



ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES LA SALLE

Neville Strange was crying. "What is all this fuss about, Kay?" he asked.

## By Agatha Christie

The invitation was ominous—but there was no way she could refuse. So Kay Strange went to the great old house on the cliff to meet her husband's first wife, Audrey. And then there began a drama of suspicion and fatal coincidence, based in old hatreds and new desires. Begin this top-notch thriller by a top-drawer writer of mystery novels—in three tightly drawn parts

**T**HE sun was pouring down on Neville Strange's house at Hindhead. Neville Strange was coming down the stairs. He was dressed in white flannels and held four tennis rackets under his arm.

If a man could have been selected from among other Englishmen as an example of a lucky man with nothing to wish for, a selection committee might have chosen Neville Strange. He was a man well known to the British public, a first-class tennis player and all-round sportsman. Though he had never reached the finals at Wimbledon, he had lasted several of the opening rounds and in the mixed doubles had twice reached the semifinals. He was, perhaps, too much of an all-round athlete to be a champion tennis player. He was scratch at golf, a fine swimmer, and had done some good climbs in the Alps. He was thirty-three; he lived in a country at peace with the world; he had magnificent health, good looks, plenty of money, an extremely beautiful wife and, to all appearances, no cares or worries.

Nevertheless, as Neville Strange went downstairs this fine morning, a shadow went with him. The thought of it furrowed his brow and made his expression troubled and indecisive.

He crossed the hall, squared his shoulders as though throwing off some burden, passed through the living room and out onto a glass-enclosed veranda where his wife, Kay, was curled up among cushions, drinking orange juice.



Kay Strange was twenty-three and unusually beautiful. She had a slender but subtly voluptuous figure, dark red hair, such a perfect skin that she used only the slightest of make-up to enhance it, and those dark eyes and brows which so seldom go with red hair and which are so devastating when they do.

Her husband said lightly, "Hullo, Gorgeous, what's for breakfast?"

Kay replied, "Horribly bloody-looking kidneys for you—and mushrooms—and rolls of bacon."

"Sounds all right," said Neville.

He helped himself to the aforementioned viands and poured out a cup of coffee. There was a companionable silence for some minutes.

"Oo," said Kay, voluptuously wriggling bare toes with scarlet manicured nails. "Isn't the sun lovely? England's not so bad after all."

They had just come back from the South of France.

Neville, after a bare glance at the newspaper headlines, had turned to the sports page and merely said, "Um . . ."

Then, proceeding to toast and marmalade, he put the paper aside and opened his letters.

"OH, BY the way," said Kay. "Shirty has asked us to go to Norway on the yacht at the end of June. Too bad we can't." She looked cautiously sideways at Neville and added wistfully, "I would love it so."

Something, some cloud, some uncertainty, seemed hovering on Neville's face.

Kay said rebelliously, "Have we got to go to dreary old Camilla's?"

Neville frowned. "Of course we have. Look here, Kay, we've had this out before. Sir Matthew was my guardian. He and Camilla looked after me. Gull's Point is my home, as far as any place is home to me."

"Oh, all right, all right," said Kay. "If we must, we must. After all, we get all

that money when she dies, so I suppose we have to play up to her."

Neville said angrily, "It's not a question of playing up. She has no control over the money. Sir Matthew left it in trust for her during her lifetime and to come to me and my wife afterward. It's a question of affection. Why can't you understand that?"

Kay said, after a moment's pause: "I do understand, really. I'm only putting on an act because—well, because I know I'm not welcome there. They hate me! Yes, they do! Lady Tressilian looks down that long nose of hers at me, and Mary Aldin looks over my shoulder when she talks to me. It's all very well for you. You don't see what goes on."

"They always seem to me very polite to you. You know quite well I wouldn't stand for it if they weren't."

Kay gave him a curious look from under her dark lashes. "They're polite

enough. But they know how to get under my skin all right. I'm an interloper, that's what they feel."

"Well," said Neville, "after all, I suppose—that's natural enough, isn't it?"

His voice had changed slightly. He got up and stood looking out at the view with his back to Kay.

"Oh, yes, I daresay it's natural. They were devoted to Audrey, weren't they?" Her voice shook a little. "Dear, well-bred, cool, colorless Audrey! Camilla's not forgiven me for taking her place."

NEVILLE did not turn. His voice was lifeless, dull. He said, "After all, Camilla's old—past seventy. Her generation doesn't really like divorce, you know. On the whole, I think she's accepted the position very well, considering how fond she was of—of Audrey." His voice changed just a little as he spoke the name.

"They think you treated her badly."

"So I did," said Neville under his breath, but his wife heard.

"Oh, Neville—don't be so stupid. Just because she chose to make such a frightful fuss!"

