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Opening Extract from...

Another Woman

Written by Penny Vincenzi

Published by Headline Review

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Penny Vincenzi

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First published in 1994
by ORION

First published in this paperback edition in 2007
by HEADLINE REVIEW
An imprint of HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

1

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A format paperback 978 0 7553 3322 6 (ISBN-13)
B format paperback 978 0 7553 3266 3 (ISBN-13)

Typeset in New Caledonia by Avon DataSet Ltd,
Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP
A division of Hachette Livre UK Ltd
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.reviewbooks.co.uk
www.hodderheadline.com

Prologue

It was going to be the perfect wedding.

Of course everybody always said that about weddings, but nobody sitting round the great pine kitchen table of the bride's home that perfect July evening doubted it for a single moment. How could they? When the couple themselves were so patently and blissfully happy, sitting together, holding hands, smiling round at their families, at indulgent fathers, proud mothers and assorted friends smiling back at them. When the sun was finally setting on a perfect day, night drifting over the deep Oxfordshire valley, with just a touch of mist promising another still more perfect one tomorrow, the thick, rich scent of the roses drifting in through the open door? When Maggie Forrest, mother of the bride, could finally relax, knowing that everything was in order, the pink and white marquee up and decked with flowers, the tables half set, the champagne (vintage) delivered and in crates in the utility room off the kitchen, the food in the process of being transformed from dozens of pounds of salmon, chicken, beef, mountains of strawberries, raspberries, eggs and cream into the most splendid wedding feast by the caterers, and the cake, four exquisitely iced tiers, standing on the dining-room table?

What could possibly go wrong now? they might have asked

one another. For such a perfect match, between Cressida, younger daughter of the immensely successful and distinguished gynaecologist James Forrest, and Dr Oliver Bergin, also a gynaecologist, only son of Mr and Mrs Josh Bergin of New York City. Cressida, so pretty, with her fair English-rose beauty, so enchantingly mannered, so extremely well suited to the life and husband she had chosen; and Oliver, so dashingly handsome, and almost too charming for his own good, as Maggie Forrest had remarked, laughing, to Julia Bergin on the first occasion they had met. The guest list was long, but not too long, just 300, for Cressida had insisted on being married in the little stone church in Wedbourne where she had been christened. All over England the women on the list had been buying dresses, choosing hats, mulling over the wedding lists (the General Trading company and Peter Jones), and checking on their husband's morning suits; and the chosen eight whose small children were to be attendants had been trekking up and down to the London studio from where Harriet Forrest, Cressida's older sister, ran her fashion empire, and where the dresses had been made – not Harriet's usual sort of thing, but charming nonetheless, sprigged muslin Kate Greenaway style for the girls, white linen sailor suits for the boys. Cressida's dress had been made at the Chelsea Design Company, a wonderful creation in heavy cream silk, studded with pearls and with the palest, tiniest pink silk roses drifting down the train. It hung upstairs now in the attic room that Maggie used for sewing, swathed in its muslin cover, the veil beside it in a box, waiting for its tiara of fresh flowers to arrive in the morning, along with her bouquet (cream and pink roses) and the baskets of daisies and scabius that the attendants were to carry into the church. In the dining room of the Court House the presents were stacked, ready to be shipped over to

New York, when young Dr and Mrs Oliver Bergin settled into their new home in East 80th. Marvellous presents: glasses, china, linen, silver, all listed, the thankyou letters long since written.

A few miles away in Oxford the string quartet that was to play at the wedding was practising a rather difficult Mozart piece which the bride had specially requested; the vicar of St Stephen's, Wedbourne was running through the few wise if predictable words he always spoke at weddings and the organist was rehearsing the choir, and in particular the dazzling-voiced small boy he had just discovered in the neighbouring council estate, in 'Love Divine'. A few miles away in the garage of the Royal Hotel, Woodstock, the silver vintage Bentley belonging to the bride's godfather, the famously powerful and rich Theodore Buchan, was being given a final and quite unnecessary polish.

Everything ready; everything perfect. For a perfect wedding for a perfect bride.

And who could possibly have thought, on that golden scented evening, entertained a suspicion even for a moment, that the perfect wedding was never to take place at all?

