



Adelle (speaking of Gregory):  
He worries me so. He's like a kid who insists on climbing trees even though his hands can scarcely reach the boughs.

The early darkness of February was well upon us by the time Gregory and I arrived at my apartment block. Our breath was a frosty mist in the icy blue light of the street lamps. Gerald was silent and withdrawn now and I felt it wisest to leave him to his thoughts.

Once inside I fixed him a ham and tomatoe sandwich which he ate with reasonable appetite as he sat quietly in my armchair, reading an old issue of Saturday Review. After an hour he began to nod off over his magazine so I got up and made him a bed on the chesterfield. Once in it he fell asleep almost immediately beneath the quilt I'd taken from our bed.

Adelle got home later from her night class at the university and found me watching Gregory sleep, an open and unread book in my lap.

"What's Gregory doing on the sofa?" she whispered.

"Things went very badly at the hospital. Elaine threw a royal scene....Gregory just went to pieces." I closed the book and set it on my desk. Adelle was beside me and I could smell the cold winter air in her clothing.

"And you brought him home, fed him, and put him to bed." Her hand brushed through my hair.

"He was a wreck....I've never seen him so bad." I took her hand and held it, still watching Gregory's huddled form under the blankets. "What else was there to do?"

She leaned over slowly and kissed me on the mouth. "There was nothing else to do, lover." Her face was very close to mine, she stared into my eyes. "You worry so much, Ian. Yet you do realize that you are not really responsible for him? You worry so much." She whispered her words very softly and as softly I replied.

"People have to try. When my life was an insane mess I found you. Now Gregory's got me. Things tend to balance out."

Adelle didn't reply to that, she just stared at Gregory. "What a mess it all became," she said.

Gregory:  
I don't think I ever really realized what it would mean to have the love of a woman. Elaine has come into my life like a whirlwind, and like a whirlwind she has tumbled me head over foot. She loves me and I love her; all else can be forgiven.

The snows of February lay heavy on the ground and the roads were slick with hard ice. Gregory stared out of his window, watching the fields of white roll by. The car radio murmured a weather report but neither of us were paying attention. After ten miles we reached the turnoff and left the highway behind. The grounds, when we reached them, were empty and the trees that lined the drive were still in the quiet air. I parked my car and we got out. The buildings had an old thirties look to them and gave to the place the sad air of a summer resort in the off season. The silence was unnerving.

"That must be the central office there," said Gregory, pointing to a low building with a sign that said, "Parkland Hospital, Administration." Inside this building we found a desk in a brightly painted office and behind it a young, efficient-looking young woman. Somewhere out of sight a printer was clattering. The young woman greeted us.

"Can I help you?"  
"Yes, we're here to visit an Elaine Pierce. She was admitted two weeks ago," said Gregory. The woman turned to her computer console and typed in Elaine's name.

"Miss Pierce is in Ward 3C, sir. I don't have a record here as to whether or not she can have visitors."

"I phoned yesterday and was told there would be no problem as long as we kept the visit short." Below the level of the counter Gregory's hands were clenching and unclenching. The place frightened him. To be honest it frightened me.

"If you phoned sir, then I'm sure there will be no problem." She smiled and handed him a photostat map of the grounds. "You want Building A4, sir. Just turn left as you leave this building and follow the map. There are signs on the buildings." We thanked her for her help and left the office.

Ward 3C was a new addition to the hospital and everything in it was shiny and bright with broadloom covering the floors and abstract oils hung upon the walls. I could almost imagine I was in a Holiday Inn but for the faint odor of disinfectant in the air. We sat on firm vinyl couches in a lounge area and waited. Elaine entered.

"Hi Greg....Hello Ian." Her voice was timid. She slouched more than ever now, as if ready at any moment to pull her head into the crooks of her arms. Her blonde hair was tangled and limp and her eyes were ringed by dark, bruised circles. Her wrists, braceleted with clean white gauze, crossed in front of her faded jeans. She watched Gregory and waited for him. He stood and embraced her as she put her arms about him. She whispered in his ear. I

## Speaking of Gregory

by Geoffrey Jackson

figdgeted nervously and felt, rather than saw, his imploring glance.

"I'm going to find myself some coffee," I said, rising. "Can I bring you some?" Elaine ignored me but Gregory nodded yes. I left them to themselves.

For the next twenty minutes I wandered the halls, reading the signs and watching the staff go about their duties. There is nothing as dull as killing time so I was glad to finally locate a coffee vending machine in a stairwell and then to head back to the lounge.

Elaine and Gregory were kissing passionately as I walked into the room. I quickly backed out. They hadn't noticed me. I crept away down the corridor red-faced with embarrassment. I could scarcely believe what I had seen. Gregory had had his hand under her blouse, caressing her breasts. It seemed impossible to reconcile that image with the quiet reserve of my friend.

