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A Dandy in Aspic

Written by Derek Marlowe

Published by Silvertail Books

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A DANDY IN ASPIC

DEREK MARLOWE

SILVERTAIL BOOKS • *London*

First published in Great Britain in 1966 by Victor Gollancz Ltd and in the USA by G. P.

Putnam's Sons, New York

This edition published by Silvertail Books in 2015

www.silvertailbooks.com

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Typeset in Ehrhardt Monotype by Joanna Macgregor

Printed in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

ISBN 978-1-909269-23-1

When she got back to the Cheshire-Cat, she was surprised to find quite a large crowd collected round it: there was a dispute going on between the executioner, the King, and the Queen, who were all talking at once, while all the rest were quite silent, and looked very uncomfortable.

The executioner's argument was, that you couldn't cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it from; that he had never had to do such a thing before, and he wasn't going to begin at his time of life.

The King's argument was that anything that had a head could be beheaded, and that you weren't to talk nonsense.

The Queen's argument was that, if something wasn't done about it in less than no time, she'd have everybody executed all round. (It was this last remark that had made all the party look so grave and anxious.)

The Cat's head then began fading away, and soon it had entirely disappeared. So the King and the executioner ran wildly up and down looking for it, while the rest of the party went back to the game.

LEWIS CARROLL,
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

APOGEE

1

Amontillado Caroline

*In the Country of the Blind, the One-Eyed man is
probably in a circus.*

—ALEXANDER EBERLIN

*The surest way to be out of fashion tomorrow is to be
in the forefront of it today.*

—ALEXANDER EBERLIN

EBERLIN ate alone as usual. Returning to his apartment at about six o'clock, he would shower in silence, change into something less comfortable, and sit down to a dinner-for-one prepared by an aged, yet untalkative, valet who let himself in at four o'clock every afternoon and let himself out at eight o'clock every evening. No words were ever exchanged between master and servant but "Good evening" and "Good night," except on one garrulous evening when the valet apologized, with uncontrolled discretion, for the wine. It was a happy relationship and Eberlin wouldn't have it otherwise. He was a quiet man by nature, to such an extent that

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an honorary member of Brook's, a jovial fellow and consequently shunned by all, remarked to an acquaintance that the reason why Eberlin was inarticulate was because he was born with a silver spoon—erism in his mouth. It was an inaccurate statement, but nevertheless this pleasantry was taken up by all the fashionable wits of the town and earned Eberlin a mysterious reputation as an outsider, a man to claim and cultivate as one's own. In no time, feasted, toasted and courted by a bevy of open-mouthed sycophants from all the right schools, Eberlin was guest of honor at the best parties and functions in London, a situation that made not the slightest difference to Eberlin's personality since he attended none of them.

Instead he would spend his free hours locked in his rooms at 24 South Street, contemplating the view from the rear window, occasionally reading a book from his library—he was now halfway through *Pelham*—or taking a slow walk across Hyde Park until he reached the Serpentine and then returning home. Once a week, on a fine Sunday morning, he would walk under Park Lane and emerge on the central island where Byron sat, all bronze and pigeonsmeared, and would read all the newspapers without discrimination, and then leave for South Street, throwing the wads of news into the trash bin outside the Dorchester Bar; and then, like this evening, he would, as usual, eat alone.

The wine was awful. The valet had bought it cheap from a supermarket, knowing from experience that his master was apathetic about the acquired bigotry of vintages and bouquets. It came out of the decanter like sludge. Eberlin drank it unconcerned, as he leafed through the letters on the table. There were ten of them, mostly unsealed invitations from S.W.1, which were usually dropped

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on sight, unopened, into the wastebasket. But this evening, Eberlin opened all, glancing quickly at Who or What was At Home, and then stopping on a small white card which stated simply:

*Caroline Sue Hetherington requests your pleasure
at 14 Ruston Gate S.W.3
for some of her Amontillado Sherry.
Seven P.M. 12 August. R.S.V.P.*

Eberlin tucked the card into his wallet and left the table. He walked slowly into the white-walled bedroom and studied a large map of London lying on the bed. Then he folded the map together and put it in the bedside table drawer.

