

## Companion

(The setting is a combination study and living room in what appears to be a rather opulent mansion. There is a desk with chair behind and in front, shelves of books, several houseplants, a sofa, three or four comfortable chairs, Maps of the world adorn one wall. What appear to be two large covered paintings are on another. There are large French windows that open onto a balcony. There is one other door that exits to the rest of the house. A young man in his mid twenties sits stiffly in the chair directly in front of the desk. He is dressed in a suit. He looks about the room. The door opens and a man enters. He is dressed for business in impeccable taste. The young man rises to greet him.)

MR. COOK

Good morning, Mr. Rivers! I trust your ride over was pleasant?

TED

Oh, yes! It was . . .very nice. I've never traveled in a launch before.

MR. COOK

Not too rough a ride, I hope?

TED

No. Not at all. I just hadn't realized when we talked on the phone that the house was on an island. When you said to meet--

MR. COOK

Mr. Solomon loves the sea. Don't you?

TED

Oh, yes. Yes, Sir.

MR. COOK

Of course, he loves the mountains, too. This house is grand, but his place in Wyoming—you'd be amazed.

TED

He has two houses?

MR. COOK

(Gesturing toward the maps.)

He also has a villa in Italy and a homestead in New Zealand as well as other more modest accommodations in other parts of the world. Mr. Solomon's business ventures take him to the far corners of the earth, and he likes to have a place he can call his own close at hand.

TED

That's . . . something. I hadn't realized that—he must be--

MR. COOK

But it is my feeling that this is the place he loves best.

(Pause. He smiles sweetly at TED.)

TED

It's certainly a beautiful . . . house.

MR. COOK

(He beams at TED. There is an extended silence. TED fidgets.)

House! A pretty inadequate term, wouldn't you say?

(TED doesn't know what to say?)

Shall we get on with the interview? I must say that you look just the ticket, Mr. Rivers!

TED

Well, I hope so.

MR. COOK

I was very impressed with your resume. Very impressed indeed.

TED

Thank you.

MR. COOK

There was enormous interest in the position—Over twenty suitable applicants. Of course times are difficult right now, aren't they?

TED

Yes. There's a lot of competition out there.

MR. COOK

How did you hear about the job?

TED

I saw the advertisement in the *Globe*—uh, the *Boston Globe*.

MR. COOK

And what was it about the advert that caught your attention? I'm interested in these things.

TED

It seemed to suit me, almost exactly what I was looking for. In a way it was intriguing.

MR. COOK

Intriguing? How was it intriguing?

TED

Well, to tell you the truth, it seemed to be describing me. It was almost as if the writer was looking for me. It said that you wanted a doctoral student working on a thesis in history with a particular interest in archaeology. Midwestern roots. No commitments. I mean, well, that's me.

MR. COOK

Just the ticket, eh?

TED

Yes sir. (Pause. They look at each other.) I hope so. (Pause.) I'm surprised that there were so many other applicants. I didn't realize there were so many others out there so much like me. Of course, you must have advertised in a lot of cities.

MR. COOK

Well, Let us hope it works out, Mr. Rivers. Mr. Solomon is eager to begin work on his next project.

TED

Yes. I was wondering about--

MR. COOK

Can't let the grass grow. He's an active man, Mr. Solomon--has to be busy all the time. An amazing man, really.

TED

I look forward to meeting him.

MR. COOK

(Pause.)

Tell me about your current position.

TED

Well, it isn't a *position*. Not exactly. I am a graduate assistant. I lead discussion sections at the University. And grade. . .uh. . .I grade papers. For Professor James. (Pause.) I assist him mostly. There are other teachers, but mostly it's Professor James.

MR. COOK

And I must say he gave you a very glowing recommendation.

TED

He did?

MR. COOK

Why wouldn't he?

TED

Oh, no reason. I'm just gratified. I wasn't sure that he had noticed me all that much. There are several assistants. Of course, I am good in my area, and I'm a hard worker. I am--a very hard worker.

MR. COOK

Well, that's what we like. Hard workers. And do you enjoy your current work?

