



The SPEISENSTEIN Files

12. Dirty Words

Everybody (with the exception of Speisenstein, who had expected to give the opening lecture that was taken by Witherington) is saying that Audley's handling of the meeting of the European Section has been an outstanding success. Only a few will give just credit also to the siren call of the urbane diversions of a capital city. But now we have left that city for the green of the English countryside.

The mellow Cotswold stone of Audley Hall is a symphony of glowing ochre in the evening sun. As we straighten our ties under its Inigo Jones columns and mount the steps that lead to the entrance hall, Audley is standing with his mother to greet us and take us in. Above us now, over the intricacies of the dark oak carving of the Grinling Gibbons gallery, a line of aristocratic Audley portraits progresses from the armour of a distant age through generations of fox hunters to the dashing figure of the world war colonel – the father that Audley never saw.

Lady Audley, perhaps, is remembering those pre-war days when the Hall echoed to the laughter of the week-end parties of the young set down from the town. Laughter there is now, certainly, and much idle chatter of matters unthought of by that doomed generation. And, although times have changed, the champagne still flows while we are waiting the moment when we shall move into the dining hall for the buffet.

The more experienced of us have already moved in some inexplicable way toward the door of the hall and I am talking to Audley about his malfunctioning channel analyzer when, at a discreet sign from the butler, he invites us to enter. As he turns, pressed by the throng of hungry cardioscientists, a piece of yellow paper flutters down onto the Bukhara carpet.

Risking my fingers in the stampede to the buffet, I stoop to pick it up. It could be something of importance to Audley: ideas for research, vital notes for the after-dinner speech he is to give this very evening. On the other hand it could well be one of those useless and trivial scraps of paper that find their unwanted way even into the elegant pockets of someone like Audley. I am making this tedious point, I realize, as an excuse for my next action. Which is to unfold the paper and read its contents.

I am at once astounded to see a heading:

“DIRTY WORDS.”

I look again. It is certainly in Audley’s hand.

Dirty words! Audley? I allow my confusion once again to excuse my next action. Which is to read on. And in full cognizance of the fact that I am prying into the most secret recesses of a colleague’s intimate affairs. I shall only say that what follows is all in Audley’s unmistakable handwriting.

DIRTY WORDS

Function.

Vague. “Cardiac Function” usually means myocardial or ventricular contraction or cardiac output.

Metabolism.

Vague.

Parameter.

Science diction. Use “Factor” or “Element” or “Measurement”.

Index.

Used to express concepts too vague to be defined scientifically. If you can’t measure the thing itself, think twice about measuring something completely different. Check the physical dimensions of the index against the property you want to assess. You may find it impossible to attribute any dimensions to the latter. That is a pretty sure indication that the original idea is crazy.

Ring Stephanie tonight

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