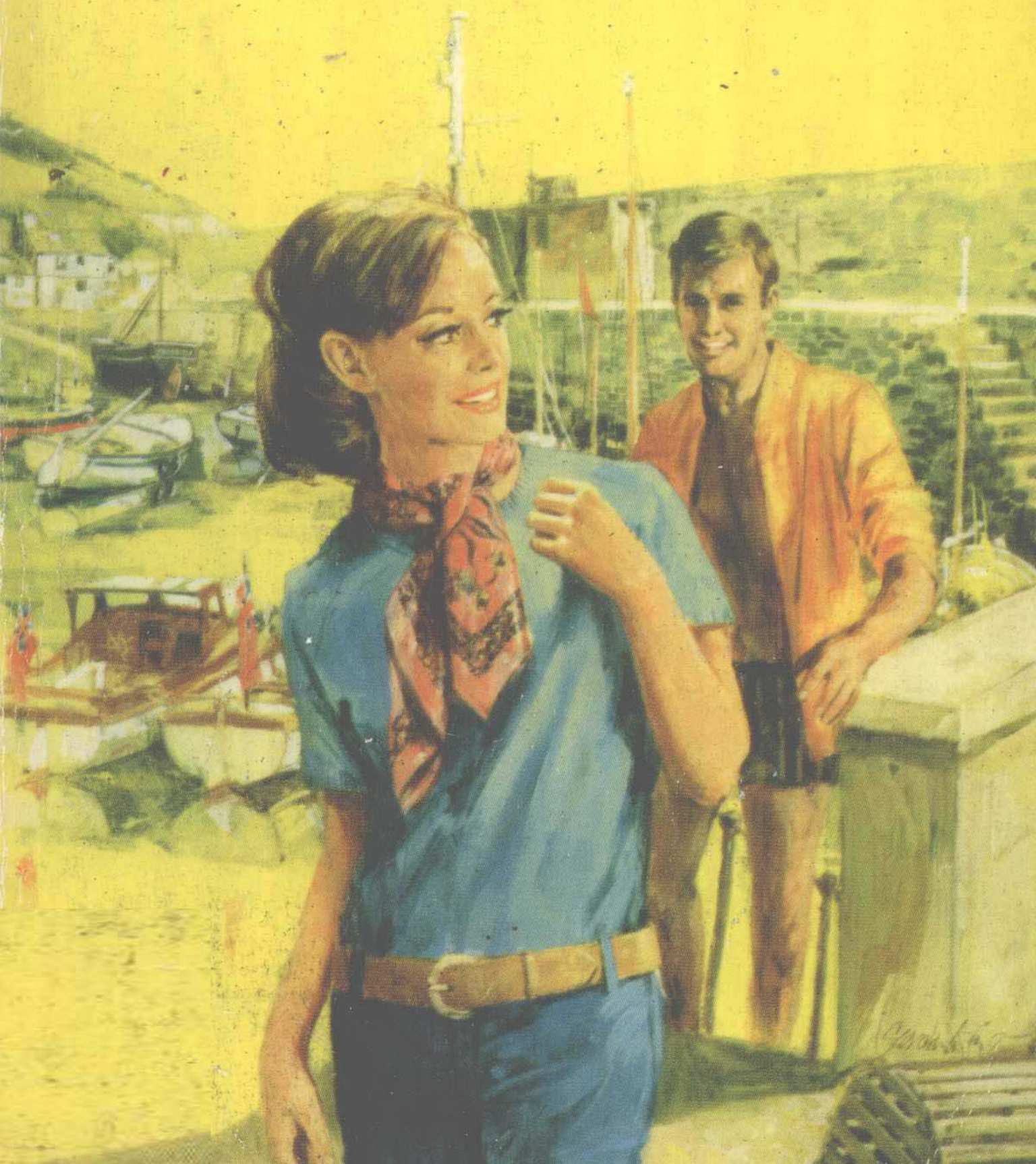


# Iris Bromige

An April Girl





# **Gay Intruder**

## **by Iris Bromige**

**At twenty-five, Gail Trevor suddenly found herself alone in the world, with very little money and no definite plans. But she was young and undismayed. There was a certain freedom about having nothing. She had no ties now. All was before her.**

**And then came the letter from her late father's dearest friend, Josephine Sherwood. A letter which brings her to the town of Beverton.**

