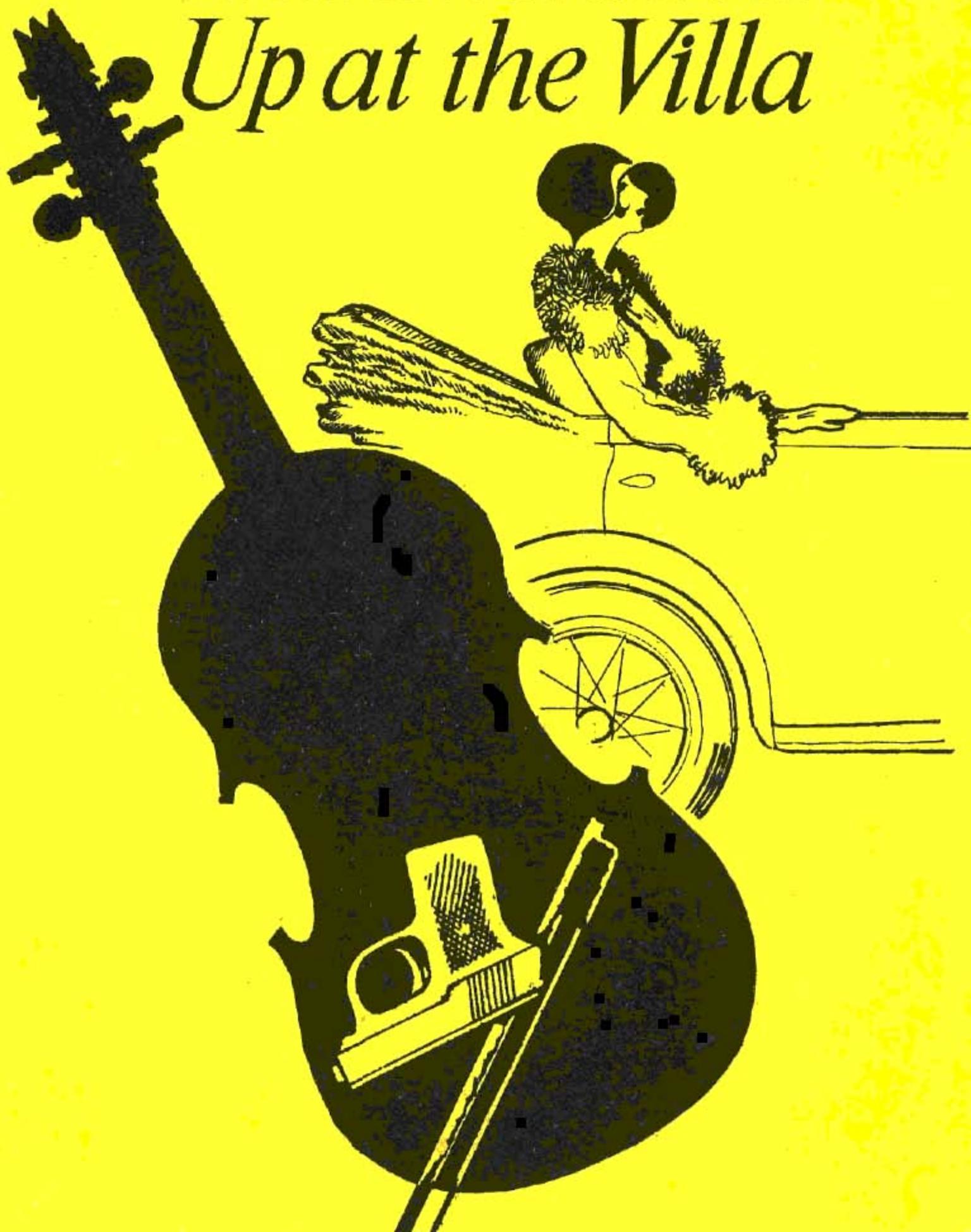




W. Somerset MAUGHAM

Up at the Villa



W. Somerset Maugham / С. Моэм
Up at the Villa / На вилле

Pre-intermediate level

Пособие для чтения

William Somerset Maugham

(1874-1965)

W.S. Maugham was born in Paris in the family of a solicitor of the British Embassy and lived there until he was ten. His parents died when he was still a child, and he was brought up by his uncle, vicar of Whitstable in Kent.

Maugham was educated at King's School, Canterbury and at Heidelberg University, Germany. He afterwards walked the wards of St. Thomas's Hospital with a view to practise in medicine, but the success of his first novel "Oza of Lambeth" (1897) won him over to letters.

With the "Moon and the Sixpence" (1919) his reputation as a novelist was assured.

Maugham's favourite among his novels is "Cakes and Ale" (1930) depicting the backstage of the world of letters.

His other popular novels include "The Painted Veil", (1925), "The Narrow Corner" (1932), "Theatre" (1937), "The Razor's Edge" (1944), "Up at the Villa" (1953).

Maugham also got an established reputation as a dramatist and a shortstory writer.

In his lifetime he published more than ten collections of stories.

All of them demonstrate his realistic manner, democratic tendencies and brilliant mastery of form. Maugham is also a prolific author of travel books, essays and literary criticism. Maugham's fiction has little romance or idealism, for he takes a sceptical view of human nature. However, his readers are confronted with the problems of good and evil, reward and punishment, justice and injustice, offering no easy solutions.

The villa stood on the top of a hill. From the terrace in front of it you had a magnificent view of Florence; behind was an old garden with few flowers but with fine trees, grass walks and an artificial grotto in which water cascaded with a cool, silvery sound from a cornucopia. The house had been built in the 16th century by a noble Florentine, then it had been sold to some English people, and it was they who had lent it¹ for a period to Mary Panton. It was scantily furnished with fine old furniture and it had an air, so it was comfortable enough to live in. It was June now and Mary spent most of the day, when she was at home, on the terrace from which she could see the domes and towers of Florence, or in the garden behind.

