

## AIRSWIMMING

Charlotte Jones

*DORA and PERSEPHONE are cleaning, but PERSEPHONE in a very half-hearted way.*

DORA/DORPH: Good morning. It could be worse, we could be on laundry duty.

PERSEPHONE: *ignores her.*

Yes, they've got quite a system going there. Pause. The delirious wash, the imbeciles carry the linen to dry, the melancholy iron it and the monomaniacs fold it and put it away. And we have to sleep on those sheets. No wonder we all have nightmares. Yes, it's a shame. After all, even nutters need their beauty sleep, what do you think?

PERSEPHONE: What are you?

DORA/DORPH: I'm sorry?

PERSEPHONE: What's wrong with you?

DORA/DORPH: Nothing.

PERSEPHONE: Why are you here, then?

DORA/DORPH: Why are you here? Silence. It's hard at first, I know. But you have to keep focused. Like Joan of Arc. Incarceration didn't get her down. She took it like a man. Refused to wear frocks. Had a short crop. They thought it was deviancy. I try to be deviant whenever I can. Vive la deviance.

PERSEPHONE: Are you mad?

DORA/DORPH: I beg your pardon?

PERSEPHONE: Criminally insane. Well, I assume you are. You seem to be.

DORA/DORPH: Certainly not. I resent the suggestion. Criminally Insane. The idea of it! Unless a predilection for Spanish cigars counts.

PERSEPHONE: What?

DORA/DORPH: That's what first got them alerted to me. To my deviancy. I enjoyed the odd smoke. Shouldn't have done it. It's not de rigueur. But whether it's criminally insane, that's a different matter. What do you think, Miss - umm?

PERSEPHONE: About what?

DORA/DORPH: Smoking cigars.

PERSEPHONE: I think it's perfectly foul. I can't believe any one in their right mind would want to.

DORA/DORPH: Ah, typical woman. There are pleasures in this world that you know nothing of.

PERSEPHONE: Well, I'm rather glad. Life isn't supposed to be all pleasure.

DORA/DORPH: Ah, indeed you are so right, Miss - umm. In fact you have inadvertantly hit upon our little motto here. What is the Latin now? Vitam sine pleurae, or some such. Life without joy. We Dymphonians live by that. Not that we feel sorry for ourselves, oh no. They also serve who only sit and polish. I can see you're going to fit in here, Miss Umm -

PERSEPHONE: I'm not here for long.

DORA/DORPH: Oh.

PERSEPHONE: No. I'll be leaving any day now. They're coming back to get me, you see. So there's no point getting your hopes up about me. I'll be leaving you very soon.

DORA/DORPH: Ah, what a shame.

PERSEPHONE: Yes, isn't it? But it can't be helped, I'm afraid. I'm coming out very soon you see. Before the King. My parents are arranging a huge party at the Dorchester. I'll be dressed in white satin from head to toe. So I can't possibly miss it. It will be the most important day of my life. Apart from my wedding day. So I have to be there. In the meantime I just have to sit tight. Get strong. This is just my convalescence home - I'd have preferred Geneva or somewhere Swiss. I can't understand why they chose here. But ours is not to reason why. What will be, will be, Mummy always says.

DORA/DORPH: Does she now?

PERSEPHONE: Yes, like one time I wanted this hat. It was huge and pink with big squashy flowers all over it and I thought it was the most beautiful hat in the world but looking back on it it was rather vulgar but at the time it would have made me very happy but Daddy said I couldn't and I was so vexed I cried and cried and all Mummy said was, 'Ours is not to reason why, Persephone Baker, what will be, will be.' Which I found oddly comforting at the time although it would have been better to have the hat I think, in fact, looking back on it, it wasn't comforting at all and I should have had the hat even if I never wore it. I said to Reggie -

*Looks at DORA.*

- well it doesn't matter. I didn't get the hat and now I'm here we're not allowed to have pretty hats so maybe it's just as well. Although I shall need one for my coming out. So I'll just sit tight. But don't get it into your head that I'm staying. Because I'm not. I expect they're coming any day now. At the end of the week probably. A fortnight at the most...

*She trails off.*

*Pause.*

DORA/DORPH: Persephone Baker.

PERSEPHONE: What?

DORA/DORPH: Your name.

PERSEPHONE: What about it?

DORA/DORPH: Nothing. I just didn't know it. You hadn't told me. I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Baker.

PERSEPHONE: Yes. Well. It won't be for long.

DORA/DORPH: No, clearly. We'd better get down to this, then. Sharpish. Before you get whisked away.

PERSEPHONE: Yes, we'd better.

DORA/DORPH: Yes, like Persephone to the Underworld, Hades will return and take you thither.

PERSEPHONE: I beg your pardon?

DORA/DORPH: The Greek myth, you know... Well, we'd better get on with this.

PERSEPHONE: Oh. Yes.

DORA/DORPH: And by the way, Miss Baker, you have a lovely voice. Music to my ears.

PERSEPHONE: Oh, right. Thank you.

DORA/DORPH: Yes. Feel free to break into song at any time.