

The Ghost on the Links

I'm drunk, not deaf, mused Cricket. The three ladies shot furtive glances in her direction and resumed their gossip.

“And he disappeared with nothing but his wallet and watch and favorite five iron...,” said Nora.

“Her girl—Lupé, right?” interjected Nyla “told our girl, who I overheard telling gardener, that there was some young thing running around the property in her underwear.”

“Oh, how humiliating!” Nancy lowered her sunglasses and confided, “If Jack pulls any stunts like that in middle age, I’ll kill him.”

“Well...,” she added. “I’d find a great lawyer and *then* I’d kill him.”

There had been a girl on the lawn. This much was true. Cricket had just put the children to bed when she spied her tripping over the croquet set and tumbling into the topiary. Like some misplaced Ophelia—white nightgown, hair matted and wild—she cried and rubbed her ankle as William knelt down to comfort her.

“I’m more his wife than you,” the girl shouted up to Will Junior’s window. “*You’re* the mistress!”

Cricket simply closed the shutters and dimmed the nursery light. She made her way slowly downstairs, adjusting the sporting prints in the hall. One well-manicured finger checked that Lupita had dusted the frames to satisfaction.

It was more than an hour before William came in and found her settled in the library with a cup of tea and the *Times*.

“It’s over between us,” William said quietly. “She just won’t accept it. She’s been having a hard time and I’m afraid that she’ll…”

If she comes anywhere near the children again, I’ll do it myself, thought Cricket. But she merely offered a small, sad smile. “Will, we’ve been through this too many times before. If you don’t love me, fine, but have enough respect for me as the mother of your children to be discreet. Keep your affairs away from the house.”

“It’s not an affair,” he argued. “We’re not intimate.”

“Fine, your *relationship* then.” Cricket removed her headband. She sighed and ran her fingers through the assisted gold of her hair. “Don’t be cruel.”

And, to be fair, things were a bit more peaceful the month after that. The late-night phone calls dwindled to a stop. Will spent more time with the children, every weekend taking the boys to breakfast at the club and to the driving range. He even purchased Junior a set in his size.

It was a Tuesday when she found the journal. Lupita was running laundry and Cricket had checked the pockets of Will’s golf bag for spent towels. And there, tucked behind the Callaway rangefinder, was a black leather book. The binding strained under the fullness of its contents. There were photographs, little glassine envelopes of beach sand, poems and pictures clipped from magazines, ticket stubs. There were entries in both a woman and man’s hand, dating back almost a year. And though Cricket thought of herself as gracefully resigned to Will’s indiscretions, each concrete discovery confirming such made her heart spin and spit glass.

There had been notes from the girl on the lawn—from others, too. Salacious suggestions in a desperate scrawl from secretaries. But this was different. The book had been passed back and forth between Will and this woman about once a week, journaling their plans

for the future. In the photograph, the redhead was wearing one of his Pendleton sweaters. She hugged her knees and regarded the coming wave.

The redhead seemed familiar to Cricket but she couldn't place her. She wasn't the mother of the children's classmates. She looked too young for that. Someone she'd seen at the spa? Will's office, perhaps? And though it seemed unbearable to know any more, she kept reading.

I pray that we'll be in our seaside cottage soon. Just you and me and the children ... It has meant so much to me, my anam cara, to spend a little time with them. I love you so much. I just want to share the things that you love.

And at that moment Cricket realized where she'd seen the redhead before.

Between the Pimm's and the repetitive melody of the sprinklers on the ninth green, Cricket had become lost in the reverie of the past weeks. Hush, hush, hush, hush. The water swept across the green, sparkling in the sun. *How superbly wasteful*, she thought. After all, the season's rains had overflowed the water hazards. It was more than enough to keep the grounds in the green. Cricket held up her glass to catch the light.

"What's she doing here, anyway?" Nyla whispered.

"People handle things different ways," Nora said gently "Perhaps the range is cathartic for her." Cricket signed her tab and rose from her table. "Let's change the subject..."

"Did you see Deirdre today?" Nancy interjected. "She was a mess."

"Who?"

“Deirdre. You know... from the pro shop.” Nancy blotted her lipstick on her napkin before taking another drink. “Sweet girl, but God she looked awful. Paler than usual. She could barely take down my info for the next tourney.”

“Probably just guy troubles.”

“With young women, it always is.”

Cricket left the club terrace and headed towards range. *Gossip is cruel*, she thought. *They ought to be more respectful of a person's privacy. After all, she smiled, there's room for more than one corpse in the reservoir.*