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Lilith, Out of Heaven

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Lilith, Out of Heaven

Marjorie drew her brows earnestly together. 'O that!' she said. 'Well, I think that's very good. I mean... that's what it is like, isn't it?' She began to laugh, and went on: 'I never have quite known what all the fuss was about. Of course, Jon is a very good painter, and I don't know why everyone doesn't see it. But he's not particularly unusual, is he?'

Jonathan struck in. 'You have to remember, Clarissa,' he said, 'that Marjorie does a good deal of work on my stuff.'

Marjorie began to blush. She said: 'Nonsense, darling.'

'Painting,' Jonathan went on, 'is apt to tire me out, and then I don't get to sleep, or shouldn't, if Marjorie didn't manage to be awake -- when it's necessary -- instead of me. It's taken us a good while to get into the way of doing it, and I was very obstinate about it at first -- very vaughty and independent and unselfish. But I learned.'

'And you don't, Marjorie,' Clarissa asked, '--no, I know you don't, but tell me: I like to hear -- you don't ever feel staid and disagreeable the next day or several days and -- let loose?'

This time Marjorie did actually blush. 'Really, Clarissa,' she said, almost sharply, 'that would be a lot of use to Jon, wouldn't it? What would be the good of his sleeping at night if he had to spend his time soothing me down by day? Jon and I manage things better than that, I hope.' She relaxed into smiles, and added: 'Have some sense!'

'So I have, I hope,' Clarissa said, laughing outright. 'Forgive me, Marjorie. I told you only wanted to hear you say so. You've no idea how charming you are when you're indignant. "Virtue in her own shape/How lovely,"' she added, throwing a mischievous glance at her brother. 'I don't wonder Jon paints as he does, but I begin to see how the light comes to him.'

Jonathan looked at his wife. 'Yes,' he said. 'Still you should hear her if I leave a tube of paint in the drawing-room.'

'O well!' Clarissa said. 'You wouldn't approve if she put a streak of green over your best crimson. I think you're both remarkable people.'

'Normal, normal,' said Jonathan. 'Common observation and a plain understanding... Are you going?'

'My dear, I must,' Clarissa said. 'I've got to be ready to go out at half past six with my inspector. You must meet him. You'd agree about common observation.' She went to kiss her sisters-in-law, breathed 'Pray for me!' in her ear, whisked Jonathan with another kiss, and was gone. The other two looked at each other.

'Clarissa's worried,' Marjorie said.

'Hardly worried -- did you ever see Clarissa worried? But she's got something on her mind.'

'What was all that about a body?'

Jonathan shrugged. 'She'll tell us when she chooses. I only hope she doesn't want you to do something for her. You ought to sign the pictures along with me. Or I will for you. "By M. & J.D." Why haven't I thought of it before?'

'You certainly will not,' Marjorie said with energy. 'I should be very angry indeed. Why, it's no more than buying a brush for you at the Stores. Anyone could do it, only... it's happier for me. And anyhow you don't leave tubes of paint in the drawing-room. I can't think why you said you did.'

'I precisely didn't,' Jonathan pointed out. 'I said she ought to hear you if I did. So she ought. When will you sit for me again?'

'Any time, now the children have gone back,' Marjorie answered. She paused in putting the china together, and a greater gravity came into her voice. 'But, Jon, if you're going to do me again...?' She paused. Her husband stared at her. 'Well, angel?' he said.

'Well,' said Marjorie, '--I know it was my fault, in a way, and of course we've no business to do it again so soon, but it was dark day and both the girl and I were tired... Still, I don't think I'd think of it if you weren't a great man, and it's no use pretending I shan't feel better... Would you mind if...'

He took her by the arms. 'As Clarissa almost said to the Colonel, "Stop, Madam. Shall I tell you?" A new frock. And you had one for the last painting.'

'I know,' said Marjorie, 'and the worst of it is I've no money at all. But, Jon, I couldn't be painted again in that one.'

'And yes,' he said, 'you'd go without sleep and food and shelter and peace -- yet, and even clothes too -- to get one of my colour-schemes right, if I were bothered. And would I put the wrong colour in to give you a tooth-ache? I don't know. Ought I to? I don't know, and at least no one else does either, which is a consolation. Besides I like the other frock.'

'O darling, you can't,' Marjorie protested. 'But it would be



LILITH, OUT OF HEAVEN

Lilith rises, Lilith runs
Runs to the hole in Adam's side
And, trowel-like hands exploring before her,
Enters the rare adventure of man-womb.
Adam's asleep - God has done sleep to him -
But Lilith's awake, Lilith watches, Lilith waits
Watches for the Tempter whose belly is full now
(Later to be scraped away by miles of crawling)
Waits for his failure
Sucking breath from the failures of Satan and man
Never forgetting the deep mystic heaven-hole womb
in Adam's side
A round shaft without top or end, unenterable to her.
Lilith cries rejection, weeps isolation,
Closes in revenge.

--Galen Peopigs, November 28, 1970

sweet of you.'

'Make me immortal in a dress,' he said and kissed her; then he held her off and looked at her. 'Could I paint you at the point of a kiss?' he said. 'No; not yet. It's a spiral in light. Well, we'll go and buy it together. Immortality has its obligations, and the nation will be, very properly, paying.'

'You're a dear,' Marjorie said.

In the upper flat Clarissa's thoughts were taken up with similar subjects, but while Marjorie was brooding on immortality she was considering the immediate present. She did not wish to look grubby for her dinner with Challis, but neither did she wish to wear anything that could be spoiled by the inevitable grubbiness of an empty house. Certainly, if she could, if money had been limitless or sufficient costumes obtainable, she would have put on her most admirable clothes; it seemed to her becoming that she should go to any such investigation bathed, handsomely clothed, and discreetly adorned. Modern wars might impose a uniformity of colour upon the battle-dress of armies; but these spiritual reconnaissances ought to be more like medieval conflicts, conducted on her side in colours and coats of arms. Discreet and effective dress was a minor glory, a badge of mankind, a display of intelligence, the term (in its own kind) of heavenly grace itself. 'A fashionable term for grace,' she thought, remembering her brother's protest against the confusion of artistic with religious meanings. She knew that he was right; one permitted oneself the ambiguity of such words, even in the lightest way, only by leave and a certain