

Best Left Unsaid: intro and ch.01

by Winnie Khaw

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Charles Faulkner

- A seemingly reliable, upstanding man until one gets closer, in which case he becomes insecure and annoyed, and will edge away carefully. Has a putty personality prone to mood swings, extreme randomness, and bouts of being a bore.

Edmund Fitzgerald

- An attractively vain rake who would do someone a good turn, then turn around again to make sure he was seen from all his best angles. Has no idea that extramarital affairs can be so dull, and that marriage to Rose is after all better than the alternative.

Halle Wheldon

- An alarmingly vivacious young woman of middle-class origins who marries Charles in order to rise in society. Has a liking for Rowan which is inconvenient to everyone involved, not least of all her newly wedded husband, who happens to be in love with her.

William Asherton

- A remarkably dexterous boy who juggles tedious school, a demanding mistress, an exasperated father, and tries desperately to divide his attention in equal parts. Has a strong probability of going completely insane.

Thomas Campbell

- An unforgivably silly boy, the son of a knight, who chases after various worthy causes in hopes of becoming a respected member of society and a credit to his father. Has no hope of fulfilling either of those aspirations.

James Hamilton

- A truly outstanding but poor man who went to university with Edmund, and aspires to be a doctor. Has great love for Natalie but little chance of gaining her father's approval unless a considerable inheritance figuratively falls into his lap.

Natalie Asherton

- An admirably perceptive and level-headed woman, Halle's confidante, in all ways including romance and the ever after. Has a soft spot for her scoundrel little brother Will and a squishy one for her beloved James, but both in a pragmatic fashion.

Rowan Heathcliff:

- A distressingly stoic man, Halle's butler and secret author behind the pseudonym "A Lady of Substantial Assets" of *Saucy Wenches and Villainous Wretches* fame. Has the spectacular ability of blending into the wallpaper.

Isabel Godfrey

- An extremely frightening nymphomaniac who belongs in an insane asylum, were there any crazy enough to take her in. Has fixated on Will as her latest victim.

Rose Fairfax

- A bland, vacuous woman who miraculously in monosyllables convinces Edmund that she is the love of his life. Has nothing else to say.

Estelle Blakely

- An outrageously bohemian artist of sorts who lures Edmund into infidelity and makes him sincerely regret it. Has a penchant for the obscene and the weird.

Hero:

Heroine:

Villain:

Professor Faugg:

Professor Kinkly:

Male Observer:

Female Observer:

Chapter 1

A nurse, also known in this story as the Female Observer, tidies a room filled with toys and children's books. She gestures to an adjacent room, whispering, "... Prologue, in which a nighttime

fairytale of traumatizing substance is told to an impressionable child." the Female Observer exits, and the scene shifts to that of a father tucking his daughter into bed.

"Daddy! Tell me a story!" an imperious little voice orders, snuggling into the covers.

"Now, sweetie, Daddy already told you three stories. You should go to sleep--"

"I WANT ANOTHER STORY!" the sweetie bellows, angelic face purpling with childish rage.

The father winces. "All right, all right, dear. If you insist. Well ...

Once upon a time, it being the case that this worthy personage, being not only worth his weight in gold, but in addition was very nearly the equal of it, consequently if he should lay down, it was only with much difficulty that he could be induced to rise again. As his person was thus progressively increased, by Gods grace to enable it to encompass his generous heart, his garments became inadequate, indeed incapable, of containing even his mortal flesh, so great it was, unmoved by a single moment of labor. Nourishment for this outstanding bulk emptied food stores, laid waste entire countrysides of their livestock. Greasy blubber escaped his orifices, yea, through mouth, nose, ears, and other openings of which shall not be imparted, altogether an exploit as yet unmatched to this day. Needless to say, the Heavenly Being loved him the more, for more there lay, immobile but for the occasional unavoidable release of certain matter, to love. He then gave up the ghost, leaving the immense remains for the grieving servants who carried away cartload after cartload of parts, and some even sank beneath their grief, or the weight borne on their backs, unaccustomed to so heavily precious cargo. The state funeral was a mournful affair, called "state" because it so covered one. He left a son, of a smaller

size than he, for to match so fantastic a magnitude would cause the earth to collapse upon itself in shuddering heaves and bury all on its surface."