For the first few weeks of her stay she had spent much time seeing the sights:² she visited churches and wandered in old streets; but now she seldom went down to Florence except to lunch or dine with friends. She was satisfied to lounge about³ the garden and read books, and if she wanted to go out she preferred to get into the Fiat and explore the country round about. After tragic death of her husband, a year before, after the anxious months, she had been glad to accept the Leonards' offer of this grand old house so that she could rest her nerves⁴ and consider what she should do⁵ with her life. After eight years of an unhappy marriage, she found herself at the age of thirty with an income just large enough, with rigid economy, for her support.

When she left England the lawyer, an old man and an old friend said:

"Now you've got nothing to worry about, my dear, except to get back your health and strength. I don't say anything about your looks because nothing affects them. You're a young woman and a very pretty one, and I have no doubt you'll marry again. But don't marry for love next time; it's a mistake; marry for position and companionship."

She laughed. She had no intention then of taking the risks of wedlock⁶; it was odd that now she would have to make up her mind⁷ about Edgar Swift who urgently wanted to see her that very afternoon before he went to Cannes.

- 1) it was they who had lent it — они-то и отдали его
- 2) seeing the sights — осматривая достопримечательности
- 3) to lounge about — лениво бродить
- 4) she could rest her nerves — она могла успокоить свои нервы
- 5) what she should do — что ей делать
- 6) taking the risks of wedlock — натолкнуться на опасность брака
- 7) she would have to make up her mind — она должна будет принять решение

Sir Edgar Swift was in the Indian Civil Service, as her father had been, and he had had a distinguished career. He had been for five years Governor of the North-West Provinces and had finished his term with reputation of being the most capable man in India. He had proved himself¹ a great administrator, though resolute he was tactful, and if he was peremptory he was also generous and moderate. Mary had known him all her life. When her father died, still a young man, and she and her mother had returned to England, Edgar Swift, when on leave², spent a great part of his time with them. As a child he took her to the circus; as a girl in her teens, to the pictures or to the theatre; he sent her presents for her birthday and at Christmas. When she was nineteen her mother had said to her:

"I wouldn't see too much of Edgar³ if I were you, darling. He is in love with you."

Mary laughed.

"He's an old man."

"He's forty-three," her mother answered tartly.

Having returned from India now he came to Florence to pay her a brief visit. He had stayed week after week and Mary saw that he was waiting for the favorable moment to ask her to marry him. He was no longer an unknown Indian civilian; he was a man of consequence⁴. Mary's mother was dead now, she had no other relations in the world; there was no one of whom she was so fond as of Edgar.

"I wish I could make up my mind,"⁵she said.

Mary lay down in a long cane chair and told Nina, the maid, to bring tea. Another chair waited for Edgar. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the city below, in the distance, was bathed in the soft clear brilliance of the June afternoon. She heard the car drive up⁶. A moment later, Giro, the Leonards' manservant and Nina's husband, ushered Edgar on to the terrace⁷. Tall and spare⁸ in his well-cut blue serge and black Homburg, he looked both athletic and distinguished. Mary knew that he was a good tennis player, a fine rider and an excellent shot.

- 1) He had proved himself — он себя проявил
- 2) when on leave — когда он бывал в отпуске
- 3) see too much of Edgar — слишком часто бывать в компании Эдгара
- 4) a man of consequence — влиятельная личность
- 5) I wish I could make up my mind — мне хотелось бы отважиться
- 6) She heard the car drive up — она услышала, как подъехала машина
- 7) ushered Edgar on to the terrace — провел Эдгара на террасу
- 8) tall and spare — высокий и худощавый

Taking off his hat he displayed a thick head of black curling hair hardly touched with grey. His face was bronzed by the Indian sun, a lean face with a strong chin and an aquiline nose¹; his brown eyes under the heavy brows were deep-set and vigilant. Fifty-four? He did not look a day more than forty-five. A handsome man in the prime of life². He had dignity without arrogance. He inspired you with confidence. He wasted no time on small talk³.

"Lord Seafair called me on the phone this morning and definitely offered me the governanship of Bengal. They don't want to bring out a man from England who doesn't know the conditions, they want someone who is already familiar with them."

"Of course you accepted."

"Of course. It's the job of all others that I wanted."⁴

"I'm so glad."

"But there are various things to discuss and I've arranged to go to Milan⁵ this evening and get a plane from there to Cannes. I shall be away two or three days. You know, my dear, this is a very important position I'm going to take up⁶. If I make a success of it, it'll be, well, rather a feather in my cap⁷."

"I'm sure you'll make a success of it."

"It means a lot of work and a lot of responsibility. But that's what I like. The Governor of Bengal lives in a fine house. He'll have to do a lot of entertaining⁸."

She saw what this was leading to, but looked at him as though she had no notion⁹. She was pleasantly excited.

"Of course a man ought to have a wife for a job like that," he went on. "It's very difficult for a bachelor. Am I telling you something you don't know when I tell you that I've been head over heels in love¹⁰ with you since you were a kid with bobbed hair?¹¹"

"Oh, Edgar, what nonsense you talk!"

"You're the most beautiful creature I've ever seen in my life and the most delightful. Of course I knew I hadn't a chance. I was twenty-five years older than you. A contemporary of your father's.

- 1) an aquiline nose — орлиный нос
- 2) in the prime of life — в расцвете сил
- 3) small talk — пустой разговор
- 4) It's the job of all others that I wanted — именно та работа, которую я хотел
- 5) I've arranged to go to Milan — я договорился поехать в Милан
- 6) to take up — занять (должность)
- 7) a feather in my cap — предмет гордости, достижения
- 8) He'll have to do a lot of entertaining — Ему придется часто устраивать приемы
- 9) as though she had no notion — как будто она не понимала
- 10) head over heels in love — по уши влюбленный
- 11) with bobbed hair — с короткой стрижкой

A lot of water has flowed under the bridges since then. I was wondering if now the discrepancy of our ages seemed as important to you as it did then."