"She didn't make a fuss. Audrey never made fusses."

"Well, you know what I mean. Because she went away and was ill, and went about everywhere looking brokenhearted. That's what I call a fuss! Audrey's not what I call a good loser. From my point of view, if a wife can't hold her husband, she ought to give him up gracefully! You two had nothing in common. She never played a game and was as anemic and washed up—as a dishrag. No life or go in her! If she cared about you, she ought to have thought about your happiness first and been glad you were going to be happy with someone more suited to you."





Nevile turned. A faintly sardonic smile played round his lips. "What a little sportsman! How to play the game in love and matrimony!"

Kay laughed and reddened. "Well, perhaps I was going a bit far. But at any rate, once the thing had happened, there it was. You've got to accept these things."

Nevile said quietly, "Audrey accepted it. She divorced me, so that you and I could marry."

"Yes, I know—" Kay hesitated.

Nevile said, "You've never understood Audrey."

"No, I haven't. In a way, Audrey gives me the creeps. I don't know what it is about her. You never know what she's thinking. She's—she's a little frightening."

"Oh! Nonsense, Kay."

"Well, she frightens me. Perhaps it's because she's got brains."

"My lovely nitwit."

Kay laughed. "You always call me that!" "Because it's what you are!"

They smiled at each other. Nevile came over to her and, bending down, kissed the back of her neck.

"Lovely, lovely Kay!" he murmured.

"Very good Kay," said Kay. "Giving up a lovely yachting trip to go and be snubbed by her husband's prim Victorian relations."

NEVILE went back and sat down by the table. "You know," he said, "I don't see why we shouldn't go on that trip with Shirty if you really want to so much."

Kay sat up in astonishment.

"And what about Saltcreek and Gull's Point?"

Nevile said in a rather unnatural voice, "I don't see why we shouldn't go there early in September."

"Oh, but, Nevile, surely—" She stopped.

"We can't go in July and August because of the tournaments," said Nevile. "But we finish up at St. Loo the last week in August and it would fit in very well if we went on to Saltcreek from there."

"Oh, it would fit in all right—beautifully. But I thought—well, she always goes there for September, doesn't she?"

"Audrey, you mean?"

"Yes. I suppose they could put her off, but—"

"Why should they put her off?"

Kay stared at him dubiously. "You mean, we'd be there at the same time? What an extraordinary idea."

Nevile said irritably, "I don't think it's at all an extraordinary idea. Lots of people do it nowadays. Why shouldn't we all be friends together? It makes things so much simpler. Why, you said so yourself only the other day."

"I did?"

"Yes, don't you remember? You said it was the sensible, civilized way to look at things."

"Oh, I wouldn't mind. I *do* think it's sensible. But—well, I don't think Audrey would feel like that about it. You know, Nevile, Audrey really was terribly fond of you. I don't think she'd stand it for a moment."

"You're quite wrong, Kay. Audrey thinks it would be quite a good thing."

"Audrey—what do you mean, Audrey thinks? How do you know what Audrey thinks?"

Nevile looked slightly embarrassed. He cleared his throat a little self-consciously.

"As a matter of fact, I happened to run into her yesterday when I was up in London."

"You never told me."

Nevile said irritably, "I'm telling you now. It was absolute chance. I was walking across the park, and there she was coming toward me. You wouldn't want me to run away from her, would you?"

"No, of course not," said Kay staring. "Go on."

"I—we—well, we stopped, of course, and then I turned round and walked with her. I—I felt it was the least I could do."

"Go on," said Kay.

"And then we sat down on a couple of chairs and talked. She was very nice—very nice, indeed."

"Delightful for you," said Kay.

"And we got talking, you know, about one thing and another. She was quite natural and normal—and—and all that."

"Remarkable!" said Kay.

"And she asked how you were—"

"Very kind of her!"

"And we talked about you for a bit. Really, Kay, she couldn't have been nicer."

"Darling Audrey!"

"And then it sort of came to me—you know—how nice it would be if—if you two could be friends, if we could all get together. And it occurred to me that perhaps we might manage it at Gull's Point this summer. Sort of place it could happen quite naturally."

"You thought of that?"

"I—well—yes, of course. It was all my idea."

"You've never said anything to me about having any such idea."

"Well, I only happened to think of it just then."

"I see. Anyway, you suggested it, and Audrey thought it was a marvelous brain wave?"

FOR the first time, something in Kay's manner seemed to penetrate to Nevile's consciousness. He said, "Is anything the matter, Gorgeous?"

"Oh, no, nothing! Nothing at all! It didn't occur to you or Audrey whether I should think it a marvelous idea?"

Nevile stared at her. "But, Kay, why on earth should you mind?"

