

**Mrs Conray:** The references are exemplary. Mrs Whittock says, in terms of supervising her children's welfare and education, you demonstrated supreme skill; your service to Mrs Hawk's household – matchless; and Mrs Ashmore, who initially directed me to you, describes the most agreeable woman she's ever known in your position – that you would, in fact, be worthy of any whatever. I see no reason, if you're willing to take charge of my three little darlings, to prevent you from doing so.

**Governess:** I'd be delighted.

**Mrs Conray:** You mightn't be when you've met them. They're horrors, every one.

**Governess:** Oh I've experienced plenty of real horrors. I'm sure yours will provide no fresh challenge.

**Mrs Conray:** Despite the brevity of this interview, my offer isn't made lightly. I'm aware that the importance of a governess in the development of a child's mind and body can hardly be overstated. I've often thought the governesses of England play as vital a role in maintaining our Empire as the government.

*The governess is amused and flattered.*

*(continued)* I had one myself, of course, and she shaped me... Well, her influence on my life was profound. Now my only desire would be to know a little more about you. Your background.

*The governess unconsciously rubs her left wrist again.*

**Governess:** Of course, Mrs Conray. Though I can't imagine... Nothing about my life is so very remarkable.

**Mrs Conray:** You weren't originally a Londoner.

**Governess:** Oh no, I was born in Hampshire.

**Mrs Conray:** And your father?

**Governess:** Was a parson.

**Mrs Conray:** And you began work at what age?

**Governess:** The age of twenty.

**Mrs Conray:** I see.

**Governess:** Mrs Conray, I can't believe you've any interest in –

**Mrs Conray:** *(Interrupting)* For whom? *(Pleasant again)* For whom?

**Governess:** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs Conray:** Who was your first employer?

**Governess:** It was such a long time ago –

**Mrs Conray:** Nevertheless, her name?

**Governess:** I feel I'm being cross-examined.

**Mrs Conray:** Her name, if you please.

**Governess:** I can't remember the name.

**Mrs Conray:** Surely – your very first engagement –

**Governess:** But why? Are you unsatisfied with my references?

**Mrs Conray:** They're nonpareil, but if I'm to trust you with my schoolroom and nursery, I wish to hear about your early experiences as well as the most recent. It must have been daunting at twenty to take charge of the welfare of young of children. A provincial girl – not sophisticated or even knowledgeable I presume. A formidable task.

**Governess:** (*Increasingly uncomfortable, and unable to hide it*) I don't understand. Have you heard something that... My references –

**Mrs Conray:** (*A flash of aggression*) Damn the references. I wish to hear you speak about your early employment.

**Governess:** I'm afraid that's really very... Well, I'm afraid I can't comply, Mrs Conray.

**Mrs Conray:** Why ever not?

**Governess:** You're correct. When I began work as a governess I was unsophisticated and I made many mistakes. But one might hope to be forgiven and permitted... I see no reason to revisit those, that, period. After my first engagement, for a time I stopped working. I spent a while in... Well, I was, I wasn't fully well. But when I was judged to have recovered, I worked again as a governess and have worked ever since, and to my knowledge that work has not merited a single complaint...

*Mrs Conray waits.*

(*continued, rising*) I think, in fact, I, I, I'd prefer to leave. I'm sorry to have taken up your afternoon and disappointed you.

**Mrs Conray:** Sit down.

*The governess tries to leave, but Mrs Conray stops her.*

(continued) You fail to understand. I will be answered. I will have the name of your first employer.

**Governess:** You will allow me to pass –

**Mrs Conray:** Sit down!

*The governess is made to sit. She grasps her left wrist, and puts it to her mouth, her breathing becoming short.*

(continued) I'll give you a clue.

**Governess:** What do you want?

**Mrs Conray:** Your first employer was, in fact, a young man in London.

*The governess is shocked. She rubs her left wrist against her neck.*

(continued) Ah, light dawns. Or should I say a shadow falls. A dashing young man in Weymouth Street –

**Governess:** In God's name, who are you?

*[REDACTED]*

*The governess has risen, shedding three decades and all her neurotic twitches. So it's a fluttered, anxious woman, never before in the hall, who approaches her potential employer.*

Scene Three

*[REDACTED]*

**Employer:** ... it was almost ... poor chap, passed away.

**Governess:** ...  
*The employer is determined to ... knows how to do so.*

**Employer:** ... Both succumbed to typhoid. Damned water was contaminated. What they tell me ...

*As the young man, the governess can't help but ... the room, overwhelmed by ... and magnificence.*