

THE AFTERNOON TEA PARTY

by H.E.SOUTH

Myrna had chosen to have her annual old ladies' tea-party in the middle of summer, when they would enjoy ~~the~~ January sunshine; she had invited them on ^a Wednesday, for this gave her two days in which to straighten house and garden after a week-end of golf and family pursuits. Except for petunias there was not much of a show out-of-doors, but she had covered the hydrangeas from ~~the~~ ^{those few days} ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ bursts of high temperature, when the North wind blows hotly ^{from inland deserts} on Melbourne, ~~xxx~~ ^{38° Celsius} thermometers show over ~~100~~ Fahrenheit and birds and beasts, unable to escape from the heat, gape and pant in the shade. ^{In consequence of Lanny's protection from withering blast, these shrubs were still lovely and} On Tuesday after sundown she had picked ~~the~~ flowers from different bushes in shades of pink, blue, mauve, green and white, had split an inch or two of stem and placed them briefly in boiling water before lying them in a tub of water for an hour before arrangement. Now she viewed with satisfaction the three large bowls in which she had placed them.

She was pleased with the ^{effect in the hall} ~~hall~~, but ~~the~~ ^{entry} lounge, ^{she saw that} one ~~table~~ ^{coffee} table lacked lustre. "I'll give it a rub-up before my shower" she thought and gathering ^{tin} polish and rag quickly achieved a ^{suitable} ~~suitable~~ glow.

The telephone rang. She dropped polish and cloth on a ^{semi-circular} ~~small~~ ^{well} table - one of the antiques she enjoyed having in her otherwise modern home. When she picked up the receiver a feminine voice announced the arrival of an old friend she had not seen for a decade. Delighted to be in touch again, each enquired after the other's family and doings and made an arrangement to meet.

Finally Myrna said: "Wonderful to hear from you again. Good-bye until Friday!" As she turned away she thought: "Glad she 'phoned before I was in the shower. And that it was not one of my old ladies unable to come. ~~xxx~~ ^{Good} ~~to~~ ^{Alice} ~~hear~~ to hear from an ~~old friend~~ again."

In the bathroom fresh soap and gay hand towels had been set for the visitors. Myrna had her shower quickly and dressed to the point where she had merely to step into her dress. She was covering her face with a rosy liquid make-up which gave colour to her sallow skin, when the doorbell rang. She put on the sleeveless dress and opened the front door.

A stout woman stood before her, brandishing two pots of jam which she handed to Myrna.

"The old lady assumed a conspiratorial air."

"You did say two-thirty. I know it's not quite that. I wish to speak to you."

Myrna's hasty glance at her wrist watch established that it was just a minute after the hour. Surely the old lady could not expect her to talk for half-an-hour ~~when guests would arrive?~~ She looked enquiring and met ~~an~~ aggressive determination in response... it must be something serious. ~~In~~ Capitulation she asked: "This is jam you have made yourself?"

She held the pale jar on its side and hastily reversed the movement as some syrup oozed from its screw-on top.

"That's orange marmalade. It's rather runny; I expect I was a little impatient... the oranges were rather old and just beginning to go off a little; I made the marmalade in a hurry." She ~~picked up~~ ^{took from Myrna} the other jar she had brought ^{held it upside down. It did not move at all.} ~~it was dark brown and quite opaque; when turned on its side it remained unmoved.~~ "This cumcnot set very well, but it's time it was eaten. It has set so well that it is hard to spread, the bread breaks if it is fresh. That jam" she continued impressively "is nine years old!"

Over Myrna's sophisticated countenance an expression of amazement passed; her eyes rounded and her lips parted, yet no word came forth.

The old lady continued: "I want you to come over next week when I do some more preserving. I want to hand on my skill to you young people and teach you to turn the fruit in your gardens into jam. Would Thursday suit you? My son is bringing some apricots over for me next week."

Myrna shook her head.

"My dear Mrs. Deakin! I have been making jam for years. But thank you for your kind thought just the same." She thought: "I'll throw these two jars out as soon as she's gone... nine years old! Who would eat that?"

