've finished with this room. I'd better have a few words with Mr. Richard Amory, I suppose, and then I'll see this Dr. Carelli. Looks as though he were our man. But keep an open mind, that's what I say, keep an open mind. You coming, Poirot?

POIROT. But certainly I will accompany you.

JAPP. And Captain Hastings, too, I've no doubt. *(Laughing.)* Sticks as close to you as your shadow, doesn't he Poirot?

POIROT. *(Meaningly.)* Perhaps Hastings prefers to remain here?

(HASTINGS takes his cue in an obvious manner.)

HASTINGS. Yes, yes, I think I'll stay here.

JAPP. *(Surprised.)* Well, as you please.

(He exits to the hall with JOHNSON. POIROT follows but turns in the doorway.)

POIROT. Hastings!

(He makes an admonishing gesture to HASTINGS. HASTINGS makes a reassuring gesture back. POIROT exits and closes the door. BARBARA enters by the French windows. She stands there unobserved for a moment or two, watching HASTINGS before she speaks.)

BARBARA. What has blown in upon us? Is it the police?

HASTINGS. Yes. Inspector Japp, of Scotland Yard. He's with your cousin now, asking a few questions.

BARBARA. Will he ask me questions?

HASTINGS. *(Reassuringly.)* Even if he does, there's nothing to be alarmed about.

BARBARA. My dear, it would be wizard! But so tempting to embroider a bit, just to make a sensation. I adore sensation, don't you?

HASTINGS. I - really don't know.

BARBARA. You know, you intrigue me. Where have you been all your life?

HASTINGS. Well, after the war I went to South America.

BARBARA. I knew it! The wide open spaces. That's why you are so deliciously old-fashioned.

HASTINGS. (*Stiffly.*) I'm sorry.

BARBARA. Oh, but I adore it. I think you're a pet, absolutely a pet.

HASTINGS. What do you mean by old-fashioned?

BARBARA. Well, I'm sure you believe in all sorts of stuffy old things, like decency, and telling lies, and putting a good face on things.

HASTINGS. Quite. Don't you?

BARBARA. Me? Do you expect me to keep up the fiction that Uncle Claud's death is a regrettable incident?

HASTINGS. Isn't it?

BARBARA. My dear...

(She moves closer to him.)

As far as I'm concerned it's the most marvellous thing that ever happened. You don't know what an old skinflint he was. You don't know how he ground us all down...

(She stops, overcome by the strength of her feelings.)

HASTINGS. I - I - wish you wouldn't...

BARBARA. You don't like honesty? That's just what I said. You'd like me to be wearing black instead of this, and to be talking in a hushed voice about "poor Uncle Claud! So good to us all."

HASTINGS. Really...

BARBARA. Oh, you needn't pretend! You would! But I say that life's not long enough for lying and pretence. He wasn't good to us at all. We're all glad he's dead, really, in our heart of hearts. Yes, even Aunt Caroline. Poor dear, she stood him longer than any of us.

(She calms herself.)

BARBARA. You know, I've been thinking. Scientifically speaking, Aunt Caroline might have poisoned him. That heart attack was really very queer. Suppose that suppressing her feelings all these years had led to some powerful complex...

HASTINGS. (*Guardedly.*) I suppose it's possible.

BARBARA. I wonder who pinched the formula? Everyone says the Italian, but personally, I suspect Tredwell.

HASTINGS. Why?

BARBARA. Because he never went near the study!

HASTINGS. But then...

BARBARA. I'm very orthodox in some ways. I've been brought up to suspect the least likely person. And Tredwell is the least likely person.

HASTINGS. (*Smiling.*) Except you...

BARBARA. Oh, me!

(She smiles uncertainly.)

How curious...

HASTINGS. What is curious?

BARBARA. Something I've just thought of. Let's go out in the garden. I hate frowsting here.

HASTINGS. I'm afraid I must stay here.

BARBARA. Why?

HASTINGS. I mustn't leave this room.

BARBARA. Do you know, you've got a complex about this room. Do you remember last night? There we all were, completely shattered by the disappearance of the formula, and in you walked, and produced the most marvellous anti-climax by saying in your best conversational manner; "What a delightful room, Mr. Amory!"

HASTINGS. (*Nettled.*) So it is a delightful room.

BARBARA. Personally, I don't agree with you. Anyway, you've had quite enough of it. Come along.

(She takes his hand and tries to pull him through the open window. HASTINGS quickly takes his hand away.)

HASTINGS. You don't understand. I promised Poirot.

BARBARA. *(Slowly.)* You promised Monsieur Poirot not to leave this room? But why?

HASTINGS. I can't tell you that.

BARBARA. Oh!

(She is silent for a moment or two, then her manner changes.)

"The boy stood on the burning deck.."

HASTINGS. I beg your pardon?

BARBARA. "Whence all but he had fled." Well, my pet?

HASTINGS. I simply cannot understand you.

BARBARA. Is there such a thing? And mayn't I call you a pet?

(She slips her arm through his.)

Come and be vamped. Really, you know, I think you're adorable.

HASTINGS. You're pulling my leg.

BARBARA. Not at all. I'm crazy about you. You're positively pre-war.

(She pulls him to the French windows.)

HASTINGS. *(Yielding.)* You really are an extraordinary person. You're quite different from any girl I've ever met.

BARBARA. I'm glad. That's a very good sign.

HASTINGS. A good sign?

BARBARA. Yes, it makes a girl feel hopeful.

(She laughs and they exit through the French windows. After a moment or two, AUNT CAROLINE enters from the dining room carrying a small work-bag. She moves to the settee and feels down the back of it. DR.