Mary smiled.

"Am I right in thinking that you're proposing to me?"

"Quite right. Are you shocked or surprised?"

"Certainly not shocked. You know, Edgar, I'm very fond of you. I think you're the most wonderful man I've ever known. I'm terribly flattered that you should want to marry me¹."

"Then will you?"

There was a curious sense of apprehension in her heart.

"You say you'll be away two or three days. Will you wait for an answer till you come back?"

"Of course. In the circumstances² I think it's very reasonable -you should think it over."

"That's true," she smiled.

"Then we'll leave it at that. I'm afraid I must go now if I don't want to miss my train."

She walked with him to his taxi.

"By the way, have you told the Princess you wouldn't be able to go to a dinner party tonight?"

They both had been going to a party which the old Princess San Ferdinando was giving that evening.

"Yes, I called her up in the morning. I think it's terribly unsafe for you to drive alone at night. You will keep your promise to take a revolver, won't you?"

"Oh, I think it's perfectly ridiculous, the roads are safe, but if it'll set your mind at ease³ I'll take it with me tonight."

"The country's full of starving workmen and penniless refugees", he said. "I shan't have a moment's peace unless I know⁴ that if the need arises you can take care of yourself."

- 1) that you should want to marry me — что ты хочешь на мне жениться
- 2) In the circumstances — в данных обстоятельствах
- 3) if it'll set your mind at ease — если тебя это успокоит
- 4) unless I know — если я не буду знать

2

Mary was doing her face. Nina stood behind her, watching with interest and offering now and then¹ unsolicited advice.

Then Mary slipped into her pretty frock and put on various pieces of jewelry she had decided to wear. They were going to a new restaurant where the food was supposed to be very good² and where sitting in the open³, they could enjoy the balmy June night and when the moon rose the lovely view of the old houses on the opposite side of the river.

Mary took up her bag.

"Now I'm ready".

"The Signora has forgotten the revolver".

It lay on the dressing-table. Mary laughed.

"That's just I was trying to do. What is the use of it? I've never fired a revolver in my life and I'm scared to death of it".

"The Signora promised the Signore she'd take it".

"All right. Put the thing in".

Ciro had brought the car round. She stepped in, drove cautiously out of the iron gates and down a winding country lane till she got on to the highway that led to Florence

When Mary reached the restaurant, she found that she was the last to arrive. The Princess San Ferdinando was American; an elderly woman who had lived in Italy for forty years; her husband had been dead for a quarter of a century and she had two sons in the Italian Army. She had little money, but a caustic tongue and a great good nature. The rest of the party consisted of a couple of traveling English people, Colonel and Lady Grace Trail, a sprinkling of Italians and a young Englishman called Rowley Flint. Mary during her stay in Florence had got to know him pretty well. He had indeed been paying her a good deal of attention⁴.

Rowley was not a good-looking man. He had a tolerable figure, but he was of average height. He had not a single feature that you could call good: he had white teeth, but they were not very even; he had a fresh color, but not a very clear skin; he had a good head of hair, but it was between dark and fair; his eyes were large, but they were pallid blue.

- 1) now and then — время от времени
- 2) the food was supposed to be very good — считалось, что еда была очень вкусной
- 3) in the open — на открытом воздухе
- 4) a good deal of attention — много внимания

He had an air of dissipation¹ and people who didn't like him said he looked shifty. It was freely admitted that² he couldn't be trusted. He had a bad record³. When he was twenty he married a girl who was engaged to somebody else, and three years later his wife divorced him. He was not just over thirty. He was in short a young man with a shocking reputation which he deserved.

The Princess liked general conversation at her table and when her guests were settled down she addressed Mary.

"I'm so sorry Sir Edgar was unable to come tonight".

"He was sorry, too. He had to go to Cannes."

"It's a great secret, but he's just been made Governor of Bengal."

"Has he, by Jove!"⁴ cried the Colonel. "A damned nice job to get."

"Did it come as a surprise?"

"He knew he was one of the people who were being considered," said Mary.

"He'll be the right man in the right place,"⁵ there's no doubt about that," said the Colonel.

The restaurant had a small band. Its members were shabbily dressed and they played Neapolitan tunes.

Presently the Princess remarked:

"I think it's about time we had the singer. You'll be astonished. He's got a magnificent voice."

She called the head-waiter. "Ask that man to sing that song he sang the other night when I was here."

"I'm sorry, Excellency, but he's not here tonight. He's sick."

"How tiresome! I wanted my friends to hear him. I asked them to dine here on purpose for that."⁶

"I'll tell the violinist to play" said the head-waiter.

The violinist was a dark, slender young man with enormous hungry eyes and a melancholy look. He played his piece.

"He's quite frightful, my poor Giovanni," the Princess said to the head-waiter.

"He's not very good, Princess. I'm sorry. But the other will be back tomorrow."

The band started upon another number. Rowley turned to Mary.

"You're looking very beautiful tonight."

- 1) an air of dissipation – вид гуляки
- 2) It was freely admitted that – открыто считалось, что
- 3) He had a bad record – он имел плохую репутацию
- 4) by Jove – ей-богу
- 5) the right man in the right place – человек на своем месте
- 6) on purpose for that – с этой целью

"Thank you."

"Shall I tell you one of the things I particularly like about you? Unlike some women¹ you don't pretend you don't know you're beautiful. You accept it naturally."

Mary was indeed a beautiful creature. She had exquisite features; but what made her so remarkable was her wonderful coloring.

"I think you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

"And how many women have you said that to?"

"A good many². But it's not less true when I say it now"

She laughed.

"Let's leave it at that, shall we?"

