

Overtones, by Alice Gerstenberg

Harriet and Margaret have not seen each other in years, and neither of them wanted to. Harriet is jealous of Margaret for being married to the man she had wanted, and Margaret is jealous of Harriet for her money and beauty. Despite their hatred for each other, they happened to run into each other, and now Harriet is faced with the task of preparing the house for Margaret's visit. We don't know whether Harriet ended up inviting Margaret over or if Margaret invited herself, but regardless of how the visit was planned, neither of them wants to be in the other's company.

Because they are culturally refined, Harriet and Margaret don't act upon their feelings. They act courteously and loving toward each other through the entire visit, putting on their best socially acceptable airs, pretending to the world and each other that everything is fine when they both know things are not. During the entire visit, Harriet's real thoughts, represented in the character "Hetty," constantly manipulate her motives for kindness, telling her she must get Margaret's husband John to paint Harriet's portrait for a chance to be alone with him again. Margaret's real thoughts, represented in the character "Maggie," tell Margaret that she must get some of Harriet's money by getting Harriet to agree to be a subject for John to paint. Both women know the other hates her, but they continue to lie and deceive for appearances.

Sometimes, we don't always like the people we are with, and we should be kind to them in spite of how we feel. We should ask God to take away our jealousy and pride as we deal with people we aren't crazy about. However, mere dislike of someone in a casual situation was not the case of Harriet and Margaret. If they were not yet willing to put aside their past and accept what Providence had given to them, they were not yet ready to spend an afternoon with each other. There was nothing righteous to gain by the two of them feeding their lust for each other's detriment. When they had met each other by accident prior to this visit, Harriet and Margaret should have been courteous and parted ways once again, asking God to change their hearts toward one another. Honesty about one's shortcomings and humbleness before God is better than mere overtones of kindness.

Proverbs 20:17 "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel."

Pr. 10:18 "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool."

Ps. 2:2-3 "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things."