

In one bound, Tanya stood up from her sit and, then, moved hesitantly toward the window opened on to Delacroix Street. She vaguely cast a glance at the Pinson's residence. Her face turned gloomy. "Impossible," she whispered. "Frank, my husband, and Lorraine Pinson are lovers! No! That would cause an unparalleled scandal and unthinkable indecency! Lorraine has just reached adolescence. She can't be more than fifteen years of age (to the best of my recollection). I remember when she was born.

"So far, nobody has confirmed the rumor; otherwise, we will find ourselves in the middle of a huge scandal.

"Oh, God, don't let that happen. Frank would bring dishonor to my family. I would bear responsibility for such disaster since I have made him the elect of my heart."

Tanya, a twenty-five year old woman, had whatever could make anyone happy: she was aglow with health, extremely beautiful, highly educated and well off. Though she had no children yet, she managed to avoid loneliness by lodging her younger sisters, Pauline and Wanda, and her older brother, Maurice, who had all experienced dearth of money, after having wasted their respective portions of the paternal inheritance. Subsequently, their mother, Mrs. Martine Olivier, joined them, who suffered from a disease of unknown etiology.

In spite of this "crowd" living in her house, Tanya's sadness, far from

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softening off, had worsened.

She came back and sat down again on the golden brown leather sofa, by her first cousin, James Cardin, who had never spent a day without visiting Mrs. Olivier, her aunt on the maternal side, and without having a nice conversation with the siblings. He knew the house inside out, to such a par that he looked as if he belonged to the household. Certainly, he had awareness of the family situation and had often participated in some of the family decision-making.

Facing him and Tanya, Pauline, Wanda and Maurice lazed in large armchairs.

James observed abruptly, “Tanya, you have given too much importance to your quarrel with Frank. Come on! Is it the end of the world? Maybe you don’t have awareness of it, but you have so many options readily available. You look ravishing and young; your business flourishes. Hey, don’t always listen to your heart; which doesn’t always serve as a good adviser. You have to start thinking about your own survival. In addition, nothing happens by chance. You may have an opportunity to start a marvelous existence, free from unnecessary aggravations.”

He beckoned to the siblings to draw their attention and went on, “Haven’t I told the truth? Look at this gorgeous woman. She may conquer the world with her appealing personality, instead she lets Frank poison her life.”

Tanya squeezed her chin for a split second before saying, “James,

you talk about my husband!”

“Who doesn’t deserve the love of a special woman like you,” the cousin pointed out.

“I forbid you to speak this way about Frank!” yelled the woman. “And I mean it. Otherwise...”

She moved away from her cousin without completing her sentence. Then, casting a searching glance at everybody sitting in the living room, she pointed out, “You know, Frank remains to me the same well-meaning person of character I met years ago. Perhaps, I bear responsibility for our constant disagreement. For one thing, I don’t know how to ‘cajole’ him—if you get my meaning: I have neglected him, giving myself up to my store. This reminds me of the fact that money can’t buy happiness.”

Only Tanya fully realized what she had alluded to and the kind of trouble she had experienced to manage her big department store located, in one of the City commercial areas. How many times hadn’t she requested earnestly for Frank’s assistance? “My husband’s presence at the store would alleviate my burden,” she had often said to herself and to her mother. “And sometimes I feel like giving up everything”.

Unfortunately, she had never succeeded in convincing Frank of her concern. “That’s not my line of work, Tanya,” he replied to each of her entreaties. “I have never had a bent towards business. I will act clumsily; I don’t want to mess things up.”

After a pause, he would rush saying, “Tanya, darling, I want you to

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remember that my decision has nothing to do with the way I feel for you. I love you, Tanya. I have never loved anyone else and I won't take interest in any other women."

Maurice beckoned to her *beloved sister* and advanced sententiously, "My dear Tanya, I don't know the real motive for your disagreement with Frank. Both of you haven't told me anything which could enlighten me. I have no bad feelings toward your husband, and you have awareness of my respect for him. To tell you the truth, I like him a lot. He represents one of the best minds in Cows Island. As for me, contrary to what James has said, I think he highly deserves your love.

"However, the reasons you have just put forth seem unjustifiable. Nobody, including Frank, would take you for a bad person."

Tanya wrung her hands and breathed deeply. She asked herself if she should keep her marital problems to herself. "As a wife, I should," she whispered. "Frank and I should find a way to iron out our disagreement.

"However, I need to take someone else into my confidence; otherwise, I will have a nervous breakdown. Besides, shouldn't I take my siblings (and my first cousin) into my confidence?"