"Why? Don't you know that I'm disparately in love with you?"

"Disparately is hardly the word. You've made it clear during the last few weeks that you'd be glad to have a little flutter with me."

"Can you blame me?"

"I'm not blaming you. Only as far as I'm concerned,³ you're barking up the wrong tree⁴ and I hate the idea of you wasting your time."

"I have plenty of time to waste. Have you ever been in love?"

"Yes, once."

"Who with?"

"My husband. That's why I married him."

3

They had dined late and soon after de ven the Princess called for the bill. When it grew evident that they were about to go, the violinist who had played to them came forward with a plate. There were a few coins on it from diners at other tables and some small notes. Mary opened her bag.

"Don't bother," said Rowley. "I'll give him a trifle."

He took a ten-lira note out of his pocket and put it on the plate.

"I'd like to give him something too," said Mary. She laid a hundred-lira note on the others. The man looked surprised, bowed slightly and withdrew.

- 1) Unlike some women – в отличие от некоторых женщин
- 2) A good many – достаточно много
- 3) as far as I'm concerned – что касается меня
- 4) you're barking up the wrong tree – ты не на ту напал

"What on earth¹ did you give him that for?" exclaimed Rowley. "That's absurd."

"He plays so badly and he looks so wretched."²

"You might drop Rowley at his hotel, Mary," the Princess said. "He's right out of my way."³

"Would you mind?"⁴ he asked.

They got into her car and drove along the quay. The full moon flooded their way with radiance. They spoke little. When they came to the hotel Rowley said:

"It's such a gorgeous night; it seems a pity to waste it by going to bed. Wouldn't you drive on a little? You're not sleepy, are you?"

"No."

"Let's drive into the country."

"Isn't it rather late for that?"

"Are you afraid of the country or afraid of me?"

"Neither."

She drove on.⁵

"Are you going to marry Edgar Swift?" he asked suddenly.

She paused for a while⁶ before she answered.

"Before he went away today he asked me to. I said I'd give him an answer when he got back."

"You're not in love with him then."

"What makes you think that?"

"If you had been you wouldn't have wanted three days to think it over."

"I suppose that's true. No, I'm not in love with him."

"He's in love with you all right."

"He was a friend of my father's and I've known him all my life. He was wonderfully kind to me, and I'm grateful to him."

"Are you dazzled by the position he can give you?"

"I dare say.⁷ After all,⁸ I'm not inhuman."

"Do you think it would be much fun to live with a man you weren't in love with?"

"But I don't want love. I'm fed to the teeth⁹ with love."

"That's a strange thing to say at your age."

- 1) What on earth – с какой стати?
- 2) he looks so wretched – у него такой ничтожный вид
- 3) He's right out of my way – мне с ним не по пути
- 4) Would you mind? – ты не против?
- 5) She drove on – она поехала дальше
- 6) for a while – некоторое время
- 7) I dare say – смею сказать, да.
- 8) After all – наконец-то
- 9) I'm fed to the teeth – я сыта по горло

"You see I was madly in love with my husband. They told me I was a fool to marry him; they said he was a gambler and a drunkard; I didn't care.¹ He wanted me to marry him so much. You don't know how charming he was in those days, so good to look at, so gay and light-hearted. He was so kind and gentle and sweet when he was sober. When he was drunk he was noisy and boastful and vulgar and quarrelsome. I used to be so ashamed. I did everything I knew to cure him, it was useless. I couldn't keep him from drinking."

"Why didn't you leave home?"

"How could I leave him? He was so dependent on me. When anything went wrong,² it was me he came to for help. He clung to me like a child. And when he died in my arms, I was broken-hearted."

The tears were flowing down Mary's face. Rowley sat still and said no word.

"I'm sorry to have got so emotional. I'm being stupid."

"When did your husband die?"

"A year ago. He was smashed up in a motor accident. He was drunk."

For a little they sat in silence.

"Are you sure you're not committing yourself to a slavery when you marry a man who means nothing to you? Edgar is the Empire-builder;³ it's not a type that has ever very much appealed to me."

Mary giggled.

"No, I should hardly think it would. He's strong, he's clever, he's trustworthy."

"Everything I'm not in short. You haven't got a very good opinion of me, have you?"

"No, I haven't. Because you're a waster and a rotter. Because you think of nothing but having a good time."

"Why shouldn't I have as good a time as I can while I have the chance? It may be that I'd be easier to live with. I should certainly be more fun. Damn it all⁴ I'm in process of making you a proposal of marriage."

"Are you? But why? What on earth put it in your head?"

"It just occurred to me⁵. I suddenly realized that I am terribly fond of you."

1) I didn't care – мне было все равно

2) When anything went wrong – когда что-то было не так

3) the Empire-builder – человек-творец

4) Damn it all – черт побери

5) It just occurred to me – мне только что пришло в голову

"Oh, shut up. It's lucky for you that I have a cool head¹ and a sense of humour. Let's go back to Florence."

They drove in silence till they reached the hotel.

4

Mary drove through the streets of Florence, along the road by which she had come, and then up the hill on the top of which was the villa. About half-way up was a little semi-circular terrace, with a tall, very old cypress and a parapet in front, from which one got a view of the Cathedral and the towers of Florence. Tempted by the beauty of the night Mary stopped the car and got out. The sight that met her eyes, the valley flooded with the full moon, was so lovely that it touched her heart.

Suddenly she was aware² that a man was standing in the shadow of the cypress. She saw the gleam of his cigarette. He came towards her. She was a trifle startled³, but had no intention of showing it. He took off his hat.

"Excuse me, are you not the lady who was so generous in the restaurant?" he said. "I should like to thank you."

She recognized him.

"Are you a violinist?"

He spoke English well enough but with a foreign accent.

"I owed my landlady for my board and lodging. The people I live with are very good to me, but they are poor and need the money. Now I shall be able to pay them."

