

**The Whores
Of
Coxcomb Hall**

The Whores of Coxcomb Hall
also published as
The Ghost of Jimmy Savile

by E.G.Taylor

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E. G. Taylor & Ms. A. M. M. Taylor

Edward George Taylor was born in Boston, Lincs. on 12th March 1908 and died on 3rd December 1969 in Caistor Sands, Gt Yarmouth. He was an itinerant piano tutor/ tuner by profession, covering the East Midlands and much of East Anglia. *The Whores of Coxcomb Hall* is his only known work.

The assistance of his sister and sole executor, Alice Margaret Munro Taylor (1910-2007) in the granting of all permissions, including the right to change or update references to actual places or persons, is acknowledged with gratitude.

The Whores of Coxcomb Hall

Egg Taylor

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Chapter One

Counsel of Perfection

One dry autumn night, outside the Victorian wing, where Rowell, O'Donnell, Jackson and Newlings had their apartments, some distance from their rotting sash windows - those tall, sad casements, battered by the coastal winds and rains - there stood a dark-skinned and bulky figure, with a pair of binoculars trained on the second floor of the building. He was focusing in particular on the lonely windows of Jimmy Newlings' sitting room. He'd been standing there, binoculars raised, perfectly still, for some time, and his polished toecaps had sunk in the dewy lawn.

From his vantage point, standing there in the dark, in the centre of Rowell's immaculate horseshoe of rose beds, the trespasser had spied upon a pivotal meeting of minds.

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For the first time ever, Dr White, no less, was Jimmy Newlings' guest. The back of Dr White's learned head was discernible through the barrels of the trespasser's binoculars in some detail. Above the wispy dogtooth of his Harris Tweed stretched a pale celery stalk of muscle, either side of which were hairy hollows of flesh. The hair from these hollows, in wiry curls, lifted a straggling grey mullet, long and neglected, the collapse of what had once been, in younger days, a smooth and oily DA, or duck's arse. From time to time Dr White's head moved energetically on its stalk, reflecting the gravity and earnestness of his part in the conversation. Sometimes his head pitched down and forward, as he strained to make a point, and his mullet was lifted clear on its wiry grey hairs. At other moments, in response to something Newlings had said, his head retracted and shook with weary denial, as if the very depths of despond had been plumbed in this conference, and the mullet broke up on the collar of his greasy Harris Tweed.

Dr White and Jimmy Newlings had been talking for more than an hour and a half. They had exchanged more words on this occasion than they had exchanged over the entire decade they had spent working together at Coxcomb Hall. It was an extraordinarily intense and personal meeting of minds.

But the spying trespasser, who had been where he stood for nearly twenty minutes, had had enough. He returned his binoculars to their case and took his

leave. He noticed the tell-tale footprints he left behind in Rowell's lawn, but they did not concern him.

This was Ossaf, Head Boy, going about his endless, unfathomable and insidious business.

The meeting between Jimmy Newlings and Dr White had begun in the staff room at the end of the day. As White finished sifting through some circulars in his pigeon hole, Newlings had approached him from the refreshment area with an unopened bottle of what he claimed to be twelve-year-old, single malt whisky. The bottle had, to Dr White's scientific eye, a lurid look and bogus label - too many thistles, cudgels and what have you. (In fact, it was ironically reminiscent of the Coxcomb crest, with its phoney dragon, tridents and crossed halberds. Had Newlings sunk to home-brew?)

"Er . . . One for the woods, Whitey? What d'you say?"

Something in Newlings' thin-lipped smile and watery gaze was pitiful this autumnal afternoon. White had noticed, as had others, that Newlings often smelled of the bottle these days. Ah, it was noted, with satisfaction, the crapulous habits were creeping up on him at last. Dr White's seat at chapel was next to Newlings', and for the last few weeks he'd had to put up with the noisome stench of sour booze on Newlings' breath - always at evensong, sometimes at matins too. For nearly ten years Principal and Choirmaster Bob Rowell had flattered

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Jimmy Newlings that he could have been a professional baritone, but for want of good training and a bit of luck. So Newlings never failed to belt out verse after verse of whatever godforsaken collect or hymn they'd been given without inhibition, as if this were the only outlet of feeling in his life, which for so many years it actually had been.

But here was Newlings with the bottle in his hand by the dusty pigeon holes, with his straggling eyebrows pointing upwards in a plaintive way, and to Dr White it seemed churlish in the extreme not to give in to this appeal, from one man to another, to share a glass of the good malt, and with that sharing of a glass or two share also, no doubt, woes of a fairly predictable and tedious kind for a master living alone at the Hall. Woes that he himself had exchanged, about a year ago, for the woes of marriage to an attractive and much younger woman.

Failure has its gradations, and all who had worked at Coxcomb Hall for more than a few months knew the gradation of Newlings' failure. The pupils of Newlings' history classes subjected him to tortures classical, medieval and modern. He had somehow become inured to it, had learned to get through the day, endure the week, shoulder the terms and years as his private burden, and such fortitude had made him an immovable part of the institution, staggering out each morning from his quarters under Rowell's apartments (which lent him no protection at all) and returning thereto in the

evenings to mark the worthless rubbish of his pupils, to tear out from their exercise books the shameful pictures of himself scrawled in blue biro in obscene acts and pleasures, of Jimmy Newlings gobbling his own faeces or his own cock and balls, of Jimmy Newlings bent with both hands up his arse, sucking his own cock, with the words '*Your COCK!*' scrawled large, and with a pulsating arrow pointing and so on and so forth. Newlings would sit at his desk each evening, under the lamplight, tearing out these pages, lest O'Donnell or some other master or monster should see them, putting the books to rights, rendering them thinner and thinner before returning them to their owners for more drawings and messages – '*Your KNOB!*' "*Your GOB!*" '*Your ARSE!*' - the next heavy day.

The great solace of Newlings' life, until recently the only solace of his life, had been to make a daily calculation of his savings, and to study daily the progress of his investments. Newlings' savings were the source of endless rumours at Coxcomb – inflamed, exaggerated rumours that he had done nothing to inspire and which, he was sure, all began with his *rival en amour* Dick Baker's jealousy and spite, but perhaps it didn't help that he took the 'pink 'un', the *Financial Times*, the one pretension and luxury he had never denied himself. The paper connected him with a world about which he knew very little, but the delivery of the fresh, pressed pink pages to his apartment every day made him a part of that world nonetheless. The journalists and

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commentators addressed him as part of their readership, treated him with due respect, and commented upon the stocks he too had watched, and agreed with him, more often than not, about what would go up or down or stay the same. The pink 'un had a symbolic value in his life quite as important as its usefulness, lending meaning and direction to this course he'd charted into the doldrums of middle age.

