

What Happened Next: A Revealing Conversation

“Thank you for inviting me to stay to dinner, Mrs Arnott. This really is quite a feast.”

“Not at all. It’s nice to get to know Miriam’s friends a bit better. Miriam speaks so highly of you.”

“That’s very kind. I do enjoy Miss Arnott’s company very much.”

“In that case, if you wish to continue seeing my daughter, we must ensure that propriety is maintained. Meetings should be properly organised with my approval.”

“Mother, we have always met in the company of others, as you well know. We have had tea with mutual friends once and took a walk in the park with them another time. That is all. Apart from today, of course.”

“That’s as may be, Miriam, but if this young man wishes to court you then convention must be followed. Otherwise, you will lose your good name.”

“Oh, I do think you are being premature with your comments, Mother. Such a thing has not been considered.”

“I can assure you, Mrs Arnott, that the last thing I would wish to do would be to damage Miss Arnott’s reputation.”

“You live with your grandfather, I believe?”

“Oh yes, Mr Arnott, Sir, I do. He has always been very kind to me.”

“What of your parents and siblings?”

“Mother, do not be so rude as to interject and ask such questions. This is a dinner party, not an interview!”

“I’m just interested, Miriam. And if this friendship may end up in a marriage proposal, then we have every right to establish the young man’s pedigree.”

“I am happy to answer your questions. In your situation, where a man of whom you know nothing sits at your dinner table claiming a friendship with your daughter, I would want to know more about him. The truth is I did not know my parents. My father died before I was born and my mother in childbirth.”

“Such a sad tale. To have missed out on a family, parents, brothers and sisters.”

“I beg to disagree. For one cannot miss what one has never known. I have had a perfectly happy life. A good education and now I practise law with a small firm in Chancery Lane.”

“We had a lovely walk along the Embankment this morning. With Aunt Imelda as arranged. Such glorious weather.”

“I always enjoy a walk along the river. When I was a lad, I used to look across to the other side and wonder what it was like where the poor live.”

“It is but a warren of narrow streets, hovels, dirt and lacking daylight, Sir. A breeding ground for thieves. When I was a boy, I went exploring and got lost. A lovely lady found me and brought me home to my grandfather. A rather frightening time.”

“Indeed, it must have been.”

“And now I must thank you for a delicious meal and take my leave. I have an arrangement to meet with a client in my chambers at four o’clock.”

“I do hope you will visit again, Mr Brownlow?”

“I would be delighted to come again if Miss Arnott is in agreement. But I must say that Brownlow is my grandfather’s name. My name is Twist. But please, do call me Oliver.”