**Beverton, with its ancient buildings, its air of bustling activity, the river, the distant line of the moor and the feeling that the sea was not far away, rambling Holly Lodge, Aunt Jo and her two sons, George and Max, who were only a few years older than herself.**

**No summer, she thought, had ever held such promise, promise of a new life, of gaiety, happiness and perhaps even love.**

# Alex and the Raynhams

by Iris Bromige

Alex Madison at twenty-five knows more about animals and country life than about the world of men, in spite of her striking good looks. When she takes a post as secretary-companion to the elegant journalist Dorinda Raynham, she is quite bowled over by the combined charm of the Raynham family. Only Dorinda's son Nigel seems rude and hostile.

But Alex is to discover, rather painfully, that all that glitters is not necessarily gold, and that the handsome and friendly Bruce might be crueller than Nigel.

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## AN APRIL GIRL

Rupert, lingering over his coffee, wondered what was behind the smooth defence she put up. On the surface, the cool, efficient career girl, with everything buttoned up. But just as one brown wavy tendril had escaped from the hair smoothly swept up on top of her head, so he sensed an entirely different person beneath the facade, a person she was determined to conceal. She might appear practical and independent, but her mouth was sensitive, and the dark brown eyes time and again betrayed the composure she wore like a cloak.

She had aroused his curiosity. She offered a challenge. For more than a year now, no female had evoked any other response in him than a cold distaste which embraced the whole sex. He must be cured, he thought sardonically. Or ready for another lesson?

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# **An April Girl**

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**Iris Bromige**



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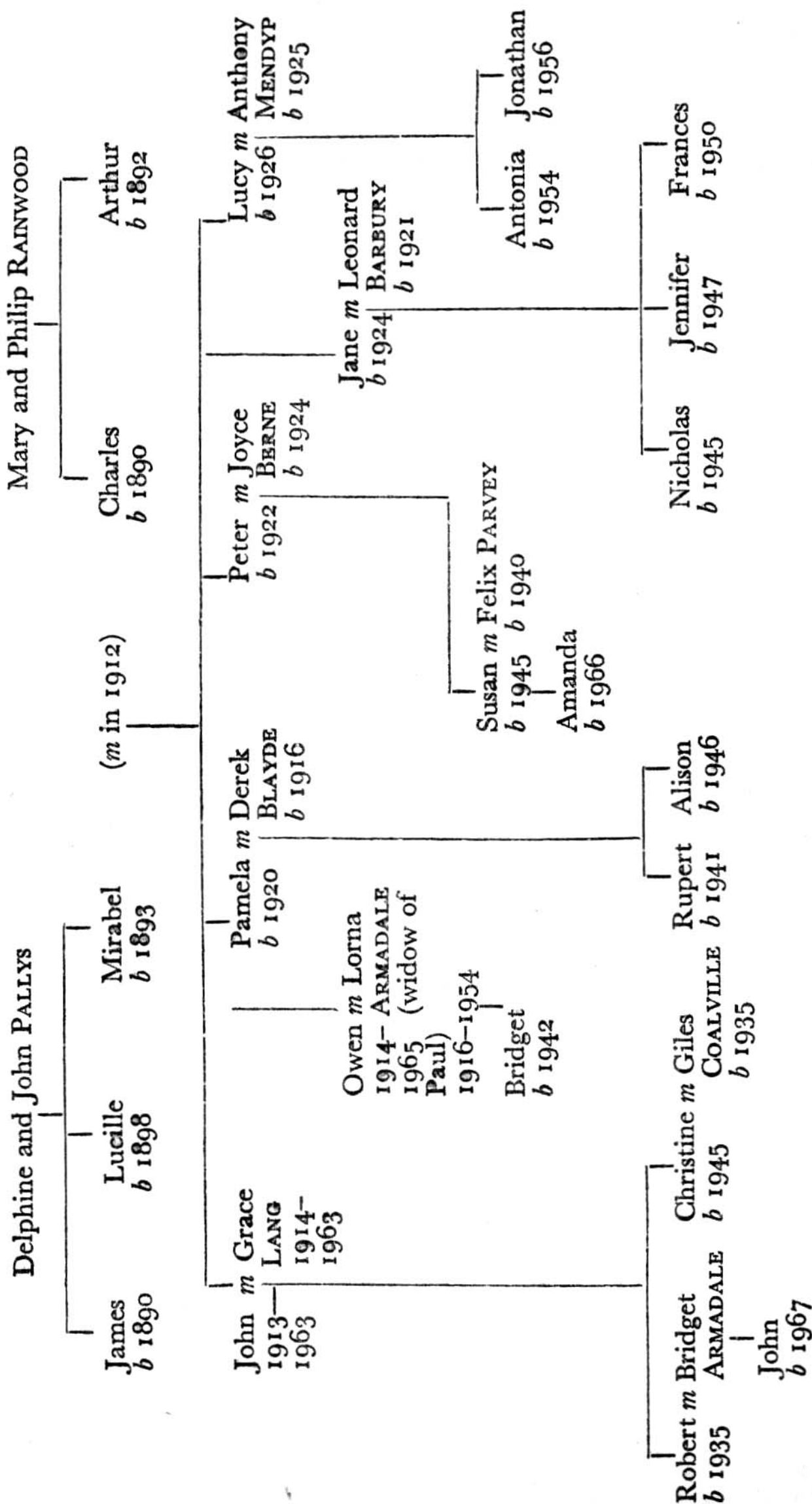
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# THE RAINWOOD FAMILY TREE