Newlings' life was a life well known, well mythologized, almost obituarised already. To others it was a warning, a marker buoy held in view when they too began to feel the undertow of dissipation and self-contempt, and the years slipping by beneath them. But now, evidently, Newlings' life had changed, something had given up, some cable of perdurable toughness had become so tense and chafed that it had snapped, casting adrift the buoy upon the open seas. Newlings had taken to the bottle. And Dr White, old Whitey, still with some bourgeois pretensions of what it was to do the decent thing, had acceded to his colleague's invitation to share a few glasses of the amber liquid this foul Wednesday afternoon. They were not even halfway through the week: on Saturday came more duties to keep the beasts occupied with sports and CCF, and a multitude of energy-sapping and time-wasting pursuits, and on Sunday there was the week's marking still to be done. But the extraordinary thing about this Wednesday meeting was that the main subject of their conversation did

not derive from any outpouring from Newlings at all. Quite the reverse. It was Dr White who was holding forth. Dr White was not accustomed to drink. His wife kept him away from it. Early in their marriage she had discovered that a few glasses of wine or a finger or two of whisky all too often led to a dropping of inhibitions from the good doctor, led to lascivious petting and, on rejection, the beginnings of bad temper. So Clara had banned drink from the house. It was an unnecessary and burdensome evil and expense, she said. Their budget was modest and if she could do without it, he could too. (Clara was as good as her word. She never drank. For her own diversion she smoked hashish, wheedled from the aging trendy and mock-reprobate Dick Baker, sometimes as payment in kind.)

After just a couple of glasses of whisky White's manner had become unguarded. He looked about Newlings' neat bachelor nest, with its sprinkling of heirlooms and antiques, such as the rather fine rosewood table he sat at now, with misplaced envy. It all seemed very warm and cosy and rather satisfactory to him this evening, this bachelor existence. Newlings had some nice things. Some very nice things. This oval rosewood table, French polished, Newlings said, was particularly nice. Of course he knew, as everyone did, that Newlings hoarded his money and invested shrewdly, and the thought of that financial security appealed very deeply to White as well. He had begun to worry

about why he and Clara, with no mortgage or rates to pay, somehow never managed to have any money left at the end of the month, despite his cutting back on old indulgences.

"No, married life's not all it's cracked up to be, Newlings," he had reflected after a couple of glasses, with a rueful wince, and he shifted in his chair on saying this, as if the admission had caused some painful wind.

Newlings looked down, he had to, and found himself staring at the good doctor's hands, so large and furry, curled inwards on his rosewood table. What a study of hopelessness there was in those hands, for any half-competent artist! He reached across and topped up his guest's glass. He tipped in some water too, just a drop, from a miniature crystal jug.

"Oh come on, Whitey," Jimmy Newlings teased. "You have so much now! You, of any of us, surely can't complain. You have Woodlands, a lovely wife, holidays away from here, if not abroad, I shouldn't wonder . . ."

White stared into the gentle brown grain of the rosewood, and looked at the light playing in the crystal jug. He was not used to drink at all, he reflected. He had already taken on board more than he could handle. Up to the gunnels, in fact.

"But I'm not happy, Newlings," he said, with one of those grave, sincere shakes of the head. "I am not a happy man."

Newlings laughed. "But which of us is, Doctor?"

We all have our crosses to bear, I'm sure. I'm sure we all do."

Newlings was not adept at the conversational finesse required here, having lived such an isolated life for so long, and his wooden flattery, his feigned naivety about Dr White's marital circumstances, was clumsily done. There was about him this afternoon a bonhomie and sympathy of spirit which was actually very uncharacteristic, but White was already too drunk and self-obsessed to notice, or if he did notice, to care.

Newlings could hardly contain his curiosity. This was not what he had anticipated at all. Dr White, 'the good doctor', to borrow Baker's impertinence, had broken down into confessional mode after just three or four fingers! He was drinking on an empty stomach, of course, and was plainly out of practice. Newlings felt cock-a-hoop about bringing the good doctor to his rooms and getting him so loose-tongued, but this very success only excited a new need in him, a need to extract more, much more from the good doctor, to probe and pick at the pain like a dentist, deeper and deeper still. So far he was safe. White clearly imagined he had been the soul of courtesy in agreeing to have a drink in the first place, and was now under the drunk's delusion that he'd been hearing his companion out, rather than blathering on himself.

Newlings had arranged this meeting because he had not been able to endure the uncertainty of his relationship with the good doctor's wife any longer.

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He was torn between two very different ideas about Clara White. The first was that she was nothing but a merciless whore, bent on draining him of every penny he had for no other reason but her selfish gain. Sometimes he thought he saw signs of this in her dark eyes - a coldness, an indifference to him as he climbed on top of her and she took his cock and put it inside her. She always shut her eyes as he began to climax, but he kept his open, not wanting to miss a moment of her nakedness, of her small, perfectly edible breasts below him. On a couple of occasions he had seen her open her eyes as he came and look up into his face, in particular at his mouth, and there had been something like distaste in her eyes, something like disgust, he sometimes worried.

Or was it, rather, that her face, at the moment of climax, showed a distaste for what she was doing, for the strain and duplicity of her life?

Still waters run deep, Newlings considered, and his other idea about Clara was that her coolness and shameless greed were just a front to cover deeper feelings. It could not be that she felt nothing at all: sexual desire was always flowing one way or another, it did not simply ebb away. If she felt no desire for White, then she felt it for someone else, or she repressed her feelings for someone else, but she did not feel nothing. Desirelessness was an illusion, the repressed foolery of monks and mystics. This much insight into human nature Newlings had gained from his own existence of frustration, paedophilia, and masturbation. He could

also see that Clara White must know that her marriage to the good doctor had been a mistake. It was a sham. White had been too old, and was anyway too ill-favoured, to be an object of love and constancy. That part of White's life had passed him by. And old Whitey, to be perfectly fair, should have accepted that, in Newlings' view, gracefully, instead of chasing after the unattainable and causing everyone such inevitable unhappiness. But the fact was that White had not accepted it. He had thought he could bring this lovely young woman back to Woodlands and live contentedly in his rural idyll. And now Clara had turned to other men. Baker was a loose cannon, a cowboy, a buffoon - there was no future there. But with him, with Jimmy Newlings, it could be a different story. He was still young enough to fulfil her and to challenge her in what he called 'physical love', and he was prepared to give her his undivided devotion. Above all he could offer her a degree of financial security White and Baker could only dream about, couldn't even muster between them. It was the possibilities of their relationship that caused her strain. She appeared cold and calculating, hard and mercenary, simply because it was the easiest game to play under the circumstances. She had to stifle the side of her nature that yearned for comfort, devotion and security – all that he could so readily offer her.