Kay bit her lip.

Nevile went on: "You said yourself—only the other day—"

"Oh, don't go into all that again! I was talking about other people—not *us*."

"But that's partly what made me think of it."

"More fool me. Not that I believe that."

Nevile was looking at her with dismay. "But, Kay, why should you mind? I mean, there's nothing for you to mind about!"

"Isn't there?"

"Well, I mean—any jealousy or that—would be on the other side." He paused, his voice changed. "You see, Kay, I treated Audrey very badly. I feel that if this would come off, I'd feel better about the whole thing. It would make me a lot happier."

Kay said, "So you haven't been happy?"

"Darling idiot, what do you mean? Of

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Mr. Treves spoke slowly, apparently choosing his words with great care: "Personally, I am of the opinion that it was a particularly ingenious murder—a murder committed by a child and planned down to every detail beforehand"





EWING GALLOWAY

Your chances of getting a steak like this will improve a bit in 1945, but the supply will not be plentiful until after we've won in Europe



PHILIP GENDREAU

War uses up 600,000 barrels of gasoline a day, which means that this street scene will not return to America until after we've defeated Japan

# WHEN WILL RATIONING END?

**BY CHESTER BOWLES**

ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

**How soon can we expect to have all the meat we want? Or gasoline, shoes, canned goods, tires and automobiles? Here's a tentative timetable by the man whose job it is to insure us a fair distribution of our scarce commodities**

**M**ILLIONS of Americans would like the answer to that question. So would hundreds of employees in the Office of Price Administration. So would thousands of loyal, hard-working volunteers in our 5,400 local war price and rationing boards.

We all look forward to the day when we can once more drive into a filling station, say, "Fill 'er up"—and get the gas.

We all look forward to a return to "good old" three-pound sirloin steaks without ration points.

Rationing is a war child, and no one will be happier to disown it than those of us at OPA whose job it is to administer the program.

The question cannot be given a definite answer. There are too many imponderables, not the least of which is the progress

of the war itself. When shall we win in Europe? When in the Pacific? I have no more knowledge than you of our military plans. But, as Rationing Administrator, I can try to make a rough timetable for the demise of rationing.

At best, the undertaking is precarious. Conditions we cannot foresee today may arise tomorrow to upset my calculations.

My timetable must cover only those commodities now under rationing. Before this war is over, however, it may be necessary to ration additional commodities. Rationing is not only a national necessity but the need for it is apt to shift with changing trends in war production and in the requirements for certain commodities of our Armed Forces, our allies and civilians. Over shifting supply-and-demand situations, we in OPA have no control. In fact, the War Production Board and other federal agencies determine—and quite properly—what goods are to be rationed. When they tell us that the time has come for consumer sharing of certain goods, we have no choice but to go ahead and make arrangements for rationing them.

But what about after the war? Will it not be possible then to end rationing altogether and to celebrate its passing with great bonfires of ration books and gasoline coupons? I am afraid not. For one thing,

during a period of postwar reconstruction, the length of which no man can now foretell, some commodities now rationed may remain in short supply and heavy demand for both domestic and foreign consumption. If they do, we will have to keep on rationing them.

There is another kind of commodity that is almost certain to be scarce—what industry calls consumers' durable goods. Automobiles, already under controlled distribution, are in this category. So are electric refrigerators, washing machines, irons, radios and other products our factories stopped making after Pearl Harbor, when industry went 100 per cent to war.

## War Needs Must Come First

Which consumers' durable goods will be in such short supply that we may have to find means of distributing them equitably will depend very largely on the extent to which it will be possible to permit industry to reconvert to civilian production before the war ends. Here again, the fortunes of war will govern.

When I speak of equitable distribution of durable goods, I do not mean, necessarily, coupon rationing. It is entirely possible that industry itself will distribute available supplies of electric irons, for instance, until stock piles have been built up to the point

where normal distribution may be resumed. This could be done, as in the past, by voluntary allocation of available supplies. OPA is fully aware of the existence of alternatives to rationing that will accomplish as much in equitable distribution of goods as the bothersome point or coupon systems. OPA doesn't want to bother anybody. It has committees of experts working with industry on ways of avoiding coupon rationing after the war.

Termination of rationing, whenever it is, will be attended by many difficulties. The following timetable for rationing's end can be no more than a speculation, and its accuracy depends on the needs of our Armed Forces in battle and on post-war supply and demand. If I were to make a guess, my timetable might be something like this:

PRODUCT	END OF RATIONING
All products.....	As soon as possible after the war in the Pacific ends.
Sugar.....	At the earliest—when the war in Europe is over.
Meat.....	Some relief in 1945 (with luck) and possible end when the war in Europe is over.

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