*A Rainwood Wedding*

RUPERT BLAYDE emerged from the little church in the wake of his parents and his sister, and shivered as the east wind met him like a dagger. The hills across the valley were capped with snow and the country had a grey, shrivelled look under the sullen sky. What a place, he thought gloomily, for a January wedding. Might as well have chosen the north pole. He turned up the collar of his coat, dug his hands into his pockets, ducked his head against the wind and stepped out briskly on the trail which the other guests were following. The hotel where the reception was being held was fortunately only five minutes' walk away, so that cars were needed only for the older and less robust members of the party. His long legs soon carried him past his family.

"Hi, there! You're in a hurry," said his sister, running after him.

"Hardly the weather for lingering. Hope to goodness there's some hot food waiting for us and not cold snippets. I'm frozen and starving."

"Don't sound so grouchy. This is a wedding party, you know," said Alison, half running beside him.

"Why Christine had to have the whole Rainwood tribe up here, I don't know. If she had to be married in Northumberland in mid-winter, she should have had a quiet wedding and been satisfied with telegrams from the family."

"That's what she wanted. Grandma wouldn't hear of it, though. You know what a thing she has about the family."

"Then Christine should have been married from her own home in Surrey."

"It's not her own home any more. It's Robert's home now. Christine's been up here for more than a year and loves it."

"Trust Christine to be awkward."

"Oh, don't be such a cross-patch. I think it's lovely here. I wish we were staying longer so that I could explore the hills. And the hotel's jolly comfortable, even by your fussy standards."

"I'm not fussy. I agree it's a comfortable place, and warm, thank heavens! That's why I'm hurrying back. That church was icy."

"Christine and Giles looked so happy, they made me feel warm just to see them."

"I lack your youthful romantic enthusiasm."

"Oh, you're impossible these days, Rupert."

"I know," he said, with a wry smile that made her relent.

"I love weddings," said Alison, seizing her hat just in time to defeat the wind.

"And with a family as large as ours, you're likely to see plenty. Christenings are entering into it now, too. Soon there won't be a week in the year when there isn't some family function we're expected to attend. Grandma doesn't pass up the slightest chance of getting us together."

"Is it such a burden? I think we're rather an amusing collection."

"In rationed doses. Thank heavens Great-uncle Arthur's car broke down in Yarmouth and he's incarcerated there with the herrings. At least, we're spared that much. I even noticed on Grandmama's austere features a faint glimmer of relief at the news. Though what he was doing in Norfolk on his way up here, only heaven and Arthur Rainwood know."

Alison giggled as she followed her brother into the hall of the Burnside Cottage Hotel, where a blazing fire welcomed them.