"What are you doing here?" asked Mary.

"It's on my way home. I stopped to look at the view,"

"Do you live near here, then?"

"I live in one of the cottages near your villa. You have a beautiful garden and there are frescoes in the villa."

"Would you like to come and see the garden and the frescoes?" she said.

"It would give me much pleasure. When would it be convenient?"

"Why not now?" she said on an impulse⁴.

"Now?" he repeated, surprised. "I should be very pleased."

"Jump into the car. I'll drive you up."

- 1) I have a cool head – я хладнокровный человек
- 2) she was aware – она осознала
- 3) She was a trifle startled – она немного испугалась
- 4) on an impulse – поддавшись порыву

When they got to the villa, Mary parked the car and went into the house.

"Come along",¹ said Mary. "I'll get you a glass of wine and then we'll go and look at the garden."

"No, I had no dinner. Wine would go to my head."

"Why did you have no dinner?"

"I had no money. But never mind about that;² I shall eat tomorrow."

"Oh, but that's awful. Come into the kitchen and I'll find something for you to eat now."

"I'm not hungry."

"I'm going to make you supper."

They went down into the kitchen. They found bread and wine, eggs, bacon and butter. Mary turned on the electric stove and started to toast some slices of bread and to scramble the eggs into a frying-pan.

"Cut some rashers of bacon³ and we'll fry them. What is your name?"

"Karl Richter, student of art."

"That sounds German."

"I was Austrian when Austria existed."

There was a sullenness in his tone which made Mary give him a questioning look.

"Have you ever been to England?"

"No, I learnt English at school and at the University. It's marvellous you are able to cook."

"Would it surprise you if I told you I'd been a working girl and had to cook for myself?"

"I shouldn't believe you. You are like a princess in a fairy story."

When everything was ready they put it on a tray and went into the dining-room.

"I'm ashamed of my poor and shabby clothes", he smiled when they sat at a table.

"How old are you?" she asked him.

"Twenty-three."

"Are you an artist?"

He laughed.

"Can you ask me after hearing me play? I'm not a violinist. When I escaped from Austria I got work in a hotel. Then I had one or

- 1) Come along – проходи
- 2) But never mind about that – да это ничего
- 3) rashers of bacon – куски бекона

two odd jobs¹, but it's difficult to get them when you're a foreigner and your papers aren't in order. I play the fiddle when I get the chance just to keep body and soul together²."

"Why did you have to leave Austria?"

"Some of us students protested against the Anschluss. We tried to organize resistance. The result was that two of us were shot and the rest were put into a concentration camp. I escaped and crossed the mountains into Italy."

"It all sounds rather horrible. What are your plans for future?"

A look of despair crossed his face. But he laughed.

"Don't let me think of that now. Let's enjoy this priceless moment. Nothing has ever happened to me like this in my life."

Mary looked at him strangely and it seemed to her that she could hear the beating of her heart. It seemed to melt in her bosom. She rose abruptly from the table.

"Now I'll show you the garden and then you must go."

She led him out into the garden. They walked silently. The light summer air was scented with the white flowers of night.

"It's so beautiful," he murmured at last. "It's almost unbearable. You must be very happy here."

"Very," she smiled.

"I'm glad. I should like to die this night. Nothing so wonderful will ever happen to me again. I shall think of it all my life. I shall always think of you as a goddess in heaven³."

He lifted her hand to his lips and with an awkward, touching bow, kissed it. She gently touched his face. She had a feeling that was strange to her. Her heart was filled with loving kindness.

He passionately clasped her in his arms.

5

It was dark in the room, but the windows were wide open and the moon shone in. Mary was sitting in a straight-backed chair and the youth sat at her feet. He was smoking a cigarette telling her his life story. His fate seemed so cruel to Mary that she couldn't find words to console him. What could she do? Give him money? That would help him for a while perhaps, but that was all; he was a romantic creature who knew more of books than of life, and he would refuse to take anything from her. There was no way out. On a sudden a cock crew. She took her hand away from his.

- 1) odd jobs – случайные работы
- 2) keep body and soul together – сводить концы с концами
- 3) goddess in heaven – богиня в небесах

"You must go now, my dear," she said.

"Not for a long time yet. I adore you. You've made me so happy. You've given me something to live for."

"I'm glad. Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye till when?"

"Good-bye for ever, my dear. I'm leaving here very soon - in three or four days, I expect."

"But I must see you again. Once more, only once more. Or else I shall die."

"My dear, don't be unreasonable. It's impossible. We part forever."

"But I love you. Don't you love me?"

She hesitated a moment. She thought it necessary to tell the plain truth. She shook her head.

"No."

He stared at her as if he didn't understand.

"You were lovely and miserable. I wanted to give you a few moments' happiness."

"Oh, how cruel! How monstrously cruel!"

Her voice broke.

"Don't say that. I didn't mean to be cruel. My heart was full of tenderness and pity."

"I never asked for your pity. Why didn't you leave me alone?"

There was something tragic in his indignation. There was no love in his eyes now, but cold, sullen anger. His white face had gone whiter still and it was like a death mask. It made her uneasy¹. She knew now what a fool she'd been. The servants slept far away and if she screamed they would not hear her. Idiot that she was!

"I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I'll be glad to make up²."

"Are you offering me money? I don't want your money. How much money have you got here?"

She took her bag and as she put her hand in felt the revolver.

"I've got two or three thousand lire."

"You vile woman, Are you so vile that you think any man can be bought off at a price."

"My God, why can't I make you understand. If I offended you, if I hurt you, I ask your forgiveness. I only wanted your good."

"You lie. An idle, sensual, worthless woman,"

1) It made her uneasy – это ее взволновало

2) to make up – возместить (убытки)

He took a step toward her. She was seized with panic. He looked sinister and menacing. She snatched the revolver and pointed it at him.