The valet was waiting in the hall, arms extended, holding up, with professional foresight, a deep blue, blue-silk-lined overcoat. Eberlin put it on, felt the pockets for keys and money, and then strolled back into the dining room, closed the door, turned off the light and looked out of the window. The street was empty of people. He stood there, hands in pockets, for a long while. The valet was in the next room, washing up plates with the minimum of noise. Eberlin was just above average height, thin in the body and, much to his disdain, thirty-six years old. He considered it an uncompromising age, lacking the finesse of earlier years and the authority of later. Never one to consider his life of any great importance, he had endured the years of his youth with the frivolous abandon of a monk, retiring further and further from his fellow men as the months passed, until he reached the point when he contemplated celebrating his thirty-sixth birthday in the high manner of Captain Oates. But he didn't.

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Obliged, by a quirk of fate long since regretted, to play out his role, he blundered on into the dawn of middle age, a hermetic dandy, surrounding himself only with the fetish of himself—predominantly his clothes, which he chose with exquisite and envied care, his books, his three double-barreled fowling pieces by Manton, and his collection of old Sèvres porcelain locked in a vault in the V and A—and an utter lack of envy for his fellow man. He had that noble selflessness of a man who cares for no one but himself. Brummell, a man he admired unashamedly, had that. Until he went mad.

A plate bounced off the edge of the sink in the next room, cracked in midair, then split into pieces on the floor. Eberlin made no reaction, but turned suddenly from the window, crossed the dining room, entered the hall as the valet appeared shamefaced from the kitchen, and left the apartment. It was a cool summer evening, pleasant in that part of London with the park and the mews houses and the small squares. Eberlin considered walking, not because of the weather, but because his car, a Maserati Mistrale 3.7, was at present disemboweled and eight feet in the air at Cuchet's Garage, twenty kilometers from Lyons. A taxi man stood ten yards down the road as an elderly man and his wife dithered over the fare. Then the roof sign lit up once more, just as Eberlin had decided to walk.

"Ruston Gate," he said quietly to the driver. Then he closed the door and settled back into the seat of the taxi.

* * *

"Don't you think bottoms are the most super common denominators men and women have?" she said with a strident brashness that fanfared her virginity.

It was a large room on the first floor, decorated fashionably in

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Art Nouveau colorings and bric-a-brac from side-street boutiques, and carried the confused weight of self-consciousness with admirable dignity. Not one square foot of the carefully chosen wallpaper was evident behind the melee of assorted musical instruments, reproductions, bookshelves and Victorian kitchenware. Lady Hetherington called it her *conversation room*, with all that implied, and had been known to amuse the Montagus of Beaulieu in this very room by hanging radiators of vintage cars around the portrait of Prince Rupert as a special treat.

The music was loud but no one danced. The eleven people instead posed awkwardly around the room clutching warm, empty glasses in their hands and made polite comments about absent guests and the state of the Crown. In one corner, huddled on a brown velvet-covered couch, three out-of-work actors sat talking about themselves, like three Gorgons passing round the I from one to another. A small, fat man, in a three-piece suit, stood, hands clasped behind his back, staring at the spines of the books on one wall, now and then reading out a title aloud with mock surprise to an incredibly plain girl with fat legs whom Caroline had chosen as her best friend, being herself blessed with the fragile translucent beauty of a corner angel. She (Caroline) was now squatting on a footstool at the feet of two of her male guests, dressed in a simple violet sleeveless sweater and tight deep-velvet trousers, her slender arms clasped under her thighs, her head on her knees, gazing fixedly at a whippet who was asleep by her feet.

“Balls,” she said suddenly and looked up, frowning, at Nigel, a childhood friend, who was caressing her back with his hand, “why doesn’t John marry Mummy and get it over with? I mean, it’s not as

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if she's unattractive or anything. All he wants to do is sleep with her and take her to Brinkley's on Sundays and all that horrid routine. I feel for her sometimes, but she won't listen. Don't you think it's unfair?"

Nigel's fingertips had now reached Caroline's bottom and were resting on the thin pile of the trouser material with breathless apprehension. He said, "Oh I agree" quickly and slid his thumb under the cotton belt and onto the warm skin of her lower back. Caroline pulled a face, moved away, and woke up the whippet as Eberlin entered the room.

He stood at the door and looked around at the other guests. "Too late for whisky and the sherry's awful, but if you hang on

for a while, James is bringing along a pipkin," said a small pink-faced young man in a petulant tone and a honey corduroy suit.

"Caroline never has enough in the house, does she?"

Eberlin ignored him and walked across the room toward the fire as Caroline jumped up with a smile and tugged at the sleeve of his overcoat.

