**A GLOWING FUTURE**

**Ruth Rendell**

Six should be enough,' he said. `We'll say six tea chests, then, and one trunk.

If you'll deliver them tomorrow, I'll get the stuff all packed and maybe your people

could pick them up Wednesday.' He made a note on a bit of paper. `Fine,' he said.

`Round about lunchtime tomorrow.'

She hadn't moved. She was still sitting in the big oak-armed chair at the far

end of the room. He made himself look at her and he managed a kind of grin,

pretending all was well.

`No trouble,' he said. `They're very efficient.'

`I couldn't believe,' she said, `that you'd really do it. Not until I heard you on

the phone. I wouldn't have thought it possible. You'll really pack up all those things

and have them sent off to her.'

They were going to have to go over it all again. Of course they were. It

wouldn't stop until he'd got the things out and himself out, away from London and her

for good. And he wasn't going to argue or make long defensive speeches. He lit a

cigarette and waited for her to begin, thinking that the pubs would be opening in an

hour's time and he could go out then and get a drink.

`I don't understand why you came here at all,' she said.

He didn't answer. He was still holding the cigarette box, and now he closed its

lid, feeling the coolness of the onyx on his fingertips.

She had gone white. `Just to get your things? Maurice, did you come back just

for that?

'They are my things,' he said evenly.

`You could have sent someone else. Even if you'd written to me and asked me

to do it-

`I never write letters,' he said.

She moved then. She made a little fluttering with her hand in front of her

mouth. `As if I didn't know!' She gasped, and making a great effort she steadied her

voice. `You were in Australia for a year, a whole year, and you never wrote to me

once.'

`I phoned.'

`Yes, twice. The first time to say you loved me and missed me and were

longing to come back to me and would I wait for you and there wasn't anyone else

was there? And the second time, a week ago, to say you'd be here by Saturday and

could I - could I put you up. My God, I'd lived with you for two years, we were

practically married, and then you phone and ask if I could put you up!'

`Words,' he said. `How would you have put it?'

`For one thing, I'd have mentioned Patricia. Oh, yes, I'd have mentioned her.

I'd have had the decency, the common humanity, for that. Dye know what I thought

when you said you were coming? I ought to know by now how peculiar he is, I

thought, how detached, not writing or phoning or anything. But that's Maurice, that's

the man I love, and he's coming back to me and we'll get married and I'm so happy!'

`I did tell you about Patricia.'

`Not until after you'd made love to me first.'

He winced. It had been a mistake, that. Of course he hadn't meant to touch her

beyond the requisite greeting kiss. But she was very attractive and he was used to her

and she seemed to expect it - and oh, what the hell. Women never could understand

about men and sex. And there was only one bed, wasn't there? A hell of a scene

there'd have been that first night if he'd suggested sleeping on the sofa in here.

`You made love to me,' she said. `You were so passionate, it was just like it

used to be, and then the next morning you told me. You'd got a resident's permit to

stay in Australia, you'd got a job all fixed up, you'd met a girl you wanted to marry.

Just like that you told me, over breakfast. Have you ever been smashed in the face,

Maurice? Have you ever had your dreams trodden on?'

`Would you rather I'd waited longer? As for being smashed in the face = he

rubbed his cheekbone `- that's quite a punch you pack.'

She shuddered. She got up and began slowly and stiffly to pace the room. `I

hardly touched you. I wish I'd killed you!' By a small table she stopped. There was a

china figurine on it, a bronze paperknife, an onyx pen jar that matched the ashtray.

`All those things,' she said. `I looked after them for you. I treasured them. And now

you're going to have them all shipped out to her. The things we lived with. I used to

look at them and think, Maurice bought that when we went to - oh God, I can't believe

it. Sent to her!'

He nodded, staring at her. `You can keep the big stuff,' he said. `You're

specially welcome to the sofa. I've tried sleeping on it for two nights and I never want

to see the bloody thing again.'

She picked up the china figurine and hurled it at him. It didn't hit him because

he ducked and let it smash against the wall, just missing a framed drawing. `Mind the

Lowry,' he said laconically, `I paid a lot of money for that.'

She flung herself onto the sofa and burst into sobs. She thrashed about,

hammering the cushions with her fists. He wasn't going to be moved by that - he

wasn't going to be moved at all. Once he'd packed those things, he'd be off to spend

the next three months touring Europe. A free man, free for the sights and the fun and

the girls, for a last fling of wild oats\*. After that, back to Patricia and a home and a

job and responsibility. It was a glowing future which this hysterical woman wasn't

going to mess up.

`Shut up, Betsy, for God's sake,' he said. He shook her roughly by the

shoulder, and then he went out because it was now eleven and he could get a drink.

Betsy made herself some coffee and washed her swollen eyes. She walked

about, looking at the ornaments and the books, the glasses and vases and lamps,

which he would take from her tomorrow. It wasn't that she much minded losing them,

the things themselves, but the barrenness which would be left, and the knowing that

they would all be Patricia's.