"If you don't go at once I shall shoot," she cried.

"Shoot. Do you think life means anything to me? Shoot."

He came towards her offering his breast to her aim.

She let the revolver fall from her hand and she burst into tears.

"Hadn't you the courage? Poor child. You asked me not to forget you. I shall forget, but you won't."

She didn't stir. She glared at him with terrified eyes.

"Don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you."

She heard him move about the darkened room. Suddenly she heard a report and then the sound of a fall.

"God, what have you done?"

He was lying in front of the window, with moonlight pouring down on him. She called him by his name.

"Karl, Karl, what have you done?"

He was dead. She stared at the body with terror. She did not know what to do. She was afraid she was going to faint. Then she forced herself to think. Something had to be done.¹ She had an impulse² to get him out of the room. But the body was heavy. What answer could she give when they asked her why he had killed himself? The only thing she could do was to tell the truth³; and the truth was vile. The shame. The dishonour. Help, help, she must have help. Rowley. He was the only person she could think of. She was sure he would come if she asked him. At all events⁴ he'd give her advice.

There was a phone by her bed. She dialed it. She could hear the bell ringing, but there was no answer. She was terrified, thinking that he was out. She gave a sign of relief when she heard a cross, sleepy voice.

"Yes. What is it?"

"Rowley. It's me, Mary. I'm in frightful trouble. I want you to come here."

"When?"

"Now. At once. As soon as you can. For God's sake."

"Of course I'll come. Don't worry."

What a comfort these two words were. She put down the receiver.

- 1) Something had to be done – надо было что-то делать
- 2) She had an impulse – ее подталкивало
- 3) to tell the truth – говорить правду
- 4) At all events – в любом случае

When Rowley came her relief was overwhelming.

"I say,¹ what's the matter? You look like hell."

Mary couldn't tell him. She led him to her room. She closed and locked it. She touched the switch. Rowley gave a violent start² when his eyes fell on the body.

"My God!" he cried. "What does it mean? Why did he shoot himself?"

Mary was pale and trembling.

"You'd better pull yourself together³, Mary. Who is he?"

"The violinist. Don't you remember?"

"How did he happen to be here?"

Mary hesitated.

"I met him just as I was coming home. He talked to me. He looked unhappy. He was hungry. I gave him something to eat."

"And after you'd given him a snack he just went and shot himself with your revolver. Is that the idea?"

Mary began to cry. He suddenly understood what she meant.

"Mary, dear, you know I'd do anything in the world for you. I want to help you. Are you willing to take a risk?⁴"

"I'll take any risk."

"Why can't we get the body away from here? We can get him into the car and find a place on the hills round here."

"But they'll look for him."

"Why should they? Who's going to bother about him? When does it get light? Not before five. We've got an hour. Come on."

They lifted the body and carried him out of the front door to the car.

They came to the highway and soon turned to the narrow road that led to the hills. They stopped in the thicket. Without a word they set about⁵ what they had to do.

They drove back as quickly as they had come. Dawn was about to break. At length⁶ they reached the bottom of the hill where Rowley left his bike. He patted Mary's shoulder.

"That's all right. Don't bother. And look here,⁷ take a couple of sleeping tablets. I'll come round⁸ tomorrow."

- 1) I say – Послушай
- 2) gave a violent start – сильно содрогнулся
- 3) pull yourself together – возьми себя в руки
- 4) Are you willing to take a risk? – ты согласна рисковать?
- 5) they set about – они приступили
- 6) At length – наконец-то
- 7) look here – послушай
- 8) I'll come round – я зайду

6

When Mary opened her eyes she saw Nina standing by her side.

"What is it?" she asked sleepily.

"It's very late, Signora. The Signora has to be in the Villa Bolognese at one and it's twelve already."

Suddenly Mary remembered and a pang of anguish¹ pierced her heart. Wide awake now, she looked at the maid. She was as usual smiling and friendly. Mary gathered her wits together.

"Get me a cup of coffee and then I'll have my bath. I shall have to hurry."

While she waited for her coffee she reflected intently. She felt infinitely grateful to Rowley. He was a good friend; no one could deny that.

When Mary had had a cup of coffee and her bath, when she sat at her dressing-table and arranged her hair, she began to feel much more herself. All that terror, all those tears had left no trace. She looked alert and well. Her honey-coloured skin showed no sign of fatigue; her hair shone and her eyes were bright. She looked forward to² that luncheon where she would have to give a performance of high spirits and careless gaiety which would lead them all to say when she left: Mary was in wonderful form today.

7

When Mary got home a telegram, just arrived, was waiting for her: "Flying back tomorrow. Edgar." The garden was terraced and there was one place in it for which Mary had a great affection.³ It was a little strip of lawn, surrounded by clipped cypresses. Mary, lying on a long chair, felt a relief to be alone and not to have to pretend. She could surrender herself⁴ now to her anxious thoughts. Nina brought her a cup of tea. Mary told her she was expecting Rowley.

Nina was a young woman who liked to gossip, and she had now a piece of news⁵ that she wanted to impart. Agata, the cook, had brought it up from the near-by village where she had her own cottage.

- 1) a pang of anguish – острый боль
- 2) She looked forward to – она с нетерпением ждала
- 3) had a great affection – особенно любила
- 4) surrender herself – отдаться
- 5) a piece of news – новость

Some of her relations there had let a room to one of those refugees, who swarmed in Italy, and now he had run off, without paying for his board and lodging, and they were poor people and could not afford to lose the money.

"Where did he go?" asked Mary.

"He went out yesterday evening to go and play the violin at Peppino's - why, that was where the Signora dined last night; he said that when he came back he'd give Assunta money. But he never came back. She went down to Peppino's and they told her they knew nothing about him. He had some money. You see he got his share of the plate; one lady put a hundred lire, and..."

Mary interrupted. She didn't want to hear any more.