"I'm awfully glad you could make it. Sherry's not too good though, I'm afraid."

Eberlin nodded and took out a cigarette from a light leather case and lit it.

"Do you want to be introduced around or would you rather be stuffy and ignore them? I recommend being stuffy and ignoring them because they're all very dull and boring, except for Mark and he's in Canada."

She was a short girl in her bare feet, five foot one or two perhaps, but precociously attractive, and had had mild affairs with a dozen or

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so middle-aged men in the four years since leaving finishing school. All had proposed marriage and all had been refused in the nicest possible way, and all remained ardent enemies of her, meeting in public and condemning her as nothing more than a whore, and phoning her in private, hopefully, in the early hours of the morning from the bar of their club. She wore her blond hair straight, curling up only within chewing distance of her wide, pale-painted mouth, and stood invariably with her small stomach forward, looking up out of violet eyes at all and every self-respecting man who longed to put her under his arm or over his shoulder and into his bed. All except Eberlin, who barely glanced at her, but surveyed the room openly, studying each guest in turn without expression and taking in, in detail, the absurd fracas of the décor. The fat man in the corner stared at him, waiting to catch his eye, then opened his mouth in expectant greeting when Eberlin did, but remained gaping as Eberlin flicked his eyes to a framed print of a Modigliani *Jeanne* above the man's head, then over to a nineteenth-century oboe that hung, impotent, in pieces, over the armoire door.

Caroline said, "Stop it!" loudly to the whippet and glanced at Eberlin, but he took no notice and looked for an ashtray, catching sight of the fat man's reflection, still studying him slyly, one hand toying with a plaster dog, in the long, gold-framed, delicately carved mirror over the mantel. He threw the cigarette into the fire.

"Don't you want to take your coat off?" Nigel remarked, giving Caroline an overt peck on the cheek. "It's awfully hot in here." Eberlin took off the coat and handed it to Nigel who hesitated, then plonked it on the edge of the couch and shouted "Michael!" Eberlin picked it up again and carried it, draped over his arm, out of the

room to the entrance hall and laid it on the chaise longue, and then returned to the room by another door, entering behind everybody, and taking a book off a table, opened it and considered the first paragraph.

Two more guests arrived; one, carrying a large metal pipkin of beer, was presumably James. The other, a big-boned girl with black curly hair, praised everything in the room with exaggerated gasps of contemporary slang and then left quickly after ten minutes with a blue apothecary bottle which Lady Hetherington had brought all the way from Tunbridge Wells. One bold zealot had put Purcell's *O Come Ye Sons of Art* on the record player and was hushing members of his tightly knit clique of two every time the counter-tenor reached a disturbingly high octave. Caroline herself retained the attention of the more imaginative members of the group by demonstrating her appealing ability to touch her toes without bending the knees, while her best friend muttered miserably alone under the base shelf of *The Collected Works of Dickens*. The fat man offered Eberlin a Will's Whiff, which he refused curtly, crossing to a vacant hamlet chair that was conveniently out of everyone's way near the window. It was now one minute to nine. He sat down at an angle from the other guests, facing an elderly man who gave him a nod and said, "What an excellent suit," and nodded again. The music stopped abruptly with cries of "Shame!" and "God!" then the more modish sounds of a pop group hit out at all-comers. Eberlin considered abandoning the whole sorry affair altogether and returning home, when a soft white arm, wrist jangling with Persian charms appeared over his shoulder clutching a full glass of Chivas Regal, and Caroline whispered in his ear:

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"I saved this especially for you in the hope that you might arrive. It seems silly to introduce myself now, but I'm Caroline."

"How do you do," he said, taking the glass and drinking it slowly.

Standing behind him, she rested her arm on his shoulder and whispered again: "The fat man in the corner asked me if I knew you. He seemed terribly interested when I said you might come. Do you know him?"

"No."

She leaned forward, smelling heavily of Amontillado and *Numero Cinq*, so that her hair irritated his cheek, and smiled at him. Eberlin got up, walked across the room, and appreciated Prince Rupert.

"The Duke of Marlborough," said a male voice behind him and another said, "No, it's Prince Rupert," and a pretty girl in a trouser suit said, "Prince Rupert," and then the fat man said, "My name's Copperfield."

Eberlin turned and looked down at a beaming round face, squint-eyed behind spectacles. His hair was sparse, his tie Winchester, and sweat hung around his obese cheeks. "How do you do," and he extended a chubby hand.