In the night she had got up, found his wallet, taken out the photographs of

Patricia, and torn them up. But she remembered the face, pretty and hard and greedy,

and she thought of those bright eyes widening as Patricia unpacked the tea chests, the

predatory hands scrabbling for more treasures in the trunk. Doing it all perhaps before

Maurice himself got there, arranging the lamps and the glasses and the ornaments in

their home for his delight when at last he came.

He would marry her, of course. I suppose she thinks he's faithful to her, Betsy

thought, the way I once thought he was faithful to me. I know better now. Poor stupid

fool, she doesn't know what he did the first moment he was alone with her, or what he

would do in France and Italy. That would be a nice wedding present to give her,

wouldn't it, along with all the pretty bric-a-brac in the trunk?

Well, why not? Why not rock their marriage before it had even begun? A letter.

A letter to be concealed in, say, that blue-and-white ginger jar. She sat down to write.

Dear Patricia what a stupid way to begin, the way you had to begin a letter even to

your enemy.

Dear Patricia: I don't know what Maurice has told you about me, but we have

been living here as lovers ever since he arrived. To be more explicit, I mean we have

made love, have slept together. Maurice is incapable of being faithful to anyone. If you

don't believe me, ask yourself why, if he didn't want me, he didn't stay in a hotel.

That's all. Yours - and she signed her name and felt a little better, well enough and

steady enough to take a bath and get herself some lunch.

Six tea chests and a trunk arrived on the following day. The chests smelled of

tea and had drifts of tea leaves lying in the bottom of them. The trunk was made of

silver-coloured metal and had clasps of gold-coloured metal. It was rather a beautiful

object, five feet long, three feet high, two feet wide, and the lid fitted so securely it

seemed a hermetic sealing.

Maurice began to pack at two o'clock. He used tissue paper and newspapers.

He filled the tea chests with kitchen equipment and cups and plates and cutlery, with

books, with those clothes of his he had left behind him a year before. Studiously, and

with a certain grim pleasure, he avoided everything Betsy might have insisted was

hers - the poor cheap things, the stainless steel spoons and forks, the Woolworth

pottery, the awful coloured sheets, red and orange and olive, that he had always

loathed. He and Patricia would sleep in white linen.

Betsy didn't help him. She watched, chain-smoking. He nailed the lids on the

chests and on each lid he wrote in white paint his address in Australia. But he didn't

paint in the letters of his own name. He painted Patricia's. This wasn't done to need1e

Betsy but he was glad to see it was needling her.

He hadn't come back to the flat till one that morning, and of course he didn't

have a key. Betsy had refused to let him in, had left him down there in the street, and

he had to sit in the car he'd hired till seven. She looked as if she hadn't slept either.

Miss Patricia Gordon, he wrote, painting fast and skilfully.

`Don't forget your ginger jar,' said Betsy. `I don't want it.'

`That's for the trunk.' Miss Patricia Gordon, 23 Burwood Park Avenue, Kew,

Victoria, Australia 3101. `All the pretty things are going in the trunk. I intend it as a

special present for Patricia.'

The Lowry came down and was carefully padded and wrapped.

He wrapped the onyx ashtray and the pen jar, the alabaster bowl, the bronze

paperknife, the tiny Chinese cups, the tall hock glasses. The china figurine, alas . . .

he opened the lid of the trunk.

`I hope the customs open it!' Betsy shouted at him. `I hope they confiscate

things and break things! I'll pray every night for it to go to the bottom of the sea

before it gets there!

'The sea,' he said, `is a risk I must take. As for the customs -' He smiled.

`Patricia works for them, she's a customs officer didn't I tell you? I very much doubt if

they'll even glance inside.' He wrote a label and pasted it on the side of the trunk. Miss

Patricia Gordon, 23 Burwood Park Avenue, Kew . . . `And now I'll have to go out and

get a padlock. Keys, please. If you try to keep me out this time, I'll call the police. I'm

still the legal tenant of this flat remember.'

She gave him the keys. When he had gone she put her letter in the ginger jar.

She hoped he would close the trunk at once, but he didn't. He left it open, the lid

thrown back, the new padlock dangling from the gold-coloured clasp.

`Is there anything to eat?' he said.

`Go and find your own bloody food! Go and find some other woman to feed

you!'

He liked her to be angry and fierce; it was her love he feared. He came back at

midnight to find the flat in darkness, and he lay down on the sofa with the tea chests

standing about him like defences, like barricades, the white paint showing faintly in

the dark. Miss Patricia Gordon . . .

Presently Betsy came in. She didn't put on the light. She wound her way

between the chests, carrying a candle in a saucer which she set down on the trunk. In

the candlelight, wearing a long white nightgown, she looked like a ghost, like some

wandering madwoman, a Mrs Rochester", a Woman in White\*.

`Maurice.'

`Go away, Betsy, I'm tired.'

`Maurice, please. I'm sorry I said all those things. I'm sorry I locked you out.'

`OK, I'm sorry too. It's a mess, and maybe I shouldn't have done it the way I

did. But the best way is for me just to go and my things to go and make a clean split.

