

# A Proper Place To Live

by Tom Purdom

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"Do you have any good works which must be performed this afternoon?" Sir Harold Tudor-Smith asked his wife at lunch (which was, of course, her breakfast).

"Today is Tuesday, Harold."

"Ah. yes. Of course."

Tuesday was the day Lady Millicent taught reading to the children of widows whose husbands had been employed in the tea trade. The Tudor-Smiths had been enjoying their current way of life for over six years now and for that entire period it had been Lady Millicent's custom to sleep until noon and spend the afternoon playing the harpsichord and doing good works -- a regimen which she had adhered to with the steadfastness which was, as Sir Harold had often told her, one of the more appealing aspects of her character.

It was not, in Lady Millicent's opinion, the most impressive compliment she received from her husband -- although she always acknowledged it with the graciousness which was also an appealing part of her character. Steadfastness, in Lady Millicent's view, was one of the indispensable attributes of a Lady. There was no virtue more fundamental than steadfastness -- not even the ability to play the harpsichord with deftness and taste.

Today, however, on this bright September afternoon in 17--, Sir Harold was concerned with issues that must, sadly, take precedence over all other considerations.

"It involves Volume, Millicent."

"Ah. Well..."

"And someone may be Preaching Against It."

"Well. In that case, Harold."

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The first notes of Mr. William Tyler's new "mechanical contrivance" reached them when they were still several streets from the address given in the news item that had brought this matter to Sir Harold's attention. The tune was only a simple dance -- a bourée from a suite of elementary pieces by Mr. Telemann -- but it was already forcing its way through the rumble of carriages, the shouts of workingmen, and all the other street noises that normally created such a pleasant background for Sir Harold's thoughts when he strolled through his city. By the time they were within two hundred yards of the machine, by Sir Harold's estimate, the dance had been repeated five times without variation, and they were pushing through a force that dominated everything around them. Circles of children and young people were dancing as if they were being sprayed by fire hoses. Older people were walking around with their palms clapped over their ears. Dazed faces were peering out of windows and street vendors and their customers were trying to shout at each other through cupped hands. About a third of the people around them seemed to be drifting toward the source of the sound as if they were being pulled toward a drain -- and another third seemed to be moving away from it as if they were being pushed by a gentle but relentless wind.

The center of all this commotion was a modest three story house near the western corner of the

intersection mentioned in Mr. Wilberforce's weekly. A signboard advertising *William Tyler, Mechanic* hung from the second floor and a crowd was gathered around an iron door that was big enough to admit a good-sized carriage. At the next intersection, about thirty paces from the iron door, another crowd had gathered around a man in a black robe who was shouting something from a portable pulpit. A couple of dozen younger people were hopping and bouncing in time to the storm of sound coming from William Tyler's second floor window, but most of the citizens on the street seemed to be shouting at each other or listening to the pulpiteer.

In the center of the crowd in front of the mechanic's shop, with his back pressed against the door, a stooped, gray-haired man was scowling at a phalanx of waving fists. Sir Harold and his lady had both blocked their ears with wadded-up handkerchiefs but it was obvious Mr. Tyler and his opponents were saying a few words about the rights of Englishmen.

Sir Harold removed the handkerchief from his right ear, so he could use his right hand, and managed to stretch his arm through the crowd and offer the mechanic his card. It was a long reach, and the shoulders and heads bobbing in front of them should have created an impenetrable obstacle, but this was, after all, *his* London.

"I would appreciate it if I could speak to you in private," Sir Harold shouted through the fifteenth repetition of the tune thundering out of the second floor window. "I am extremely interested in some of the possibilities created by your invention."

Mr. Tyler's brow furrowed. He had indeed been discussing the rights of Englishmen with two red-faced men with very large backs. It took him a moment to change gears and turn his attention to the polite, rather diffident man who had apparently handed him a card across a distance that would have created a problem for someone who had arms as long as crutches.

"Excuse me," Sir Harold said. "Please excuse me. Thank you."

"If you don't mind," Lady Millicent said. "Thank you. That's very kind of you."

The crowd parted before the gentle pressure of Sir Harold's walking stick and Lady Millicent's parasol. Two smiling, good-natured faces slipped between Mr. Tyler and the two men who had firm opinions on the rights of Englishmen, a few vaguely promising, not quite intelligible words reached the mechanic's ear, a gentle hand rested on his shoulder, and he and his two companions disappeared through the narrow wooden door that led to his private quarters.

