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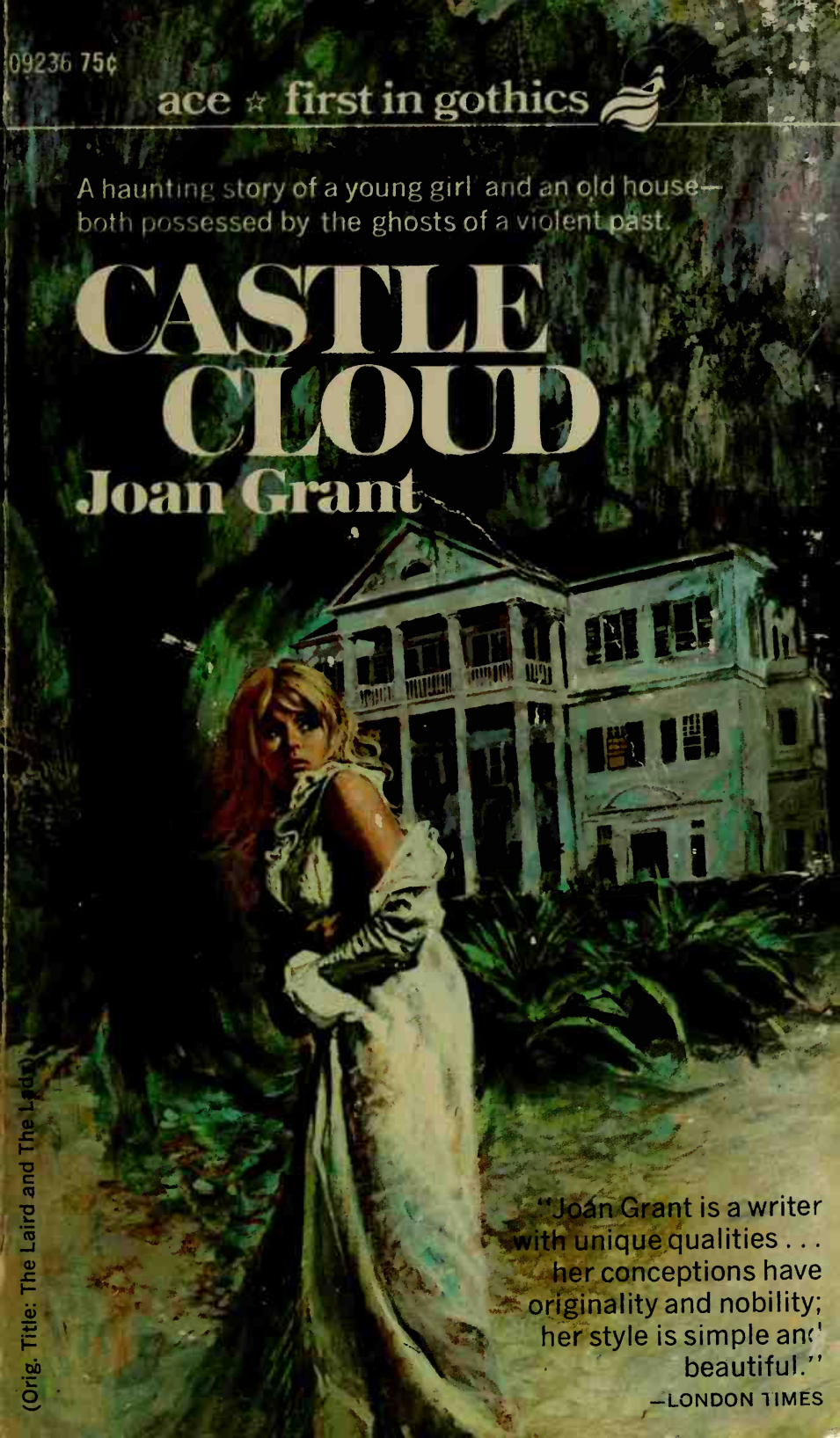

