

The diary of mrs danvers

Life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

"Mrs de Winter", everyone called her. She is not worthy of the name. That girl, who arrived at magnificent Manderley in an ugly stockinette dress, awkwardly clutching a pair of gauntlet gloves, is not fit to be called the name that was given to my Rebecca. Rebecca was beautiful. Rebecca always knew what to do and what to say, so unlike this girl who shuffled nervously up the flight of steps and stood gauchely on the threshold of the house. No, this new girl is nothing compared to Rebecca's perfection.

I was glad I had collected the whole staff to welcome her, despite Maxim's letters. The hall was full of people, all wanting to see "the new Mrs de Winter", a sea of faces staring down at her. I wanted her to feel as uncomfortable as possible, and I succeeded, for when I advanced from the crowd and lay my hand in hers, I felt it was hot and damp.

As I gave her the cold speech that I had rehearsed, she could not even lift her eyes to meet mine. When I finished, she blushed a bright scarlet, stammered some kind of thanks in return, and clumsily dropped both her gloves. What an ill-bred girl! As I stooped to pick them up, I did not care to hide the smile of scorn upon my lips, for I knew she would never have the courage to challenge me.

Later, when they had finished tea, I showed her up to her room. She tried to smile at me, a weak, artificial smile, which I did not return. She walked around the meagre room, and said that it was "very charming". Silly girl! The room they have now is nothing compared to the room Mr de Winter shared with Rebecca. Their room, in the magnificent West Wing, was twice as large as this; a very beautiful room, with a scrolled ceiling, expensive

tapestry chairs and a great carved mantelpiece. It was the best room in the house, whilst this one, in the East Wing, is hardly ever used, and only then by visitors. It is a second-rate room, which is only natural, as this girl is such a second-rate person.

I watched her disdainfully as she sat down nervously at the dressing table and started to brush her lank mousy hair, all the while trying to make conversation, trying to win me over, not knowing that I will never let her take my Rebecca's place. I almost pitied this poor girl, for she will never fit in here. No one will ever accept her. I watched her face scornfully as I told her about the West Wing, how beautiful the room was, how expensive the furnishings were, and I compared it with the inferiority of this room. I wanted her to think that Mr de Winter put her here because he does not love her, as I am sure he does not, not after Rebecca.

I watched her face, this unattractive face, and saw that already she feared Rebecca and me. She will be no match against us.

June

I caught the new Mrs de Winter in Rebecca's room today. She was snooping around because of Jack Favell's visit. Jack Favell came today, because Mr de Winter was away. We went up to Rebecca's room, and that was where Favell saw the new Mrs de Winter approach the house back from her walk. I quickly closed the shutters and we went downstairs so Favell could leave before she saw him, only to find her spying on us from behind the morning room door.

Mr de Winter had not told her about Favell then, for she was unaware of his position, and invited him to tea. If I had not been present Favell would have accepted, rash and stupid as he is. However he insisted on showing her his hideous green car, as a way of impressing her. I would not put it past him to have offered to drive her to the lodge gates. What a way to behave to someone who may very well go running to Mr de Winter as soon as he returns!

A little after half past four, I went up to Rebecca's room in the West Wing. There, as I had almost expected, at the window, stood the new Mrs de Winter. As she turned pale and awkwardly mumbled an excuse about closing the shutters, I saw that the latch of the wardrobe was not quite closed and the nightdress had been disturbed on the bed, and I knew she had been around the room. She had sat down at Rebecca's dressing table, looked in Rebecca's mirror, touched Rebecca's dressing gown, Rebecca's slippers, Rebecca's quilt, Rebecca's nightdress, and looked at Rebecca's clothes.

She had disrupted Rebecca's peace, the peace that I had kept here from the day she died. It occurred to me, this girl was afraid, that was why she came up here. She was afraid of Rebecca, who still ruled at Manderley. She had to see for herself, and after seeing, she felt like an intruder in Rebecca's house, for I keep everything exactly the same as when Rebecca was alive; it is as if Rebecca's spirit still lives in that room.

I took her arm and led her around the room, ingratiating, honey-sweet, falsely fawning, showing her the entire room, every last detail, every single expensive ornament and every intricate fabric. I wanted her to see how

inferior she was compared to Rebecca. Rebecca was so much taller than her, for when I held up Rebecca's gown it reached down to the girl's ankles. I forced her hands into Rebecca's tiny slippers to show how delicate Rebecca's feet were. I showed her Rebecca's brushes, and told her about hair-drill, how Mr de Winter used to brush it for her, and she would laugh, " Harder, Max, harder." It hurt me greatly to talk about these things, especially about Rebecca's death as I think every time about how I could have prevented it, but as I watched the new Mrs de Winter's face I knew that it hurt her more.

I blame myself for my lady's death. I had been away, only because Rebecca was in London. When I got back, however, the servants told me she had returned, then went out again. If only I had been there, just to warn her about sailing in such weather. She always listened to me. She would have moaned, and called me an " old fuss-pot", and we would have stayed home, talking until late about all she had done in London.

I told her about Mr de Winter's grief, how he paced up and down every night after her death. I wanted to make her realise, nobody wants her here. She is only here because Rebecca died. She is only here because of an accident. I told her about how I sometimes think I hear Rebecca walking behind me along the corridor. I asked her if she sometimes thought the dead come back and watch the living, whether Rebecca comes back to watch her.

I frightened her, for when I finally opened the door to let her pass she refused to look at me and stumbled as she ran.