The apparatus had been installed in the parlor on the second floor, near the top of the stairs. They had started climbing as soon as Lady Millicent had closed the private door and made sure it was securely locked. A child who looked as if she were about nine years old was sitting at the keyboard with a happy smile on her face, playing -- once again -- the same tune they had been hearing for the last ten minutes.

Sir Harold gestured at the instrument. "It might be easier to talk if...."

The mechanic frowned again, but there was, as Sir Harold knew, very little chance he would be able to deny the request. The polite, carefully dressed gentleman standing in front of him was, after all, a Tudor-Smith. And the tall, gentle-faced woman eyeing him through her pince-nez was not only a Tudor-Smith but was also, in her own right, by descent, a Cuddleby. Of the Puddleby Cuddlebys.

Mr. Tyler's daughter insisted on playing the last few bars of her tune but after that she threw up her hands in a final grand gesture and scrambled onto her bench and started curtsyng. Sir Harold and his lady straightened up as if they had just put down a pair of heavy packages. The voices of the people standing in the street reached them for the first time.

Lady Millicent applauded politely. Sir Harold stepped up to the instrument without a pause and dropped to a crouch beside the arrangement of pipes and levers on the left side.

"I think we should start by having you show me how it works," Sir Harold said. "If you wouldn't mind, that is."

The mechanic's face lit up. He stepped forward with his eyes beaming and in a moment he was crouching beside Sir Harold and showing him how the machine derived its mechanical power, just as the newspaper writer had stated, "from its ingenious use of the high pressure water system which has been a standard feature of London life for the last half decade." Water from the street, it seemed, was passed through a series of ingeniously shaped tubes which actually tripled its pressure even before it entered the

instrument proper. Then, once inside the instrument...

"I found that if I pinched the pipe in the middle, like that... I had a lot of trouble designing joints that would stand up to the kind of pressure I'm talking about here, but...."

Sir Harold nodded wisely and produced properly timed head shakes and other gestures of amazed appreciation. The high pressure water system had been one of his most important alterations and he had known when he arranged it that it had implications that went beyond daily showers and other amenities. He hadn't realized it could be used to bring Volume into his surroundings -- he had thought that required electricity -- but he wasn't particularly surprised either. If a system as logical as a series of pipes and valves could logically be used to do something, then some human mind would eventually work through all the reasoning involved and come to the inevitable conclusion. It was even more likely someone would do the necessary intellectual work, furthermore, when the end result was something human beings valued as much as they seemed to value Volume.

The London Sir Harold lived in -- *his* London -- was not, of course, the London you may read about in certain dreary books. In Sir Harold's London, the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach frequently crossed the English Channel -- at the invitation of his good friend George Friedrich Handel -- and personally staged performances of his works which invariably sent him home with his ears ringing with popular acclaim and his purse well stuffed with good English gold. The six concertos Herr Bach had composed for the Margrave of Brandenburg did not languish unplayed in the Margrave's library but were performed almost weekly by some of the finest instrumentalists in the city, many of whom received their fees from Sir Harold himself. There had even been two occasions on which the German composer's great mass in the key of B minor had been performed in Westminster Abbey, with the composer himself conducting and several hundred perfectly respectable citizens camping outside the church for a week in advance to make sure they would be permitted to squeeze into a pew.

As Sir Harold was well aware, it was a milieu which existed--like all good places--In Spite Of and Because Of. No one had to tell him there were Europes in which Herr Bach's mass had also sat unperformed for many decades and Londons where the music of Buxtehude and Couperin was not a normal part of daily life. There were even Londons in which the streets were dirty, horses created horrible traffic jams, and honest workingmen didn't live in neat, clean houses and whistle bits from Messiah and Judas Maccabaeus as they laid bricks, painted gates, and arranged their wares in tidy shops furnished with good clean running water. Those places existed. They were real. They were always there, on the edge of things, like water lapping at the dike, or wolves circling the fire.

Outside the pulpiteer was still preaching, but Mr. Tyler was so engrossed in his dissertation he apparently didn't hear the angry voice denouncing his marvelous work. Sir Harold, however, could hear voices demanding that the "music" should begin again, and other voices, equally angry, taking the other side of the matter. Lady Millicent gave him an anxious look from her position near the edge of the window and he managed to excuse himself for a moment and take her aside.

"Do you think you could step to the door, Millicent, and send a messenger to the Musicians' Guild?"

Lady Millicent straightened her back. "If you think it's necessary, Harold."

