

why don't you turn to beauty. It can be a wonderful thing. You can find it in the living and you can find it in the dead. . . ."

He paused, leaning closer to Richard's attentive face.

". . . A very close friend of mine, you would know his name, Richard, once said, 'Beauty is the virtue of the body, as virtue is the beauty of the soul.' Now what about your soul? What about its fathomless beauty?"

Rufus's voice became more intense.

"Just think of it, Richard. The beauty of your soul. Shall you know your soul, Richard? Shall you know its beauty? Of course you will. You will know it Richard, because you have suffered."

Rufus leaned closer, his voice reaching a higher pitch.

"And if you come with me, you will know it. You will have your chance. The chance that only I can give you, Richard. So come. Know the victory. Know the beauty. Know the wonder of total release that shall be yours. Come Richard. Come. Come with me."

Rufus's voice rose to the words. So also did he slowly rise from the table and Richard rose with him and they left the tavern, leaving their coats where they hung, and they walked through the whiteness of the snow and they walked to the pale river and it was not far away.

Regina—Oh No!

Ruth Paller

GAYLE carried her pecan roll and cup of steaming coffee to the window seat in an alcove of the dining room.

"I'll have my coffee now before the crowd gets here. Then I can pour for you, Susan. Is your symphony speech all ready?"

Susan placed a tray of hot rolls on the table. They gave off a smell of caramelized sugar and toasted nuts.

"I don't have to say much," she replied. "Mrs. Bingham will give the speech. After all, she's supported the orchestra for years. All I have to do is pass out the names to be solicited by the committee."

Gayle put down her cup and lit a cigarette. She stretched her legs and leaned back in the sunny alcove.

"It's lucky the painters got out of here in time for the meeting. You must be exhausted! I love what you've done to this room. The soft coca walls, this gold drapery print—it's perfect. It's—"

She sat up abruptly.

"Look who's coming up your driveway! I could swear Regina Lord's name wasn't on the committee list. I crossed it off myself when I heard she was going to Florida—thank goodness."

"She flew home yesterday. Seems she couldn't stand the service in three different hotels."

"Well, for Pete's sake! Did you have to call her right up and invite her. I know your husbands are in business together—but

couldn't you have managed not to know she was home for one day?"

Susan broke a trailing branch of forsythia into a shorter length and arranged it more securely in the turquoise bowl on the table.

"It puzzles me," she remarked. "Ted came home last night with the story that her husband asked him to ask me to invite her."

The short coppery banks on Gayle's freckled forehead bounced with the vehemence of her derisive hoot.

"So the good little wife said, 'Of course, dear. Anything to keep your precious senior partner happy. By all means, she must be on our committee. What's it to us if she never does a lick of work? What's it to us if she never gives a dime unless it's spread across all the papers? I don't know what we'd do without—'"

Susan dipped her finger in the turquoise bowl and flicked a drop of water at Gayle's nose.

"Oh, it's not that bad! We can stand her for an afternoon. You know she'll disappear as soon as we begin dividing up the work." She pulled her creamy flannel skirt into place, smoothed the matching sweater over her hips, tilted her head reflectively.

"I can't help wondering why she did want to come. She doesn't even go to the symphony concerts."

"Well, we'll soon find out. Taciturnity is not one of Regina's faults."

Gayle peeped out the window once more.

"Holy Cow! She's had her hair done platinum blond. It's in ringlets all over her head. Those curls over that bull-dog jaw—she looks like the wrestler—what's his name—Gorgeous George!"

"Gorgeous George!" Susan giggled as she passed through the archway into the entrance hall. "What a comparison!"

"Why not?" Gayle gestured expansively. "She has the build—and the delicate touch."

Susan started for the door, then stopped before the hall mirror. She smoothed her palms over the two shining wings of black hair which swept back from a center part over her forehead and retied the ivory ribbon which held her low chignon in place.

Gayle's eyes mocked her in the mirror.

"Be careful, Lamb. Make sure that every hair is in place."

Susan raised a warning finger and opened the door.

"Hello, Regina. Did you have a nice vacation?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear, it was dreadful. I can't begin to tell you. The service in Florida is absolutely unendurable. And the class of people that goes there now—well, it's the last time for me."

She pushed past Susan into the dining room.

"I had my cook bake you some of her delicious jam tarts so your table would look nice."

She deposited an ornate silver tray of cakes in the very center of the table, pushing the bowl of forsythia out of the way.

"My dear, branches from your yard? I'll call the florist and have him rush over a centerpiece. I told my cook before I left. 'Mary,'

I said, 'I know Susan Weil. She'll serve her usual pecan rolls and stuff something from her garden in a bowl and call it a day.'" "To tell you the truth," she continued, "I would have stopped for flowers on my way down only I was afraid I wouldn't get here before your committee arrived. But the convertible wouldn't start and of course it had to be parked in the driveway behind the stationwagon. By the time the garage man came out and fixed it, I just didn't have time. Where's the telephone? I'll take care of it right now."

Susan set her lips.

"Thank you for the tarts, Regina. It was nice of you to think of them. But I don't want a floral centerpiece. The yellow forsythia goes with the drapes."

Regina looked around. When her eyes rested on the new draperies, she folded her arms across her ample chest in disgust.

"Susan," she snorted, "You didn't go ahead and get printed draperies after I told you everyone is using plain silk gauze. Honestly, did you ever?"

Susan smiled tightly. Gayle rolled her eyes and made a mouth. She walked over to the table and seated herself behind the coffee service.

"Let me pour you a cup of coffee, Regina," she said.

"Just coffee—black—no sugar. I'm on a diet. Say I found a wonderful little masseuse at Fountainblau Hotel in Miami. She took eight pounds off of me."

Gayle ran her eyes up the sausage-shaped torso, from which the bust jutted, shelf-like, into the beaded yoke of the black silk suit.

"You could stand it," she said.

Regina examined the table critically. "I still don't think this table looks like anything. The first time I met Mrs. Bingham, she was hostess for the Federation meeting at her country club. You should have seen the table she set out."

Gayle's laughing green eyes met Susan's brown ones in a knowing wink.

"Did I hear Mrs. Bingham's is head of the admission's committee at their club?" she asked innocently.

"Umm-mm" Regina mumbled as she turned back her beaded cuff and raised the diamond encrusted lid that covered the dial of her wristwatch. "It's almost three o'clock. What time did Mrs. Bingham say she'd be here?"

"At three," Susan replied. "She'll be here in a minute, I'm sure."

Regina flicked a dust puff from her watch lid. She sighed.

"This thing exasperates me. It's at the jeweler's half the time being cleaned. I have a wonderful cleaner for my rings." She spread her fingers and examined the solitaire which covered the first joint of her plump ring finger and the broad band of diamonds and emeralds glittering on her small finger. "It does my earrings beautifully, too." She touched her ear-lobes, from which glistening pendants dangled.

"But this watch is impossible," she went on. "How do you clean your diamonds, Gayle?"

Gayle waved her hand airily. "Oh when mine get dirty, I just throw them out and buy new ones."

Regina blinked her little eyes, bloodshot from too much sun. The thin lips in her florid face twisted in a tentative smile.

The door chime sounded and Susan admitted Mrs. Bingham.

* * * * *

LINES

Robert Petty

There are rather looking men
Who fountain dreams,
From which we built a mansion
Out of mud,
And it is warm,
And lovers come—
And that is all we ask.
Pity the fool his genius and his dust.