

Sybil How very kind of you. And may I put your name on my list as a potential donor?

Shirley Oh yes, anything you like. Now just slip off my—er—*your* dress—

Sybil And I can also check your blood group. (*She shows Shirley the attaché case*) All I have to do is prick your thumb, then the girls in the van outside will note down your name and group. All so simple. Now, let's go into the ante-room, and you can alter my dress undisturbed.

They move to the ante-room

Sybil This way, Miss Rotherbrook.

Shirley Miss Rother . . . ? Oh yes, quite.

Sybil opens the ante-room door

Sybil This way, Miss Rotherbrook.

Sybil and Shirley go into the ante-room. As they disappear, the main door opens and Venables enters with Miss Rotherbrook. Jane Rotherbrook is an attractive brunette in her early twenties. Cool and sophisticated. She is very much at her ease

Venables This way, Miss Rotherbrook.

Jane Thank you, Mr Venables.

Venables Please excuse my shirt sleeves, but we're workers here, you know. We don't put on a show.

Jane May I quote that? (*She produces her pencil and notebook*)

Venables By all means. (*Repeating slowly*) "We're all workers here, we don't put on a show."

Jane It's so kind of you to spare a few minutes of your precious time. (*Writing in her notebook, she wanders over to the Gladstone portrait*)

Venables This morning's been more than usually hectic, but I'm delighted to help you. After all, your father's newspapers have helped me many times in the past. You may quote that too.

Jane Thank you. (*Laying a hand on the Gladstone frame*) Ah, Mr Gladstone, I presume?

Hastily Venables pushes the picture back into position as it is about to open and reveal the drinks cupboard

Venables The Grand Old Man—he means a lot to us here.

Venables steers Jane away from the portrait

Jane What a pleasant room. So full of history. These walls have seen so much—if only they could talk.

Venables (*with an uneasy laugh*) This room is "The Power House of the Nation", you know.

Jane But it's so warm and friendly—I'd describe it as the Heart of the Nation.

Venables Oh very good Miss Rotherbrook! Very good indeed. The "Heart of the Nation". Yes that's exactly what it is—and you may quote me.

Jane raises her eyebrows and moves towards the library

Jane Is that the Cabinet Room in there?

Venables No, that's the library. Whence comes my wisdom and inspiration.

Ah yes—many a happy hour I've passed in there, curled up in an armchair with a Macaulay or Gibbon, or even a Trollope.

Jane opens the library door, but before she can go in Venables utters a cry, for he of course thinks that the undressed Shirley is still in there. He runs towards Jane but trips and falls at her feet. As he falls he clutches Jane's dress and tears it

Jane Mr Venables! Are you all right?

Venables (*picking himself up*) I think so—you can't go in there Miss Rotherbrook, not at the moment.

Jane Oh?

Venables Decorators! You see, the place is littered with—er—painters and dust-sheets and—er—decorators. They came in an hour ago. Unexpectedly. (*He sees her torn dress*) Your dress!

Jane My dress! What a damned nuisance, it's torn.

Venables Did I do that? I do apologize, Miss Rotherbrook! How clumsy of me. I'm so sorry.

Jane Oh don't worry. If someone can find me a needle and thread, I'll fix it in a moment.

Venables goes to the side table on which his wife left one of her needlework boxes

Venables Here we are, the very thing.

While Venables rummages in the box, the library door swings open, and Jane looks in

Jane Oh! There are no decorators in there, Mr Venables.

Venables (*swinging round*) No! I mean—no?

Jane No, not a soul.

Venables They've been quicker than I thought.

Jane But you said they'd only been here an hour?

Venables It's the Incentive Scheme my Government introduced.

Jane takes the needlework box

Jane Thanks so much. I'll just go in here and repair the damage.

Venables Yes, you do that. And again, may I say how sorry I am.

The internal telephone rings. Venables goes to answer it

Excuse me. Affairs of State, you know.

Jane But of course.

Jane exits into the library

~~Venables (*into the telephone*) Yes? . . . Speaking. . . . Oh, it's you, Campbell. . . . You can't find my wife? . . . Nor the dress? Have you~~