Sir Harold removed a pen and pad from his waistcoat and hastily scribbled a note. From her seat near the fireplace, Mr. Tyler's daughter was eyeing the keyboard with obvious restlessness.

"I'm afraid it's unavoidable, Millicent. You can explain to the people outside that the device is silent right now because Mr. Tyler is explaining its working to a gentleman who may be able to do him some service."

Sir Harold returned to Mr. Tyler's lecture and Lady Millicent picked her way down the stairs and confronted the crowd that had shifted to Mr. Tyler's private door. A few people surged forward when the door opened but they came to a halt as soon as they saw who was standing there.

"I would appreciate it very much if I could have the services of a messenger," Lady Millicent said. "Is there anyone here who would care to earn an easy shilling?"

Two boys and a slight, bright-eyed man in his middle twenties raised their hands and started pushing forward. Lady Millicent pointed to the young man and then silenced one of the boys, before he could complain, with a simple movement of her other hand.

A plump, tousle-haired girl raised her fist at the back of the crowd. "Where's our music? What have you done with our music?"

The young man stopped in front of the door stoop and Lady Millicent handed him Sir Harold's note. "Where's our music?" the girl repeated. "What are you doing with Mr. Tyler's invention?"

"Mr. Tyler's device," Lady Millicent said, "is silent right now because he is explaining its workings to a gentleman who may be able to do him some service."

"The only service he needs is a little work with an axe," one of the stout men who had been arguing with Mr. Tyler said.

Lady Millicent turned toward the man and raised her eyebrows. His smile faded and his face slowly reddened. She transferred her attention to another aspect of the scene in front of her and the stout man made a little half step and disappeared behind a tall tradesman.

Like Sir Harold, Lady Millicent could only employ the powers customarily associated with her station. Most of the time, fortunately, that was all she needed.

The orator in the pulpit -- Mr. Herbert according to the news item -- was still preaching, even though the music had stopped, and a number of the people who had been standing in the street were drifting toward his post. Every word he was saying could be heard at this end of the street. The tousle-haired young girl had turned away from the Lady standing on Mr. Tyler's step but now she was advancing, with her head lowered and her fists clenched, toward three older women who were standing between her and the edge of the crowd around the pulpit. Two bouncy-looking boys joined her while Lady Millicent watched and a pair of older men came in from the right and fell into line with the three women.

Mr. Herbert was speaking of the rights God had given His creatures. He was talking about the beauty of intelligence and calm reflection and he had already made a few mentions of our moral duty to resist with all our might the emissaries of sin and evil. The crowd on the street, in Lady Millicent's opinion, was clearly beginning to divide into two camps. She was particularly struck by the way some of the more experienced-looking people were edging toward the sidelines.

She swept her eyes around the scene with the air of someone who was making sure everything was satisfactory and then twisted the doorknob and stepped inside.

"I believe things may be getting out of hand, Harold."

"Are you quite sure, Millicent?"

"I am *absolutely* sure, Harold."

A sigh reached her from the top of the stairs. "If you don't mind, Mr. Tyler...."

The mechanic muttered something inaudible and a moment later Sir Harold stepped onto the second floor landing and trotted down the stairs with his coat swinging and his walking stick under his arm. He pulled open the door with a flick of his velvet sleeves and stepped into the open as if he were about to call for his carriage.

The tousle-haired young girl was standing only three steps from the back of the crowd around the pulpit. The three older women and their two protectors were eyeing her and her companions with their parasols and walking sticks held in various all-too-prominent ways. Half a dozen similar groups seemed to be coalescing in other parts of the street. Voices were beginning to compete with the oration emanating from the pulpit. A few of the people standing in front of Mr. Tyler's house pressed forward and Sir Harold smiled at them pleasantly.

"I think I'd better have a word with that fellow, Millicent. I'll be back in a few minutes. Excuse me there, will you please? Thank you. Thank you."

The sound of Mr. Telemann's bourée reached him when he was halfway down the street. He had expected it but he glanced back anyway and was relieved to note that Lady Millicent was engrossed in conversation with two middle-aged, rather over-dressed, women. Their hats and their broad backs were bobbing up and down with some animation and it was quite clear no one was going to reach Mr. Tyler's door as long as Lady Millicent's companions were enjoying the attention of the Personage standing on the step.

Lady Millicent, as Sir Harold had frequently noted with some satisfaction, knew how to take full advantage of her powers.