The Evening Before

Chapter 1

Harriet

Late, she was going to be late, for the bloody pre-wedding supper. God, her mother would never forgive her. She could see her now, carefully serene smile growing tense as she looked ever more frequently at the clock, could hear the barbed comments, about how she, Harriet, was always late, always had so much, so many terribly important things to do; and her father would be trying to calm her, to make light of her lateness, and Cressida would be saying of course it didn't matter, it didn't matter at all, everyone else was there, telling her mother not to fuss, but making in fact the lateness more noticeable, more important. Well, it was all very well for her mother and for Cressida. They didn't really have immense claims on their time. They didn't have to worry about leaving London mid week for a Thursday wedding. Thursday! Why not a Saturday like everyone else? Of course her mother had worked very hard on the wedding, but it had been the only thing she had had to think about, and Cressida's job with her Harley Street doctor was hardly stressful, she could take time off whenever she needed to, at the bat of her long eyelashes. They didn't have a business to run, collections to design, stock to deliver, books to balance. Or not balance. Harriet suddenly felt so sick, so frightened that she braked violently and pulled over onto the hard shoulder. She sat there, breathing deeply

and slowly, hauling herself together. Don't panic, Harriet, don't; don't look down even. It'll be all right. Well, it probably won't, but you'll be all right. It's not a hanging offence, going bust, going bankrupt. It may be the end of a dream, but she could survive that. She'd survived the end of others after all.

Her head ached, and her throat felt dry, scratchy; it was a bit like a hangover. Only she hadn't had a drink. She'd wanted to have a drink all day, several drinks, but she hadn't. She'd had to keep her head clear for the endless phone calls, the faxes, the decisions. All to no avail, it seemed. She was almost certainly done for: stymied; defeated. She needed more money than she could possibly even imagine getting hold of, within twenty-four hours, and the one person who might be able to supply it was the one person she couldn't possibly ask. So that was that really. She just had to face it, and rethink the rest of her life. Harriet looked at herself briefly in the rear-view mirror; the events of the day showed with awful clarity on her face. It wasn't just that she was pale, most of her make-up gone, her hair uncombed, not even that she looked tired; her dark eyes were heavy, her skin somehow dull, her mouth drawn and taut (rather like her mother's, she thought with horror, consciously relaxing it, forcing a fake smile into the mirror). Her mascara had smudged, adding to the shadows under her eyes, and the collar of her white linen shirt was crumpled. Her earrings were hurting her; she pulled them off and felt her ears throb painfully, and for some reason that was the last straw and she felt hot tears stinging behind her eyes.

'Oh, for God's sake, Harriet Forrest,' she said aloud, wiping them irritably away, 'don't start crying now, just because your ears hurt.' And she turned on the engine again, pulled back onto the road and put her foot down, forcing her mind away from the day behind her and on to the one ahead. Her sister

was getting married, and she had serious responsibilities, not the least of which was to get to the Court House as soon as ever she could. Sitting on the M40 feeling sorry for herself wasn't going to solve anything. Against all logic she felt suddenly better, more in order, better in control; she was even able to appreciate the beauty of the evening, the darkness settling onto the shadowy Chiltern hills. It would be nice to see everyone, especially Rufus and Mungo, and Merlin would be there, bless him, she hadn't seen him since he got back from Peru, although she'd heard him talking on *Start the Week* or something, his wonderfully strong voice sounding more as if it belonged to a twenty- than an eighty-year-old. And then she switched on the radio, and Pavarotti was singing 'Che gelida manina' from *La Bohème* and that really was too awful, too cruel, and although she did not stop again, she saw the last twenty miles of her journey through a dreadful haze of pain.

'That was mean of You, God,' she said aloud again, as she finally turned the Peugeot into the gravel drive of the Court House. 'You really had it in for me today, didn't You?'

James

James felt a rush of intense relief as the lights of Harriet's Peugeot beamed into the darkness. It wasn't just that he had been, as always, worried about her, for she drove so much too fast (and in that way, as in many others, she was very much his daughter, the carrier of his genes), it was that her arrival would create a stir in the room, a regrouping, would make it possible for him to leave it, to escape briefly from its claustrophobic perfection. He was finding it almost physically stifling, having enormous difficulty in sitting still; indeed had got up so often