And then one day an old, insufferable acquaintance, maggot-white and as loathsome, who spoke often of his father's father's nephew's uncle, who in some respect had struck a bloodline directly to the cousin's pencil sharpener's aunt of Joseph, husband of the most virtuous Mary, came to visit the son. This impressive lineage entitled him to many things, namely being a pompous ass as well as a sententious monkey, his more probable parentage. Some generations before, a forbear had asked, trembling in trepidation, a physician, "Shall I live?" to which the man answered, "You shall sin again." And that very day, the forbear rose from his bed to resume his normal habits of evil, in longer description, pinching the bottoms of young girls and breaking wind in accompaniment to the heroine's cries of death at operas. Therefore, perhaps even the physician did not know the extent of his grandfather's wickedness, for he would live to sire the venerable mass mentioned above, who would in turn be responsible for the son's creation, thereby deserving of hell and all its misery for that unforgivable blunder. Said he, modestly, "I shall demand of my children only mediocrity." And politely the son of the sadly late respectable figure, replied, "With such a sire, 'twill come but too easily." At which the acquaintance responded, "Have done with this verbal dysentery!" though much of the spoken diarrhea had poured from his own mouth.

And finally, the son met with the devil, though he had hoped to live for, let us say humbly, the rest of eternity. And, oh horror!, the Prince of Darkness came

... with an accent. The son said, unrepentant of past sins, "I always knew you would be English." The Tempter immediately became French. "Evil is not always clothed in scales and horns," the son frowns, "but it does wear a most unfashionable hat. To continue,

what do I offer as collateral? My soul? Or is that too heavily mortgaged already?" The devil named his terms, congratulating him on the execution of incredible iniquity during the short term of his existence. "I have more ambition than to be Caretaker of the Evil Napkin!" the son shouted in outrage. And thereupon he was taken to hell, the punishment for his tremendously malevolent exploits being-the meeting of his mother. The woman had expanded during pregnancy to nearly match her mate, after which she deflated and proceeded to die. During the wedding night she had wondered on the strange shifting and eruptions of the pillows and blankets beneath her, and the absence of her husband from the ceremony as well, observing only a massive pillar of bumps and protrusions securely fixed the ground beside her. The son screamed for mercy and begged for succor, yet none came, for he was in hell while the fortunate father and husband filled the heavens, literally, with his presence."

The child stares, petrified, at her loving father, who smiles back and pats her good night.

Chapter 1

A church goer, also known in this story as the Male Observer, settles in one of the pews in a position from which he can view our sizable cast, a microcosm of popular society. As the man at the pulpit pontificates majestically, the Male Observer whispers to the reader, "In which everyone, including bald chimpanzees but excluding hairy atheists, attends prayer services, squirming uncomfortably, snoring loudly, staring blankly, or sitting in the serenity of the righteous ..." He then returns his attention to the sermon.

The Preacher of Great Doom booms, "God hates the lewd, the promiscuous! He has decreed, 'Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.'"

Thomas shifts uneasily in his seat, certain that the man is speaking directly to him. William stiffens, and not in the way he would like. Charles stares vacantly past the minister to a spot on the wall as bald as the man's head. Edmund openly snores, the pages of his hymn book fluttering up with each breath like a girl's skirts twirling shockingly in the wind.

William hisses to Thomas, "Tom, is the man an obscurantist? What's he saying?" Rose, sitting nearby, smiles vacuously and asks, "What's an obscurantist?"

Charles blinks, momentarily roused from his meditations by a particularly noisy sleepy snort from Edmund. "I don't understand church politics," he says in a non sequitur. "First of all, what has the church to do with politics?"

James tries to hush him, but failing, sighs, "What are you talking about now? What does that have to do with anything? Have some respect, for God's sake."

Charles huffs indignantly, "On the contrary, I piously respect the Popes, even Alexander Pope and his holy paen *The Rape of the Locke*. Did you know, several of his institutions are modeled after classical temples to the pagan gods, and one is now renamed from Mars to San Giovanni's Church? One pontificate even approved the turning of dice into beads for telling paternosters when, surprisingly, a momentary lapse in gambling occurred. Always he's certain to be frocked in dazzling munificence whatever the state of his deficient finances, and sure to have court painters decorate his toilet stools in naked frolicking nymphs."