Warmed by an excellent meal of soup, roast turkey and a good old-fashioned apple pie, Rupert eyed the gathering in a rather more genial mood as he sipped his coffee. How closely Grandma Rainwood held this large clan together, he thought, and how well she wore. She had the classical features that scorned the erosions of time, and her tall, slim figure was always held erect. She was sitting next to Robert



at the end of the table, listening gravely to what he was saying. She had celebrated her seventy-fifth birthday the previous week, and was as formidable now as she had been when he was a child. The old school. Didactic, she maintained and, where she could, imposed her own high standards of conduct without compromise. He had a great admiration and respect for her, and an armoured approach. In a smoky grey dress and a high turban of Parma violets, she looked the most impressive member of the party. He remembered the hat at previous Rainwood weddings, for his grandmother was thrifty with clothes, and doubtless this hat was now the wedding hat for all time. And round the table sat his uncles and aunts and cousins in abundance, for no matter what lukewarm feelings or antipathies existed between them they all rallied to Grandma Rainwood's clarion call on social occasions, even to coming up to the bleak north for young Christine's wedding.

His eyes travelled over their faces, amused at the odd array of hats on the ladies, and stopped at the young woman seated next to Great-uncle James. He had noticed her in church, sitting beside Great-aunt Lucille, and wondered who she was. A friend of Christine's, perhaps. Very trim, with hardly any hair visible under the neat jade green fez. Large dark eyes, a straight nose and a sensitive mouth in an oval face. The green dress exactly matched the hat and was perfectly plain except for a crystal spray on the shoulder. Stylish, he thought, as Christine rose to cut the cake and the waiter came round with champagne.

Robert made a good, brief speech toasting the health of the couple, the groom responded with equal warmth and brevity, and Christine suggested that they all dispersed to the lounge where they could relax. The cheerful informality of the bridal pair was making this wedding a very pleasant affair, after all, Rupert decided, as he accepted his mother's invitation to join her on a comfortable sofa in the lounge.

"Isn't this jolly?" said his mother. "Trust Christine to make it homely."

"M'm. Funny, I didn't realise Christine had grown up

until I heard she was getting married. Surprise of my life. Thought she was still a scatter-brained kid. I must say she's made an extremely sensible choice. I take to Giles."

"So do we all. Just what Kit needed. A good deal older than she is, but that's probably all for the best."

"Who's the girl in the green dress sitting on the chair by the window? Know her, Mother?"

"She's Aunt Lucille's secretary and companion."

"What, Miss Croyde, the paragon? I never visualised her as young. I've heard about her on the family exchange, of course. She lives on the job, doesn't she?"

"Yes. She goes everywhere with Aunt Lucille. On all her business trips. Lucille says she's wonderfully efficient and she doesn't know now how she ever got on without her."

"Aunt Lucille's pretty efficient herself."

"Yes. But she is getting on for seventy, you know. It's wonderful how she holds the reins of her business empire. She says she'll never retire. But Miss Croyde's able to take a lot of the tiresome work off her hands."

"Surely family weddings aren't part of a secretary's job?"

"They've been in Edinburgh for the past two days. Aunt Lucille is thinking of opening a salon up there and went to inspect some premises. They came here from Edinburgh this morning, and of course as Miss Croyde was with her, Aunt Lucille brought her to the wedding."

"Never misses an opportunity, Aunt Lucille. You'd think she'd opened enough beauty salons to keep her happy. Wonder what she does it for. She's made a pot of money. Can't need any more."

"She says business keeps her young."

"Well, I wish she'd stop trying to look glamorous. All that make-up and that blue hair. It's a mask, not a face."

"Miss Croyde seems rather out of it over there. I don't suppose she knows anybody and Aunt Lucille doesn't appear to be bothering about her."

"A bit much, to be pitched into the Rainwood army without a guide, to say nothing of the bridegroom's party,

which is pretty large. She looks admirably composed, though. A cool customer."

"That's her business training. Inside, she may be feeling shy and unwanted." Pamela Blayde eyed her son thoughtfully, then added: "Why not go and have a word with her?"

"She's probably enjoying the role of spectator. Not everybody's as sociable as you, Mother. Hullo, Christine," he added, standing up. "You make a bonny bride. And Giles looks amazingly carefree. My blessings on you."

Christine's heart-shaped face with its quirky smile had a refreshing charm. Her head-dress was slightly askew, but the simple lines of the white brocade dress suited her slender figure and the happiness in her face was infectious.

"I do hope you're enjoying yourselves. It's such a long way to have come," she said.

