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# THE THREE

By LOUISE VAN DE VERG

"I NEVER saw such a thick fog," said the man. "Where do you suppose we are by this time?"

"I don't know," returned the woman. "Frank, I'm afraid."

"What nonsense, Margaret! The driver set us in the right path!"

"Did he?"

"Of course he did!" said the man, testily. "Don't let yourself get nervous. Don't you suppose that driver knows his business? He's been meeting the ships from—from—the ships down there at the docks for twenty years. He told me so."

"I heard that." Margaret's little gloved hand moved a trifle frantically. "Frank, you don't remember, either! That's—that's what's un-remembered me—not the fog! I can't remember where it is we've come from—nor where we're going!" Tears were near the surface of her voice. "Frank—do you remember?"

"Of course I do! We've come from——" There was a long, blank pause, through which the white fog dripped from invisible trees and fell with little pattering sounds to the unseen ground. They could see nothing but a short stretch of beaten path, with a little green at the edges, always the same, receding into the fog at their backs, appearing from the fog in front of them. They continued to walk, but there was panic between them as they paced through the looming and invisible wood.

At last the man spoke. "I don't remember," he said, under his breath. "I—don't—remember." The silence fell again, heavily, oppressive as the fog.

They came to the gate before they knew it was there, and paused before it, doubtfully.

"Shall we go through?" asked the woman.

"The path does; and the driver said——"

"Ah, don't speak to me of the driver!" But she opened the gate, and they went through together. The sound of the dripping trees grew faint behind them, and there were flowers beside the path, now. "I hope Edith has not been worrying about us," said Margaret.

"Edith!" cried the man. "Edith! Then you do——"

"It came to me all at once," she said, wondering. "Until you spoke I didn't realize I hadn't known before."

"Edith what?"

"I—don't remember her married name. She's a widow, and we're—we're——"

As she spoke they came to a house—a small, comfortable cottage, by what they could see of it. "We're what?" asked the man.

"I don't remember that," she answered, the anxious frown on her brow again. "It must be that we have been invited to call—if we were to stay longer we'd have had our own bags. I—almost feel I know this house, Frank! I suppose it's because Edith has sent me pictures, but I don't remember it, if she did—nor Edith, either! It's charming, isn't it?"

"We'll have one like it. Mrs. Dawes," said the man, smiling at her, "after the honeymoon's over."

"I—don't know that I want it," she said, somberly, making no response to his overture. "It's charming, but it—frightens me."

"You're nervous."

"I wish I could remember! If I could remember I'd be all right."

"It'll come back to you," he reassured her. "It's begun already. Isn't there anyone home, d'you think?"

"I don't know," Margaret sighed. "You might ring," she suggested.

A moment later, Edith was at the door. "How do you do?" she said, interrogatively. It was plain she did not know them. Margaret felt a shock of surprize, but was able to answer.

"I am Margaret Chiltern," she said. There! She had made the mistake she had feared to make. Margaret Chiltern, indeed! Margaret Dawes since this morning. She glanced at her husband. There was no expression in his face.

"Come in, Mrs. Chiltern." Edith was opening the door. "And Mr. Chiltern! I'm glad to see you. I was almost afraid you'd be lost in this fog."

Well, well, it was a natural mistake on her part. Why didn't Frank correct her? She was a hospitable soul, thought Margaret, but typical of the women whom matrimony deadens, whose husbands leave them for other women by the time they reach the forties. Perhaps she had been spared a heavier heartache, by her husband's early death. These thoughts were in the top of Margaret's mind as she followed her hostess down the passage. Beneath them surged horror. Horror of what? She would not look at it long enough to find out; she was only able to cast oblique glances, and see the matronly figure of Edith moving kindly in its midst.

"This is your room," said Edith, opening a door.

"Why, our trunks are here!" cried Margaret.

"Yes," said the woman with a surprized look. "What's the matter, Mrs. Chiltern?"

"Nothing—nothing," said Margaret. "You have—unusually quick service here."

"Yes, it's good," assented Edith. "You'll want to freshen up, after

your journey, I suppose. I'll see to tea, unless there's something else I can do for you."

"Thank you, we shan't need a thing," said Margaret.

"I don't usually have tea, when I'm alone," Edith said, "and it's such a pleasure to me that you like it. I always had it when Ronny was home." She smiled, and left them.

"Now is Ronny her husband?" wondered Margaret.

"Don't, Meg!" Frank almost moaned the words. "Let's get away from here! I don't like it, Margaret! There's—there's something about that woman!"

