

Garden Flowers – ‘A Fall From Grace’

Challenge: This story is positively overgrown with 21 types of garden flower, but can you weed them all out? They appear in checklist order. A bonus flower has self-seeded anywhere in the story, but can you dig it out?

Difficulty rating – medium

	Garden Flowers	✓
1	Pansy	
2	Tansy	
3	Bluebell	
4	Carnation	
5	Hyacinth	
6	Lupin	
7	Bergamot	
8	Lily	
9	Violets	
10	Foxglove	
11	Petunia	
12	Clematis	
13	Orchid	
14	Tulip	
15	Lotus	
16	Snowdrop	
17	Rose	
18	Iris	
19	Red hot poker	
20	Yarrow	
21	Aster	
22	Bonus flower ‘Amaryllis’	

Wearing minimal make-up, a plain but well-fitted black silk dress, and with her auburn hair swept up in a bun, Grace's look of 'simple elegance' drew little attention to her attire or indeed her – just as she'd planned. It did help that the other guests in the private dining room proudly sported over-the-top bling and eye-catching French and Italian designer-wear in bright colours even a rainbow would have avoided.

Grace had chosen the venue carefully and knew that fine dining didn't come finer than this, or more expensive. A table for eight, at what her husband, Tempest, called 'the swankiest restaurant in Knightsbridge' was, she hoped, to prove costlier than he could ever imagine.

Sitting quietly while her trumpet-tongued husband held court at the far end of the table, Grace sipped mineral water from a crystal goblet and set it down by the silver cutlery, polished to perfection, that framed a Liberty placemat and a fine lace napkin. The Italian glassware twinkled in the light from two ornate candelabra, yet paled beside the ostentation of the table's centrepiece – an elegant life-sized swan sculpted from royal icing and marzipan.

Seated immediately to Grace's right was Mitchell Barnes, a celebrity chef famous for his coarse humour and Essex roots – when it came to dodgy one-liners, highlights and tans, he was as flaky as his pastry.

Alongside Mitchell was his fashion designer wife Arabella – Bella to her friends – a rather muscular woman in her late thirties who claimed to be distantly related to the Queen. Grace knew full well that her bloodline was more scarlet than blue. Bella's role as a fashion designer was a far cry from her previous incarnation as a pole-dancer well-known for her 'swinging' ways. To be fair, her intimate knowledge of

the entertainment industry did prove invaluable when her former career suddenly became the latest must-have exercise regime. Her range of risqué sportswear, popular with men as well as the women who wore it, had earned her millions, and the chance to re-invent her past on social media.

Beyond Bella was Maya Zamoro, a young starlet whose flawless Eurasian complexion and athletic curves had earned her roles in several low-budget action movies, as well as the close attention of Grace's husband at the head of the table. Opposite Maya was the founding member of *The Fargonauts*, Clem Fargo, a man who put the 'age' into aging rocker and whose guitar was plucked less often than the female fans invited to his infamous after-stage parties.

The final two guests on Grace's immediate left were Raymond Feltz, a sharp-suited hedge fund manager who gambled regularly but never with his own money, and his partner, Carla, the only guest Grace hadn't seen before this evening. Carla's Jimmy Choo heels couldn't have been any higher, synthetic boobs any perter, cleavage any deeper, or hair extensions any longer. In a way, Grace admired Carla, as she obviously knew which kit attracted which tools – in this case, one with a very deep wallet.

White burgundy flowed freely as they ate the first course – *Langoustine á la Nage*. Grace provided small-talk only when needed, which wasn't often when speaking to people more interested in themselves than others. She kept one eye on Maya, observing as the actress fawned over her husband, touching his hand and even looping a lock of his long hair round her perfectly manicured fingers. Grace knew Maya's attraction lie less in Tempest's looks, which were more ragged than rugged

these days, and more in his position as the star of a long-running medical soap on TV.

The head waiter came to take orders for the main course, showing unflinching professionalism as Raymond stabbed at the menu and bellowed, *'I'll have this hand-reared Highland steakburger mottled with gruyere, topped with wild honey and mustard piccalilli...'* Though wearing a bespoke suit and a Thomas Pink shirt, Raymond revealed his more humble roots by adding, *'...but throw in some chunky chips and don't forget the Heinz.'* He threw the menu at the waiter who caught it deftly.

