

**BEFORE THE PARTY**

J. Alfred Lappherd strode up the steps to the front door of his suburban home clumsily embracing two paper bags which, even to the most undomestic, would suggest the presence of groceries. Awkwardly he pressed the door bell. In a moment he heard the scampering of his dog, followed by the quick and certain steps of Helen coming to admit him.

"Thank you, Helen," he said, passing his burden to the bony figure who automatically wheeled around and walked sprightly with all the grace of a successful servant towards the kitchen. "And here's my little puppy; come to papa, Mickey boy," exclaimed the new arrival while proceeding to engage in his usual mock-combat with the canine, vigorously rubbing its ears and receiving a playful bite in return. The growling of the dog, and the forced laughter of the man were interrupted by the light footsteps of a woman descending the stairs. "Oh, did I wake you, darling?" Alfred queried apologetically.

"No, Alfred, I only lay down for a half hour; I was so tired, so awfully tired." She was standing before him now, her dull brown eyes seeking pity. She continued, "Did you bring home the butter and . . ."

"Yes, dear, I did," he interrupted.

"Surely, you didn't enter by the front door?" Louisa whined uneasily.

"I stand before you guilty," replied the husband with a cynical grin.

"What will Mrs. Manion think? Oh, Alfred, you're so careless. Come, let's sit in the parlor before dinner; I've so much to tell you."

"I thought I might peruse the **EVENING MAIL**," he uttered despairingly, watching his wife lighting a cigarette and tapping a cushion to support her head, "but I suppose that can wait till after dinner." He sat down in a plush chair opposite Louisa, crossed his legs, and introduced the topic he knew to be uppermost in Louisa's mind. "Are you all prepared for the party tonight?" To anyone but Louisa the question would have betrayed a certain ironic vein.



"My bridge party—that's what I want to speak to you about. I'm so bewildered," moaned Louisa, dismissing her cigarette to the ash-tray and bending forward with a disturbed air. "It's that irresponsible Helen, she doesn't know the correct way to prepare delicate dishes—and I must have something distinctive for the girls."

"I have found her steak dinners beyond reproach. Of course, when it comes to *Hor d'oeuvres* one must know the exact way to mix the oatmeal," blasted Alfred. "It takes a bit of the artist, I believe. But did you consult the cook book?"

"Yes, we did," she whimpered.

"And was it the magic 'Open Sesame' of all your difficulties?"

"The magic what?" she asked, her brow betraying the worry of one unable to penetrate ignorance.

"I meant, darling," explained the husband patiently, "was it of any help to you?"

"Oh yes, it was, it was," answered Louisa brightly, "it gave in every detail the instructions for preparing sandwiches with Caviar. . ."

"Another name for fish eggs," interrupted the husband who shifted bodily position as one who triumphs in conversation is wont to do.

"And it showed how to prepare olives stuffed with Pimiento cheese," added the wife enthusiastically.

"Pemento, my dear, and at a very nice price," corrected Alfred showing impatience; "I honestly believe I'll be on prison rations for a week after this . . ."

The wife sensed Alfred's dissatisfaction and proceeded to rationalize for her irritating behaviour. "Why, dear, don't you realize what this means to us? We have been in Bord for no more than two months, and already we have been mentioned in the Society Page three times. And I intend to notify the papers of tonight's party; they should carry it tomorrow."

"Yes, we have been very fortunate," agreed the husband while removing his horn-rimmed glasses from his



thin, moustached face. Two months in Bord, he thought. It was better in Tyneville. Less emphasis on respectability there. But the Company needed a new manager when old Henson died. Promotions were always welcome. They wouldn't leave him here very long; didn't Patter hint that there would be a position available in the head office in at least two years. And for that time he was manager of Rite-Fit Tailors, Bord Branch, Ltd. A voice shattered his speculations.

"Dinner is served, Mr. Lappherd." Helen was standing in the doorway, her round face flushed, giving evidence of lengthy subjection to the heat of the cooking range.

"I'll be there ipso pronto," replied Alfred with a smile; then he added to his wife who was heading towards the stair-way, "aren't you going to join me?"

"I had lunch at five. I'm really too excited to eat now. I think I'll take down the painting in my room, and hang it above the mantlepiece. Then I'll change for the party," explained Louisa as she mounted the stairs.