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For
Lucy Alice Beatty

CASTLE CLOUD

(Orig. Title: *The Laird and The Lady)*

JOAN GRANT

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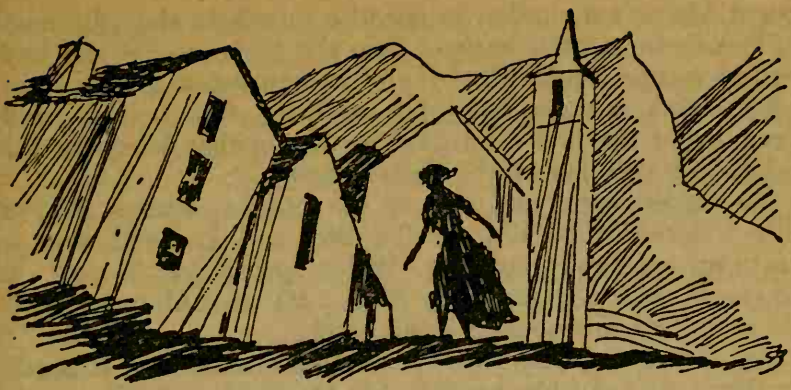

PART ONE

I THE LADY

MARYLDA WOKE RELUCTANTLY, and did not open her eyes, for she was trying to recapture a confused but happy dream in which she had not been lonely. In a moment or two she would have to ring for coffee, then pack her overnight bag, pay the bill and drive on alone to Paris. She was still as much alone as she had been at the end of the war; more alone, for then she had believed that by hiding her real identity she could find friends instead of the acquaintances of an heiress. What had nearly two years of hard work brought her? Nothing except an increasing sense of futility: in future she would sign checks and leave more efficient people to do the actual work of trying to help the starving children of Europe. Now she was on her way back to America, to become the rich Miss Blenkinsop again. Only Grummie, her oldest trustee, would be really glad to see her, and even he would be relieved that her experiment had failed.

How long would it take her to reach Paris? She tried to remember the name of the place where she was spending the night. She had decided to drive until she was really tired, for then it would be easier to sleep. Her head ached. Surely she wasn't going to be ill again? Not that she had been really ill, but a bad bout of 'flu in Germany had made her

accept Maizie's invitation to spend a month in the villa near Antibes, before going back to face the social racket she had tried to escape. Maizie had found it amusing to pass off her rich relation as some one who needed a free holiday, and pretend that she had even paid for the clothes Marylda was taking back with her on the *Queen Mary*.

She turned over, and one of the pillows, square pillows with goffered frills, slid off the bed and knocked over a carafe on the table beside it. Water spread into a pool on the carpet. Marylda stared at it. . . . It's an Aubusson. How odd to find a real Aubusson in an hotel.

She sat up and her head ached so much that it made her dizzy. She put her hand to her forehead and felt a wide strip of sticking-plaster. How had she hurt her head? The cuff of the long-sleeved nightgown fell back from her wrist. How did she come to be wearing this extraordinary garment? How did she get here? This mature and beautiful room couldn't belong to an hotel. . . .

She lay back, trying to marshal her thoughts into orderly sequences. Bourgoin . . . you had dinner in Bourgoin; soup, and cold chicken, there was no point in ordering anything interesting when you were eating alone. You intended to stay at Autun, but this certainly isn't the Hotel St. Louis. It was raining before you reached Mâcon and the windshield wiper wasn't working properly.

Her efforts to remember were interrupted by a tap on the door which opened before she could answer. A maid, her hair white as her lace-edged apron, her eyes black as her neat alpaca dress, brought in a breakfast tray.

"Madame is feeling better after her sleep?" she inquired.

"Yes, thank you," said Marylda, trying hard to remember how she came to be receiving this hospitality. She was relieved to find that she had not also forgotten her French.

The maid drew back the curtains and opened the shutters of one of the three tall windows. "Madame perhaps finds the light too strong? When the head has been hurt it is not wise to strain the eyes." She smiled. "But I can assure Madame there will be no scar; I have had experience in these matters otherwise I should have insisted on summoning the doctor last night in spite of Madame's protests."

She arranged the curtains to her satisfaction, drew forward a screen so that there should be no suspicion of draft from the window she permitted to remain open. Then from a dressing-room, which led from the right side of the room, she brought a brush and comb, hand-mirror and powder

bowl and put them on the bedside table. They were of gold with an elaborate coat of arms, and Marylda wondered how she could discover most tactfully the name of her hostess. Judging from the nightdress she must be old, and the coronet belonged to a marquise.

"Madame la Marquise is very kind to take in a stranger. Will you please convey to her my profound thanks until I can give them in person?"

"Did I forget to tell you last night that Madame was away in Morocco? When she comes home she will say, 'Honorine, I trust you gave every hospitality to our English guest.' She would be most distressed if you did not tell us everything you want. Madame is very fond of the English."