Aloud she said: "But I suppose you did not come so early just to speak about jam. Will you just give me time to finish my face... I won't be a minute."

She saw the old lady ~~was~~ settled comfortably and dashed away to fix her hair, pin ~~a~~ ^{on her bodice} a jewelled brooch, ~~out on~~ ^{fix} ear rings and dab a powder puff, noticing that the coloured liquid ^{was} applied as the doorbell rang, did not cover the right side of her face: a large rectangle from ear to jaw and cheekbone showed her own quite different colouring. It looked weird. The dry material should be removed and the whole thing done again: ^{but} There was

In a couple of minutes she seated herself ~~beside~~ the old lady.

"We've a quarter of an hour before the others come. How can I help you?"

"There is something worrying me. It is about Lucy!"

"She is coming this afternoon."

"You know there is trouble in her marriage. He's a gambler... horses, they say." She looked at Myrna, who was silent; she resented ^{being asked to} discuss ~~the~~ her friend ~~in this way~~ and was irritated by outside interference in private affairs.

"I want to have a little talk with her. You know Vicar calls me his lieutenant. He says I do half his work for him. I keep asking her to come over for a little talk but she won't come. I want you to use your influence to get her to confide in me."

After a long silence, during which Myrna noted the compressed mouth and out-thrust chin, she ~~reminded her~~ ^{reminded her}: "We had a cup of tea, you and I, only last week, with Lucy."

"What?"

"We had tea with her last week!" cried Myrna loudly.

"It's not the same. I want her to come to me - just the two of us, speaking together. I want her to confide in me!"

"You should not force someone to confide in you."

"What?"

"You should not force a confidence!" shouted Myrna.

"No need to shout; I can hear you perfectly. Just speak naturally." She patted the chair on her right hand. "Come and sit on this side. This is my good side. I have an excellent hearing aid" she pointed out.

"I said you must not ~~interfere~~" said Myrna, suppressing the word 'meddle' which came naturally to mind.

"Her husband gambles, you know. I want to remind her that the Church instructs us to forgive. Always forgive."

"You'll put Lucy under additional strain."

"What?"

"Unwise - to - interfere!"

"She needs guidance. I am an experienced woman - I'm eighty-two, would you believe it?"

"Nobody believes that I am eighty-two. I don't look it, of course... hardly a gray hair. Of course Dad looks his age, he has aged greatly since he retired. Would you think I was eighty-two?"

Myrna politely shook her head; glancing at the dark hair referred to, she noted that it was a different, ~~gray~~ ^{gray} shade near the head... *died by herself no doubt!*

"I am going to help Lucy" continued the octogenarian. "I am going to get her sooner or later to come over for a little talk. I thought you would encourage her to come and see me next week; ~~xxx~~ I shall be free on Monday."

Myrna again shook her head. She was thankful ^{through the French window} to see a woman approaching, ~~and~~ without waiting to hear a knock she leapt to her feet and opened the door. A frail, stooped figure shuffled slowly towards her. It was a shock to recognise Cathie Dillon. It must be six months since they had met, and some reverse in health must have occurred. She was relieved to see the beautiful gray eyes unchanged, the familiar expression smiling and friendly.

"I hope I'm not too early... I think I am, but I came by train and the next one would have been rather late."

"It is good to see you. Our last meeting seems such a long time ago!"

"It was in July. ^{Six months!} Such a cold, gray day, wasn't it? I remember the wind was sharp, too."

"But your house was warm. What a happy afternoon we had. I did enjoy myself."

She led Cathie to the chair she had recently occupied and introduced her ^{two} guests ~~to each other~~, adding: "Mrs. Deakon is well named. She is active in Church circles."

"Yes, I've always enjoyed Church work. I've been President of the Women's Guild many times, also the Young Wives' Group. It is a good idea for the older woman to pilot young ones through their difficulties. But I don't do as much as I used."

"I expect you have more time to look after your family - have you any grandchildren?" asked Cathie.

"Two grandsons and three grand-daughters! One of the girls is the most beautiful child I've ever seen." She turned to Myrna. "~~Patience!~~ ^{Beatrice}" she said.