"How do you do," said Eberlin quickly and returned to the painting.

"You're Eberlin aren't you?" Copperfield said quietly. "I've heard a lot about—"

"Excuse me." Eberlin returned to the hamlet chair and sat down again and picked up his drink. It was now twelve minutes past nine. Caroline was standing with a group of men near the piano and was listening to none of them. She looked steadily at Eberlin over her shoulder and smiled, and then walked across the cluttered room

toward him.

"I do hope you're not bored," she said. "A little."

"Would you like to see the rest of the house? It's not much but you might like it. I'll show you."

Copperfield stubbed out his cigar and stared at the two of them. Michael, an ex-lover of Caroline's, muttered in his ear and he smiled and they exchanged glances and another man laughed. Then Copperfield came up behind her and hovered his splayed fingers under her bottom and the two men chuckled, and he winked over her shoulder at Eberlin who said "All right" to Caroline and left the room, treading on Copperfield's black, neatly polished, patent leather toe.

There were only three other rooms in the house, besides bathroom and kitchen. One was a form of study where the late Lord Hetherington had begun every year his definitive biography of Edward the Confessor, contemplated his butterfly collection, and had made love twice, with blatant exertion, to his wife three days before their wedding. It was now never used except to store Caroline's old dolls and her mother's copies of *Elle* and *Vogue*. The other two rooms were bedrooms, decorated in a ridiculous shade of yellow, with paper grapes cut out and stuck over the ceiling by an earnest designer friend of Lady Hetherington's, long since forgotten. The sexual undulations of Lady Hetherington were, in fact, well known in her section of London society, as well as on a small but impishly pert Greek island in the Adriatic. She had, it seems, lost her virginity at an early age and had been offering herself as a reward for its recapture ever since.

Eberlin stood on the white carpet of Caroline's bedroom and glanced at his watch.

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“Well, that’s about it,” she sighed, “except for the John, and that’s in a horrid puce color. Some odd whim of Mummy’s after she spent the weekend at the Chestertons’. I’m glad you came. I feel very privileged.”

He looked at her as she sat on the edge of the bed chewing the inside of her mouth.

“I expect you’re fed up with my saying that, aren’t you?” “Not at all.”

She gave a quick laugh and pulled at her hair.

“I don’t really want to go back down there yet. I know it’s my party and all that but it’s awfully dull. They always are. Oh dear.”

She pulled her left leg at right angles onto her other leg and toyed with her toes. She was indeed an eminently seductive girl, being small-breasted in the right manner and wide-mouthed and pleasantly apathetic about everything important. Eberlin moved a step nearer and she looked up at him with a wide smile and returned in inviting concentration to her foot.

He had met many attractive women in his life, and despite his lack of apparent interest, had retained his boyish surprise at the infinite variety of beauty there was in this narrow sphere. He had had a few affairs of no import in his early twenties with various fashionable girls of small minds. And then at twenty-five had prolonged an affair into a confined relationship that had broken the back of his cynicism toward women and had left him, after the full final cymbal-crash of the breakup had faded, with a profound respect for the opposite sex, an abject disenchantment with himself, and a darkhaired young son called Jesse. He had tried vainly for the last weeks of the affair to alchemize the horrendous quarrels into something better but, mostly

through his own fault, it all collapsed around him; except for the final pathetic attempts to establish himself, like a struggling spiritualist slipping her card into a passing coffin.

At first, after they had lived apart, he would visit her and his son with a shifting uneasiness, buying small presents like colored bricks and bibs. And then as the months passed, he found himself being pushed further away, until the very district where she lived, with new friends and new patterns of speech, began to bear the exclusive properties of a sanctuary to all but himself. His visits became rarer then as he steeled himself to blunder through the looks and questions of *his* strangers and *her* intimates, until he abandoned it altogether in a morass of self-pity and bitterness. After five years he never saw her again, though he read somewhere, or somebody told him, that she had married a property owner and was living in grand style somewhere near Bath. The end of the affair had been made official, and yet even now, at thirty-six, he felt an involuntary pang at oblique reminders of her—her name, walk, gestures, phraseology echoed in someone else, the inevitable comparisons when bores praised their lovers, the whole, sad, enviable, incredible monolith of the affair.