"Find out from Agata how much he owed Assunta. I - I don't like the idea of her suffering¹ because she did someone a kindness. I will pay."

"Oh, Signora, that would be such a help to them. You see, with both their sons doing their military service and earning nothing, it's a job they have to keep doing."

"That'll do. You can go now."

If only Rowley would come!

At last she heard her name called.

"Mary."

It was Rowley. He appeared at the end of the grass plot and slouched towards her with his hands in his pockets. He was entirely unruffled². He gave her a scrutinizing glance. "What's the matter? You don't look any too good."

She told him what Nina had just told her. He listened attentively.

"But, my dear, there's nothing in all that to get the wind up³ about. Jittery, that's what's the matter with you. He owed his landlady money; he'd promised to pay her and hadn't enough. He shot himself and he had plenty of motives."

What Rowley said certainly sounded reasonable. Mary smiled and signed.

"I suppose you're right. I've got the jitters⁴. What should I do without you, Rowley?"

"I can't think," he chuckled.

"I was so upset last night I didn't even thank you. It was frightful of me⁵. But I am grateful, Rowley. I owe everything to you. Except

- 1) I don't like the idea of her suffering – мне не нравится, что она страдает
- 2) He was entirely unruffled – он был полностью спокоен
- 3) to get the wind up – что бы испугаться
- 4) I've got the jitters – я нервничаю
- 5) It was frightful of me – это было ужасно с моей стороны

for you¹ I think I should have killed myself. By the way, I don't really know why that poor boy killed himself. I'm tortured with remorse²."

"I think I can tell you why he killed himself," said Rowley. "He was homeless, outcast, penniless and half-starved. And then you came. Suddenly the whole world was changed because you loved him. You raised him to the stars and then you flung him back to the gutter. Wasn't that enough to decide him that life wasn't worth living?"

She didn't answer. She handed him the telegram she had received from Edgar. He read it.

"Are you going to marry him?"

"I want to get away from here. I hate this house now. I want someone to take care of me. Of course he may not want to marry me."

"What the devil are you talking about? He's crazy about you³."

"I must tell him, Rowley."

"Why?" he cried, aghast.

"I must be honest."

He frowned.

"You're making a terrible mistake. I know these Empire-builders. The soul of integrity and all that. What do they know of indulgence? They've never the need of it themselves. It's madness to destroy his trust in you. He dotes on you.⁴ He thinks you perfect."

"What is the good of that if I'm not?"

"Well, my dear, have it your own way⁵."

8

It was about four next afternoon when Nina came out to Mary sitting in the garden and told her that Edgar Swift was on the telephone. He had just arrived at his hotel and wanted to know if he could see Mary. She sent the message that she would be glad to see him whenever he cared to come.

Presently she heard the car drive up and a moment or two later Edgar appeared. He warmly clasped her hand.

"How cool and fresh you look, and pretty as a picture."

" Did you have a nice trip?"

- 1) Except for you – если бы не ты
- 2) I'm tortured with remorse – меня терзают угрызения совести
- 3) He's crazy about you – он увлечен тобой
- 4) He dotes on you – он обожает тебя
- 5) have it your own way – делай, как знаешь

"I'm so very glad to see you again," he said. "It seems a century since I went away."

"It hasn't been very long. You were very busy, weren't you?"

"Yes, of course; I had talks with my Minister. I'm to sail at the beginning of September. I don't want to bore you with the compliments he paid me, but..."

"I want to hear. I shan't be bored."

"Well, he said that he knew no one could do the job better than I. It was very flattering."

"I'm sure he was right. You're very ambitious, aren't you?"

"I suppose I am. I like power and I'm not afraid of responsibility. I have certain gifts, and I'm glad of the opportunity to make the most of them. Mary, you promised to give me an answer when I came back. I'm impatient to have it."

She gave a little sigh.

"Before we go any further I've got something to tell you. I'm afraid it'll bitterly distress you. You must know the facts and then do what you think fit."

"I'm listening."

Once again she told the long painful story which the day before she had told Rowley. She omitted nothing. She tried neither to exaggerate nor to minimize. But it was harder to tell it to Edgar. His face was set and stern. And now she realized that her story was so fantastic that didn't seem to belong to real life; it was the kind of thing that happened to one in a nightmare.

At last she finished. Edgar sat quite still for a little while¹, then he got up and began to pace to and fro² across the green patch. On his face was a dark, sullen look that she had never seen on it before. He looked strangely older. At last he stopped and spoke to her. His voice was tender.

"You must forgive me if I'm rather taken aback³. You see you're the last woman I should ever have expected to do anything like this. It seems incredible that you of all people..."

"I have no excuses to make for myself."

"We needn't go into this. I love you enough to understand and forgive. You're a romantic, silly little thing. The fact is you badly need a man to look after you."

She looked at him doubtfully.

"Do you still want to marry me now?"

- 1) for a little while – недолго
- 2) to and fro – туда и сюда
- 3) taken aback - впечатленный

"You surely didn't think I was going to leave you in the lurch¹? I want you to marry me. I will do everything I can make you happy. Career isn't everything."

She stared at him with sudden perplexity.

"What do you mean?"

He sat down again and took her hands in his.

"Well, darling, you see this does alter things a bit. It wouldn't be fair if I took on this job now."

"I don't understand."

"Don't bother about it, Mary dear. We can take a house on the Riviera. I've always wanted a boat of my own."

"But you can't throw everything up just when you're reaching the top of the tree. Why should you?"

"I've got to play fair². The Government has trusted me and I've never let them down³. Our situation in India largely depends on the prestige of its administrators. It's no good arguing, Mary; I must do what I'm convinced is right."

Watching every line of his grim face, she sought to disclose his real feelings to her. She knew very well that he had been shattered by her confession. She had destroyed his belief in her and he would never again feel quite sure of her. But he was not the man to take back the offer he had made. She knew also that with his energy, his passion for work and his ambition, he would never cease to regret his lost opportunities. He was the slave of his own integrity.

