

- INSPECTOR Nonsense, of course she will. And let's hope it teaches you a lesson. Is there anything you need?
- DANIEL Nothing, thanks.
- INSPECTOR How are you managing up here on your own?
- DANIEL The village grocer sends up what I need. Not that I'm eating much . . .
- INSPECTOR Now listen to me. You're young. Even supposing she doesn't come back, don't let it spoil your life. It's not worth it, nothing is. You get married in June and she leaves you in September. What's three months in a lifetime?
- DANIEL It's easy for you to talk.
- INSPECTOR ~~Take the long view, man.~~ With these rich women you can't win. They've had money all their lives and they're used to their own way. She'll either come begging for you take her back or you'll get a letter from her asking for a divorce.
- DANIEL (*outraged*) A divorce! ~~Oh, charming!~~ When she practically went down on her knees to get me to – I didn't want to get married. I was much too unsettled. ~~And she'd do a thing like that to me?~~ (*Abruptly.*) That's what you've come for, isn't it? Well, go on! Give me the divorce papers! Come on, let's have them!
- INSPECTOR (*patiently*) Why should I have any divorce papers? I'm a policeman, not a lawyer. I told you I had no news of your wife and haven't. Why should I lie to you?
- DANIEL (*feverishly*) All right then, let's just hang around and hope that our darling Elizabeth will come trotting back. I want her! I want her back!
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(*The INSPECTOR exits. The police car is heard driving away. FATHER MAXIMIN appears at the door. He is a ~~young~~ man with a pleasant, open face. He taps on the door.*)

MAXIMIN Good evening.

DANIEL Er . . . Good evening . . .

MAXIMIN You are M. Corban, aren't you? Daniel Corban?

DANIEL Yes.

MAXIMIN I know the lady of the house, but I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you yet. I'm Father Maximin.

DANIEL How do you do? Can I take your hat?

MAXIMIN Thank you. I've just taken over the parish of St Jean from Father Simonet. I expect you know Father Simonet, don't you?

DANIEL No. I'm on holiday. I've only rented this place.

MAXIMIN Oh, yes, of course.

DANIEL Sit down, won't you? Can I give you a drink?

MAXIMIN I won't say no. It's chilly these autumn evenings.

DANIEL Whisky? Brandy?

MAXIMIN A little brandy, thank you. I ventured to call because I have a holy picture for Mme. Corban.

DANIEL A holy picture?

MAXIMIN It's a custom in our mountain churches. We present a holy picture when we've received a donation.

DANIEL My wife gave you a donation?

MAXIMIN Yes, the other week, when I was making my yearly round of visits to the summer residents. She gave me two hundred francs. That's a lot of money. Very, very generous of her; your wife is a wonderful person.

DANIEL Yes, isn't she?

MAXIMIN Here's the picture.

DANIEL And here's the brandy.
(They exchange picture and drink with a smile.)
I hope it brings me luck – will it?

MAXIMIN Luck? Well, that's up to God, isn't it? You've caught the sun, haven't you?

DANIEL Yes. I went out without my shirt; silly.

- MAXIMIN You want to be careful, even at this time of year.
- DANIEL I'll see my wife gets it anyway. That is, if I ever set eyes on her again. You see, Father, your Lady Bountiful has left. Gone, slammed out of the house! Here's to her!
- MAXIMIN I'm so sorry . . . believe me, my dear friend, when one has the good fortune in life . . .
- DANIEL No sermons, please.
- MAXIMIN I'm not going to give you one. Anyway, sermons are out of fashion. These days young clerics go in for psychoanalysis.
- (DANIEL *laughs. A Pause.*)
- MAXIMIN May I ask you a question?
- DANIEL Do.
- MAXIMIN Are you still in love with your wife?
- DANIEL Yes.
- MAXIMIN You were married in church, I hope?
- DANIEL (*lost in his memories*) Yes . . . A tiny church among the pine trees near Juan. Just she and I and a couple of tramps for witnesses. A honeymoon in Venice. She'd been there before but I hadn't. It was marvellous. Then a friend of mine wrote and offered to rent me this chalet. We settled in, and the very first evening – the remoteness of the place, I suppose, or just being on our own for the first time – but we started to quarrel. We made it up, but the second evening we quarrelled again. Elizabeth packed her bags and left. That was ten days ago and I haven't heard a word from her since.
- MAXIMIN My son – I am going to give you a little sermon now – sorrow is sent to try us, but God will be merciful. Tell me, would you be prepared to take your wife back here and now, without a word of reproach?
- DANIEL Of course.
- MAXIMIN Then you deserve the good news I'm bringing you. Your wife has come back.

DANIEL What did you say?

MAXIMIN I saw a young woman at afternoon prayers today, in my church at St Jean. She was weeping. I recognised her as Mme. Corban. She asked for confession and then she told me the whole story. She was so afraid you'd be angry that she didn't dare come home. So I said I'd come and confront you myself, and here I am.

DANIEL You mean my wife's here, in the village?

MAXIMIN No, my son. She's waiting outside the house, just a few yards from you.

DANIEL (*dazed*) Give me a cigarette, will you?

MAXIMIN I'm afraid I don't smoke.

(DANIEL *leans back, gasping, almost ill with shock.*)

DANIEL In the bureau.

MAXIMIN (*going to the bureau*) Oh! Yes. I shouldn't have broken it so suddenly. It must have been a great shock for you. But still a joyful one. Joy works in some strange ways – Monsieur Corban – look.

(FLORENCE *has come in. She is attractive, young and carries a small suitcase.*)

DANIEL (*stammering*) But . . . but –

FLORENCE (*breathlessly, rushing into his arms*) Daniel, Daniel, please forgive me. I'm so happy. Everything will be all right now. I know it will. I've missed you so terribly. Dear Father Maximin, thank you for everything. I'm sorry . . . please excuse me . . . I . . .

(*She runs ^{up stairs} out overcome with emotion. MAXIMIN gazes after her.*)

MAXIMIN (*beaming*) There!

DANIEL (*dazed*) But . . . but that's not my wife!

MAXIMIN What?

DANIEL That woman isn't Elizabeth.

MAXIMIN What are you talking about?

DANIEL I've never set eyes on that woman before in my life.