to refill the glasses, to offer more coffee, to pass fruit, cheese, biscuits, that Maggie had finally said sweetly, but with a just discernible touch of irritation, that he was making everyone feel exhausted, and that he should relax and let people help themselves. As if she of all people knew about relaxing, with her overcontrolled calm, her near-manic, all-encompassing smiles. Susie, for all her energy, her eager vitality, had a well of calm within her that was truly restful. He looked at her now, as she sat chatting easily, happily to Josh Bergin, to Cressida, to Oliver, and wondered resentfully as he had a hundred, a thousand times if Alistair recognized his intense good fortune in having her as his wife. She had taken that marriage in all its distinct lack of promise and turned it into something happy, constructive, strong. He had never in all the years heard her complain about, even belittle it; it was her job, her career and she had been hugely successful at it. And now, by some extraordinary, almost evil quirk of fate, it was threatened. She had come over to him in the garden where they'd been having drinks in the scented early evening, before supper, her dark eyes just a little wary, and said, 'Jamie, we have to talk.' And a little later, while Maggie was putting the final touches to her supper, and Alistair was, in his beautifully mannered way, helping to carry glasses in from the garden, he walked with Susie through the rose garden and she said, her voice half amused, half anxious, 'Jamie, you're not going to believe this, but Rufus tells me he wants to get married.' And he said, 'Well, is there any great problem in that?' And she said, 'Just possibly, yes, there is. He wants to marry Tilly Mills. I'm not sure quite why, but I think it might very well open a rather large can of worms, don't you?'

And ever since he had been so afraid, so deeply uneasy, that he had had trouble swallowing Maggie's perfect supper, and

had been more consumed with longing for a drink than he could remember in the whole of the – what? – twenty years that had passed since Tilly Mills had been born.

It was the forced inactivity that was so frightful, his absolute powerlessness to do anything about it. Any other night, he would perhaps have talked to Rufus, questioned him casually, gently about his life, about his plans, would have been able to form at least some impression of how serious things really were. But not tonight, with all the family gathered for his daughter's wedding, when he had so many other worries and concerns, slight in absolute terms, but of immense importance in the immediate future, and so he had simply had to sit and watch Rufus, as he sat at the table, displaying the slightly old-fashioned charm that was his trademark, talking with huge and courteous interest to his mother, (he was famously devoted to Susie), to Julia Bergin, to Maggie, to Janine Bleche, Cressida's French godmother (amazingly glamorous still, even if she was over seventy), and know that before he could explore the matter any further, at the very least twenty-four hours would have to elapse. It was almost unendurable.

He looked with intense envy at his godfather, slumbering sweetly in the corner by the Aga: Sir Merlin Reid, famously eccentric explorer (and making discoveries still, even in his ninth decade, with the world so much smaller, so much more familiar than when he had begun his travels, sixty-five years earlier). Merlin had cut short his last expedition (travelling the Central Cordillera by mule) in order to be at the wedding. He had never married himself, had said no woman would stand for him, nor he for any woman, but James was a son to him, and Cressida and Harriet granddaughters: he would not have missed being in the family, he said, at this time for the world. He was still, in his eighties, wonderfully erect and youthful, his

white hair thick, his blue eyes brilliant; he was much given to bargaining for everything, not only in the souks and casbahs and bazaars of the world, but in Harrods and Sainsbury's and even on British Rail.

'Give you five guineas for that tie and that's my last word,' he would say to some flustered young salesman, or, 'If you think I'm paying twenty quid to travel twenty miles you can think again, fifteen's my last offer,' and just occasionally someone would give in to him, either to humour him, or to amuse themselves, would sell him a shirt for half price or give him two pounds of apples for the price of one. He had never managed to persuade British Rail or London Transport to drop their rates for him, but London cabbies occasionally would, especially if he had regaled them with some story of his travels, a journey into the unknown or a brush with a hostile tribe which they could pass on to other customers.

The passionate envy James felt as he looked at Merlin now was not only for the sweet sleep he was so patently enjoying, but for the long peaceful life, devoid of any complexity or wrongdoing, that lay behind him. Merlin might have risked acute danger at the hands of hostile tribes, deadly wildlife and savage environments, but he knew nothing of guilt, of remorse, of wrecked relationships, of ruined lives.

And then James thought that there was at least one thing he could do, that would make him feel a little better. He could tell Theo. As he had done in every other crisis of his life. He would call Theo at his hotel – the bugger should have been here anyway, what was he doing for Christ's sake, spending this important evening alone with his new little bimbo of a wife? Despite everything James grinned to himself at the thought of what Theo was almost certainly doing with the new little bimbo – and talk to him. Not now, of course not now. But first

thing in the morning while everyone was busying about, occupied with things like hair and flowers and dresses and hats, he would go and talk to Theo, lay his troubles before him, and ask him what he thought he should do. Theo would have an idea. Theo always did.