"~~Patience!~~" Myrna thought of the sullen disposition and heavy build

child" repeated the old lady. She demanded of Myrna. "Well! Have you ever seen ;such a beautiful child?"

"I don't think she is beautiful." The old lady did not hear and held her head enquiringly, so Myrna shouted: "I don't think she is beautiful."

"You don't?" The old head was held back ~~to consider opposition~~ ^{to consider opposition}.

"Tall, strong, pretty as a picture, ^{well muscled but} ~~not an ounce of~~ fat on her body!"

Myrna thought it ~~was~~ time to change the subject, so she said to Cathie:

"You have a new grandchild, don't you?" Then ^{affairs, a new} They discussed Cathie's ^{minuted} home in Brighton.

She ~~sold~~ Mrs. Deakin in a loud voice that Cathie's husband used to practice nearby. "Just around the corner from here. You'll remember Doctor Dillon?"

; "How does he like a nine-to-five job" ^{she asked,} "Instead of being a hard-worked G.P. often called out at night?"

"He's too old to be so active now. He enjoys having fixed hours of work."

"All the doctors seem to be forming clinics in the suburbs. ~~There are~~ ^{They have} ~~there~~ a roster and ~~they~~ take night calls in rotation."

Two ladies in their late seventies ~~had~~ arrived. One ^{wore a costume} ~~held an~~ upright stance, spoke in a vigorous tone, and looked shrewd and alert; the other was plump, pink-and-white, prettily dressed in ~~a~~ soft chiffon; she ^{looked} ~~was~~ gracefully ~~and~~ feminine. As soon as the sprightly ^{one -} Mrs. Harncastle had an opportunity she said to Myrna: "I had to bring her... Mrs. Parker. At times she's quite dim. She should have someone living with her to look after her. You'll see a big change in her!"

Myrna lifted her eyebrows in acknowledgement, hoping the ^{the clear voice & the positive words} gentle friend had not heard. It seemed to be a day when she had to keep changing the subject, and she said: "Are you pleased to be back in Melbourne? It is good to have you back with us again. You stayed in Lincolnshire, didn't you?"

"Lincolnshire. Where I was born and bred."

"I had an idea you were from Yorkshire."

"No! No! Lincolnshire. With a smile she added: "Not Yorkshire! It's not the same at all. An industrial county."

"I see: no mills and factories in Lincolnshire." Myrna struggled with a recollection of English counties. The name Gainsby occurred to her and she

"An: Fishing: That's quite different. we are seafarers and land-
holders. ^{industrialists: TBG are} They are not quite... not quite... You know, it's like the
difference between living in Toorak and Moorabbin; ^{one has} ~~which has~~ factories and
things, ^{the other} ~~while like Toorak~~ has the better address."

~~The~~^A young, thin woman who had recently arrived now ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ^{smiled and said in}
a teasing way: "What about the Lincolnshire poacher in the song?" She
murmured a few bars: "for it's my delight on a shiny night, in the season
of the year." This was ~~Lucy~~^{Lucy}, about whom the early discussion had taken
place. She had looked overtired and ~~unhappy~~^{unhappy} when she arrived but had ^{now} relaxed.

Mrs. Harncastle responded to the sally with gusto and they were laughing
together when Mrs. Deakin said meaningfully to Lucy:

"Man cannot live by bread alone. We must cultivate a spiritual
attitude to life."

Mrs. Harncastle gazed briefly at the stout speaker, and then in a firm
but agreeable tone began talking about the difference between Melbourne
addresses and quoted a friend who had told her: "Thank goodness; you're at
the right end of the ~~road~~^{Highway to Ruff Rd.} - the Brighton end, not the Moorabbin end." She
finished by saying ^{w. a smile}: "Actually we are pretty near the middle."

Mrs. Deacon insisted: "When we are worried about having a good address,
we are not thinking in a spiritual way."

"Who's worrying?" demanded Myrna.

Mrs. Harncastle, disposing of Mrs. Deakin in one annihilating glance,
said agreeably to Myrna: "Mac told me you had a telephone flirtation
when I was out the other day."

"He's a delightful man. Perhaps we did."