Once he had found an old letter of hers in a neglected book, and had sat staring at it without reading it for a quarter of an hour, blocked in the whole agony of the moment. He couldn't bring himself to destroy it, yet he feared rediscovering it on some unexpected day in the far future. And so he tried to lose it, leaving it around negligently, hiding it amongst a gallimaufry of rubbish, pushing it under things, out of sight and between things. Finally it did disappear and he spent three frightened hours in his pajamas one night looking for it feverishly, but it never turned up. For two months afterward he

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never touched an object that didn't readily come to the eye, and then the letter gratefully slipped into the back of his mind and he relaxed.

Eberlin still regretted one thing above all—that he could never be sure if he should have married her. His antipathy began in fear but went on into something more inexplicable that he never resolved. He didn't marry her and henceforth nurtured a bitterness at all married people, as he had watched contemporaries marry and assume that marital hat, that middle-class insular smugness which seemed to be the hallmark of the pedestal they had erected. And so he abandoned them and lived with himself, suffering only the briefest of relationships with women, preferably none at all. Each month his bank would send a check to his ten-year-old son, whom he wouldn't recognize in a small room, and each year he became more attractive to women in general and more forgotten to one in particular. Eberlin hated it all. He stood studying the crown of hair of this girl, this child sitting before him, this small, inconsequential creature whose narrow life had hardly yet begun. He felt old.

"Aren't toes funny things when you think about them, which I do never," she said suddenly, then looked up and caught his expression. "What are you thinking? Awful question."

Eberlin smiled and turned away toward the window. It was now nine forty.

"I don't suppose you remember ever meeting me before," she was saying, "but I saw you when I was with Mummy in North Africa, last month. You looked all sort of brown and distinguished and very English in a nice sort of way, and very super, and I asked someone who you were and they said your name was Eberlin and you were in the Ministry of something. All very mysterious really. Mummy fan-

cied you like mad.”

“What part of North Africa was that?” said Eberlin quietly. “Oh, Tripoli. Mummy’s got this thing about Dido—you know,

the jolly old queen of Carthage. That’s Tripoli, isn’t it?” “Yes. Near there.”

“Mmmmm.”

A sigh and a pout. “What *do* you do?”

“Nothing very dramatic. A desk job.”

“Oh, I can’t believe that. I bet it’s all swish and underhand and night flights to Budapest,” she gurgled, and stared frowning at Eberlin’s back. He had to stay there eleven more minutes now at the least. It was a slight discomfort, but with an attempt at Stoic resolution, he could probably last out. She was quite a sweet girl but so very young, and would probably say, any minute, something like “Do you find me attractive?” He lit another cigarette. Smoking too much, Eberlin.

“Do you think I’m attractive—I mean, sexually attractive?” she said suddenly, standing up and thrusting out her jaw as if it were the most serious matter on earth. Which to her it was. “Mummy’s incredibly sexy and is always having it away all over the place. No end of lovers. I’m not at all seductive though,” and then, “Am I?”

Eberlin inclined his head slightly toward her and replied: “A little. But it doesn’t disturb me.”

“Oh.”

She looked down at herself, prodding her stomach, casting a scrutinizing look every now and then at Eberlin, then at a mirror on one wall. Someone downstairs shouted, “*Caroline!*”

“I suppose you’re right.” She frowned finally, staring into the mirror. “I’m not really what you might call—*voluptuous*, am I?”

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Eberlin laughed and said pleasantly, "I wouldn't pay too much attention to your reflection. I've always thought that in this modern age of scientific advance, it was about time someone perfected the art of making the common mirror. In all my life, I have not encountered one that has interpreted my image correctly."

"Caroline! Caro-*line*!"—it must be Nigel—"that dog has messed all over Michael's coat and he's furious!"

There was a long pause, and then Caroline shrugged and walked slowly to the door.

"I'd better go down. Are you coming?" "Not yet."

She nodded thoughtfully, gave a sudden smile and went out quickly. He heard her running down the stairs and someone saying, "Where have you been?" and the reply, "Oh, shut up—I've been in the john, for Godsakes!" Eberlin walked out of the room, paused on the landing and entered the musty dark study of the late Lord Hetherington. He closed the door, sealing out the social whirl, and studied the objects on the desk, then glanced out of the window. London was a cold city at the best of times, but retained a casual indifference to its inhabitants that was comforting. He could see the dark shape of a domed building—couldn't be St. Paul's, could it? Brompton Oratory more likely—and the lighted windows of the Georgian houses opposite. No one particular in the street. He was about to turn and leave when a voice behind him said:

"Oh there you are."