Tilly

Far away in Paris, Tilly Mills, despite every resolution to the contrary, heard herself saying that yes, she would like to go to Les Bains Douches with the new big screen hotshot, Jack Menzies, who might have a face like an angel with a past as *Arena* had put it last week, but also had a serious personal hygiene problem. She knew it was crazy, that she had an early call, that it had been a tough day, that if Mick McGrath should be there he would kill her, that she had been late the night before, that it might hit the papers and upset Rufus, but she had to do something to distract herself from the thought of what was going on in England. The frenetic atmosphere of what was still considered one of the chicest discos in Paris would surely take her mind off the twin spectres of a self-congratulatory James Forrest leading his younger daughter down the aisle, watched by roughly 300 adulatory friends and family (Rufus Headleigh Drayton amongst them), and the colour and added interest she might have brought to the occasion had she yielded to temptation and Rufus's fairly intense pressure and attended the wedding. She could have been there right now, in England, a few miles (or not even a few miles) from the heart of the Forrest home, casting a six-foot-one-and-a-half-inch shadow over James Forrest's happiness.

'Shit,' she said aloud, 'shit, shit, shit,' then she stood up, tugged her Lycra dress down so that so long as she stood absolutely straight it just covered her buttocks, and sashayed across the room towards the exit, feeling rather than seeing every pair of male eyes (and a good few female ones as well) fixed upon her, and sensing rather than hearing her name being passed from mouth to mouth, table to table, and then as she hit the street, walked through the door of the restaurant followed by Menzies and his minder (Christ, what was she doing with this Hollywood riffraff when she could be with Rufus?), met the inevitable wall of flashbulbs, went into further automatic pilot, and in one swift movement smiled at them, made some crack about giving them a flash and slid into the Menzies limo. And wondered as it shot off into the night, not for the first time, how she imagined she could possibly move with any degree of permanence from this world into the sweetly ordered, old-fashioned one inhabited by Rufus Headleigh Drayton.

Theo

Theodore Buchan, sitting alone in the bar of the Royal Hotel, Woodstock, embarking on his fourth Armagnac, and waiting with a fair degree of impatience for his fifth and fairly new wife Sasha to return from what she still insisted on calling the girls' room – he must have a little chat with Sasha about the things which were beginning quite seriously to irritate him – was also concentrating his formidable energies on not thinking about the wedding at which he was to play a considerable part the next day.

'Of course you must come,' James had said, when Theo had

first tried to make excuses, offering perfectly genuine-sounding alibis in the form of conferences, company launches, merger announcements, a long-postponed and promised honeymoon with the new Mrs Buchan. 'Of course you must come. Cressida is your goddaughter for Christ's sake, and you're my oldest friend, and how could you even think we could do any of it without you? How could I get through the day even? Besides, you love weddings – even when they're not your own. And since when, Theo, could a conference, let alone a honeymoon, not be put off?'

He had been genuinely and deeply hurt; Theo had recognized the fact, promised to come and spent the following months preparing himself for the ordeal.

The wedding itself of course would be wonderful: the daughter of one of his oldest friends marrying the son of another. Dear old Josh, who'd been at the International School with him, with whom he'd gone on sexual rampages in Geneva, whose best man he had been at his wedding to Julia. That marriage had lasted. Only Josh's second, and the first had been very swiftly over. And Julia was a good wife to him, of course. That helped. Intelligent, (whatever the Forrests thought), gracious, a little intense – but then she was an American – and very sexy. Very very sexy. There'd been that rather strange incident one night when Josh was away – Theo wrenched his mind away from the incident: one of the few times he felt he had behaved really well – and she had been a terrific mother to Oliver. Although she did rather over-love him, Theo felt. But the boy had survived her spoiling, was really very nice indeed. A perfect husband for Cressida. The whole thing was nearly perfect. The only thing that could have improved on it would have been Cressida marrying his own son, his beloved Mungo, named by his doting parents after an obscure Scottish spirit in

honour of the country of his conception, but that would have seemed almost incestuous, so closely had they grown up together. Worse still, if she'd fallen in love with – Theo switched his mind away from the one unthinkable, the one he and James never even spoke about, and concentrated instead on Oliver. Charming, brilliant, good-looking Oliver. A little lacking in humour perhaps, but still a golden, blue-eyed boy. Literally as well as metaphorically. Not only graduated summa cum laude out of Harvard medical school, not only winner of a research scholarship to the Mount Sinai, but a superb sportsman too, played tennis for Harvard; wasted, in a way, on the medical profession, but he would no doubt make a fortune out of his specialty, as they called it out there. He was already doing brilliantly.