Some of the people around him had started shaking their fists at Mr. Tyler's windows and some of them had started dancing and capering with infuriatingly satisfied looks on their faces, but no one interfered with him as he skirted the edge of the crowd near the pulpit. A few men even touched their foreheads and mouthed something that was obviously a good day, sir. Two or three women dimpled and presented him with their prettiest curtsies when he lifted his hat and gave them a smile.

The crowd immediately in front of him parted before the gentle pressure of his stick. He looked up at the orating clergyman and presented his card with a bow and a very eighteenth century sweep of his headgear.

"Excuse me, old fellow. If I might have a word with you...."

Mr. Herbert, like Mr. Tyler, looked startled and a little confused.

"I really would appreciate it," Sir Harold said. "If you would be so kind...."

The clergyman might indeed love *the* Lord -- Sir Harold had no doubt that he did, in fact -- but he too, like most of his countrymen, apparently found it hard to resist *a* lord. He descended from his perch after a few hasty excuses and Sir Harold led him toward a small alley located between two houses.

Three young ladies of the highest status came around the corner as they reached the end of the alley and strolled past them with their parasols framing their faces. They were of varying heights and hair colors but they were each enough to make Sir Harold lean on his cane and look appreciative and they all smiled in return as they passed. A quick glance at Mr. Herbert indicated, however, that he had hardly noticed their existence.

"I would appreciate it, Sir Harold, if you would tell me what you have in mind. I believe my flock is already getting restless."

A motion of Sir Harold's cane had brought the smiling trio back for another pass but there was still no flicker of a gleam on Mr. Herbert's face. There were only a few reasons, Sir Harold believed, why people engaged in the kind of activity Mr. Herbert was indulging in, and it didn't take long to eliminate most of them. An offer of a large sum of money for unspecified services was immediately refused on the grounds that Mr. Herbert was occupied with causes that could not be abandoned for any purpose. So, too, was a fine position on the board of one of the leading charities supported by Mr. Herbert's denomination.

That left -- alas -- only one serious possibility, in Sir Harold's opinion. What Mr. Herbert most wanted was what he had here today.

"I'm really most sorry you feel that way, Mr. Herbert." Sir Harold said. "Lady Millicent and I have been deeply impressed with your actions. We came here, in fact, largely because of your presence."

"Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Now if you will excuse me, my flock...."

"I am associated with a number of important enterprises, Mr. Herbert. I cannot leave a man of your ability without making one more attempt to recruit his talents in the service of at least one of them. I would especially like to offer you, sir, a lively and responsible post in the Society for the Encouragement of Public Cleanliness and Decency or the Society for the Improvement of the Manners of the Lower Orders. You could do valuable work in either of them, in my opinion. Or both, if you felt you could sacrifice that much of your time to the betterment of the world."

Mr. Herbert paused with his body braced for one more attempt to slip sideways and somehow maneuver himself past the indolent gentleman whose person and cane always seemed to come between him and his pulpit. The expression on Mr. Herbert's face made it quite clear he was aware that both of the organizations Sir Harold had mentioned had been involved in public disturbances in the last fortnight. Only two days ago, twenty of the leading members of the Society for the Improvement of the Manners of the Lower Orders had been set upon with paving stones and flower pots when they had held a lecture-meeting in Mixers Cross; their arrest and imprisonment had initiated a series of judicial actions that might keep the courts occupied for two decades.

"Both of those organizations need the kind of ability you can bring to them," Sir Harold said. "At this very moment, in fact, the Society for the Improvement of the Manners of the Lower Orders is holding a meeting which may decide its entire future. If it were to fall into the wrong hands...."

A chair carried by two broad-shouldered youths swept around the corner in response, apparently, to

a sweep of Sir Harold's stick. A card and a small purse were thrust into Mr. Herbert's hand.

The clergyman stared for a moment at his pulpit and the scene in the street. His eyes seemed particularly attracted by the point at which the three matrons and the tousle-haired young girl were still eyeing each other.

"I need you desperately, Mr. Herbert. England needs you. The Society for the Improvement of the Lower Orders faces, in my opinion, decades of legal injustice and public calumny. If you will simply present this card at the door...."

Mr. Herbert straightened. Sir Harold leaned on his stick and watched the two broad-shouldered youths trot him around the corner to the land of his dreams.

An older man had already stepped into the pulpit and taken Mr. Herbert's place, but it was clear the people around the platform were having trouble hearing him over the charms of Mr. Telemann's *bourée*. The red faced young girl was dancing again, now that Mr. Herbert had been replaced, and the three older women and their friends were now the people who looked as if they might be seriously contemplating violence.