Copperfield entered quietly, shutting the door behind him. "I thought you'd gone."

He stood, smiling fatly up at Eberlin, a dead cigar still in his mouth. Eberlin dropped the heavy curtains back into place and, pull-

ing a chair out from under the desk, sat down, crossed his legs and waited. Copperfield wandered around the room irritatingly, picking up irrelevant objects like a chunk of Dover chalk labelled DOVER CHALK, and a rolled-up rubbing of the Black Prince rather badly done. He moved heavily, breathing emphatically as if from asthma and now and then humming an odd tuneless mnemonic of music to himself. No words were exchanged for three whole minutes. Eberlin listened to the strained highlights of music and noise below and thought of nothing at all. There was a sudden thump as Copperfield dropped the unfinished Chapter One of *Edward the Confessor, A Portrait* onto a small side table, took the cigar from his mouth, and remarked casually to a print of the Magna Carta, bought from H.M.S.O., that was hanging on one wall:

“Pity about Nightingale.”

Eberlin pulled at, imperceptibly, the crease of trouser above his knees and made no reply.

“Did you ever meet him?” “No.”

“Funny chap,” said Copperfield.

Eberlin swung around in the chair and stood up. “I’m afraid I must leave.”

Copperfield glanced at him carefully, then crossed deliberately to the door and leaned on it, facing Eberlin and fixing him with a cherubic smile of utter complacency.

“I’ve heard a lot about you, but never had the pleasure of meeting you before. Frazer thinks very highly of you.”

Eberlin stood in the center of the room, deadpan, and stared at a spot just above Copperfield’s indecently covered scalp. There was no impatience or insolence in his attitude; he was just someone

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passing the time by standing still. The fat man gave a quick tug to the points of his waistcoat and picked at some imaginary fluff on his lower jacket.

"I've always felt that you were being wasted tied down to the office. It suits me because I'm a lazy sort of chap, not one to go running around. But you ... always surprised me ... you sticking it there. No ties or anything," and then looking up through his silly little glasses, "have you?"

"No."

"No, I thought that. No ties. I'm a married man myself—well, I look it don't I? Married. You must have gathered that from the way I was ogling the sexy little hostess. A man of your perception must have noticed that. It's very obvious. But I can't help it. I go to strip clubs on the sly. I'm that kind of man. I even have a collection of pornographic magazines at home, hidden away. Untouched photographs—they show everything. You know? He gestured. "Well, you can tell I'm the type who does things like that—by just, well, looking at me. I get the magazines from a friend of mine in C. and E. He's not really a—you speak Russian, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Yes."

"Say something in—no, that's silly. I speak it too but not too well. French, yes—but Russian, not too good I'm afraid."

He looked up quickly and appraised Eberlin with a diminutive smile. Eberlin stared back calmly and then said:

"Do you mind moving out of the way? I'm leaving." Copperfield did mind and ignored the question. "You were in North Africa

recently, weren't you?" No answer.

"Tangiers, wasn't it?" "Tripoli."

"Oh yes. Tripoli. Of course. I don't know why I said Tangiers.

Nightingale, I suppose.... Speak Arabic at all?" "No."

"No. Well, who does nowadays?"

Copperfield was suddenly propelled forward into the room and away from the door he had been leaning on, as it was pushed open from the outside suddenly and Caroline stood staring in, lower lip under top, at the two men in the study.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know—"

She turned to move away, when Eberlin stepped forward smiling.

"It's all right. I was just leaving."

She caught Copperfield's sudden look of anger as he turned quickly back toward the door.

"Do you have to?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so. I have some work to do."

He brushed past her and made quickly for the top of the staircase. Copperfield shouted after him:

"Can I give you a lift? I heard you pranged your car in France."

"No, thank you."

And he was down the stairs, carefully, followed by a breathless Caroline, and picking up his coat from the chaise longue, and down the second flight toward the front door and into the street. He pulled the coat on, glancing around him. Caroline ran out after him in her bare feet.

"I'm sorry you have to go. You will come round again, won't you?"

But he didn't answer, leaving her gazing after him as he strolled

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cautiously down the road to the main junction. At one point he glanced back and caught sight of Copperfield quickly pulling away from the study window, and then a taxi lurched into range, and he was running toward it. It was nine fifty-five and he was late.

* * *