When the sommelier topped up his wineglass, Raymond swigged it back and said, *'Ugh, this stuff's vile. Let's have champagne instead.'*

Maya clapped her hands and suggested they have a magnum of Krug, stating through a fit of giggles, *'It's the only type I can drink,'* but she failed to add, *'when someone else is paying.'*

Grace quietly ordered another San Pellegrino – she needed to keep a clear head for the entertainment later. She watched as her husband whispered something in Maya's ear that made her blush. Grace gripped her glass tightly and was sorely tempted to hurl it across the table. Closing her eyes, she remembered how stoic and uncomplaining Tempest's mother, Gladys, had been over the last two years. Degenerative cancer wasn't easy to watch, let alone bear. Gladys had never moaned, even at the end, and didn't comment on the fact that it was her daughter-in-law, and not her son, who did all the visiting. At least she had spent her last few weeks supported by the wonderful staff in the hospice run by a local charity.

Caviar was served 'to complement the Krug', everyone tucked in greedily except Grace, and Carla, who said it gave her indigestion. When the mains arrived, Mitchell was surprised his was the only meal covered by a silver cloche. Before he could lift it, Tempest stood up and addressed the table. *'I've set a little challenge for our celebrity chef,'* he said with a flourish of his napkin. Everyone quietened. *'Mitchell, I've taken the liberty of ordering a special sauce for your steak, and I'll wager you five hundred pounds you can't tell what the key ingredient is.'* Tempest smiled and winked at Maya. Grace frowned.

Mitchell stared at the cloche then eyed a grinning Tempest at the head of the table before exclaiming, *'You sly fox! Gloves are off, I'll take that wager.'* He uncovered his meal and sniffed for several seconds at the rich sauce artfully criss-crossing his sirloin. Finally, he gave a guttural laugh. *'Gotcha!'*

'Go on then,' said Tempest. *'What's in it?'*

Mitchell savoured the sauce, and the moment, before announcing the special ingredient to be, *'Truffles of course!'*

'Damn!' cried Tempest throwing his napkin on the floor and sitting down in defeat.

Mitchell accepted the congratulations of the other guests. Amid all the toasting, drinking and eating, Grace struggled to swallow even a mouthful of her green salad, and the fact her husband could lose money so easily on a bet, yet had refused to pay for private medical care for his mother.

Mitchell insisted Tempest pay his debt in cash the very next day.

'So long as you give my wife a receipt so she can offset it against tax,' said Tempest. He waved his champagne at Grace. *'My wife's not only my agent, she's also a trained accountant, aren't you, pet?'*

Grace nodded, gritting her teeth to stop herself shouting, *'Don't call me pet, you Neanderthal!'*

'She's a shrewd investor too, aren't you my dear?'

'I only invest in ethical companies,' said Grace quietly.

'Don't we all, love,' said Raymond. *'Someone here owns half the forests in Scotland – offsets more tax than carbon though, eh Clem?'*

'A tissue of lies,' exclaimed the rock star, *'They're owned by an offshore trust...'* He smirked before admitting, *'...in which I might be the only shareholder.'*

Raymond snorted. *'Personally, I only invest in companies that have virtual monopolies in their business.'*

Tempest leaned forward, eager for insider information. *'Such as?'*

'Large construction firms, utilities, national lotteries...even the odd small firm like that one with sole rights to manufacture London cabs.'

'That's one way to offset your taxis, I suppose.' Tempest roared at his own joke and everyone joined in except Grace, who wasn't sure if she could take much more.

'Kidding aside,' said Tempest clearing his throat noisily, *'I don't have time to do all that mundane stuff that agents and accountants do, but my wife seems to revel in it, don't you sweetie?'*

The dessert course arrived at that point, so Grace didn't have to answer.

As the champagne flowed the conversation became louder. Maya excused herself in a slurred voice at one point and headed for the private toilets that the restaurant provided as part of the 'exclusive luxury dining experience.'