To revive Lucy, whose ^{face again showed tension} ~~unhappy expression had returned~~, she ex-
plained: "Doctor asked me how my rheumatism was. When I mentioned that three
drugs I'd been taking had made me worse, he told me to 'stay off them and
drink whisky instead.'"

"Isn't he dreadful! exclaimed Mrs. Harncastle proudly. He's over
eighty, you know."

"He said that when a case of gout came into Edinburgh Hospital everyone
rushed to have a look at it - "

"All nonsense!"

"Because all the Scots drink Scottish whisky."

Mrs. Parker related a story about a visit to Egypt she had made when a young widow. She spoke very slowly and at times seemed to lose the thread of her story and hesitate before resuming.

"These Arabs had brought a number of camels - in the hope of selling camel rides to us... Well, I was the only one in our ship's party who decided to ride... There was a man and his wife: he said, so that I shouldn't go around the pyramid - out of sight altogether! - alone with the Arab, he would come too... ^{But} His wife wouldn't speak to him for days afterwards..."

"See how she's failing... lack of focus" Mrs. Harncastle told Myrna, as one demonstrating in the lecture room. Her crisp voice was clear but Mrs. Parker showed no sign of having heard. She continued:

"It really was quite sweet of him... I think he was afraid the Arab might rob or frighten me into giving him more money."

Thirty years ago she would have made a delightful companion on a camel ride. Myrna said: "No doubt the husband considered his 'crime' worth his connubial punishment."

Mrs. Harncastle smiled and said: "An old friend of Mrs. Parker is going to pay her air fare back to London next April, so that he can see her again!"

Myrna asked if she were looking forward to her trip. "Yes, and to seeing my younger daughter and her family again."

"I have a criticism to make" said Mrs. Harncastle. "She plans to fly over non-stop. Which is most unwise. Far too big a strain. She should break the journey at Rome, to rest a day or two, before continuing."

Mrs. Parker made no reply. Mrs. Harncastle continued emphatically: "Most unwise to take it all so quickly. ^{Upsets the} ~~circadian~~ ^{circadian} rhythm."

The last couple of guests to arrive were an elegant, slender woman and her aged and wrinkled aunt. The old lady was very stooped but had a pleasant expression.

"Leonie, you and Miss Patterson are the last to come and living next-door you had the shortest distance to travel. I think you know everyone here."

; Leonie's entrance was, as always, superb. She swept into the room, striding gracefully, her handbag in ^{her right} ~~her~~ hand ~~the~~ while the other ~~hand~~ clasped

"Tell us" she ~~said to some~~ ^{asked} "about the wedding you had in your garden a little while ago. It seems to be the fashionable thing. We went to one of ourselves last month; ~~the~~ all went well, except that the temperature dropped ~~and~~ ^{unexpectedly} the weather turned suddenly cold, and there we all wore in our silks and short-sleeved dresses, waiting in the garden for the bride, who was traditionally late although she had only to walk from her own bedroom to the tree on the lawn in her own garden."

Leonie responded: "Well, ours took place under our gumtrees in our garden. Our little friend entered from the lane and of course everybody thought she would ~~arrive~~ ^{unexpectedly} arrive from the opposite direction, so she and her bridesmaids were amongst us ~~suddenly~~ - it was a surprise! then there was the sudden ~~change~~ ^{flush} while the clergyman performed the ceremony. I thought there was a wonderful sense of joy and freedom."

"Surely one has to be married in a church! ~~Are you~~ ^{YOU} sure a clergyman officiated?" asked Mrs Hamcastle.

"The Church is relaxing; a lot of its old ideas. It is moving with the times." ^{"But surely reverence was missing from the ceremony?"}

Again the Aunt broke her silence by saying dogmatically: "It's all wrong. If you can't marry in Church you ought to go to a Registry Office!"

"But why, Aunt? It's not nice in a stuffy old Registry Office."

"You ought to get married in a Church. The Church is a hallowed place."

She added, in full explanation: "No sanctity in a garden."

"But, Aunt, have you been to ~~one~~ ^{a garden wedding?}" ^{"Make no difference. I couldn't stand it."}

"No, I couldn't stand ~~a garden wedding~~ ^{it!}."