Generally this idea of Clara White gained substance only after two or three fairly large glasses of whisky, with just the one cube of ice for all three,

but tonight, hearing Dr White's confession of his marital unhappiness, Newlings' lover, White's wife, was virtually there, present in the room with them, with hardly any alcohol to heat Newlings' fantasy, with hardly any clothes on at all. Clara White had become an ectoplasmic figure in his living room, small and dark and perfectly formed, brought into being by the sheer power of White's disillusionment and Newlings' lust. Newlings was not drunk by any means. He had faked a drink or two, even poured one down the sink in his kitchenette, because he was so concerned to hold on to every word of the good doctor's confession.

"Couples have their rough patches," old Whitey began again, turning his glass on the polished table in maudlin meditation. "I know that. Of course. But Clara has never, even from the start . . ."

But the enormity of what he was about to say out loud dragged White back from the brink. An inner panic shut him up, literally shut his mouth, made him gulp.

Newlings was at a loss as to how to make his guest open wide again, so that he could probe and pick deeper and deeper still, and somehow hook the nerve that would make White cry out in agony and complete that line of thought. He sensed that the things he really wanted to hear were at the very front of the good doctor's mind, but not quite in the right order for utterance. He feared that more whisky would prove counter-productive, would turn back or dissolve the befuddled queue of words, and

White would become less likely to express anything really satisfying and important.

"She is a lovely woman, your wife," Newlings prompted, setting his foot patiently across his knee.

White looked up sharply. His soggy eyes focused on his host.

"I mean, you are very lucky," Newlings repeated quickly, stupidly.

"No I'm not, Newlings. I'm not lucky at all." White shook his head. The maudlin earnestness returned. "I've got no luck at all. No luck at all, Newlings."

Newlings slapped the calf of his leg. "But you are! You are *so* lucky! Lovely house. Lovely wife..."

Dr White braced himself in his seat. His jaw clenched, his nostrils flared. His face was suffused with blood. What came next was ejected from him, like some bile his system had to get rid of despite his efforts to contain it. It burst out. It burst through him -

"I think Dick Baker is fucking my wife!"

White's milky eyeballs trembled in pools of feeling. Newlings was fearful. He had never expected a breakdown of this kind, something so without self-respect. White's whole head was trembling now in tiny, involuntary shakes. Here it came again -

"I think Dick Baker is fucking my wife!"

Newlings frowned back in utter disbelief. "Oh come on, Doctor! You are *drunk!*"

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But Newlings was inadequate to the situation he had created and he well knew it. This scene was all of his making, and he had lost control of it. He'd half filled the good doctor with whisky and the man had become emotionally incontinent. He looked horrible, quite bloated with feeling. His eyes bulged. His cheeks were flushed and puffy, almost like - like O'Donnell's, for goodness' sake.

The way White appeared to Newlings was not at all an exaggeration of how he felt. The whisky had seeped into the very warp and weft of his defences, and all the fears and miseries he kept so tightly bound up twenty-four hours a day, both at home and at work, had pressed through their softened confines. The ill feeling and unhappiness was like some sweat or lymph opening up the pores of his skin and leaking out into the open, and creating an awful stink. Doctor White was on the verge of complete incontinence, of breaking into tears.

"Mine is a loveless marriage, Newlings . . ." he confessed at last.

Newlings felt such a deep satisfaction and relief on hearing this he had no idea what to do or say. After a decent pause, he murmured: "Oh, come along now . . ."

He had to take a break. He stood and went out to his kitchenette on the pretext of refilling the crystal jug with water.

In his kitchenette he put the jug on the drainer and leant over the sink.

What kind of crisis had he precipitated here?

Wasn't this just the kind of thing English etiquette had trained people to avoid at all costs? How on earth would he and White face each other in the staff room tomorrow morning? The workplace must be free of personal sentiment - a golden, a glistening rule. What could they say or do now when they passed each other in the Quad? To show how we truly felt about all that went on around us, about ourselves, about each other, was madness - we would walk around with tears streaming down our faces all day long. It just wasn't on. Feelings had to be kept in check in order to get everything done, get organised, get through the day. Yet here he was breaking up the very defences poor old Whitey needed in order to cope, to survive. Newlings felt ashamed of himself. Thoroughly ashamed. Not only of what he'd done tonight, obviously, but of what he'd been doing these last seven months or so. Of how he, too, had been making love to the good doctor's wife. Ah, but there was the difference, Newlings noted, and he bit his thin lower lip and closed his eyes, considering this difference. For Baker it was simply a biological thing. It really was what the good doctor had said it was. But for him, for Newlings, it was something else again. White's confession had allowed him to see past his usual preoccupations - his jealousy of Baker; his anxiety about being found out - to his real feelings for Clara. And despite her ruses and strategies, Newlings began to see that he was in part responsible for the corrosion of Clara's feelings for

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her husband. His relationship with her had drained the marriage of its brief vitality, displaced whatever she had felt for the good doctor, and trapped these people in a loveless union.

Oh, what a mess.

"I had better go."

Dr White was standing at the doorway of the kitchenette. The fever of sentiment had subsided. He seemed quite self-possessed once more.

Newlings looked at him, still with his thin lip bitten, buttoned.

"Forget what I said just now, Newlings. I was drunk. It was nonsense."

Newlings nodded. "Of course, old man."

"Good night."

"Good night."

Chapter Two

Parsons' Bones

There took place in the dark and freezing Games Room one Tuesday evening a fearful drawing of lots. A tight group was gathered around the broken billiards table. Around this inner core a second group patrolled in stops and starts, chins raised, keeping a watchful eye over hunched shoulders, awaiting their call to the baize. Then a third and utterly desolate and outcast group lay dashed against the walls and windowsills, taking what comfort they could from lukewarm radiators. These were the most sinister. Their eyes were heavy and their expressions swollen with appetite. They had lost. They knew their fate.

Under the silent flickering of the black and white television, during the epilogue of *Dixon of Dock Green*, these wallflowers, with their heads

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roughly shorn and their skin lumpy with acne, with their downy beards that grew in patches where they could not shave, these lost souls by the radiators and windowsills looked quite as ugly and sinister as they felt, and capable of anything, any crime.

The billiards table was full-size and there was ample room for eleven bodies standing round. Another of Rowell's hand-me-downs from the Royal Air Force, it was a ruined and useless thing. The baize was torn and ragged and the slate bed had been cracked long ago in some berserk act of anger or bravado.

No less than a hundred seniors had entered for selection. Only ten would go.

Only ten.

The decision was made on the roll of Parsons' ancient, yellowed, chipped and uneven bone poker dice, which were spilled by Parsons himself from an antique leather cup. Savouring his role at the head of the billiards table, the lofty and sententious Parsons stalled proceedings yet again - his eyes downcast, fondling his dice - to mention, by the bye - even though everyone had heard the story a thousand times - that his dice and cup were the last effects of a long dead uncle, a wandering seafarer of the Orient, with the White Star Line, an old sea dog who'd tragically drowned at sea, and who'd lost every possession in the world save this plain leather cup - held aloft and turned about, for all to see the WSL monogram - and these lonely bones, now cast before them on the green sea bed, as it were -

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"Shut it, Parsons."