Marylda was about to say she was American, but decided it would be wiser to reserve explanations until she remembered more. She lay back and watched her set a coffee-jug, a plate of rolls and a porcelain basket of strawberries on a table by the fireplace. Why not beside the bed? However she had already been so attentive that it would be churlish to ask for more . . . perhaps it was the custom of the house not to breakfast in bed. A pair of walnut *armoires* seemed oddly familiar until she realized she had seen their equal in the Louvre. The maid opened one of them and took out a rose-colored velvet bed jacket which she draped around Marylda's shoulders.

She stood back to regard the effect. "Madame is looking beautiful . . . a little pale, but that is only to be expected, and it is most becoming to one who has dark hair and so white a skin. I will tell Monsieur that in a moment you will be ready to receive him."

She left the room before Marylda could think of a question that might give her a clue as to who "Monsieur" might be. Was he her host? Undoubtedly, for who else but some one who obeyed a set of conventions no longer in ordinary use would breakfast with an uninvited though somewhat battered guest? The old *noblesse* probably clung to the tradition of social breakfasts, in memory of the spacious days when the King and Queen summoned their courtiers to attend their toilet. What would the marquis be like? Would a footman in livery attend to pour the coffee; or was it in fact chocolate, a more traditional beverage? Anyway this was an adventure, and even breakfast with a bearded ancient was far more romantic than *petit déjeuner* alone in an hotel. How Grummie would have enjoyed finding himself in a museum and being the guest, even if uninvited, of one of the relicts of a dying

civilization! How fortunate that he had taught her about antique furniture: she would have a basis for conversation, a chance to prove that some Americans had a knowledge of European culture for which they were seldom given credit.

"Marylda," she said severely, "you are enjoying yourself for the first time in years. You are suffering from amnesia. You have got yourself into a highly equivocal situation such as Mr. Grummit predicted with all the pompous gloom of the traditional trustee. You are about to encounter a complete stranger—if he is *not* a complete stranger the situation may be even more delicate! But instead of feeling the trepidation suitable to a virgin of twenty-three in a foreign land, you have no regrets except that a lipstick is not available. I wish you knew whether 'a moment' really means an hour. Am I expected to let the coffee grow cold, or is it presumed I breakfast before receiving visitors?"

There was a knock on a door which until then she had not noticed, for it betrayed its presence only by narrow cracks which imperceptibly broke the pattern of poised shepherdess and ambitious shepherd that composed the wallpaper.

She demanded a last hurried reassurance from the hand-mirror and slid it under her pillow. "*Entrez!*" she called—after all it was possible, though unlikely, that her host could speak no English.

The door opened. A very tall young man, wearing a magnificent brocade dressing-gown, hesitated on the threshhold.

"I apologize for butting in like this," he said, "but they think you're my wife."

II THE LAIRD

THE YOUNG MAN went across to the table and began to pour out the coffee. "Two lumps?" he asked, as though nothing could be more usual than breakfasting with a complete stranger who was presumed to be one's wife.

"Two lumps," said Marylda, "and black, unless it's real milk without skin or there's a strainer."

He inspected the contents of the silver jug. "Real milk, I think, but no strainer. It may be wiser not to risk it if you mind skin as much as I do." He smiled. "It is fortunate we already find a taste in common."

He spread butter on a roll. "Jam? There is no marmalade I'm afraid."

"Jam, but only half a roll. I'm not hungry this morning."

He brought it to her and put the cup on the bedside table. "Head aching?" he inquired.

"Only if I move it suddenly. I feel as though some one has been trying to screw it off my neck, but no doubt it will recover by the time I've had a bath."

"No bath, they haven't been able to light the boiler for years—fuel shortage."

"Of course," said Marylda, "how stupid of me to forget. Did you shave in cold water?"

"They brought me a copper can, and lent me this dressing-gown."

"Pardon me if I display undue curiosity, but who are you and how did we get here?"

"I'm Rowan Cairdrie. Don't you remember?" He sounded startled. "You seemed quite coherent, after you came around. I found it most reassuring. When I carried you up the hill I thought you were going to die on me."

"That would have been a definite breach of manners! You carried me up the hill? Would it be too much to ask what hill, and why I had to be carried?"

"Well, you couldn't walk, and there was no one about, and it was raining hard. It seemed proper to take you towards the only light I could see. You'd had a crack on the head. Damn it, I'd walked five miles and the only car I saw nearly ran over me when I tried to stop it."

"How odd," said Marylda, "perhaps the driver was drunk."