"Have you been to one?" ^{Aunt} persisted Leonie gently.

"Couldn't stand it. I couldn't stand it!"

"But, Aunt, have you seen one yourself." ^{categorical}
; This pronouncement caught everyone's attention and caused ~~xxxxxxxx~~

complete silence.

Myrna attempted to revive the conversation by asking: "Who was the parson? one of the old school or a young rebel?"

"He was reasonably young. Actually, he is the bridegroom's brother."

Mrs. Deacon, who was attempting to follow the discussion, asked "What did you say."

"He is the bridegroom's elder brother!"

"What? I didn't hear."

Lucy. "Remember, Jesus told us we must forgive the sins of our brother, not seven times but seventy-times seven."

It was apparent from Lucy's face, flaming with colour, and Mrs. Deakin's satisfaction that some reproach was being driven home. Myrna's face expressed cold disapproval. She rose.

"I must ask you to excuse me while I bring in our tea. Lucy, will you give me a hand?"

Myrna had prepared sandwiches. ^{and a chocolate cake} "I also ran up a sponge/this morning and some tartlets yesterday. Nothing chewy for our old dears. But, Lucy, you'll have to be firm with Mrs. Deakin. She sees herself as your mentor and guide; it's ridiculous. She is too deaf to be anybody's confidante, also she doesn't know as much about the world as she thinks she does; she is unqualified to advise you about anything - ~~she~~, she's getting senile, or should I say anile?"

"She keeps on about a little talk... that's why I asked her over with you ^{to my place} last week. She won't take no for an answer. Every time I forget home difficulties she brings me back to them."

; "You'll have to be very firm indeed."

Lucy surveyed the tea waggon. "It looks a gorgeous spread/ Of course, at this age they don't have to watch their weight."

"Sometimes they really tuck in at this time of the afternoon. ~~They~~ It seems old people love to eat between meals. I have an old ladies' party once a year... this year they all seem so much older - except for Mrs. Harncastle, who's still taking ~~University~~ special educational courses, reading new subjects every year and is as tough, direct and focussed as ever."

They wheeled in the waggon, and while Myrna poured tea into Spode cups, Lucy carried each one, ~~hexily~~ set in its saucer on a plate, embroidered ^{linen} napkin between, and ^{silver} teaspoon and fork set neatly under ^{its} ~~the~~ handle. ^{F.P.} Leonie, however, had vanished: nobody knew where; ~~and~~ when she re-entered the room there was no bulge at the waist, ^{no hand clasping a button.} To Myrna's enquiring look she replied:

"The chicken died."

"Where did you put it. I'll see to it later on."

"I" said Leonie magnificently "have disposed of it."

Myrna ^{decided} ~~knew~~ she would have to find the small body later on. She knew

② She potted the rest in her night + ordered "Come + sit here. I want to hear what you have to say."
She recalled that she had to have some company to say. "You weren't home, so I left them in a note. The last had them too much. Did you find them? Lucy apologized for not having heard the other woman. "When I found out of the box they were stuck together + mouldy." FP's every copy to her that you didn't use them. "You don't want to be too large off. Mrs. Deakin took you for a walk. FP said Lucy didn't want to go. Nobody could find them."

asked Lucy for a
Later
Mrs. Deakin, who had enjoyed a second cup of tea, handed it to Lucy.

"Put that down, my dear. And then come back here... I have something to say to you." When the younger woman returned she said: "We haven't had that little talk I've been asking you to come over and have with me."

Lucy said cheerfully and clearly: "You forget that you and I and Myrna had a little chat ~~xxxx~~ at my home last week, because you wanted one."

"That's not what I meant. I want you to come over for a little talk - a private little talk - with me." Thrusting her chin forward and pursing her lips she leaned forward. "You know Vicar calls me his Lieutenant. He says that I do half his work for him!"

Lucy felt her face drain of colour. She trembled as she said: "I have absolutely no intention of coming over to you for any private 'little talk', Mrs. Deakin."