The populace of his London, in Sir Harold's opinion, was basically peaceful and contented, but the strain created by Mr. Herbert's sermon and Mr. Tyler's machine had been building up for several hours now. All around him he could see angry faces, sullen faces, brooding faces. Even most of the dancers were casting defiant or arrogant looks at the people watching them. A few steps from Mr. Tyler's house a little boy was deliberately executing a cheeky set of movements in front of two tight-faced couples.

Lady Millicent was still chatting with her two admirers. Sir Harold's walking stick and his apologetic smile got him through the crowd in front of the house again and a tip of his hat and a soft word shifted the two ladies to the left and placed him on the steps. He looked around the street, smiling vacantly, and saw six well-fed, well-dressed men and women striding around the north corner with containers of various sizes and shapes clutched in their hands.

"Excuse me, Millicent. If you don't mind, ladies..."

"Yes, Harold?"

"Our friends from the Musicians' Guild seem to be here. Would you mind talking to them for a moment and then joining me upstairs?"

"Certainly, Harold."

A minute later Sir Harold and Mr. Tyler were once again bent over the machine and Mr. Tyler's daughter was perched on the edge of a chair with her arms folded over her pinafore.

"I would appreciate it if you would let me indulge in a bit of business talk." Sir Harold said. "I have a certain interest in supporting the arts, as you may be aware..."

Mr. Tyler's face brightened. "Would you care for some refreshment, Sir Harold? Can I offer you some tea? Or do you prefer coffee?"

"Tea will do nicely, thank you."

A trumpet call interrupted their conversation a moment after Miss Tyler exited in search of the tea. The trumpet broke into a *bourée* very similar to the dance she had been playing and then more just instruments joined in, one by one. By the time Miss Tyler had returned with a tray, Lady Millicent had re-entered the parlor, and the musicians had switched to an *allemande*, from a suite by Herr Bach, whose sonorities included the sound of a few string instruments.

Miss Tyler stared out the window with a frown on her round little face. "We seem to have attracted some street musicians," Sir Harold said.

"It does sound that way," Mr. Tyler said. "Actually, I'm afraid I'm not really much of a one for music. That's not bad though, if you don't mind my saying so. Did I tell you I've been thinking about ways my thing could imitate almost anything else -- anything you blow into anyway?"

Sir Harold had asked Mr. Tyler about his financial ambitions while they were waiting for the tea and he had already decided the mechanic was very like most of the other inexperienced inventors he had dealt with. Mr. Tyler was essentially an enthusiast who would probably be content to spend the rest of his life in his shop bending and connecting and turning out whatever marvels his brain seized upon. He was also the victim, however, of the customary delusions about the wealth and social position you could amass by

inventing things. He was already talking -- with some enthusiasm -- of the dowry he would provide his daughter, the house he and she would soon live in, and all the other glories that are supposed to come to every man who bestows the blessings of his creative vision on mankind.

They were all desires Sir Harold could fulfill with some dispatch. Mr. Tyler was a good bargainer, but Sir Harold easily detected the mechanic's little swallow when he heard the sum his visitor was offering for the exclusive rights to the use of his invention. He could even pick up some of the tension in Mr. Tyler's facial muscles when he explained that the machine would be used in Westminster Abbey on certain state occasions and that it would be the center of a festival of grand and heroic music which would become one of the great annual events of the city.

It was a vision that had been given some thought on Sir Harold's part. The great machine would dominate much of the program but there would be trumpets, too. And drums. And hundreds of musicians. And then, when the people had all been exhausted by Volume, the sound of a single pipe would be heard in the land.

There was nothing wrong with Volume in itself, in Sir Harold's opinion. He himself enjoyed a fine surging climax or the swell of a great chorus, with voices, organ chords, and musical instruments resonating in the cavity of a great church. The problem was uncontrolled Volume. Volume that was created by portable and relatively inexpensive devices must eventually, Sir Harold knew, escape from its natural realm. Sooner or later, if it were not watched with care, it would penetrate domains that should be ruled by gentler noises, or even by silence. Mr. Tyler had already mentioned that he was thinking about other devices which could draw their power from the water system, and he had noted, in passing, that he could design a smaller version of his machine which could be wheeled around on carts and attached to outlets in parks and other places where people might want something "a bit livelier than a pair of flutes."

The sticking point -- as Sir Harold had feared -- was the stipulation that he should have *exclusive* rights to the use of the new machine. Mr. Tyler had also realized that if Sir Harold were willing to spend so much money, his invention must be more valuable than he had thought it was.