"Naked frolicking nymphs?" James repeats in disbelief at this rambling rant, then reminds Charles testily, "O aspiring satirist, the humiliation of Voltaire, 'Beware the littleness of your faith.'"

Charles wags a reproofing finger at him. "The total absence of inhibition is characteristic of persons ruling, along with reckless extravagance and careless bankruptcies. And woe the sons of perdition who perceive these habits as less than virtuous! The Pope's a person with good business sense and amiable principles, a man of genius for mismanagement."

The Preacher of Lesser Doom intones more gently than his colleague, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God ..."

James gives up on Charles. "I can't argue with you when you're in this mood." He adds in annoyance but with some sarcastic humor, "You've certainly slipped from your foothold in Heaven. That's the Roman Catholic Church you're kvetching of. You'll be excommunicated."

"I can't in good conscience support an institution whose supposed believers sell the Archangel Gabriel's feathers. Even if he did have giant feathery wings, what are they still doing floating around here? The truth might prove acutely embarrassing, not mention inconvenient, to those involved."

The Preacher of Great Doom thunders, "--and finally, hell awaits those who sin and do not repent, who continue in debauchery without seeking redemption."

Thomas fumes in a loud whisper, "... therefore, though I steamed in hysterical rage, at four in the morning I calmly wrote off a note of handsome properties to him, imploring a duel to save both our honors."

William blinks. "And all this ... over a mistake in the post?"

"It was no laughing matter!" Thomas clenches his fists at the memory. "He deliberately and callously sought out my letter--"

"I hardly think--"

--and with savage intent read aloud the contents, to my mortification and the glee of the assemblage." Thomas' eyes burn red from fury, giving him all the frightening appearance of an enraged fluffy bunny.

"You were at a farm." William tries to interject a voice of reason. "Who heard the message besides cows, horses and pigs?"

"What? He wasn't at Parliament, Will. Besides, you don't understand. To hear my words of loving adoration--sullied by his uncouth tongue--is intolerable! It is unbearable! It is my destiny to root out these barbarous fiends!"

"Tom, think about this. The man's a farmer; in the event that he does agree to your ... proposal, he'll come armed with a pitchfork against your pistol. How would that assuage your wounded self-regard? And what happened to 'succor the agrarian class'?" Absently William wondered what would happen if he only encouraged the general insanity of the situation. The farmer's pitchfork against Thomas's pistol! Ha! No contest there.

The farmer would win.

"This is personal business," Thomas huffs. "Besides," he smiles happily, distracted by his new interest, "I've moved on to women's rights."

In the adjacent pew, Halle leans over to Natalie without averting her gaze and whispers through a smile aimed at the Preacher of

Great Doom, "Why is he staring at me?" Natalie looks at the man in question, then back at Halle. "He's not, dear."

"He is!" Halle hisses frantically. "He's making direct eye contact."

"The man's cross-eyed, Halle. You're imagining things." Halle puzzles over this for a moment, then decides to the contrary and shakes her head stubbornly.

Natalie teases her, "You haven't done anything wrong, I hope? Are you feeling guilty?" As Halle suddenly finds a King James Bible intensely interesting, her eyes widen. "You haven't, have you?" she blurts in a louder voice than intended.

"Shhhh!!" numerous voices immediately hush her.

"Well, I might ... perhaps ..." Halle fiddles with an invisible loose thread on her dress. "That is ... I'm noticing things about a certain person ..."

William pauses from what seems to be an exasperated argument with Thomas and helpfully interjects, "Sounds like puberty, Halle. Has it hit you yet? Slapped me pretty hard." He beams at the cherished memory.

"Brother dear?" Natalie asks sweetly.

"Yes, Nattie?"

"Go back to discussing with Thomas the whys and wherefores of centipede propagation."

"There's nothing to talk about," William sulks. "What kind of pathetic sex life is leaving spores lying around for the female to pick up?"

"Will--"

William wisely takes the hint and returns to the suggested topic.