Shaking, she turned blindly to the tea-wagon and took her tea to a seat beside Mrs. Parker, who was happy to ramble on gently about her two daughters. The hot tea helped ~~her~~ ^{Lucy}. She smiled absently at the pink and white lady, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ having heard nothing of what she had been told. Aunt came into the conversation, saying to Lucy:

"You look very nice to-day, dear. Brown suits you. When I was young I was told 'always dress to your eyes.' So remember that - always dress to the colour of your eyes: brown if you've brown eyes, blue if they're blue."

Lucy, who had ~~xxxx~~ gray eyes, could not think of a suitable answer. My ~~eyes~~ ^{pupils} must be ~~dark~~ ^{dilated} with anger or something, she thought. Myrna, ~~xxxx~~ stepping into the breach, said: "Lucy looks nice in blue, too."

Mrs. Parker now surprised Myrna by ~~xxxx~~ asking about her right cheek. "Have you had an accident? I notice there's something about ~~xxx~~ your right cheek?" She touched the lower side of her own face.

Myrna thought: "The old lady ~~wasn't~~ ^{isn't} too dim to notice my ~~two-coloured~~ ^{two-coloured} effect." "I suppose it must be pretty obvious." aloud she said "I wasn't quite ready when my first visitor arrived, and I got my glamorous make-up on too quickly."

"It doesn't look too bad" consoled Mrs. Parker. "It's just that I noticed the difference in colour."

Leonie now remarked teasingly: "I knew you weren't really ready for us, even when I came ^{late, as you pointed out!} you hadn't had time to take the furniture polish away!" Everybody turned at her gesture and surveyed the stained cloth and bottle

thought you
got round to it, so
other was for them?
And you couldn't think of any way for them?
"No!" A pity they were invited, but I must not let them up myself

leave out one person who's here to-day. Surveying her guests, she noticed Mrs. Deakin signalling in a peremptory way to Lucy, who turned from her deliberately and a few moments later left the party, excusing herself by saying:

"My smallest is due home so I must go."

Mrs. Deakin bustled after her, catching her on the steps of the house.

"Has anybody been talking about me? Why won't you come over for a little talk? Has anybody told you not to come to me?"

Lucy began to shake. Her mind flooded with hysterical thoughts to be poured forth... because you're like some character from 'Pride and Prejudice', because you badger me, because you're like the lady of the manor who assumes the right to interfere in the villagers' lives, because you follow like a bloodhound on my trail, because you're like a bulldog, never letting go your mouthful of flesh... Controlling herself with a great effort, she said:

"Because you hound me, Mrs. Deakin."

"What?"

"You - hound - me!"

She fled homewards, trembling and frightened by her own re-action. She thought: I nearly burst into flames, or hysteria, or something horrible... must avoid her in future... I could finish in a mental asylum."

Mrs. Deakin, returning to the party, found general farewells in progress. The vigorous Mrs. Harncastle had returned to the subject of Mrs. Parker's non-stop journey to Britain:

"Circadian Rhythms... it's our own body's time.. when you go from one time zone to another, one's time rhythm is disturbed... some are more upset than others. It's most unwise for older people to not make a stopover half between here and Britain.

Again the gentle pink-and-white woman listened pleasantly but made no reply. "She's determined!" said Mrs. Harncastle. "But I know what I'm talking about. On her own head be it!" She fell back as they took their leave to again inform Myrna that her companion was failing and that somebody ought to travel with her. "Madness letting her go alone!"

And odd observation coming from Aunt, thought ~~Myrna~~. And what about ^{his niece} Leonie, who brought a dying chick to a tea-party?

She turned to look for ~~it~~ ^{the body} in the garden, thinking to find it in ~~the~~ ~~rose garden or some~~ equally inappropriate spot. Yes, there it was, lying under the standard "Peace" ~~rosebush~~. "I knew she wasn't practical enough to cope. Those energetic blackbirds probably ~~had~~ ^{disinterested} ~~discovered~~ it five minutes after she thought she had ~~covered~~ ^{buried} it. She decided to ~~bury~~ ^{bury} it herself and was about to carry it off when Mrs. Deakin re-entered the garden. Without realising ^{what} she was doing it, ~~she~~ ^{Myrna} stooped to gather ~~the~~ rose petals lying here and there on the bed.