Then, she spoke up. "Let me tell what I think has gone wrong. Frank's outspokenness has generated powerful people's animosity towards him. Therefore, his enemies have ostracized him and kept him away from important positions to which his education entitled him. His professor's income, for example, happens to be slender.

"Well, for one thing, my dear husband can't tone down his criticism

of the rotten state of affairs.

“Mind you! He doesn’t go everywhere and voice his opinions; not at all. Nevertheless, through his philosophy teaching he does. Apparently, some malicious students may have reported what he has professed.

“I couldn’t care less. This country needs someone like him with dissenting opinions in order not to fall too deep into mediocrity. However, my husband has shown reluctance to accept anything from me.

“I think I have just expressed one of the causes of our disagreement.

“I don’t see anything wrong with sharing my belonging with him; above all, we are married under the joint estate system. However, he persistently declines my kindness, reminding me of his contentment about his lifestyle, his philosophy of existence and his love for me. He may have told the truth, but why can’t I content myself with his stand? I don’t know what else to do.

“Undoubtedly, at the beginning, I didn’t understand him; I remonstrated with him for not taking advantage of his youth and education, and for not trying to press on regardless. He could have used my social influence as a springboard.”

She paused to get her breath back and then went on, “To speak earnestly, at the beginning, I aimed for the status of a woman whose husband shone in national affairs, of whom they would speak highly. Therefore, I wouldn’t exclude the fact that I might have wounded Frank’s feelings and cooled off his love for me. My attitude sounded as

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if I looked down on him! No! I would never behave like that. Not only I love him, but also I have the greatest respect for him.

“Unfortunately, our relationships haven’t improved at all. What should I do?”

A dead silence reigned over the living room, which seemed to agree with the dull weather showing through the windowpanes. The sky clouded over, except that a fringe of brightness kept coming out on the horizon.

Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning, Wanda insinuated, “Unless Frank has just time for someone else, a school girl! You know whom I have in mind. Lorraine! No one else.”

Afterwards, the sibling went deeper into the armchair in which she lazed: she meant to make herself as much “little” as possible.

By the way, no one should have any surprise at her attitude. That “eternal roguish”, from earliest youth, had always taken pleasure in *launching bombs of insinuations* in the middle of a conversation, while giving the impression of acting as the most “innocent” person in the world.

On the other hand, Pauline had been known for her *rough candor* and cursing habits. That day, she tried to explain in *her own way* the meaning of her “incorrigible” sister’s innuendo.

“Tanya, my love,” she observed, “as far as I can remember, you have always been naïve. Don’t believe that you have made any mistake.

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Furthermore, your generosity has no bounds. So, stop blaming yourself. Let us call a cat by its name: your Frank enjoys himself with that charming high school girl. That husband of yours has shown a great deal of disloyalty and disgusting ungratefulness, after all that you have done for him. You have done him a big favor by marrying him, haven't you?

"You could have found a man more in line with your social and economic status than he. Of course, Lorraine could be his daughter. She is only fifteen. Nevertheless, you know, some men like young chicks, freshly coming from puberty.

"Anyway, your husband behaves like an insatiable stallion full of sexual appetite. I have presented the whole picture."

James coughed slightly, before supporting her cousin's argument, "Pauline, you have perfectly expressed my feeling; except I couldn't put it as bluntly as you've done. Only Tanya suffers from chronic blindness."

"Shut up!" exclaimed Maurice. "Mom can overhear us."

Maurice's warning happened to be judicious: his mother, Mrs. Martine Olivier, had sharp ears. Her children, when they were small, used to marveling at her auditory keenness, which enabled her to "fathom their little secrets" and baffle their young minds by thwarting their "well-kept childish plans" not in harmony with the family ethics.

Perhaps Maurice, Tanya, Pauline, Wanda and even James could no longer receive spanking, but they would feel so unhappy if they made

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their *dear mom* and *auntie* upset.

Additionally, Maurice had a specific reason in mind when he gave his warning: the doctors taking care of Mrs. Martine Olivier didn't rule out, beside pernicious anemia, the possibility of a certain mental stress in her, possibly worsened by the loss of her beloved husband. And to avoid the worst—in case that their tentative diagnosis should turn out true—they had advised her to take long rests and eschew stressful situations.

Thus, Frank and Tanya's disagreement could seriously affect her health, the more so as she loved her son-in-law as a mother would love her real child.

In addition, Mrs. Olivier was of a *sententious nature*; as soon as she had noticed something wrong in “her family”, she would hold a “round table conference” and dwelt on speculations touching on a variety of theories stemming from the bible, traditional ethics and current philosophical and psychological stands. Since she loved reading, her gift of the gab kept you *stationary* until she had “settled” the matter under discussion.