After dinner Alfred took up the paper and enveloped himself in a cloud of smoke as if to insure his privacy. Shortly, however, Louisa tip-toed into the room carrying the cherished painting which she grasped securely with both hands. The husband paid no heed to the interruption. Yet he was aware of a struggle taking place about the mantlepiece; and he looked up nervously to see Louisa vainly attempting to adjust the work of art. "A task for Sir Galahad," he muttered, laying aside the paper and striding across the room to his wife. "I'll hang it up, dear," he said, grasping the object which she held as cautiously as if it were an atom bomb.

"Thank you, Alfred; I really didn't want to disturb you. . . ."

Alfred's brow contracted as he gazed upon the oily canvass. Turning to his wife, he spoke with an air of perplexity, "What in the world is this? I can't tell which is top or bottom. I suppose this is an example of impressionistic art; am I right?" he stared into his wife's blank face.

"It's a Gushwin, my dear, a Gushwin." She stressed the proper noun as if to so sanctify the artist that he would be beyond criticism.



"But what does it mean? 'Ecstasy' it says on the margin; but all I can see are a dozen disconnected lines," he vociferated almost in despair.

"I don't know. But I'm sure the girls will," the wife assured him.

"I would say it was the product of a drunken artist who fell into a bucket of paint and then staggered across the canvass," interpolated Alfred with a cynical grin adorning his prim countenance. Then he placed the weird coloured object above the mantelpiece to suit his mate's taste before resuming his seat. "Any more last minute tasks?" he asked while lighting a cigarette.

"I'm worried about so many things, Alfred. My playing is one cause of my anxiety; it's the bidding that bothers me most," Louisa whined nervously while patting a loose hair back into its forced position.

The sweep of her arm to her black and well-groomed hair attracted Alfred's glance, and his eyes came to rest on her countenance. A beautiful woman, he thought, as he remarked the slender and doll-like face whose ruby lips were enticingly attractive. Her scarlet satin dress did justice to her girlish figure which she so meticulously protected. She hadn't changed over the five years of marriage. Shallow, flippant, frivolous—just like she always was. Never was intelligent. Must have been pushed through school. But her beauty. Bewitching. And her girlish laugh. Five years. Five. Five. When he suddenly realized that he was staring at her, he promptly rose and stood before Louisa's section of the bookcase. "It might be a good idea to take another glance at Culbertson on the subject," he mused while running his eyes over the titles and speaking their message, "let's see, it should be here: **The Cocktail Party, Ulysses, The Egyptian, The Mature Mind, Contract Bridge,—ah, this is it.**"

"I'm afraid I haven't got time to read it now," she announced. "I must go see how Helen is doing with the asparagus rolls. Then I must put the pickled Letchi nuts in a bowl for the girls, and also arrange some of our monographed cigarettes in the golden container I got from Mrs. Tait."

"I dare say none of the others receive any better coaching than this book can provide," remarked the hus-



band, disregarding his wife's lengthy exposition of her standing tasks.

"Mrs. Main's son has helped her a lot," complained Louisa; "at least that's what the other girls claim."

"I suppose children do serve a good purpose some times," said Alfred philosophically while looking at a group of children scampering about just outside their residence.

Louisa blanched for a moment and then spoke in dogmatic tones on the one subject about which she had firm convictions and an unwavering opinion. "You know my views on that matter, Alfred, and this is no time to start such a discussion—the last time we nearly quarreled."

"Yes, I remember," agreed the husband pensively.

"Ruins your figure. Causes nervous breakdowns. Ties you down till you're contented with knitting needles. And who would come to your bridge parties? A family they say—that's all right when told to ignorant people," enumerated Louisa, adjusting the belt about her slim waist and staring into her husband's reddened face.

"Yes, just for ignorant people," Alfred agreed in laconic sarcasm while reaching for his coat. Then he added, "I think I'll take a walk in the evening air. My stomach seems a bit upset."

Louisa stood in the doorway exhibiting a furious mein as she watched her husband saunter slowly down the lattice-bordered walk accompanied by the spaniel which brushed affectionately against his leg.

—O. K. E. '51.

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#### THE FOURTH CRUCIFIXION

She poured her blood on craggy stone,  
Her tears on mangled feet;  
Alive in death she trod the street  
Alone;  
Her heart on a twisted thorn  
Bore Christ till He was reborn.

—R. O. F. '51.