The protest came from the satellite patrol, from someone still awaiting his turn at the table.

And it was seconded by a cheeky junior at the doorway, a very short boy who was leaning round the open door, whose black fringe ran square to his glasses then fell away in long kiss curl sideburns.

"Jack Tar again, is it?"

"Good God!" bellowed a defeated soul from the lukewarm radiators, "He's well out of it!"

"Let your uncle's spirit be with us, dear Parsons," several close to him smilingly intoned, and gestured for him to continue, to cast the dice, for goodness' sake.

Each winner was selected from a sub-group of ten hopefuls. The highest score over three throws went through. But there were many draws, settled on the roll of a single die. The tension was fierce when two players drew again, and yet again, as happened several times. These contestants insisted the crowd step back to give Parsons more room, and then, as all surged forward to see the fourth result, more time was lost in re-establishing order. But results were emerging. Six of the ten had already been selected. Of the fifty-four rejected, some still lingered close to the inner patrol, mingling, if they could, with those awaiting their chance. From these interlopers came calls for a revision of the rules, as it turned out the seventh winner had failed to score as well as many rejected in earlier rounds.

Parsons' wouldn't entertain pleas of that kind,

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and in this atmosphere it seemed as if the seven who'd been chosen would gladly have murdered the protesters rather than give up their places.

All this was the outcome of what Parsons had taken to be a chance encounter with Clara White - the witch of the woods, the bitch of the woods - late Monday afternoon.

Like all seniors, Parsons smoked, but he liked to smoke alone and to combine his smoking with other solitary pursuits. To guarantee his isolation he walked half a mile or so away from the Quad, another quarter of a mile beyond Woodlands, the tied cottage of Dr & Mrs White. There were certain trees, old friends, Parsons had marked out in a shady clearing. He would lean against one of these and enjoy the ritual of opening his packet of ten Player's No. 6 and lighting up. He always smoked two cigarettes. For the first he stood looking up through the bare branches at the still, grey skies, while he savoured the momentary high of the nicotine, and the pleasure of caressing himself through his trousers. When this first cigarette was finished and its butt extinguished in the damp humus of the woodland floor, he would turn and set one arm against the tree, lean his head on his forearm, undo his trousers and take out his erect cock. After fondling himself for a few moments he masturbated quickly onto the tree trunk, his excitement driven hard, chased down by fear of discovery.

The orgasm over, he wiped any mess away from

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his trousers and underwear with some toilet paper, discarded the paper on the fallen leaves, then moved to a clean tree, another friend, where he smoked his second cigarette. Since the onset of puberty this had been Parsons' chief pleasure in life.

He was a full bodied, pleasant looking youth who would have been handsome but for his ears, which were small, cupped and protrusive, shaped like a seal's ears. They were always red and veiny, as if someone had just boxed or flicked them, as bullies had done without ceasing, approaching him from behind at any time of day or night all through his junior years. He could not grow his hair to protect himself and improve his appearance because all boys (but the most cunningly evasive) were shorn in the darkness of the barber's van that visited every fortnight, without fail. Despite his seal's ears two things set Parsons apart as personable and self-confident. Firstly, he was one of the few blessed with a clear skin. The institutional diet of brisket, tapioca and suet didn't seem to trouble his system at all. He thrived on it, and never had so much as a blackhead on his cheek, neck or back. Secondly, he was one of the very, very few who'd had a sexual relationship with someone not of his own sex. It was rumoured that he had been walking out with a dark lady on Hemsby Lows, the common ground behind Hemsby's council estate. The looks and age of the lady were not known, but there were various stories about her being a single mother or a divorcee. Some jealous souls said she was more

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than fifty.

Perhaps it was this woman he thought of on his walks through the woods, and who filled his fantasy to bursting when he masturbated against the tree. If it was, and she had any emotional attachment to the young Parsons, so much the worse for her, because she was about to be displaced in his affections.

Clara White had noted Parsons' habits and the hours he kept. Well before his arrival she had come to the clearing where he liked to stop. She knew she was at the right place from the toilet tissue lying about, in various states of sodden decay. The tree she had chosen to hide behind was no more than twenty-five paces from his favourite place. She wanted as little distance separating them as possible. She had trodden the leafy steps she would take two or three times already to remove any treacherous twigs.

Thus she had accounted for her prey's senses of sight and hearing, but foolishly she had forgotten about his sense of smell. She wore as always her patchouli oil, with which she had heavily laced the evening air on these practice steps to and from her hideaway.

When Parsons arrived in his clearing he sniffed the air in alarm and stood very still. He frowned and glanced about. But he had smelled this scent, though nothing like as strong, on more than one occasion over the last few weeks, and it had not signified anything then, no human presence. As far as he knew it could be the scent of some strange

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shrub given up to the evening air. After a minute or so he relaxed, leant back against his favourite tree, and took out his cigarettes as usual. Once he had lit up his Player's No. 6 the smell of patchouli oil was forgotten and he drifted off into his usual luxurious fantasies.

Clara watched and bided her time until Parsons finished his first cigarette, put it out, turned to the tree and undid his trousers. On her feet she wore rope sandals. She trod in silence the damp and leafy floor to where he stood braced against the tree. The patchouli oil went undetected until she was upon him, and even as he turned she reached round and took his firm warm cock in her hand.

"Let me help you," she said, in her softest whisper, as if nothing would give her more pleasure. And her tone was in part sincere, because she did find the act pleasing in a way she never found doing such things for her husband pleasing. Here there was no overlay of reward, reconciliation, obligation. Here was the simple pleasure of feeling the young man's strength in her hands and seeing him submit to the wondrous relief she was offering him. Clara imagined she was fulfilling his most sublime and long-held fantasy. She reached round and cupped his balls and he came in a matter of seconds. While he stood slumped against the tree she leant against him, pressing her small breasts against his back, and whispered: "Tomorrow you can bring a friend . . . Only one. Any friend - except Ossaf - of course."

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Without explanation for either the offer or the exception, she turned and disappeared into the woods, leaving Parsons to understand of the episode, the miracle, what he could, and to enjoy his second Player's No. 6 in peace.

Woodlands was a dark cottage and its small windows were inset, close set, and darker still, so that it always looked blind, stupid and deserted. Parsons had grown complacent, believing that once he was off the beaten path (well worn by Dr White's anxious steps, head down, three or four times a day) the trees were so dense it was unlikely Dr or Mrs White could see him from those pitted windows, even if he or she had wanted to.

From the safety of her kitchen, staring out over a pile of dirty dishes, Clara White had spied on Parsons. She had wanted to see him. She had looked out for him.