Funny how history repeated itself. The gynaecologist's daughter marrying the gynaecologist – and this was third generation. Well, at least Cressida was Oliver's first choice, the love of his life. Not entirely predictable, perhaps, gentle, sweet little Cressida – several people had remarked that Harriet seemed more his style: hopelessly wrong there of course, but then people were usually wrong about such things and few people knew and understood Harriet. But certainly he needed a Cressida, a loving supportive wife, someone who could run his home, entertain for him, back him up, raise his children perfectly. And Cressida was extremely socially accomplished: despite her gentleness, she wasn't shy, and she was very efficient – although undeniably impractical: it was a family joke, Cressida's physical incompetence, it wasn't just that she couldn't change a plug or thread up a sewing machine, she could never even get the right station on the radio, or fill up the windscreen wash on her car. But she was superb at persuading people to do things for her, at delegating; she

would be a perfect wife. For a rich man. Not so good for a poor one, maybe. Well, that was all right. She wasn't marrying a poor man.

Funny, how marriage as an institution went on and on. People said it had had its day, that everyone simply lived together these days and so on and so forth, but the fact remained that in the end they usually wanted to formalize things. He'd read somewhere that statistically there were more marriages than ever. Well, thought Theo, waving at the barman – Christ what was Sasha doing in the lavatory, giving herself a blowjob? – he certainly kept up the batting average. Five was quite a good total. It was his compulsion to own things, of course, that had led him to it: companies, houses, paintings, cars, horses, all neatly packaged up and labelled 'property of Theodore Buchan'. And women. He'd tried not owning them, tried just having mistresses, but it never worked. Most recently and most terribly it hadn't worked. He was too possessive, too distrustful to love and let go, in that awful modern psycho-babble phrase. It was fine, having a mistress as well as a wife, you could love her and let go, although even then he found that painful, when he was very involved with them, with the mistresses, and they started having other relationships. That was how he'd arrived at marriages three and four: both wives had originally been mistresses that he hadn't been able to face losing. Then somehow there'd still been something missing in the relationship, risk, intensity, and he'd had to find a mistress as well . . . and so it had gone on. Until – well, until. And then there'd been Sasha and she'd gone straight to ranking as wife. He'd met her at a race meeting in Longchamps, she'd been with someone he'd been trying to do a deal with, and he'd taken one look at her, so edibly delicious, so perfect, with her peaches-and-cream skin, her tumbling hair, and a body that he

could see would soothe and ease him out of the considerable pain he was in, and he'd had to have her. She was lonely, she told Theo, her blue eyes wide with innocent distress (and so was he, rawly, desperately lonely), and she didn't like being on her own, she was no good at it, she really needed someone to care for. And Theo had offered himself up to be cared for, and that had been that. And without looking too far forward and by sheer force of will refusing to so much as glance backwards, he had married her. And it had worked to a surprising degree. Theo was still slightly shocked at how well it had worked. And he'd managed to avoid thinking too much about what had happened before until tonight. And tomorrow. When he had to confront it, face it, face – well, face the whole damn thing. He didn't know how he was going to handle it. He felt, if the truth was to be told, shit-scared. Which was a situation Theo wasn't used to at all.

He waved at the waiter again, asked for a cigar; he was just drawing it into life when Sasha came hurrying across the room, slightly flushed, freshly made-up, hair reshaped, a cloud of that heavy sexy smell she wore – what was it called? Obsession, great name – hanging about her. She sat down beside him, kissed him, took his hand, smiled into his eyes. Theo looked at her, at her swelling breasts in her black dress, at her perfect thighs, disappearing into her short skirt, at the delicately rounded stomach, and felt his erection beginning to form, to stir with its profoundly powerful precision. He didn't say a word, just stared at her for a moment, stood up quickly, pulled her up almost brutally, and then dropped her hand and stalked out of the bar and into the lift. She followed him, half anxious, half excited; he stood aside to let her pass, then shut the door and pushed her against the back of the lift. His face must have been easy to read, for she smiled at him, very slowly and

confidently, and pushed up her dress; she was wearing no pants, no tights.