"Why, Frank!"

"I didn't dare correct her about the names," he went on. "There's something about that woman," he reiterated. "I'm—yes, I am! I'm afraid of her!"

"You're getting as bad as I am," smiled Margaret, but without mirth. "She's a dear thing."

"Yes, but Margaret, I know her, I tell you! I know her! Only I—can't remember. Did—did you see that scar on her throat?"

"I saw it," she answered steadily. But she was unable to hide a small shudder that possessed her at the moment of speech. "This room's—familiar, somehow, too," she said, after a minute. "I know I've been in this room before."

"How could you have been?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's because it's—it's like the rooms the women's magazines tell you how to furnish. I don't suppose I really have been in it," she added, gazing idly into the fog. "She'd remember me, if I had been. I think the fog's not so thick."

"Let's go back, now, Margaret, before she comes again, while the fog will hide us."

"Back where? Oh, Frank, I *couldn't* go back to those woods again not knowing where we were going, or what would happen!"

"You don't know what's going to

happen here. It may be something horrible. I feel it, Margaret, I feel something horrible in the air. Please come away, darling!"

"It's the fog," she assured him.

Edith's knock prevented a repetition of his plea. They went out to sit at a pleasant tea-table and smile politely comfortable smiles at their mysterious hostess, who placidly poured, and served, and chatted in a halo of terror.

"Romny—my boy, you know—is in South America—with a steamship company. He's a dear boy, and a very capable officer. He's doing awfully well."

"I'm glad of that," said Margaret. "Do you hear from him often?"

A distressed look crossed Edith's face. "I haven't heard from him since the earthquake," she said. "But really, I don't suppose there's any reason to worry. That country, you know! That earthquake was when I lost my husband," she told them.

It was hard for Margaret to sit with a polite face, even a sympathetic face, while icy fear swirled about her. She ventured a glance at Frank. He, too, was tortured.

Edith's voice continued, to an accompaniment of Margaret's murmur of sympathy. "We had been driving, you know, and we were coming home. Frank—my husband's name was Frank, too, like yours, Mrs. Chiltern—Frank had been nervous all day and the traffic had bothered him. You know, I believe there is something in the air, before a quake! At any rate, we both felt it—a kind of tension, you know. We were glad to get home. I went in first, and Frank was right behind me. We had one of those big hat-racks, with mirrors, in the hall, and the first thing I noticed was that it was moving. The next minute I knew nothing."

A hat-rack with a mirror—a dark hall—a woman coming in out of the night. As though in a moving picture, Margaret saw herself in that

hall, moving from that shadow with a gleaming—what? Not a knife! Yet in the picture it was a knife, and Margaret seemed quite calm. In a whirl of horror she forced herself to listen.

"The mirror was broken, and a piece of the glass cut me here," Edith touched the scar on her throat. "I had a bad concussion, and was unconscious for several weeks. I never even knew when Mr. Dawes' funeral took place—I have never known the date." She rose. "We need some more jelly," she said placidly, moving to the kitchen.

This horror left her untouched, yet she was part of it. The pictures were whirling now, before Margaret's eyes. She could no longer hide from them the knife, nor its use, nor their flight, nor their capture—nor the plain, bare room from which they had started that morning, with the terrible throne in its center—the throne of death.

"Frank!" she whispered. "Frank! Her husband's name was Frank Dawes!"

"We had seen this house before. It was mine—where I lived—with—her." He was breathing heavily. "She doesn't know us," he whispered. "She doesn't know us—and I guess she never will."

"We'll have to get away!"

"We can't. We were brought; we'll have to stay."

"But we're dead, Frank! We're dead! And I thought after we were dead we'd—we'd be together."

"She was dead first; and we are together—with her."

"We've got to get away, Frank!"

"We can't. I know we can't." There was a dreary and desolate finality in the insistent repetition.

"Even—here—it follows us," she mused, and she did not again think of flight.

Edith was in the room again. "I've been very much alone, since then," she said. "That was why I advertised for a couple, or two ladies to

live with me. I do hope," she smiled, "that you won't call me Mrs. Dawes, Mrs. Chiltern. Let's not stand on ceremony. My name is Edith, you know."

Margaret's lips were stiff, but she smiled. "I will call you Edith," she

said. "I've felt from the first I knew you well."

"I'm glad. And may I call you Margaret?" She moved to the window. "The fog has lifted," she said. "We can see the woods plainly. I love those trees!"