

Bidding was slow at first. There were quite a few things that Daphne thought might have tempted Jasmine under normal circumstances, but she kept quiet, her mouth and plump chins set in as much resolution as the wobbly flesh would permit; several lots went for prices that must have disappointed their erstwhile owners.

If only Jasmine hadn't set her heart on the teapot, Daphne thought, she might just manage to get it quite cheaply. And perhaps she would have a chance to talk to Mr. Robinson about it when the auction was over.

After about twenty minutes Mr. Robinson started on lot 21 – the teapot. Daphne opened the bidding with a cautious three pounds, but Jasmine immediately raised her to ten. Jasmine had never been wise with money – and yet she didn't have much of it! Daphne sighed and bid fifteen pounds, only to see Jasmine raise her hand and bid twenty-five. The bidding followed briskly in five pound steps to fifty pounds, when Jasmine at last faltered. This was the limit Daphne had privately allowed herself.

'Going to the distinguished-looking lady in the blue coat,' Mr. Robinson said, giving Daphne a warm look. Daphne smiled. She felt caressed.

'Against you, Madam,' he added, glancing at Jasmine. But Jasmine shot daggers at Daphne, and snapped 'seventy!'

Seventy pounds! It was ridiculous, but Jasmine's eyes were burning, and she had plainly forgotten everything except the need to score points off her old rival.