"It's a delightful wedding," said Pamela. "I've never enjoyed one more. I can see why you love this country, Kit. It suits you. Surrey was always a bit tame for her, Giles."

"She's a wild one," said Giles, putting an arm round his wife's shoulder.

"On a chain now," said Christine, laughing up at him.

"Never," said Rupert. "She'll always pack a few surprises for you, Giles."

"I know. An interesting prospect," said Giles.

Rupert eyed Giles Coalville's strong, dark face with something like envy. Quiet, sure of himself, sure of Christine, he seemed to know exactly where he was going and why. He rode life with firm confidence, as though it was a good, sound horse instead of the bucking, unreliable brute Rupert had found it to be.

Christine told them a little of the history of the hotel, which was the centre of fierce Border raids in the past, before she and Giles moved on.

"How happy they are!" said Pamela. "I'm so glad for Christine. She's a dear girl."

"Hullo, Grandma," said Rupert. "You look splendid. Come and sit by Mother and brace her up. She's getting sentimental."



"Don't be silly, Rupert," said his mother briskly. "You confuse sentiment and sentimentality. You lump them together these days and dismiss them both."

"I'd prefer that hard chair if you'd fetch it, Rupert, please," said his grandmother. "I don't like lounging. It makes my back ache."

"And therein lies a whole philosophy," said Rupert, smiling as he fetched the chair.

"Where's your father?" asked Mirabel, as she sat down.

"Search me," said Rupert.

His mother looked round as though for a handbag she had just missed, and said:

"Nowhere in sight. Now I come to think of it, I don't remember seeing him after Christine cut the cake. I wonder where he's got to."

"Well, he'll turn up again I expect," said Mirabel, scanning the crowd. "Rupert, dear, I think it would be kind to go and have a little talk with Miss Croyde. She looks so out of things. You know her, don't you? The girl in green sitting on her own by the window. She's Aunt Lucille's secretary, and only knows one or two of us."

Rupert eyed his grandmother wryly. This time, he supposed he'd have to go.

"She may be enjoying a little peace," he said.

"Let us show some courtesy. Lucille may leave her like a piece of luggage until she wants to pick her up again, but that is no excuse for the rest of us to neglect her," said Mirabel with some asperity as she glanced across the room at the noisy group surrounding Lucille.

"Very well, Grandma. I obey," said Rupert.

He threaded his way across the room to the solitary chair in the window. The girl had turned away and was watching the burn flowing past the hotel garden.

"Hullo. Can I get you a drink?"

She turned, startled, then smiled politely.

"No, thank you. One glass of champagne is enough."

"I'm Rupert Blayde. Cousin of the bride. And you're my great-aunt's Girl Friday, I believe."



“Yes. Philippa Croyde. I don’t feel I ought to be here at all, you know, but Miss Pallys insisted. I don’t know the bride or the groom, or either of the families, except for old Mr Pallys. He wasn’t much help in identifying the party, though,” she added, smiling. “He didn’t know any of the groom’s friends, and he says he gets all his own family muddled up now that he’s getting old. Can’t remember whose child is whose, and he much preferred to talk about the days when he was young and his father was a country doctor, which was quite fascinating but didn’t leave me any the wiser about my fellow guests.”

“Well, let’s see if I can do better.” Rupert sat himself down on the window seat beside her. “You know Grandma, I expect.”

“Mirabel Rainwood. Yes, she’s rather a legend. I’ve heard a lot about her from Miss Pallys and I was introduced to her when we came out of church. She’s a great character, I guess. You’d never imagine that she was Miss Pallys’s sister.”

Her voice was low and pleasing, her profile as she looked across the room at his grandmother was neat and clean-cut. She listened attentively as he pointed out the various members of the Rainwood family.

“And the tall, dark man who gave the bride away? Who is he?” she asked.

“Christine’s brother, Robert. Their parents were killed in a car accident several years ago. Robert is the eldest of our generation.”

“Robert Rainwood, the lawyer. I’ve had correspondence with him. He acts for Miss Pallys, but I’ve never seen him. Funny how you imagine people. I always thought of him as a dried up, middle-aged man. He doesn’t look like a solicitor.”

“What should a solicitor look like? A mummy?”

“One is apt to generalise. The only two solicitors I’ve ever known were both desiccated and seemed rather inhuman.”

“You have a Dickensian attitude to our profession,