It was all very well winkling five pounds a week from Dick Baker, Crafts Master, but he, it seemed, could take or leave her services these days - on two occasions recently he had not even showed up. And little Jimmy Newlings, History Master, though a more secure source of revenue, had his problems too. She had begun to find his short, hard body repugnant in the extreme, and his desperate gasps as he became excited, and the spots of saliva that dried in the corners of his mouth, were sounds and sights

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which lingered afterwards in her mind, triggering post-coital depression. No. One way or another Newlings was not going to last. She had noticed a whiff of strong beer or liquor on his breath several times in recent weeks. He was slipping away. The discipline had gone. The iron in his soul, the resilience and willpower that the little man was renowned for, had turned out to be pewter, fit only to make tankards out of. But for her part at least, the 'relationship' - Newlings had started to use this word: "*I want to talk about our relationship*" - had been a success. She had been seeing him for more than six months and had put away some seven hundred pounds of Newlings' salary and savings.

But Clara was inclined to think that she must go on accumulating much more, much, much more, in order to win her freedom from serfdom and gain a measure of control over her life, and arrangements with the likes of Newlings and Baker were not going to secure the capital she needed in the long term. *Capital* - that was the word. Her ambition, which seemed even to her a touch fantastical, this idea of the sheer quantity of money she must get hold of, had been inspired by her reading from *The Age of Leisure*. Capital seemed to sit there as an immovable ballast at the bottom of Jane Austen's novels; capital remained the underlying preoccupation in Trollope's books, and in Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* - and most particularly, of course, in the character of Rebecca Sharp. Clara kept remembering, for her

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courage and comfort and inspiration, Becky Sharp's working maxim: All men are fools.

Newlings, Baker and her husband all confirmed that idea, and gave her confidence in the potential of her circumstances. At Coxcomb Hall, a quarter of a mile up the woodland path, there was a source of wealth Bob Rowell - that lazy and perverted swindler! - had not even begun to tap. Just a quarter of a mile up the woodland path were scores of young men at the peak of their sexual potency, and in their education, if that is what it had to be called, that ungovernable force was ignored, dismissed, treated as a nuisance, an embarrassment. A mere quarter of a mile up the woodland path there was the equivalent of maybe a whole gallon, a half-bucketful of semen thrown out every week, slopped out, poured down the drain, or left to dry on cold, soiled sheets. And the supply was inexhaustible. All that was required was a plan bold enough and ingenious enough to tap it at source, to cream it off for a mutual profit.

There were certain blessings to be counted here. After all, it was not as if she was having to sell her services at closing time on freezing backstreets to reeling drunks, nor to the likes of Jimmy Newlings several times over, week in and week out. Instead her clientele was a stream of pure youth, of frustrated, naïve, unquestioning, and deeply appreciative young men. She would not even have to sell herself entirely - not unless the price was right, and the mate agreeable.

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These boys were by and large the sons of the English lower middle or middle-classes. This was no Charterhouse or Harrow. The parents of these boys would not have a great deal of money, but they would have enough, collectively, to make Clara White a sum of capital within, perhaps, a year at most. And here she also remembered from her reading what it is that divides English people more effectively even than education or class, love or marriage - all obstacles with which one can come to terms, reach some compromise, in one way or another - no, the division that mattered above all, where there could be no compromise, the hardest, fastest, and most bare-fisted fact of life, was the uncrossable divide between those who started out possessing a few thousand pounds, and those who started out borrowing a few thousand pounds.

She had quizzed Baker and Newlings about the parents of these boys. Many of them were not even in the country. They were service people abroad in places like Aden, Cyprus, Kenya, Papua New Guinea; confused soldiers wrestling with the mess of vestigial empire. Other boys were the children of naïve foreigners who hoped to get their offspring an advantage in life from an English boarding school education, who believed Rowell's assurances that after Coxcomb Hall their sons would - as a matter of course - attend Oxford or Cambridge university, whichever they preferred. These people were at an even more remote distance, in every sense, from the realities of life at the Hall, and their social

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pretensions made them all the more gullible and exploitable. And there was another, much smaller group she had identified: those who had already been cast out from other systems, streetwise neo-criminal elements who had been placed here prior to a proper tempering in borstal or prison. These she would have to watch out for, no doubt, but they could not spoil her plans if she were circumspect.

The arithmetic was dazzling. To start with there would be ten boys, each week, each of whom would pay five pounds. What Clara had in mind was a group variation on what she'd done with Parsons. It would all be over in quarter of an hour. She was confident she could ensure that. The boys would be so excited on arrival, having thought of little else all week, that she would be able to stroke them to orgasm within a few seconds. If some had cunningly masturbated already in order to enjoy her attention longer, she could make timing part of the conditions: a boy who took more than his allotted time would be left to finish the job himself, while she moved on to the next.

There was a snag, of course. She was dealing with something instinctive here, and according to Baker and Newlings and her own husband, these young men had reverted to behaviour that could properly be called bestial. The stories she had heard from her husband about the sadistic Ossaf, for example, were really quite appalling. Newlings referred to the boys as 'beasts' or 'brutes' at every

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opportunity: they were 'beasts, young beasts, nothing more nor less'. And he did not use the word 'beast' with any humorous hyperbole. What was to stop a boy, then, whom she had brought to the verge of climax, turning on her, trying to hold her hand on him, trying to pull her to him, trying to kiss her, perhaps? No doubt at first they would be too nervous to question her authority, but once one of them had sensed that when he took hold of her he dominated her, what could not happen? There would be ten of them against her. What could they not do? What could they not plan in advance?

Their own self-interest was at stake: one false move on their part and the sessions would be over - but Clara knew the folly of that line of thought. No, the solution, of course, lay in avoiding any confrontation, it lay in strategy and diplomacy and in forging an alliance. There was a *mutual* benefit here. There should not be division and distrust. To forge such an alliance she first had to find a leader, and this was why she had focused on Parsons. From her enquiries she knew that Parsons, though friendless as any other boy, was one of the oldest and strongest and not to be crossed lightly.

Hallett was so handsome. Parsons wanted to bring along someone whom Mrs White might find appealing, and Hallett was the very best Coxcomb Hall could offer, except perhaps for his younger

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brother Christopher, but Christopher's heavenly features were as yet untested by the uglification of puberty. Anthony Hallett, with his cowlick of blonde hair, his pale clear skin and retroussé nose, had an air of superiority and purity that made him sought after by all the boys, junior and senior alike, and by Rowell himself and all other homosexuals on the staff. He'd had to fight off the latter suitors ever since he was a junior. Though not shy, Hallett was by nature a rather private soul, and not the arrogant sensualist reflected in the swooning eyes of others. He was artistic and sensitive and, like Parsons, enjoyed his own company. But his elusiveness only added to his reputation, made him all the more desired. Hallett did not relish this attention. He was no more vain than any young man of his age.

