

MARGARET'S PARTY

“My God, Margaret, what happened to you?!”

“What..do you mean?”

“I mean, look at you! Your dress is dishevelled, your handbag is open, your stockings are torn, your face is bruised, and your hair is all over the place.”

Margaret looked around her. She saw people encircling the pool. Beautiful people, gentlemen in dark suits, ladies in evening wear. The night was enveloping and languid. People talked softly and cleverly. Margaret saw a clear sky. But the stars reflected Margaret's inner disjointedness. To her horror, some primitive reflex made her saliva drool out of her mouth, as she smelt the aroma of barbecued meat.

The way she felt, and the picture of herself described by Irene did not match her self-image, nor her civilized surroundings. It matched a rat dragged in by the cat from the gutter. She would never go to a party in that way, she would be one of the more glamorous ladies by the edge of the pool.

But nothing much matched. She did not match herself. As she looked at her ragged self, she wondered who she was. Where was she? She did recognize Irene, who looked at her with concern.

“You are Irene, right?”

“My God,” said Irene with mild sarcasm. “I am only your best friend since school days!”

“Who..where..what?”

There was a ring. Margaret was dimly thankful that she recognized it as such. Aha, the sound of a door opening was logical. But two more people came into the garden to strain Margaret's mind. They mixed with the others but they were in police uniform.

The police uniforms approached her. Young faces, they could almost have been her sons. They seemed pleased for some reason. Police should look stern.

The police said, “We got him.”

“Are you OK?” they asked Margaret, with a familiarity, which threw her into confusion.

They explained to Irene, and whoever else wanted to hear, as some of the suits and dresses tactfully came within earshot if you spoke loud. The police spoke loud, as it behove their profession.

“A driver hit her and drove on. She”, pointing to Margaret, “was recovering consciousness as we arrived. We told her to come in here, as she said that she had some very good friends here. We alerted another car and we went after the bastard ourselves. We lost him, but the others got him. We thought we'd better see how she was.”

Irene edged Margaret to a side room, away from the guests, and a particularly concerned man, who must have been the host.

“What happened, Margaret, what can you remember?”

Margaret knitted her brow, reflecting her desire to knit together her tattered mind. “In the morning I took Colin to the airport. He was flying to Hong Kong again. In the evening I remember getting ready to go to a party, oh yes, to come here, to what's his name, John's place.”

“John! So you remember John. You remember John?” with a special emphasis on the name.

“Oh dear, something to remember? What? John’s a dear, yes, dear what?” Margaret felt hot suddenly. She wondered if she had a fever. Irene saw her blush.

“So you and John.. you have gone that far?” she whispered.

“Oh yes. So I got in the car. To come here, to Johnny’s party.” Margaret wondered why the affectionate form of John slipped out of her mouth. Yet she was pleased to be filling the squeezed out sponge of her mind once more. It felt like when she was a child, expanding her mind with new information.

“Yes, yes, so I got into the car. I had this tie pin that I wanted to give him. Oh dear, dear, Johnny...He won’t like me like this, ugly, dirty, with no brain.

“I remember more now. Yes, I drove toward here. But I don’t remember getting here.”

The doorbell rang again. Margaret felt pleasure at recognizing the sound. The pleasure was confirmed when she recognized two more policemen enter through the chink in the door. There was something comic about a man who was with them speaking incoherently. Now it seemed that it was someone else’s turn to take over the baton of her shattered mind. “I did not go overseas...would you...diamond pin...not for me...she was holding it in her hand..”

The whole circus was coming toward her. She felt like laughing, but she sensed, too hysterically, so she suppressed her giggles as the incoherent man was dragged to her.

“Do you recognize this man?”

“He is Colin, my husband!”

The host had peeled off from the other ladies and gentlemen, joining the police and their prize. “Did you want to see me?” he asked politely.

Margaret saw two heads looking at her. An interesting picture. The two men’s heads in the foreground, Irene and two policemen behind them, and the ladies and gentlemen in the background. Why could she not be among them, with her dress nicely waving behind her as she weaved among the guests?

For the second time that night, Margaret slumped into the gentle pillow of oblivion.