

EDWARDIAN SCENE

(A scene for 2 women)

from

'Portsmouth and Privilege'

by

Anthony Pearce

INT. VIRANDA - DAY

Dressed in modest opulence, furnished with two high-backed, upholstered chairs. Cynthia and Alice sit separated by a spotless tea setting.

Their pleasant tone barely conceals a tension between them

CYNTHIA

Thankfully for all concerned, this venture is not one which requires your approval. Perhaps, the weather being what it has, the trip by motor is something of a gamble, but it's simply one that need be taken, I'm afraid.

ALICE

Still, seems a questionable time to be away.

CYNTHIA

Don't be a nuisance, Alice. If you must know, Gerald's trip to Downing St. could prove a boon to the entire household, whether they're aware of it, or not.

ALICE

Well, it's bad business.

CYNTHIA

And none of yours, frankly. Honestly, I don't see the point of fuss - alarming the staff. It's not as though they have a say, or could lift a finger.

Sipping her tea does not hide the judgment in Alice's glance.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Oh, don't look at me as if I've just dehumanized the working class. I'm only saying that the issue is above their station, and yours too, not to put too fine a point on it. Besides, it's hardly charitable to be judging Gerald's absence so harshly with Lawrence away.

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ALICE

Away? Don't be silly. I'll be on his arm this evening. He's escorting me to my soiree.

CYNTHIA

Is he? I expect the geography will come as something of an inconvenience in his schedule as he's bound by boat to Portsmouth this morning. Did he not tell you? Odd.

Cynthia draws a perverse glee from revealing the news to Alice.

ALICE

Nonsense. He can't be --

CYNTHIA

Here for your big coming out? No, I'm afraid he can't. Pity. Though I do see your point. Seems a questionable time to be away.

Cynthia is surprised to see Alice trying to hide her devastation with little success.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Alice. That was unkind. You care for him sincerely, don't you? I must confess, I didn't see it until now. But it's there - not just in your eyes - but your lip, your jaw - just a quiver - you hide it well, better than I at your age.

(a sad laugh)

Am I now so jaded? Men wander through our lives like courting apparitions, it's so easy to mistake one for another - to dismiss them as merely prospects - acceptable...or not. Sadly, no kindness I can say will return Lawrence for your event.

The momentum of a new direction takes Cynthia.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

However, in the absence of our chosen escorts, we can, you and I, bask this evening in the attentions of a dozen more. This is still your night, Alice.

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CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

And if - when - Lawrence returns,
the devil will be yours to call
due.

Anthony Pearce