He liked the usual solitary pursuits - music, reading, even poetry – but his favourite pastime was to spend the afternoon alone in the Art Loft, hunched over an art book, copying the nudes of old masters, or, very occasionally, nudes of himself from photographs he had taken with his own expensive automatic camera. Hallett did nothing with all his nudes, never flaunted himself or his paintings in any way, and was not at all flirtatious or promiscuous, but by virtue of his sheer desirability he was known as Whore Hallett. The name had stuck for so long few knew his real name was Anthony.

Clara was dressed all in black as usual, but the

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outfit was deceptive. She wore a double-breasted raincoat, though the evening was as fine and mild as it had been the previous day, and, most strange, she wore a veil. She needed the veil to give her confidence. She did not want to address these young men unobscured. Yesterday she had approached Parsons from behind: one could dispense with so many words that way. But today there would have to be many more words and they would have to be spoken eyeball to eyeball.

When Parsons and Hallett arrived, she watched them for some time from her hideaway, while she gauged their mood and gathered courage.

Parsons took out his cigarettes and he and Hallett smoked nervously together. Parsons had told Hallett what had happened but did not want to say anything speculative about this second meeting. He did not want to raise Hallett's hopes too much in case Mrs White - the witch of the woods, the bitch of the woods - didn't turn up, and he would look a fool, or a liar, and his motives - alone with Whore Hallett deep in the woods? - *Really?* - might be misconstrued.

As they put out their first cigarettes the petite, veiled form of Clara White emerged from the shadows and walked towards them head down, like a nun. Parsons and Hallett felt self-conscious and ill at ease as she came closer.

Only when Clara raised her head to speak to them did she appreciate how tall and strong these young men were. She felt a fleeting panic. She was

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vulnerable here in the middle of the woods. What folly this was. And at her request there were two of them now. But she smiled, pulled her wits together and carried on. After all, there was not much else she could do.

"We have to talk about terms."

She looked first into Parsons' eyes, and then into Hallett's, afraid of the sinister intentions she might find. Parsons' eyes were grey and very slightly protuberant: there was a frankness and steadiness there. In Hallett's blue eyes she saw a wiliness, but it seemed more humorous than cunning, and she liked him immediately. She was pleased and relieved. There was humour too in the curl of his mouth. She understood in this moment that her idea of these boys had been conceived from the stories she'd heard of Newlings' and Baker's sufferings, and her husband's sufferings, at their hands. But these were just the stories of a few whining and inadequate middle-aged men, who no doubt blamed these 'young beasts' for all their own professional and personal failings. Clara's fears fell away. She began to relax and felt ready to assume command.

But Hallett spoke next. He said, with a flick of his blond hair and a winning smile:

"Of course."

He seemed much quicker than the ponderous Parsons, and Clara addressed her next remark to him.

"I need to make money," she said. She glanced

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back at Parsons, who shifted his weight under her gaze. "I'm happy to give you the help I gave you yesterday . . . as often as you like. But for a fee."

"How much?" Hallett asked, assuming what was to Clara a disheartening gravity of tone. She looked back at him. He swallowed under her gaze, and her hopes dipped with his Adam's apple. Perhaps what she had in mind really would be too much, be out of the question.

"Five pounds," she said, without wavering. "Each."

Hallett took a sharp intake of breath and a frown creased his brow. But Clara was not to be put off. She had to see her proposal through. There was no choice now.

"You may not have that kind of money with you," she said, looking up into Hallett's eyes, which now swam with unspoken, probing questions, "but I'm sure you can get it if you try. Try very hard." She finished with a smile to Hallett, and was rewarded by Hallett offering his own long and subtle smile.

Clara did not want to talk for much longer – the fewer words between them the better. When she spoke again she accompanied her words with actions. It was time to appeal to instinct.

"I'm prepared to see the two of you, and up to eight of your friends . . ." she said, and as she spoke she undid the top buttons of her coat. Keeping her head down, she let the flap of her coat fall wide to reveal her pale, pert, thirty-one-year-old breast,

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slightly dipped, her nipple erect in the evening air. Without looking up she refastened her coat, then, smiling first at Hallett, then at Parsons, she completed what she was saying, "On Friday, here, at five o'clock." The boys' eyes were tight and their mouths pursed. "Each boy must wear long trousers and a belt," Clara added. She had been right to be so bold, and to come here prepared to be so bold. "I shall show you why on Friday. Why we need the belt, that is," she added, smiling again at Hallett. "And I must have the money in advance, at the very start, or I shall just go away again."

Hallett said: "You'll have the money."

Clara took great heart at his attempt to assume some adult authority and decisiveness, when it was obvious from his eyes that he could hardly contain his excitement.

"Oh," Clara added, as if she'd nearly forgotten, "and Ossaf cannot come."

"Of course not," Hallett agreed. They seemed to have assumed his exception.

Clara nodded, smiled farewell to each of them, then turned and left without another word.

Chapter Three

Dr & Mrs White

Lovers. Lovers, lovers, lovers - he saw them everywhere. He saw smiling twosomes, contented threesomes, chattering foursomes. No sooner had he woken up in the morning, or in the middle of the night, than the fear of cuckoldry drew tight over his eyes like a blindfold of fishnet stockings. This is why he sat in moody silence in the staff room, on his own, watching, scowling. This explained his snappishness, his wild and violent behaviour towards any good-looking boy who upset him, in or outside his laboratories.

The four hundred yards of dry, leafy path that led from the Quad to Woodlands, very beautiful in October and April, were walked blindfold by Dr White at a fierce and jerky pace, nearly a jog, several times a day, as he went home to share a cup of tea at eleven, or a salad at one or afternoon tea

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at three, with his attractive young wife. She was always there waiting for him, with a cold cup of tea or a wet, droopy salad, and some new lie or pretence.

Clara cultivated a sense of mystery about herself, a sense of the occult, by dressing in widow's weeds and by dabbing her body and her clothes with cheap but exotic scents, such as her Indian patchouli oil. As soon as she'd arrived at the Hall as Whitey's lovely young bride, she was named 'the witch of the woods' or 'the bitch of the woods'. 'Have you seen the witch of the woods? Have you seen the bitch of the woods?' But it was as if that was what she'd expected, or even wanted. It was as if, from the start, she was one step ahead of the game.