Now she knew quite definitely, that whatever the circumstances, even if nothing had happened that he need be afraid of, even if he were made Governor-General of India tomorrow, she didn't want to marry him.

With a sigh she thought of Rowley; how much easier it was to deal with a scamp like that. Whatever his faults, he was not afraid of the truth. She pulled herself together.

"You know, Edgar dear, it would make me miserable to think that I'd ruined this distinguished career of yours. You're needed. It's your duty to take this job."

"I'm not so conceited as to think I'm indispensable, you know."

"You are not obliged to marry me."

"But I want to marry you. There's nothing in the world I want more."

"Edgar dear. I owe so much to you; you're the greatest friend I've ever had; but I don't love you. I want to be frank with you."

1) in the lurch – в беде

2) to play fair – вести честную игру

3) I've never let them down – я никогда их не подводил

When you were going to be a Governor of Benga¹, you would have had a lot of work and I should have had a lot too; it seemed enough if I liked you. We should have had so many interests in common. But if we're just going to live a quiet life on the Riviera, with nothing much to do from morning till night it makes things different."

He was silent for a long time. When he looked at her again his eyes were cold.

"You mean that you were prepared to marry the Governor of Bengal, but not a retired Indian Civilian on a pension. In this case we need not discuss the matter further."

Again he was silent. He was humiliated, poor man, but at the same time Mary was pretty sure he was infinitely relieved.

"There seems² no object in my staying in Florence any longer. I shall go back to London tomorrow."

"Good-bye, Edgar. And forgive me."

He took her hand and kissed it, then with dignity walked slowly down to the gates. She heard his car drive away.

The interview had tired Mary and she fell asleep. In an hour she woke refreshed. She took a stroll³ in the garden and then sat on the terrace to watch the lovely light of the declining day.

Giro, the manservant, came out to her.

"Signer Rolando is on the phone, Signora," he said.

"I'll come along now."

Mary didn't particularly want to speak to Rowley just then; but it occurred to her that he might have something to tell her.

Fifteen minutes later he was with her. It was a strange contrast he made with Edgar as he walked across the terrace. Edgar, with his height and his spareness, had looked wonderfully distinguished; he had a natural dignity and the assured air of a man who had been accustomed for many years to the obedience of others. Rowley, rather short, rather stocky, wearing his clothes as though they were a workman's overalls, slouched across, with his hands as usual in his pockets, with a kind of lazy impudence, debonair and careless, which Mary was bound to admit⁴, had a certain attractiveness. With his smiling mouth and the good-humoured mockery of his grey eyes, a person who was easy to get on with.

- 1) interests in common – общие интересы
- 2) There seems – кажется
- 3) took a stroll – прогулялась
- 4) was bound to admit – была вынуждена признать

It suddenly occurred to Mary why notwithstanding his faults (and disregarding the great service he had rendered her) she felt so much at ease¹ with him. You could entirely be yourself. You never had to pretend with him.

He mixed himself a cocktail, drank it at a gulp and then sank comfortably into an arm-chair. He gave her a roguish look².

"Well, darling, so the Empire-builder's turned you down³. It was stupid of you to spill the beans⁴. You couldn't expect a man like that to swallow that story of yours."

Mary smiled.

"He behaved very well."

"You're not sore, are you?"

"I? No, I don't ask you to believe me, but the truth is that as we talked it all over I came to the conclusion that I wouldn't marry him at any price. I want to get away from here, Rowley."

"I see no reason why you shouldn't. A change will do you good⁵."

"You've been very kind to me. I shall miss you."

"Oh, but I think we shall see a great deal of one another in the future."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, because as far as I can see there doesn't seem much else for you to do but marry me."

She stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, a lot has happened since then and I dare say it's slipped your memory⁶, but I did make you a proposal of marriage the other night. You don't suppose I took your answer as final."

"I thought you were joking. You couldn't really want to marry me now."

"You see, my dear, the advantage of me is that I'm a bad hat. A lot of people reproach me for the things I've done; I dare say they're right. But anyhow I've got neither the right nor the inclination to reproach other people for what they've done. Live and let live has been my motto. You see, I'm not a man of character⁷ with an unimpeachable reputation, I'm just an easy-going chap with a bit of money who likes to have a good time. You say I'm a rotter and an idler. Well, what about reforming me? I've got an estate in Kenya and I'm going to manage it myself.

- 1) she felt so much at ease – она чувствовала себя легко
- 2) He gave her a roguish look – он лукаво посмотрел на нее
- 3) turned you down – отказался от тебя
- 4) to spill the beans – проговориться
- 5) will do you good – пойдет тебе на пользу
- 6) it's slipped your memory – у тебя вылетело из головы
- 7) a man of character – человек с характером

Perhaps it is about time that I settled down. You might like the life there."

He waited a moment for her to speak, but she said nothing. She was so surprised and all he said was so unexpected that she could only look at him. He went on, talking with a slight drawl.

"You know, I can't help thinking¹ you rather sweet. You see, I liked your sending for me when you were in a hell of a mess. You've got nerve² all right and I liked that too. Of course you behaved like a perfect idiot. But it showed you had a generous heart, and, to tell you the truth, not many women I've known had that. I love you terribly, Mary."

She looked at him for a moment reflectively.

"But I don't love you, Rowley."

"I told you the other night, you will if you give yourself half a chance."

She looked at him for some time, doubtfully, and then suddenly the gleam of a shy but faintly teasing smile stole into her lovely eyes.

"Well, if you insist on marrying me. ...But it's an awful risk we're taking."

"Darling, that's what life's for - to take risks."

- 1) I can't help thinking – я не могу не думать
- 2) You've got nerve – у тебя есть мужество