Mrs. Deakin spoke sharply: "You heard that Lucy told me she would not come over for our little talk - I thought you might know why?"

"Come and sit down." Myrna led ~~the~~ ^{her} ~~old woman~~ ^{neighbor} to a seat. "I can't see why you want her to confide in you?"

"What?" Lips pursed. head back, chin forward in ~~a~~ ^a characteristic attitude, she continued: "I am older than she is. I have had more experience of the world than ~~she has~~ ^{has}. I can advise her."

"I think you should leave her alone. She already has her share of trouble."

"What?"

"Best to leave her alone" shouted Myrna, who was now exasperated.

"No need to shout. Just speak in your ordinary tone and I can hear you."

After an interval of silence, during which ~~Mrs. Deakin~~ ^{she} surveyed ~~her~~ ^{M.} in ~~an~~ ^{his} autocratic manner, ~~the~~ ^{she} ~~latter~~ said: "If I have no co-operation from you I

shall have to report the matter to the Vicar." ^{at Myrna through narrowed lids. The wrinkled mouth was pursed & projected.} "Go right ahead." ^{Used to ~~be~~ ~~own~~ dominating her family, she was using every effort to accomplish this interview on wh. she had set his heart.}

"What?"

"Do that!"

"I am very upset! Very upset indeed!" After a pause she added: "Vicar calle me his Lieutenant. He says I do half his work for him." There was another pause. "He will be disturbed about this... very disturbed. I shall have to tell him. I am deeply hurt. But I am prepared to discuss the matter if Lucy comes over to my home for a little talk."

"You must excuse me" said Myrna. "I must start getting dinner."~~xxx~~

"I shall have to tell Vicar."

To her surprise Mrs. Deakin ~~was~~ ^{did} appear.

"You heard that Lucy told me she would not come over for our little talk?; I thought you might know why?"

"Come and sit down". Myrna led the old lady to a garden seat. "I can't see why you want her to confide in you?"

"Why?" Lips pursed, head back, chin forward in her characteristic attitude, she continued: "Why won't she come? Why don't you persuade her?"

Myrna paused to reflect. Then
Because you are an unsuitable person, thought Myrna. ~~she~~ ^{she} ~~alone~~ she said:
C "Leave her alone. She has the right not to consult you, or me, if she chooses."

"I," said the old woman, straightening her bowed shoulders and assuming a regal erectness, "I am prepared to discuss the matter with her if she comes over for a little talk."

"Leave her alone!" shouted Myrna at the top of her voice.

"No need to shout! just speak in your ordinary tone and I can hear you."

face Myrna was too exasperated to ~~xxxxxx~~ answer, but she was aware that her face had become hot, ~~and~~ flushed and angry.
Mrs. Deakin surveyed her critically. "If I have no co-operation from you

I shall have to report the matter to the Vicar!"

Go right ahead, thought Myrna. "You do that" she replied.

"What?"

"Do that!"

"I am very upset! Very upset indeed!" *←*

ensued
Silence/for a minute and then she added: "Vicar calls me his lieutenant.

He says I do half his work for him." Another silence, during which Myrna was surveyed, *by pale eyes, pale & nondescript in themselves but now radiating aggressive.* then: "I am deeply hurt. But I am prepared to discuss the matter if Lucy comes over for a little talk."

, "You must excuse me" said Myrna. "I must start getting dinner ready."

"I shall have to tell our Vicar!"

"My dinner!" shouted Myrna, standing up.

← Mrs. Deakin followed suit. *←* She was breathing more heavily than usual, the expression on her face was militant, ~~the~~ ^{her} chin thrust forward, then held stiffly up. ~~and~~ some agitation ~~xxxxxx~~ became apparent as she spoke: "What a thing to happen... I must tell Vicar about it. I am deeply hurt. ;I am very upset indeed. *Vicar will know.*"

Myrna shook her head. She ~~was~~ found herself feeling sorry about the whole thing and wished she had not been brought into the sad, *ridiculous* trivial affair.

"Used to getting her own way all her life." *←* she thought. "This is