With her affairs Clara played her part in maintaining the status quo at Coxcomb. She helped to keep safe the isolation of the community against the tide of worldly influence, the social upheaval of the mid-sixties, that washed in such flotsam as the enlightened pornographer, Ray Hooley, or the strange offbeat musician, Egg Taylor. The sexual needs which might have driven men like Jimmy Newlings to seek relief in Gt Yarmouth, the nearest town large enough to support prostitution, were more than satisfied in Woodlands, deep within the grounds of the Hall itself. Bob Rowell approved of and encouraged these affairs. He even urged headmaster O'Donnell to visit Clara White. And O'Donnell did visit. After carefully checking Dr

White's timetable, and the timetables of Baker and Newlings, he rolled all the way down the path to Woodlands on his bony shanks. But on arrival he was rebuffed. Clara didn't even let him inside the house. Rowell had a word with Clara on O'Donnell's behalf, and explained to her that the more staff became accustomed to the Hall as their own hermetic world, their own England, their own scepter'd isle entire unto itself, the better for everyone concerned; and, indeed, the better for England herself. His appeal had no effect on Clara.

In some ways Clara appeared to have a perfectly traditional, not to say Victorian view of life and marriage. The forging of a sound alliance, a keen sense of economy and good husbandry, guided her judgement in most matters. But this attitude was very new. Before her marriage to Dr White she had spent a thriftless and shiftless youth, sharing various untidy flats and slovenly households, and moving from one lowly secretarial position to another until she finished up, at the age of thirty, living on her own in a boarding house, earning her living as a receptionist at Gt Yarmouth's Eastern Electricity showrooms. One miserable December morning, in an early snowfall, walking towards the bright orange logo of the showrooms in Mare Street, Clara Evans, as she was then, had had a moment of epiphany. She stopped there, on the pavement, in the snow, and looked ahead at the overbearing orange logo, and she'd understood in this moment that unless she acted decisively, her life would

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become so oppressed by the drudgery of her working days it would not be worth living. Worse still, she knew that she would, in fact, just carry on, carry on and live it out, wear it out, like some old coat she hated but couldn't afford to replace, until she was seventy or eighty years old, and then die somewhere not far from where she'd started out, a burden to the state in some home or hospice. In this moment the future was entirely clear and true to her.

Though she carried on to the showrooms that December morning, in her mind she had reached a turning point. She was thirty and she was still single. She knew herself to be reasonably attractive. She thought her hips too broad and her breasts too small, but she knew from the way men looked at her and quickly looked away that these were minor blemishes, if blemishes at all. But all of the men in all of her offices had always seemed so lumpy and middle-aged, so lecherous and treacherous, and they dressed all year round in Marks & Spencers beige or brown. They talked of nothing but football, cars and television. Hopeless prospects.

Clara Evans had needed to change her life. But how? *How?*

In the end she could think of nothing more imaginative than the irksome business of evening classes, the slow climb up the ladder of second-rate qualifications that might one day lead to a third-rate career. It was at these evening classes, at the Technical Institute, that she met the beaky, quite elderly, and very unappealing Dr White. He was

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teaching CSE mathematics and science in the evenings to supplement Bob Rowell's paltry salary, and to get him away from what he thought of sometimes as the madness of his life at the Hall.

But Clara Evans found that maths and science, taught by Dr White, made as little sense to her second time round as they had at school. Her days were filled with the tedium of filling in Electricity Board forms and her evenings, in her chilly, lonely digs, were now filled with turning pages of grey, incomprehensible diagrams under a lowly Woolworths table lamp. A terminal disillusionment set in and a defeated soul became manipulative and vindictive. From Dr White's uncertain manner with the women in his class - with all the women in his class - it was obvious that he was a deeply frustrated man, and, very probably, a very inexperienced man. Whenever he introduced a new theorem or equation, he took every opportunity to rush to the women's desks to explain things to them personally, but then held back from them, all confidence lost, no sooner than he'd started. And the younger and more attractive the woman the more flustered he became. Such agitation, such buzzing lust, made his teaching infuriatingly ineffective to the young fathers and young farmers waiting with sharpened pencils, logarithms and protractors in hand, ready to move on in life.

The idea settled in Clara's mind that if she could seduce this beaky, hairy-eared, aging schoolmaster into supporting her indefinitely, this would be, in

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the short term at least, prize enough to compensate for his age and his shameful unattractiveness, and in the long term it might lead to other possibilities, opportunities, any of which had to be better than things as they stood.

Married life had worked out very much as she'd wanted and expected. She loved the isolation from worldly cares of Dr White's cottage in the woods. She loved the freedom to get up when she liked and to eat and drink as she pleased. Above all, and this was her greatest pleasure, she loved to sit and read whatever she chose. Alongside her maths and science classes, she had started and abandoned a course in English Literature. The teacher was a passionate young graduate who had inspired her to buy the set classic - *Emma*, by Jane Austen – before she quit.

In Woodlands, this introduction blossomed into inspiration.

Without the stultifying effect of work on her leisure hours she found herself, after some effort, able to cope with the antique, circumlocutory language, and then to enjoy it. After *Emma* came *Mansfield Park*, and then *Sense & Sensibility*, *Pride & Prejudice* and even *Northanger Abbey*. In Woodlands, Clara White discovered the wonderful ease of living in fictional worlds. Rising when she chose and travelling to Hartfield or Mansfield Park

or Norland Park every day, clip-clopping through landscapes not dissimilar to those she now inhabited at Woodlands, was a great deal different to walking up the dark streets of Gt Yarmouth at 7.30 sharp towards the orange logo of the Eastern Electricity showrooms.

Clara White had found her vocation. She was to be a lady of leisure.

But after a while her monologues about literary characters and great authors filled her husband with a smouldering anger. At first he tried to read a book or two himself to keep up, but he quickly abandoned these attempts. He was not a reader and she was already too far ahead. Now she'd been through the Edwardians. Now she was reading poetry. Now she'd started Hemingway . . . Her husband's attempts to share in her new passion, his tentative contributions to discussion, such as he could manage, made no difference, never stemmed her flow, never interested her. All of a sudden, he was too ignorant.

Dr White had imagined that he had married a woman who was so many years his junior she was almost a child, an innocent. He had relished the idea of bringing her to Woodlands where he could ravish that innocence. Where he could, at last, explore all the possibilities of sex, about which he'd fantasised so heatedly through a long and lonely bachelorhood. But this was not all he had hoped for. He had hoped – and he had told her, quietly but passionately, of this hope – that they would have a child, before it

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was altogether too late for him. Clara had assured him that this was what she wanted too, oh yes, that she felt the same need, the very same need, and the same urgency.

But these books of hers - these wretched books! - as he saw it, had changed all that, had somehow taken her innocence away and taken her away too. He had to work all day and mark all evening - what chance did he stand of keeping up with her reading, of being able to talk back to her about this book or that book? Inside he ranted and railed against his young wife. Instead of enjoying the fruits of marriage in his rural idyll he found himself living with a lazy and slatternly bookworm. Cursed with the bourgeois repression of his own upbringing, Dr White's anger and sexual frustration grew worse, grew into a weighty sickness, a source of depression that became more acute the more he tried to deny it to himself.

