

Your main commentary should be focused on *do*. Other topics may also be addressed.

When I returned to the gambling house, Sarah and Sir Cecil were already outside. She was supporting him with both her hands, but his tall, bent form looked likely to overwhelm her at any second. As I came hurrying up, I could hear him saying:

5 "It's you they don't like in here, my dear. When I used to frequent this place by myself, they always treated me like royalty. Oh yes, like royalty. Don't like women of your sort. They only want real ladies or else whores. And you're neither. So you see they don't like you one bit. Never had any trouble here until you insisted on tagging along."

10 "Come along, darling. Here's Christopher."

"Banks, my boy, you can speak frankly. This wench here. As you see, she's a good few years younger than me. No spring chicken herself, mind you, ha ha! But still, a good few years my junior. Tell me frankly, my boy, do you suppose, in a place like tonight's, where you found us tonight, a place like that, do you

15 suppose a stranger looking at the two of us together... Well, let's speak frankly! What I'm asking you is, do you suppose people take my wife for a harlot?"

Sarah's expression, as far as I could see it, did not change, though a slight urgency entered her ministrations, as though she hoped the treatment would bring a change of mood. Sir Cecil waved his head in irritation as though

20 avoiding a fly, then said:

"Come on, my boy. Do speak frankly now."

"Now, now, darling," Sarah said quietly. "You're being unpleasant."

25 "I'll tell you a secret, my boy, I'll tell you a secret. I rather enjoy it. I like people to mistake my wife for a harlot. That's why I like to frequent places like that one tonight. Get off me! Leave me alone!" He pushed Sarah aside, then continued: "Other reason I go, of course, no doubt you guessed it, I owe a little

money. Run up bit of a debt, you know. Nothing I won't win back, of course."

"Darling, Christopher's been very kind. You mustn't bore him."

30 "What's the harlot saying? Hear what she said, my boy? Well, don't. Don't listen to her. Don't listen to trollops, that's what I say. They'll lead you astray. Particularly in times of war and conflict. Never listen to a trollop in times of war."

He climbed to his feet unaided, and for a moment stood swaying before us in the middle of the room, his unfastened collar sticking out from his neck. Then

35 he moved off into the bedroom, closing the door behind him. Sarah gave me a smile, then went in after him. Had it not been for that smile-or rather, something like an appeal I detected behind it-I would certainly have withdrawn at that point. As it was, I remained in the room, examining absent-mindedly a Chinese bowl on a stand near the entrance. For a time, I could hear

40 Sir Cecil shouting something; then there was silence.

Sarah emerged alter perhaps five minutes and looked surprised to find me still there.

"Is he all right?" I asked.

45 "He's asleep now. He'll be fine. I'm sorry you were inconvenienced, Christopher. Hardly what you were seeking when you came looking for us this evening. We'll arrange something to make up. We'll take you out to dinner somewhere. Astor House has good food still."

She was guiding me out of the room, but I turned at the end and said:

"This sort of thing. Does it happen a lot?"

50 She gave a sigh. "Often enough. But you mustn't think I mind. It's just that I do worry sometimes. About his heart, you know. That's why I always go with him now."

"You look after him well."

55 "You mustn't get the wrong impression. Cecil's a dear man. We must take you out to dinner very soon. When you're not busy. But I suppose you're always busy."

"Is this how Sir Cecil tends to pass all his evenings?"

"Most of them. Some of his days too."

"Is there anything at all I can do?"

60 "Anything you can do?" She gave a light laugh. "Look, Christopher, I'm fine. Really, you mustn't get the wrong impression about Cecil. He's a dear. I ... I do love him so."

"Well, then, I'll say goodnight."

65 She took another step towards me and raised a hand vaguely. I found myself grasping it, but not quite knowing what to do next, kissed the back of it. Then, mumbling another goodnight, I stepped into the corridor.

"You're not to worry about me, Christopher," she whispered in the door. "I'm perfectly all right." Those were her words to me last night. But today, it is those earlier words of hers, uttered three weeks ago when I first saw her at the

70 ballroom of the Palace Hotel, that return to me with particular pertinence. "I don't expect we'll be going anywhere in a hurry," she had said. "Unless someone comes to the rescue." What could she have intended by making such a remark to me that evening? As I say, even at the time it puzzled me, and I may well have quizzed her further about it had not Grayson, just at that

75 moment, emerged out in the crowd, looking for me.