Sir Harold smiled. "I was afraid you would see that. I seem to be dealing with a very shrewd man, Millicent."

"It's occurred to me, in fact," Mr. Tyler said, "that this might be something on which I could take bids. You *are* the first person who's approached me, Sir Harold."

Lady Millicent straightened -- an act which always impressed Sir Harold since she was, at any given moment, standing as erectly as a lady should. She looked at Mr. Tyler in the same way she had looked at the man who had made a remark to her in front of the house and he, too, turned away from her.

"I'm afraid I don't normally engage in auctions," Sir Harold said. "It really isn't our type of thing."

"My husband has made you a very good offer, Mr. Tyler," Lady Millicent said. "I can assure you no one has ever regretted any agreement they have negotiated with a member of my family."

Mr. Tyler's face reddened. Sir Harold rested his right hand in the mechanic's grimy sleeve and used his other hand to make a nonchalant, mildly apologetic gesture with his stick.

"I can already see the expression of delight that will cross the King's face when he hears the first notes of your device next month." Sir Harold said. "It will be a pleasure to introduce His Majesty to the originator of such an invention -- and his charming daughter. I would be very surprised if you did not find yourself and your daughter invited to be permanent guests at every Royal Festival in which your invention plays a role."

Mr. Tyler swallowed. He glanced at Lady Millicent out of the corner of his eye and she gave him a smile that bathed him in sunshine and approval.

"It does sound like a generous arrangement, Sir Harold. I suppose I might do better if I shopped around, but on the other hand, I could do a lot worse, too, couldn't I? And waste a lot of time I could be spending enjoying myself."

"Then let's shake on it, sir, like two gentlemen. And let me give you something in writing, too -- like a good businessman should."

A solid grip pressed on Mr. Tyler's right hand. Paper and a pen emerged from Sir Harold's pockets. Words appeared on the paper. Sir Harold appended his neat, unremarkable signature at the end and Mr.

Tyler found himself clutching the pen and affixing his own name beside it.

"I'll take this to my solicitors and have them send you two good copies," Sir Harold said. "You'll have them by this evening, along with three hundred pounds to seal the bargain."

Lady Millicent extended her hand and presented Mr. Tyler with a card engraved with the address of one of her charities. "I would appreciate it very much if you would call on me at this address," Lady Millicent said. "We have some pressing problems which could use the attention of a gentleman with your skills. I can assure you every lady there would appreciate any effort you can bring to bear on our affairs."

Mr. Tyler pushed himself out of his chair as if he were wearing clothes stuffed with lead. He stared at his two guests with eyes that looked a little glazed and unfocused and Sir Harold leaned on his stick and waited politely.

"Could you see your way to making that five hundred pounds, Sir Harold? If you don't mind. I'll be buying Nellie some new clothes, for one thing."

"Of course. Think nothing of it."

"I have my own things made at Madame Russell's," Lady Millicent said. "On Plumtree Street. I'll be happy to tell her your daughter is coming if you would care to look at her offerings."

"In fact," Sir Harold said. "we could even drop your young lady off there right now. And make arrangements to have her returned when she's finished. Don't you think we could manage that, Millicent? Eh?"

"What a marvelous idea, Harold. Of course."

\* \* \*

Tea had taken its place in the music room, Lady Millicent was seated at the harpsichord, and the children of widows whose husbands had been employed in the tea trade were gorging on cakes and chocolate in an upstairs location while they awaited the belated arrival of their reading teacher. "I really couldn't have handled it without you, Millicent," Sir Harold said. "You were superb, my dear. Absolutely superb."

"Thank you, Harold."

"And there's even time for you to play for a few minutes before you go upstairs, eh? You should be able to fit in something from that notebook Mr. Bach wrote for his wife, shouldn't you?"

"Of course. Harold. Would you care for the second partita? Or would you prefer the first?"

"Whatever you like, my dear. Whatever you like."

The muffled rumble of carts and wagons reached them through the curtains. Birds twittered and shrilled in the garden. Lady Millicent rested her fingers on the keyboard with her hands slightly arched and her elbows, wrists and hands level, just as Monsieur Couperin recommended, and the first notes of the second partita replaced the faint neighing of a horse and the subdued oaths of an impeccably considerate carter.

"There is nothing like the influence of a Lady," Sir Harold said.

"Or a gentleman, Harold. Or a gentleman."

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