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I told Helen my story and she went home and cried. In the evening her husband came to see me and brought some strawberries; he mended my bicycle, too, and was kind, but he needn't have been, because it all happened eight years ago, and I'm not unhappy now. I hardly dare admit it, even touching wood, but I'm so happy that when I wake in the morning I can't believe it's true. I seldom think of the time when I was called Sophia Fairclough; I try to keep it pushed right at the back of my mind. I can't quite forget it because of Sandro, and often I find myself regretting lovely little Fanny. I wish I hadn't told Helen so much; it's brought everything back in a vivid flash. I can see Charles's white pointed face, and hear his husky nervous voice. I keep remembering things all the time.

We met for the first time on a railway journey. We were both carrying portfolios; that is what started us talking to each other. The next day Charles 'phoned me at the studio where I worked, and we met every day after that. The sun seemed to shine perpetually that summer, the days were all shimmering and beautiful. It never rained, yet everything remained fresh and





green, even in London. The summers used to be like that when I was a child, and in the winters there was always deep snow or hard frost. The weather has grown all half-hearted now; soon we won't be able to tell the change in the seasons except by the fall of the leaf, like it says in the Holy Bible, and that will be the end of the world; at least I think it says that.

Charles and I were both twenty when we met, and as soon as we were twenty-one we decided to get married secretly. There was a church next door to the house where I had a bed-sitting-room, so we went there to ask the priest to put the banns up. We dared not ring the bell at first, we felt too shy. Charles said they would ask us in and give us a glass of sherry and some funeral biscuits. We stood on the doorstep rehearsing what to say and the priest must have heard us, because he suddenly opened the door although we hadn't rung the bell. He took one look at us with his deepset eyes and said 'Banns' in a shouting kind of voice. He asked us some questions and wrote down the answers in a black notebook, and said if we had an organ it would cost extra, and confetti cost extra, too, because of all the mess it made, so we said we could do without both those things, and he shut the door again. We went back to my bed-sitting-room and planned how we would spend the ten pounds Charles had just received for painting a screen with Victorian women creeping about. He painted it for one of his Aunt Emma's friends, and he was offended afterwards because it was put in the maid's bedroom, but we were glad of the ten pounds because that was all we had to spend on our entire home.

A few days after we had arranged about the banns we had dinner with a spiritualist friend of ours, and after we had drunk a little wine confided our marriage plans to her. She was highly





delighted to be involved in a secret wedding, and when we told her we only had ten pounds to furnish our home she gave us a cheque for another ten pounds to go with it; she also said she knew someone who had a flat to let on Haverstock Hill. Not satisfied with all this help, she offered to give us a little reception at her flat after the wedding.

The next free afternoon we had, we went to the address in Haverstock Hill she had given us. A woman with very fuzzy black hair came to the door. She had a huge silver belt round her waist, and arty, messy clothes. She kept saying 'GER-G E R' after every few words, rather like a giant cat purring. She showed us the flat, which consisted of a large basement room with an old-fashioned dresser, and a small kitchen and use of bath and lav. When we had seen it she said we had better meet her sister 'GER-G E R', so we went upstairs and met the sister, who had even more fuzzy hair, but it was fair, and her eyes were round and blue and her face like a melting strawberry ice cream, rather a cheap one, and I expect her body was like that, too, only it was mostly covered in mauve velvet. She spoke to us a little and said we were little love-birds looking for a nest. She made us feel all awful inside. Then she suddenly went into a trance. We thought she was dying, but her sister explained she was a medium and governed by a Chinese spirit called Mr Hi Wu. Then Mr Hi Wu spoke to us in very broken English and told us we were so lucky to be offered such a beautiful flat for only twenty-five shillings a week; it was worth at least thirty-five. So when she had recovered we said we would have the flat, and left the first week's rent as deposit.

After this we had a frantic time shopping; we did most of it in Chalk Farm Road, N.W. We bought a massive oval table for





seven-and-six, and chairs for one-and-six. A carpenter made us some little stools because I like sitting on stools better than anything else. We painted all our furniture duck-egg green with a dash of sea green; we had the paint specially mixed for us. We found the rugs rather expensive; we had to have two and they were a pound each. The sheets and blankets were a great worry, too. We had to get the divan on hire purchase and for months after were having trouble over it; we nearly lost it several times, but after two years it really belonged to us, and they sent us a large and legal paper to say it did.

We redecorated the flat ourselves. Because the room was rather dark we painted the walls a kind of stippled yellow; lots of black hairs from the brush got mixed with the paint, but they looked as if they were meant to be there almost.

We had white walls in the kitchen, and Charles painted a chef by the gas cooker. The thing we were most pleased about was the dresser; there were drawers for our clothes and shelves for the china. We had a proper tea-set from Waring and Gillow, and a lot of blue plates from Woolworths; our cooking things came from there, too. I had hoped they would give us a set of real silver teaspoons when we bought the wedding-ring, but the jeweller we went to wouldn't, so our spoons came from Woolworths, too.

