

VERSION ANGLAISE ET COURT THÈME

I : VERSION

They were engaged to be married, Lilly and Maurice. It had been so for nearly three months. Lilly lived with her Aunt Lisbet in a semi-detached villa on the outskirts of Guildford, where Maurice's regiment was quartered. She had never known her mother ; when she ransacked the dim memories of her childhood, there was nobody further back than Aunt Lisbet. Her father she scarcely remembered at all, for he had died when she was quite a little girl. He had been a bookmaker, and a coloured photograph of him — a burly, red-faced man, in a white top-hat, and a long, grey dust coat with a scarlet flower in the button-hole — hung over the fire-place in Aunt Lisbet's bedroom. Underneath the photograph was written, James Maguire — 'Big Jock.'

During his lifetime 'Big Jock's' good luck had been almost proverbial, so that he was reputed to be worth a 'tidy pile.' But at his death, when all his debts had been paid, scarcely a hundred pounds remained. What had become of it all no one knew, and Aunt Lisbet had never forgiven her brother for this mystery. The disappearance of the money itself exasperated her; but the thought that for years he had been secretly making away with large sums without a word to her, his sister, who had kept house for him since his wife's death, and who had been a second mother to his child, made her especially furious. This bitter feeling against her brother, instead of subsiding as time went on, only rankled the more in her mind, and now, except in terms of abuse, she never mentioned his name. She was a thin, sharp-boned, little woman, with red lids to her greenish-coloured eyes, a long, aquiline nose and a pointed chin. When she spoke to Lilly of her father, there came into her voice a curious, rasping intonation. Aunt Lisbet drank ; chiefly brandy, and her drunkenness took the form of fits of ungovernable passion.

These outbursts were almost always directed against Lilly ; not that Aunt Lisbet had any particular personal animosity towards her niece, but because Lilly was the handiest object on which to vent her feelings. She would begin by recalling some evil trait in Jock's character. Lilly had no really tender affection for her father's memory, the little she knew of him was far from creditable. But this disparagement of him by Aunt Lisbet somehow made her blood boil, and at times the scenes between them were very violent. And though, except for these occasions, they seldom quarrelled, Lilly loathed Aunt Lisbet with an instinctive, imperious loathing. And this afternoon, as she drove home in the dog-cart by Maurice's side, her hatred for her aunt seemed fiercer than it had ever been before. The horse's hoofs rang clear on the hard, white road, as they sped swiftly along, Lilly leaning against Maurice's shoulder, plunged in a brown study. Presently she said, meditatively : 'What is the earliest date on which your father can arrive ?' 'Well, he won't leave Bombay for another fortnight, then he'll not hurry himself on the journey, so it will be at least a month before he reaches England. It's a beastly long time, isn't it ?' 'Oh, Maurice! What's the good of waiting? He will never consent, let's get married at once.'

Recklessly he dropped the reins and taking her face in his gloved hands, held it up to his. Their lips met, and putting both his arms round her, he strained her to him. The kiss was a long one ; at last she gave a little moan ; he let her go. 'You don't know the old gentleman, you see,' he continued. 'My infernal busybodies of relations have been writing all sorts of tales about you — at least, not about you, but about your aunt and your father, and about — well, a lot of damned rot.'

II : THÈME

Les événements se sont déroulés comme suit : Sissy a rencontré Merlin-Fernandez chez des amis, ils ont sympathisé, ont esquissé quelques pas de danse, se sont découvert des points communs : ils étaient du même signe, avaient habité la même ville, fréquenté le même lycée ; coïncidences qu'ils ont commentées fiévreusement sur le canapé du salon comme s'il s'agissait de phénomènes paranormaux. Ensuite, ils ont fait une promenade dans le jardin de leurs amis, pendant laquelle Merlin-Fernandez a gratifié Sissy de considérations élevées sur l'architecture et la peinture – il expose ces jours-ci – avant de redescendre sur terre et de lui proposer de rentrer en voiture avec lui. Chemin faisant, il a commencé à l'abreuver de questions sur ses occupations, sur ses fréquentations, sur les hommes qu'elle avait connus avant leur rencontre ; sous-entendant apparemment qu'à dater de leur rencontre elle était censée changer de calendrier.

Patrick Lapeyre, *Sissy, c'est moi*, 1998.