TED

Oh yes! But I'm anxious for a real job.

MR. COOK

And the grant money's running out?

TED

Yes. There's that.

MR. COOK

Our good fortune, I'm sure. Tell me about your family, Mr. Rivers.

TED

Well, there's not much I---

(He is interrupted by the door opening. MAVIS, a well endowed and formidable woman in her late fifties enters. She carries a tray with coffee and brownies.)

MR. COOK

Ah, just the thing! Thank you, Mavis. Mr. Rivers, this is Mrs. Mavis Ames. She runs the household here—among other things. And she runs it splendidly, I might add. Are those brownies, I see?

MRS. AMES

I was in a quandary, Roger. I didn't know if a sweet would be the thing so close to lunch, but young men love their sweets, don't they, Mr. Rivers?

(She sets the tray down on the coffee table, sits on the sofa and starts to pour.)

TED

It's very kind of you.

MRS. AMES

And come away from that silly desk! Come sit over here, and we'll all get acquainted. Don't be so stuffy, Roger! You've probably scared this poor boy to death.

MR. COOK

(Rising.)

Of course! You're right as usual, Mavis. Come along Mr. Rivers.

TED

(Standing, not quite sure of himself. He moves toward the chairs.)

Thank you.

MRS. AMES

You sit right there in that comfy chair and tell me all about yourself.

TED

(Sitting and accepting coffee.)

Well, I was--

MR. COOK

He had just started telling me about his family.

MRS. AMES

Family? But. . .but that's wonderful. Family! Of course! Where do you come from, Mr. Rivers?

TED

Peoria, Illinois. At least I did.

MRS. AMES

And your family is still there?

TED

My parents are--They died when I was small. I lived with an Aunt.

MRS. AMES.

Oh, I am sorry. But you had an Aunt? You aren't alone then? That's good. She must be proud of you now.

TED

I'm afraid she's gone too.

MR. COOK

Sad.

MRS. AMES

So, you've no one? Did you hear that, Roger? This poor boy is all alone.

MR. COOK

He's done well in school though. Excellent record. Remarkable!

MRS. AMES

Orphans try harder, don't you think? I remember the last lad we had here. He tried awfully hard, didn't he?

MR. COOK

Well. . .yes. You'd have to say that for him.

TED

Is that the person I'm replacing?

MR. COOK

In a manner of speaking, yes--although the job has changed dramatically.

TED

I am wondering what--

MRS. AMES

Wonderful scrabble player, that boy. Wasn't he? I love scrabble. We used to play in the evenings. Do you play scrabble, Mr. Rivers? Or may I call you Edward. That's your name isn't it? Edward?

TED

Ted, actually. My friends call me Ted.

MRS. AMES

Ted! Did you hear that Roger? He calls himself Ted! Have another brownie, Ted!

TED.

I haven't quite --

MR. COOK

John!

TED

Ted.

MR. COOK

No. No. I mean that I should go get John, Mr. Solomon' physician.

MRS. AMES

Not that he's ever ill.

MR. COOK

Yes, you'll want to meet John. He's not only a physician but an extremely talented scientific researcher as well. John's up to all kinds of things.

MRS. AMES

Mr. Solomon has a constitution like a horse!

MR. COOK

Of course, I'll get him. Can't forget John. He'll want to have a word with you.

MRS. AMES

Of course there are the odd bouts with Malaria

TED

Malaria?

MR. COOK

(Rising.)

He'll be in the lab.

MRS. AMES

He picked it up in the jungle. He was a soldier of fortune, you know. He spent a good deal of time in the jungle.

MR. COOK

You keep the young man entertained, Mavis. I'll get John.

TED

Jungle?

MRS. AMES

You never really get over malaria. Did you know that?

COOK

I'm off then.

MRS. AMES

Send Alicia in. I'm sure she'll want to meet Ted.

MR. COOK

Just the ticket! I'll send Alicia in on my way to get John.

(He exits.)

MRS. AMES

My niece, you see. She works in the library. Mr. Solomon has an extensive collection of books. When he heard our Alicia was training as a librarian, nothing would do but to have her here.

TED.