This weakness of his, this repressive tendency, had been obvious to Clara from the outset. His outmoded, patronizing, gentlemanly posturing when he'd courted her had never fooled her for a moment. She had seen it for what it was. An aping of high English manners, inhibition and constipation of thought and feeling. Once married and settled in Woodlands she was quick to turn this weakness against him. An unwanted advance - and they were all unwanted - was rebuked with silence and cold withdrawal. His slightest impatience or irritation hurt her feelings for days and he found himself

shunned for his barbarous incivility. And her withdrawal, by and large, meant withdrawal into another book, another imagined world.

She caught him watching her as she neared the end of a novel, waiting for the vacant period when she might give him some attention, by and by. If he had offended in any way she arranged to have another book to hand, but out of sight. When she finished the current read she sighed, closed the book, and looked for a long, reflective moment at its covers, and seemed about to say something, but then did not.

At these signs Dr White made himself more comfortable on the sofa, and tidied a space next to him for his young wife.

"Now, my dear . . . "

But she would be on her feet even as he spoke. She would stretch her lovely young body in front of the fire, and then, feigning a frown of pleased surprise, she would take up her next volume, thicker than the last, from where she'd hidden it round the side of the mantelpiece, or from under the Daily Mail. She sat down again and curled her legs up beneath her in what had once been Dr White's very own fireside chair, a club chair, but which had now become her 'reading chair'. She ignored his fretful sighs. To her he was not there. She was immersed again between the sheets of another book.

Within a few minutes Dr White left the room to do some chore in the kitchen, or to iron his clothes for work the next day.

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By this pattern of provocation and withdrawal Clara secured much solitude from her husband and smothered any criticism firstly of her reading, and then, as time passed, of her housework too. Little by little she stopped doing things. She got out of the habit of ironing regularly, of washing up after supper, of sweeping and cleaning the ancient lino of the mouldy kitchen. She left things until, in the end, her husband began to take them up. He was orderly and could not bear living amid shabbiness, dirt and waste. Of course she had to be careful not to let things go too far. When she sensed that he was on the verge of breaking down under the strain of his day job at the Hall, and his night shift of housework at Woodlands, when he was on the verge of mental collapse, and of losing, at last, his precious temper, she had strategies to relieve him and to dissipate ill-feeling. She would have a sudden burst of energy herself and clean the kitchen or the living room from top to bottom. And she would cook a good meal for him. And she would tidy away all the bills into their respective files. She would accept no praise or recognition for these sudden spurts of industry. Tacitly, she implied that she was perfectly happy to do the housework, the effort meant nothing to her - *but she would not do it at his command!* Neither was she his guilt-slave, and the more he tried to treat her as such the less she would do.

These pretences schooled her husband to further patience and silence, and, most importantly, into

doing more and more of the things he wanted done himself. He assumed the burden of the routine chores - shopping, which he loathed, which he felt to be a public disgrace; cooking, washing up, putting out the washing, taking in the washing, ironing - and as he worked harder so his young wife, from the corner of her eye, as it were, monitored his behaviour and timed the deployment of her other stratagem, when it was time to reward rather than punish.

The harder he worked and the more he took on, the more likely it became that she would come to him, quite out of the blue, to give him some sexual treat or favour. He stood washing up at the sink, after cooking and clearing away the Sunday lunch, and she came through from the living room, where she had been sitting reading in front of the fire, and slipped her hand between his legs. He stopped still where he was as she undid his trousers, stroked his furry belly and felt him through his underpants. When he tried to turn to embrace her she held him to the sink with her forearm across his back.

"Carry on washing up," she whispered into his hairy ear.

Obediently he took up another pan and dipped it into the suds. She stooped, pulled down his pants and drew his cock back between his legs to give herself room. He moved to assist. Then she began gently to squeeze and stroke him - to milk him, as it were - as he stood there at the sink.

"Carry on washing up," she whispered, very

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low, when he stopped again, his hands flat on the bottom of the greasy sink, his rolled sleeves getting wet, his face twisted in ecstasy, and in agony also, in the agony of all his repressed ill-feeling welling up against him. And until he resumed his chore she would only hold him, but as he began to scrub and rinse more vigorously, so she would begin to rub and milk him more vigorously, until he could bear it no more and he climaxed and his trunk slumped over the sink. With his orgasm, which she prolonged to the full, all his pent up fury was released, all the private rants and rages were expunged and once again he was cleaned out and ready to go to work on Monday morning, and begin another hellish week in the servitude of Rowell and O'Donnell, in the company of the dullards of the Hall, to earn the soldier's pay that would keep his wife in the style to which she had become accustomed.

But in fact Clara was not as dependent upon him as he might have supposed, and was becoming less so as the months passed. His tied house, Woodlands, had become for her not only a comfortable retreat from the world, but an ideally lucrative situation. From the first week they were married she had put much of the housekeeping money into her own deposit account; she'd added to this with the revenue from Baker and Newlings, which she banked each Friday morning. Not only were there these sums, which had enjoyed a steady growth over the last year, there was also, in prospect

now, a vein of income which was potentially far, far greater than that she currently mined at the Hall, or that her husband mined, for that matter.

She had no competition. Matron was the only other female in the confines. Despite her more privileged access to the boys, Matron wasn't even in contention. A very tall, virgin spinster in her mid-sixties, she attempted to be the shipshape-and-Bristol-fashion stereotype, the pristine battleship she believed everyone expected her to be. Her double-breasted tunic was firmly pressed, and her long, flowing grey hair was pinned back in a bun so extended and so severe it lent her head a weathervane for seeking out mischief. For such pains she was ignored: no one cared in which direction, down which corridor, she headed. No one, not even Rowell himself (he had long forgotten), even knew her real name. She was simply, solely, only, 'Matron'. Beneath her forlorn attempts at starched white efficiency, Matron was just another lost and unhappy soul whom Rowell had trapped in his employ for personal gain rather than professional purpose. Matron was an alcoholic. The battleship could be discovered run aground and rudderless any time of day or night. This meant that more often than not Rowell himself was obliged to minister to first aid cases, and from there it was but a short step for him to instruct boys generally on other matronly matters, such as personal hygiene. For some of the more sporty boys, this might mean a long hot shower and a rubdown in the warm, red

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luxury of Rowell's apartments, and perhaps even a massage with various oils and creams to ease the strains of rugby or cross-country. For the very small ones a soothing balm on the buttocks might be needed for the wounds left by O'Donnell. O'Donnell's excesses were at their worst when provoked not by his passion, where there was a discernible patterning to the wounds, a gentle, climactic patterning either side of a central stripe – tending to these wounds had its rewards for Rowell too, which he never failed to mention to O'Donnell. No, O'Donnell's excesses were at their worst, at their most reckless, bruised, bloody, and quite unerotic, when provoked by Dick Baker.