A few minutes later, Tempest announced he was going to 'water the plants' and went too. Lips tightly pressed, Grace feigned interest in a photo of the limited edition Lotus Elise Clem had recently added to his supercar collection, while really she was mentally timing husband's absence. Eight minutes later, and with a smug grin on his face, Tempest returned. Impressive, thought Grace, he normally only lasted two, but then he had been drinking. It was a short while before Maya rejoined the dinner party. Her re-applied make-up couldn't hide her blushes, and the rather disappointed look she gave Grace's husband.

Eventually the time came for vintage port and Cognac. Confident the bill would be the same price as the lavish funeral Gladys had never had, Grace took several slow, deep breaths. There's no dropping out now, she thought.

Grace rose from her chair, smoothed the creases from her silk dress and waited for silence. Tellingly, it was her husband who was the last person to notice her standing and only when the conversation had stopped. Tempest scowled at his wife. *'What is it, dear?'* he snapped. *'I hope you're not going to embarrass yourself in front of our guests.'*

Grace's eyes narrowed. *'No, dear. The only embarrassment here is you.'*

For once, Tempest was lost for words. His mouth opened and closed like a fish. *'You always tell me I'm a really supportive wife...'* Grace paused while she glanced at Maya, *'...and then you go and screw every slutty co-star you've ever worked with.'*

The starlet gave a sharp gasp and shrieked, *'I resent that!'*

'Now, now,' said Tempest as he patted Maya's wrist with his left hand. His wedding band glistened in the candlelight making Maya snatch her arm away as if touched by a red hot poker.

Grace gripped the edge of the table for support. *'Tempest, you've cheated on me, and cheated your mother out of the love and care she deserved before she died.'* Her fingertips began turning white. *'It may be twelve years overdue, but consider yourself well and truly dumped!'*

There were sniggers from the male guests and a collective intake of breath from the ladies. Everyone turned to Grace's husband, their eyes gleaming with expectation as they waited to see how their soap star host would act in this unfolding drama.

Tempest focussed his gaze on his wife and gave a smile as cold as his eyes. After a pause long enough to build dramatic tension, he said *'Leave then.'* Giving a dismissive wave of his hand he added, *'I would have done the same years ago myself, only you were quite good at ironing my shirts and a lot cheaper than hiring an accountant.'* He stopped for a sip of brandy. *'Besides, I'm the one who is rich and loved by the public.'* He nearly spat his next words, *'Whereas, you'll soon be poor and nobody has ever cared about you, least of all me!'*

There was silence round the table – several people even held their breath in an effort not to be the first to break it.

Grace slowly drummed her nails on the polished dining table and smiled. *'The staff at Yarrow Road Hospice care. Especially when I, or rather you, made a rather large donation to their charity this morning in memory of the care they gave your*

mother. Quiet enough to make people strain to hear, she added, *'I'm afraid you're not as rich as you think you are. In fact, you're really quite poor.'*

Tempest lived up to his name as he slammed a palm on the table. *'Dammit, woman, you can't do that!'*

'Yes I can,' Grace said calmly. *'Much of the money was in my name anyway. You really should have read the things I made you sign, they weren't all for tax purposes.'* Her fingers drummed faster, then stopped suddenly. *'Of course you could ask for it back, but they'd be ever so upset, as would your loving public – especially after I've already given a press conference before this meal telling everyone about your kind generosity. It'll be all over the tabloids tomorrow.'*

Tempest slumped back in his chair. *'This can't be happening to me.'*

Raymond chuckled, *'Looks like she's had the monopoly on your money, mate.'*

'Oh, shut up, Raymond!' snapped Tempest.

Grace reached for the purse hanging on the back of her chair. *'I suggest you have a whip round...pet.'* She took a folded twenty pound note out of her purse and dropped it in her unused champagne glass. *'That's for my salad and water. I hope you enjoyed your caviar and Krug everybody. Have a good evening...what's left of it.'*

With poise that did full justice to her name, Grace left.

Unnoticed in the hubbub that followed, Carla smiled in admiration, raised her own champagne glass, and gave a silent toast to her erstwhile hostess.

X—X

Answers

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...bloodline was more scarlet than **blue**. **Bella's** role as a fashion designer was a far cry from her previous **incarnation** as a pole-dancer...

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