He seems to have a great many interests. I hope that I--

MRS. AMES

She's an orphan as well. How's that for coincidence?

TED

It's . . .uh

MRS. AMES

Do you have a girlfriend? Fiancée, perhaps?

TED

No. I--there's no one really.

MRS. AMES

But of course, Roger would know all that. He would have mentioned it. He researches the applicants thoroughly, you know. He wouldn't have invited you here unless he were certain you were just right for the job.

TED

Well, that's nice to know. When do you think--

MRS. AMES

Roger is nothing if not thorough.

TED

I wonder when I'll be meeting Mr. Solomon?

(Door open. A lovely young woman enters. She wears something floral and flattering.)

MRS. AMES

Alicia, my dear! Come and meet Ted Rivers!

ALICIA

(Sits and reaches for a brownie.)

Hello, Mr. Rivers.

TED

Please call me, Ted.

MRS. AMES

He's interviewing for the position.

ALICIA

Don't worry. You won't have to marry me to get it.

MRS. AMES

Alicia!

ALICIA

She always asks them if they have a fiancée. It wouldn't matter. I'm not thinking of marriage.

TED

Oh.

ALICIA

But Auntie Mavis thinks about it all the time—for me that is. She's determined to marry me off. Personally, I think she should—

MRS. AMES

Alicia, perhaps we shouldn't be so familiar right away. Ted's just finding his feet.

ALICIA

Well, we can't have lost feet, can we? Do you travel, Ted?

TED

Well. I haven't--not much. Just here and there.

ALICIA

Here and there?

TED

I went to a conference in Toronto last year.

ALICIA

Canada. I'd love to see Canada.

TED

I didn't really see much of Canada. Just Toronto.

ALICIA

There's this whole giant country to the north of us, and no one really ever talks about it. Don't you find that odd? Seems we'd be going on about Canada all the time.

TED

Toronto seemed nice.

ALICIA

I suppose if they posed some real threat--had the bomb, for instance then they'd be more interesting.

MRS. AMES

Well, it's hardly likely that the Canadians would get themselves a bomb.

ALICIA

Or if they started sending illegal aliens our way.

MRS. AMES

It's not the sort of thing the Canadians would do. Why would anyone want to leave Canada?

ALICIA

It's cold, isn't it? It's terribly cold. Was it cold in Toronto?

TED

Well, as a matter of fact--

ALICIA

But they have tunnels, I understand. To get around when it's really, really cold. I expect they'd be handy if there *were* a bomb.

TED

I--

MRS. AMES

Did I tell you that Alicia is a librarian?

TED

Yes. You mentioned that.

MRS. AMES

That's the source of her imagination. Books!

ALICIA

Do you like books, Ted?

TED

Well, as a matter of fact, I do.

ALICIA

That's good. Everyone should read. I read a great deal.

TED

I read quite a bit myself.

ALICIA

It's not like there's anything else to do here.

MRS. AMES

Alicia would like to paint.

TED

Oh.

ALICIA

But I have no eye. I can't draw a straight line.

MRS. AMES

But you'd like to, wouldn't you dear? I think there's something we'd all like to do if we could. I've always fancied I would have enjoyed playing an instrument. The piano or one of the woodwinds. Do you play an instrument, Ted?

TED

The guitar. A little. I can find my way around a tune.

MRS. AMES

A tune!

ALICIA

Did you bring it with you?

TED

No. I, uh--I didn't think it would be appropriate for a job interview. If I get the position, I'll bring it of course.

ALICIA

Bring it?

TED

When I go to get my things.

MRS. AMES

Ted is from Peoria, Illinois, Alicia. He was raised by his Aunt. I'm sure the two of you will have lots to talk about.

ALICIA

What happened to your parents? Did they dump you or die?

MRS. AMES

Alicia! Don't be rude!

TED

It's all right.

ALICIA

Plane crash?

TED

No. (Pause.) It was an automobile accident. They were coming back from Chicago.

ALICIA

It gets cold there too, I understand.

MRS. AMES

More coffee, Ted? Pour Ted some more coffee, Alicia.

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