July

Mr de Winter has decided to revive the fancy dress ball. There was much excitement in the house as the preparations took place. The whole village was talking about it, remembering the last ball at Manderley. The fancy dress balls had always been magnificent affairs, with fireworks and music, the great hall full of adoring people, lords and ladies, the bishop and his wife, people from Kerrith and around, and standing in the centre of the room would be Rebecca, smiling, shining in her dress, looking more charming than anyone else. Everyone talked about how elegant she was, how wonderful Manderley looked, and what a lucky man Mr de Winter was. Whenever there was a pause in the stream of guests, she would turn to me and we would share a smile at how well we had organised the whole thing.

The preparations this year brought for me a stab of pain. In all the busy arrangements, there was no Rebecca. The servants carried on, it seemed, as if they had forgotten her, and instead went to this child, calling her " Mrs de Winter". However, the girl is incapable of such a task as running the Manderley ball. While Rebecca organised everything, depicting precisely the flowers on the tables, writing each of the invitations, this ignorant girl did not even lick a stamp, instead choosing to stand about doing nothing except getting in the way.

She is entirely unsuited to the position which she forced herself into. A few days before the ball, I found some of those sketches of hers in the waste paper basket. She had been considering what to wear for the ball. As you can imagine I was filled with derision at this. How typical for someone like her to be stuck for something to wear! I laughed as I thought of her trying so

hard to find something special, not knowing that nothing she could find would make her even half of what Rebecca was.

That was when the idea came to me, a fantastic idea. I took up the flimsy sketches and arrived at her room. As I confronted her about her lack of decision, she avoided my gaze and began to file her short, brittle nails in her nervousness. I suggested to her the idea of copying one of the pictures from the gallery, in particular the one of the young lady in white, with a hat in her hand. That picture was Caroline de Winter, a sister of Mr de Winter's great-great grandfather.

She married a great Whig politician and was a famous London beauty for many years. What the new Mrs de Winter does not know is that at the last fancy dress ball at Manderley, Rebecca had copied the exact same picture. Of course, this girl and my Rebecca are very unlike, but with exactly the same costume, and a wig, I was sure that the first thing the guests would think of will be Rebecca. Mr de Winter will get such a shock, which he deserves for letting this girl take Rebecca's cherished place. Everyone will think that she did it all on purpose; it will be another one of her silly inexperienced slip-ups. I was determined that, amidst the celebrations for the " new bride", no one will forget Rebecca.

As I expected, the girl did order the dress, and on the evening of the ball I heard her and Clarice the little maid giggling in her room like two silly schoolgirls. I stood and waited in the doorway leading to the West Wing, so I could see everything. In due course, the music stopped, and the drum started beating, a soft humming sound escalating to what sounded to me

like ominous thunder. The drummer shouted, " Miss Caroline de Winter." A figure appeared at the head of the stairs, dressed in white, a sash and a ribbon, her hat in her hand, her curls standing out from her face. It was the very image of Rebecca.

I was overwhelmed; the resemblance was striking; my eyes stung as I almost, almost believed that it was my Rebecca, that my dear Rebecca was back, standing at the top of the stairs, waiting to meet the applause. No applause came. I was torn back into reality as I realised that the whole hall was still. Then they must have all seen it. Yet the girl went on smiling, putting one hand on the banister. " How do you do, Mr de Winter," she said. Mr de Winter stood still.

He stared up at her, his glass in his hand, his face drained of colour, ashen white. The girl began to be afraid. My plan had worked, Mr de Winter was angry at her, and she had humiliated herself in front of all the guests. I heard her trembling voice in the hall, the long silences, the harsh tones of Mr de Winter. Then I saw her blindly running down the empty corridor, a stunned and stupid animal. She saw me standing triumphantly in the doorway, not caring to hide the loathing I felt for her.

She turned and ran from me, tripping and stumbling, down the long narrow passages of Manderley, a home that is not, and will never be, her own.

July, a few days later

Rebecca is back. Not in person, but I feel her here. Last night Frith brought back the rumour that the Je Reviens was found by divers who went down

about the ship in the bay, the one that ran aground when the bearings were confused. However, it cannot be Rebecca's boat. Rebecca's boat was crashed to bits on the rocks, yet this one was perfectly sound.

When the diver broke through, he also found something else, a body. Who could it be? The flesh is rotted away by now, so as yet nobody knows. I cannot think who it could be. It cannot possibly be Rebecca, as she was found and identified at Edgecombe over a year ago. Maybe Mr de Winter made a mistake when he identified her? Yet Rebecca is too experienced a sailor to let herself be trapped in the cabin like that. Could the body belong to one of Rebecca's men?

This morning I received a message from Robert that the new Mrs de Winter wanted the menu changed to a hot meal. I was surprised, for she had never before dared to contradict anything I had done, and I did not think it necessary to bother serving someone like her a hot meal while there were plenty of leftovers from yesterday. It was even more astonishing that she should have sent the message by Robert. I confronted her about it. " I'm not used to having messages sent to me by Robert," I said. " If Mrs de Winter wanted anything changed she would ring me personally on the house telephone."

I expected her to blush, and apologise, maybe even offer to keep the menu the way it was before. Instead, she looked at me, calmly and composedly, and answered,

" I am Mrs de Winter now."

How could she have said that, when before she had not dared to meet my gaze? How could she have stood up to me, when before the slightest mention of Rebecca made her blush? What has changed? What has Mr de Winter told her?

I pressed her about the story of the boat, but she would not reveal anything. She stood there, meeting stare with stare. I wonder, has everything changed? Even this girl dares to defy me. I do not know what has happened. I do not know what is going to happen, but I feel that nothing will ever be the same again.