“Maurice is right,” conceded Pauline. “I will go soon to the movies with my *sexy* Boland. I don't intend to postpone such wonderful moments. Therefore, I have no time to listen to my mother's admonishment.

“In addition, you know that she disapproves of my dating him, because, my mother strongly believes in my *beloved* Boland's

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uselessness. I wouldn't dare challenge her opinion on him, but he makes me feel so good; and I refuse to listen to the voice of reason. And Mama Martine embodies reason."

She giggled and, maybe, she would have expanded on her feelings, but Wanda emerged from her armchair once more and cast an arch glance at the front door.

"Speaking of the devil," she pointed out in a falsely raucous tone, "and he is sure to appear. Look at the star, the one who has supplanted our sweet and beautiful Tanya!"

Lorraine briskly entered the living room. She was radiant with beauty, youthfulness and *apparent boldness*. Although she had just turned fifteen, she appeared full-blown, like a grown-up woman. She wore a green crepe de chine blouse hanging down a plush skirt of the same nuance, with a large pearly button securing its opening. She had the waist girded with a green velvet girdle. A topaz bracelet adorned her wrist, while her high-heeled brown shoes hammered masterfully on the floor.

"Good morning, my friends," she greeted in a crystalline voice.

Everybody answered together, "Good morning, Lorraine."

"How chic are you!" observed Wanda.

The adolescent smiled at her ingenuously.

"Oh," mentioned Pauline, "this is quite understandable: Lorraine looks practically like a grown-up woman. Look at her.

"Lorraine, you are dazzling. Are you sure, you are not older than the

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age they usually give you? Don't answer my question, I am just joking.

"But, listen everybody; you know that women make themselves beautiful when they have to visit their prince charming..."

"Pauline!" exclaimed Tanya suppliantly.

Either Lorraine did not understand Wanda and Pauline's remarks or she didn't mind, but she acted naturally, with a broad smile radiating her face.

She asked, "Tanya how is your mother? I haven't seen her for a while."

"So, so," replied the hostess.

"Good. Give her my regards."

Without further ado, the young visitor inquired, "I think Frank is in the library, is he not?"

"Yes, he is," confirmed Tanya.

Lorraine proceeded nonchalantly toward the library. When she reached it, she knocked at the door. Frank showed up himself at once. At this point, Tanya could only see the door closing on her "husband and his girlfriend".

Tanya felt, for the first time, the bite of jealousy. The image of Lorraine and Frank consumed with passion in the warm confined library appeared so vivid in her mind!

She had the impression that someone had slashed her heart with an icy knife, and that a frozen lake filled up her stomach.

Still she didn't want to give too much importance to her fit of

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jealousy, which “probably” rested on nothing but appearances often deceiving and on her sisters’ and cousin’s unreliable insinuations.

“I admit that I might be naïve” she thought, “and that Wanda, Pauline and James might have told the truth. I don’t want either to confuse my suspicion with the true relationship between Frank and Lorraine; which could be just pure friendship, a possibility between a grown-up man and an adolescent.

“I know Frank better than anyone else does. During our ‘long’ engagement, we used to trusting each other. To the best of my recollection, he has plenty of integrity. Doesn’t he believe that we shouldn’t confuse love with a joking matter? He would never make me jealous. No, no, a man can’t completely change overnight. I can’t certainly take *my Frank* for a depraved! He wouldn’t commit adultery, with an adolescent, in broad daylight, at home, in presence of his wife, his sisters-in-law, his brother-in-law, his cousin-in-law and his mother-in-law for whom he has always shown respect. No, no, I will never expect such vileness from him.”

Tanya felt someone touching her on the hand; she turned quickly and saw James sitting close by (even too close).

“Tanya....,” he started.

She pulled her hand quickly and cut in, “Please, James! Spare me your remarks!

“It is not the time now. I will have a word with my husband, as soon as Lorraine has left. We shouldn't have any reason for alarm. Please,

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leave me alone.”

“Yes, Tanya, we should have reason for alarm!” Wanda shouted.

“Look who is coming!”

Everybody focused on the front door: Denis and Corrine Pinson burst into the living room.

“Has Lorraine, my daughter, come here, in this house?” yelled Denis Pinson.

Tanya kept silent for a short while.

Her love for Frank, still strong, seemed to invite her to curb her jealousy and to save her husband from a scandal, indeed from an unmanageable misadventure.

In addition, because of her business, she could get hurt in the process, since the media and her competitors kept watching and scrutinizing her.

Then, suddenly, assailed by bitterness and anger, tired of “all this nonsense”, the “crazy romance” going on in “her house”, she pointed the way to the library.