As I went around the building, walking slowly with brimming styrofoam cups of steaming coffee, I passed a window and through it I could see the icy fields and the snow covered pines rolling to the horizon. To one side was the old wing of the hospital, stately and impressive with its massive doors and its gabled roof. One could barely see the heavy iron gratings on the windows. I stood there and thought of all the turmoil and anguish contained within those walls, surrounded by the cold serenity of the winters day. It was mysterious and incomprehensible and I could find no meaning in such thoughts. Then I realized that I didn't have any true idea of what Gregory was feeling or was capable of feeling, despite years of friendship. He too was mysterious. I left the window and went through the corridors till I reached the lounge. This time I was careful to cough loudly before I reached the door.

The were sitting apart on the couch. Elaine glaring at me while Gregory stared at his hands. I offered him a lukewarm cup of coffee.

"Thanks," he said, hardly daring to look at me as he took the cup. I glanced at my watch.

"It's nearly been half an hour Greg." He looked up and smiled weakly at me and then Elaine.

"I guess we have to go now, I'm afraid," he said.

"Don't go," said Elaine.

"I'm afraid we have to Elaine. You're only allowed a half hour visit and we wouldn't want to aggravate the nurses would we?" Gerald was standing and I edged towards the door. Elaine sat motionless, staring at the floor.

"Elaine, I'll come back."

"Please don't go," she said, her eyes beginning to weep.

"Oh, don't cry, Elaine." He took a Kleenex from a box on the coffee table and made a motion to dry her tears but she only flung her arms about him and began to really sob.

"I hate it here Greg!" she cried loudly. Gregory tried hopelessly to sooth her. From the hall I could hear footsteps clattering. Elaine's crying was rising in pitch and she started to beat her hands across his back. Blood began to seep through her gauze

holding a syringe filled with a milky pink liquid. I took Gregory by the arm and pulled him from the room.

We had to walk the full length of the corridor and through a double set of fire doors before we left Elaine's sobbing behind. And when those cries were finally cut off with the snap of the door latch Gregory stopped walking. He trembled violently and tried to speak but only to stammer and halt. When I laid a hand on his shoulder he buckled at the knees and I had to catch him to keep him from falling to the floor. He was sobbing convulsively and I held him till he had exhausted himself. Then I put my arm under his and then held him across his back.

"Come on Greg," I said, "Let's go home."

Gregory:  
Being deeply involved with a woman is a terrific commitment. I can see that now with Elaine. There's something very sad about her and I find myself struggling to find the source of her unhappiness. Her life is a maze of tragic frustration, it simply overwhelms me. Yet I am committed. She needs me.

"Ian, I'd like to introduce you to Elaine Pierce. Elaine, this is Ian Tate." Gregory stood tense and anxious in the doorway. Elaine smiled at me cautiously with her head hung forward as she peered at me through her bangs. She was a tall thin woman, dressed in a pastel pink dress, her cheekbones blushed a delicate mauve. A fashionable figure yet her elegance was completely undercut by her poor carriage. Her slouched posture, the way she peered at me, all suggested something off, a mongrel with a show class coat. She shook my hand, her touch vague and damp.

"I'm pleased to meet you Elaine," I said. She only nodded her reply. Gregory was beside me, waiting for a sign of approval; a nudge, a knowing look, something to confirm his choice.

"I'd better check on the roast," I said. "Adelle's in the living room and I'm sure she'd be glad to fix you both a drink." I then turned and retreated to the kitchen, being careful to avoid Gregory's eyes as I did.

Elaine became less withdrawn as we ate dinner. Her head came up and her eyes began to look less fearfully about the table. Adelle was studying her intently, as was I, though for the most part the conversation centered on the pet passions shared between Gregory and Adelle.

"Come on Adelle, Maigret's one of the greatest detectives in fiction. If you'd only read some more of Simenon's books you'd agree with me." Gregory punctuated his point with a flourish of his hand but Adelle only snorted and dismissed him with a wave of her fork.

"I like excitement in a mystery, my dear Gregory, and if I want psychoanalysis I can read Freud. Maigret just mopes around for 180 pages, eating his wife's soup, brooding in brasseries, and sucking on his pipe. Then the crook turns around the confesses the whole thing. Probably out of boredom I would imagine. I mean how much Parisiane atmosphere can one take?"

**Oh, a marvelous girl, as long as you keep an eye on the silverware. A totally unreliable woman leaning on a totally reliable man...**

bandages. "I love you! I love you!" she wailed. Then two nurses brushed past me and took a firm hold of her. At their touch Elaine shrieked and struggled violently. Another nurse entered and asked us to leave. She was

Gregory sat up and leaned over the tossed salad. "I suppose you're idea of a great detective is that thug Marlow, or worse yet, Spenser!"

"Oh come on now, Spenser's great fun!"