Slowly, gracefully, like a dancer, she raised one of her golden legs and wrapped it round his waist; Theo felt her hand unzipping his fly, reaching for his penis. His blood sang, his entire energy focused on her, on reaching into her; and as he felt her, sank into her wetness, stood there braced against her, feeling the glorious pulling pleasure so intense it was near to pain, holding her small buttocks, kneading them, reaching for release, he was able for a brief but timeless time to forget, even to care about, what he had to face the next day.

Susie

Susie felt terribly tired. Like James, she looked enviously at Merlin sleeping so very soundly in his corner. The day seemed to have gone on forever. Normally she never felt tired, certainly not in social situations; she tried to ignore the fact now, afraid of its implications, concentrated even harder on Josh and the stories of his youth. She liked Josh; he was so uncomplicated, so charming – and so very good-looking. Susie could never understand why women said they didn't like good-looking men. In her experience, they were no less interesting and no more conceited (which was the charge women tended to set against them) than plain men, and at least you could enjoy the looks if they were being boring.

Alistair was good-looking; it had been a factor certainly in her decision to marry him. She really couldn't see why that was so terrible. If you were going to live for the rest of your life with someone, you wanted them to be the kind of person you'd

be happy with; Susie would not have been happy with a physically unattractive man.

She looked at him now, being charmingly attentive to Maggie, and thought how good he was. He found Maggie something of a trial, she knew, although he greatly enjoyed her cooking, and had had two helpings of her salmon en croûte that evening, and one and a half (mindful of Susie's watchful eyes) of the chocolate mousse. He was always telling her how wonderful it was to be given things like cream and pastry and roast potatoes, after the food he got at home: it was one of his jokes that even the water in Susie's kitchen was low-fat. Just the same, he looked wonderful on the low-fat water, ten years younger than his fifty-nine years, his dark brown hair still thick and hardly grey, his lean body muscley and strong, his blue eyes brilliant and amusedly alive. In fact she had to admit he actually looked a lot better than James these days. James had put on a lot of weight lately, and he often looked terribly worn. He did now; well, that was partly her fault. Perhaps she shouldn't have told him. But if she hadn't, Rufus might have said something; not the kind of thing James would be able to handle in the middle of his daughter's wedding day. And he had other things on his mind as well, poor Jamie: Maggie increasingly – what? – difficult, his practice increasingly demanding, and shorter term, there was tomorrow to worry about. Not that anything major would, could possibly, go wrong, but he had a speech to make, hundreds of guests to receive, a strung-up wife to steady, a daughter to lead down the aisle. Not easy, any of it.

She saw Janine looking at her, smiling, and smiled back. Dear Janine; how lovely she was still, and how very Parisienne, with her jet-black bob, her pale face and dark eyes, and her tiny, trim figure. She was dressed in a plain linen shift, made

Maggie look very gross; Susie wondered, as she so often had, if Maggie had any idea that Janine had been Jamie's first love, had schooled him in sexual matters when he'd been a raw boy of eighteen and she a sophisticated woman of thirty-three. And then decided she couldn't possibly. Maggie was a darling, but she wasn't overburdened with intuition. Thank God . . . Susie looked at her watch: almost half past ten. It was getting late. The bride should be getting her beauty sleep. She looked as if she needed it; beneath her happiness was a heavy shadow of tiredness.

Although Harriet looked a lot worse. God, she was thin. Even to Susie, who saw thinness, not cleanliness, as next to godliness, Harriet looked thin. And pale and exhausted. Poor little thing. She had a lot to carry in that business of hers, and no help from anyone really. Of course she wanted it that way, had turned down a lot of offers of partnership (including a very generous one from Theo), had a seeming obsession about making it on her own, (and you didn't need to be a psychoanalyst to work out that one, Susie thought), but when things got tough she must surely yearn for an arm to lean on.

Thinking of arms made Susie suddenly sharply aware of her own, aching dully (probably it wasn't, probably entirely psychological) and the phone call she had to make in the morning. She'd almost decided to leave it until the day was over, but she liked to face things, did Susie, liked to know what she was up against. If the news was there, she needed to hear it: for better or for worse.

The phrase, singing through her head, made her think again of the morning, of Cressida's wedding day, of the need for them all to go, to leave the family in peace. She stood up, held her hand out to Alistair.

'Darling, come along. We should get over to the Beaumonts.