

For two hours he led them through room after room, explaining, describing and answering questions. Neither Felix nor Idina was in a position to criticise with knowledge, but in an unmethodical, haphazard way Yolande had picked up a considerable amateur knowledge of furniture, which was at least sufficient to impress Deryk and to enable her to appreciate how easily he surpassed her. Equally at home in Italy, Spain, France and England, he had carried out a dozen schemes in as many rooms with the minutest attention to rugs and hangings, fire-places, illumination, pictures, ornaments and bibelots, until each room was a complete and perfect example of a period in the art of decoration.

"I had no idea it was to be like this!" Yolande gasped, as he led her away from the last of three Empire drawing-rooms.

"You didn't know I was keen on furniture? That's really why I took this place. Ripley Court was so crammed that you could do nothing short of improvising a bonfire and cleaning out everything. This gave me an opportunity."

They were standing on the south side, looking down on to Carlton Garden, and Yolande felt that with a single book on one of the tables, a single piece of embroidery dropped carelessly across the arm of one of the chairs, the room would look as if it had been continuously inhabited since the house was built.

"And you did it all in about two months! No wonder you're feeling overdone!"

"It was hard work, but that never killed a man. I'm all right, Yolande; you can say I've had too much London, if you like, but that's all. And I can go away now that this place is pretty well finished. By the way, you must come and see my roof garden."

He hurried her the length of the gallery and up a staircase past the second floor on to the flat roof. Felix and Idina were left to follow as best they might, and indeed with as long an interval as possible; Deryk was deriving a wonderful, unexpected enjoyment of the afternoon from