

PHYLLIDA. Still insulting.

LUCIUS. (*Determined.*) Phyllida.

PHYLLIDA. Yes.

LUCIUS. What I want to say.

PHYLLIDA. Yes.

LUCIUS. What I want you to know. Is that ... (*Percy, a robust explorer, enters, covered in snow and in snow.*)

PERCY. I have returned.

LUCIUS. Percy! (*Percy strides over to Lucius and manfully shakes his hand, coming halfway between Lucius and Phyllida.*)

PERCY. My God, but it's good to be back at the old club!

LUCIUS. You've come back! And right at this moment ...

PERCY. Barely made it. Barely. Harper's bought it.

LUCIUS. He's dead?

PHYLLIDA. Oh, dear! How horrible for you.

PERCY. Worse for him. Done in by a batch of warrior monks. Deadly fellows. One of them kicked Harper's head clean off. Lost Beebe too. Fenwick fell off a mountain and Beauchamp was gored by a yak. Dangerous work, exploring. Who's this now? Sister of yours? Pretty thing.

LUCIUS. I'm pleased to introduce Miss Phyllida Spotte-Hume, I'm proposing her for membership.

PERCY. A female? How extraordinary. Sir Harry Percy, gentleman explorer at your service. (*He bows and kisses her hand.*)

PHYLLIDA. (*Charmed.*) A pleasure, sir.

LUCIUS. (*Trying to hint to Percy to leave.*) We were just talking. Privately.

PERCY. (*Hinting to Percy is useless.*) Oh? What about?

PHYLLIDA. Coma and death.

LUCIUS. (*Hurt.*) Not just that ...

PERCY. Ah. Death is ever with us. Had many a narrow escape myself on this last trip. Avalanche. Crevasses. Hostile natives. Stanley lost a foot.

LUCIUS. The other one?

PERCY. Yes. Pity. I used to call him "Limpy," you know, as a joke. Keep up his morale. Now I can't call him that.

LUCIUS. It would be insensitive.

PERCY. It would be inaccurate. He can't even limp anymore. Mostly drags across the ground. I could call him "Draggy," I suppose, but not much of a ring to it. "Old Stumpers," perhaps? Well, I'll think of something. Oh, but you missed a grand adventure, Lucius!

LUCIUS. Sounds it ...

PERCY. (*Ignoring him.*) Once we were trapped by a snowstorm in a mountain pass, our bodies and minds frozen with cold and boredom. Nothing to do but brush the snow off of poor footless Stanley while we waited out the monks. But then we saw the most astonishing creatures. Two birds. Huge birds with snow-white plumage and golden eyes. Knowing eyes, almost. We watched them gliding effortlessly on the raging mountain wind like ... swallows on a summer breeze. I tell you it gave us hope to see that. They were like messengers of God. They had no fear of us at all. Magnificent creatures.

PHYLLIDA. They sound beautiful.

PERCY. And delicious.

LUCIUS. Well ...

PERCY. Tasted like chicken. Only, you know, more foreign. Who's the fellow with the feathers?

PHYLLIDA. This is Luigi, a genuine warrior of ...

PERCY. Put 'er there, old sot! (*Percy extends his hand to Luigi, who slaps him on the face. Percy punches Luigi in the nose. Luigi, far from being angry, starts laughing.*)

LUIGI. Huei! Huei! Ha ha ha ha!

PERCY. Easygoing chap. I like him. He can stay for brandy and cigars. (*Sloane, Walling, and Cope reenter.*)

COPE. Is that Percy? Welcome back, old scrum!

PERCY. Cope, you old snake charmer! And Walling. Jane still hasn't found her way out of the cage? Not too bright, is she?

WALLING. She's very loyal to me.

SLOANE. I see you've met ... the woman.

PERCY. Well, if Lucius is vouching for her, I think we ought to consider it. I mean the times are changing. Nothing wrong with women, inherently. Queen's a woman, isn't she? Not as attractive a woman as Miss Spotte-Hume here ...

PHYLLIDA. Please: Call me Phyllida.

LUCIUS. What?

PERCY. Phyllida. Then welcome, Phyllida. And now, get out! It's time for brandy and cigars. (*The men make delighted noises at the thought of brandy and cigars.*)

PHYLLIDA. Excuse me?

LUCIUS. Percy —

PERCY. Can't have a girl around for brandy and cigars. You'll have to retire to the lounge with the other ladies.