Right? And now will you please be a good girl and go away and let me get some

sleep?'

What happened next he hadn't bargained for. It hadn't crossed his mind. Men

don't understand about women and sex. She threw herself on him, clumsily, hungrily.

She pulled his shirt open and began kissing his neck and his chest, holding his head,

crushing her mouth to his mouth, lying on top of him and gripping his legs with her

knees.

He gave her a savage push. He kicked her away, and she fell and struck her

head on the side of the trunk. The candle fell off, flared and died in a pool of wax. In

the darkness he cursed floridly. He put on the light and she got up, holding her head

where there was a little blood.

`Oh, get out, for God's sake,' he said, and he manhandled her out, slamming

the door after her.

In the morning, when she came into the room, a blue bruise on her forehead,

he was asleep, fully clothed, spread-eagled on his back. She shuddered at the sight of

him. She began to get breakfast but she couldn't eat anything. The coffee made her

gag and a great nauseous shiver went through her. When she went back to him he

was sitting up on the sofa, looking at his plane ticket to Paris.

`The men are coming for the stuff at ten,' he said as if nothing had happened,

`and they'd better not be late. I have to be at the airport at noon.'

She shrugged. She had been to the depths and she thought he couldn't hurt

her any more.

`You'd better close the trunk,' she said absent-mindedly.

`All in good time.' His eyes gleamed. `I've got a letter to put in yet.'

Her head bowed, the place where it was bruised sore and swollen, she looked

loweringly at him. `You never write letters.'

`Just a note. One can't send a present without a note to accompany it, can

one?'

He pulled the ginger jar out of the trunk, screwed up her letter without even

glancing at it, and threw it on the floor. Rapidly yet ostentatiously and making sure

that Betsy could see, he scrawled across a sheet of paper: All this is for you, darling

Patricia, for ever and ever.

`How I hate you,' she said.

`You could have fooled me.' He took a large angle lamp out of the trunk and

set it on the floor. He slipped the note into the ginger jar, rewrapped it, tucked the jar

in between the towels and cushions which padded the fragile objects. `Hatred isn't the

word I'd use to describe the way you came after me last night.'

She made no answer. Perhaps he should have put a heavy object like that lamp

in one of the chests, perhaps he should open up one of the chests now. He turned

round for the lamp. It wasn't there. She was holding it in both hands.

`I want that, please.'

`Have you ever been smashed in the face, Maurice?' she said breathlessly, and

she raised the lamp and struck him with it full on the forehead. He staggered and she

struck him again, and again and again, raining blows on his face and his head. He

screamed. He sagged, covering his face with bloody hands. Then with all her strength

she gave him a great swinging blow and he fell to his knees, rolled over and at last

was stilled and silenced.

There was quite a lot of blood, though it quickly stopped flowing. She stood

there looking at him and she was sobbing. Had she been sobbing all the time? She

was covered with blood. She tore off her clothes and dropped them in a heap around

her. For a moment she knelt beside him, naked and weeping, rocking backwards and

forwards, speaking his name, biting her fingers that were sticky with his blood..

But self-preservation is the primal instinct, more powerful than love or sorrow,

hatred or regret. The time was nine o'clock, and in an hour those men would come.

Betsy fetched water in a bucket, detergent, cloths and a sponge. The hard work, the

great cleansing, stopped her tears, quieted her heart and dulled her thoughts. She

thought of nothing, working frenziedly, her mind a blank.

When bucket after bucket of reddish water had been poured down the sink and

the carpet was soaked but clean, the lamp washed and dried and polished, she threw

her clothes into the basket in the bathroom and had a bath. She dressed carefully and

brushed her hair. Eight minutes to ten. Everything was clean and she had opened the

window, but the dead thing still lay there on a pile of reddened newspapers.

`I loved him,' she said aloud, and she clenched her fists. `I hated him.'

The men were punctual. They came at ten sharp. They carried the six tea

chests and the silver-coloured trunk with the gold-coloured clasps downstairs.

When they had gone and their van had driven away, Betsy sat down on the

sofa. She looked at the angle lamp, the onyx pen jar and ashtray, the ginger jar, the

alabaster bowls, the hock glasses, the bronze paperknife, the little Chinese cups, and

the Lowry that was back on the wall. She was quite calm now and she didn't really

need the brandy she had poured for herself.

Of the past she thought not at all and the present seemed to exist only as a

palpable nothingness, a thick silence that lay around her. She thought of the future, of

three months hence, and into the silence she let forth a steady, rather toneless peal of

laughter. Miss Patricia Gordon, 23 Burwood Park Avenue, Kew, Victoria, Australia

3101. The pretty, greedy, hard face, the hands so eager to undo that padlock and

prise open those golden clasps to find the treasure within . . .

And how interesting that treasure would be in three months' time, like nothing

Miss Patricia Gordon had seen in all her life! It was as well, so that she would

recognize it, that it carried on top of it a note in a familiar hand: All this is for you,

darling Patricia, for ever and ever.