"No, you weren't drunk," he said consolingly. "You tried to draw up too fast and skidded into a stone wall."

"How reassuring," said Marylda a little coldly. "I hope I did you no damage?"

"Not a bit, for when I saw you charging at me I did a neat vault over the wall into a nettle-bed—never moved quicker since I dodged a mortar bomb near Caen. I'm afraid your car's rather bent," he added, "and the wall's not so good either."

"This gets interesting," said Marylda. "I appear to have lost a car and gained a husband."

"You must be concussed." He looked at her with some anxiety. "But you can remember all the *essentials*, can't you?"

Marylda wondered what he meant and decided to explore this unknown ground with caution.

"Not *all* of them," she said with carefully feigned frankness. "For instance, I forget why you were walking through the rain in a rather remote part of France."

"When my car packed up I shoved it into a field and set off to look for a garage or somewhere to sleep. I saw your headlights and waved to you to stop. When I climbed back over the wall you were out cold and there was blood all over your face. I couldn't investigate much for I hadn't a torch."

"It must have been annoying," she said, "to be landed with a female juggernaut in unknown territory—or is the territory in fact familiar?"

"Couldn't know less about it. I've been staying near Valence with a cousin. We drove down together, but he met some people and decided to join up with them, and I wanted to get back to Scotland."

"So you are Scotch? You don't talk with an accent."

He looked a little embarrassed. "One doesn't—at least not if one goes to school in England. I was at Winchester."

"I have heard there is a cathedral there."

He laughed politely as though she had made a joke.

"You see I'm an American and ignorant of England," she explained.

He appeared to find this disconcerting. "But you have practically no accent. I mean no one would know you were American . . ."

"Several of us don't talk out of the side of our mouths or chew cigar-butts. You mustn't judge us by the cinema."

"I don't," he said hastily. "I hardly ever go. It's not worth driving to Inverness just to waste a couple of hours cooped up in a stuffy theater."

"Do you know many Americans?"

"None!" he said vehemently. "I mean, that sounds awfully rude, but . . ."

"We are not all barbarians," she said kindly. "There are some who have ceased to defend stockades against Red Indians, others who have not even a nodding acquaintance with gangsters."

He blushed, and in silence helped himself to strawberries.

"The French," she remarked brightly, "are so delightfully hospitable. Most people would have done no more than telephone for a doctor or direct us to the nearest hospital."

"There isn't a telephone."

"Then they could have sent some one with a message."

"You kept on saying you didn't want a doctor. And there wasn't really any one to send. There's no one here except the butler and his wife Honorine, who brought our breakfast."

"But who owns all this?"

"Madame la Marquise—I didn't discover her name. Apparently she is visiting her daughter in Morocco."

"I hope she doesn't come back and object to us occupying her room—it might be a little awkward to explain. Or do you think she would have been equally undismayed when you walked in carrying my wet, and I gather somewhat bloody, self? There are gaps in my memory of our arrival. What happened after you started carrying me towards the lights?"

"I crossed a field studded with stones over which I frequently stumbled, and reached a lane. It is excessively steep so I presume there must be an alternative route to the castle. It is a castle rather than a château; the outer walls must be fifty feet high between the round towers. Fortunately the gates were open, for I was in no mood for burglary and they look strong enough to require dynamite." He grinned. "I had no dynamite."

"An oversight which might occur to any one," said Marylda graciously. "I have neither an ice-axe nor an elephant gun—one cannot make provision for everything. But don't let me interrupt."

"We entered the outer courtyard, which I mistakenly expected to be paved or grassed. Apparently it is a formal garden, for I tripped over low hedges which surround rose beds of a particularly thorny variety."

"You should have kept to the path," said Marylda. "It was too late at night to attempt a maze."

"How right! I admit to being a trifle hurried. The hound bayed with a certain intensity which suggested that an early arrival at the house would be expedient."

"What kind of hound? Fox, blood or wolf?"

"I think its ancestors must have had very catholic tastes: size rather than quality was their slogan and in the fitful moonlight it appeared not much smaller than a donkey." He got up to make her a formal bow. "I may claim sufficient discernment not to have considered throwing you as a sop to Cerberus."

"The salvaged collop is more than grateful! Did you kill the poor dog?"

"Fortunately no hostile gesture was required. As it was obviously impractical to outdistance him, I made suitable noises, hoping that he would successfully translate them into the local idiom. To my intense relief he proceeded to display a slobbering geniality. This sagacious if inadequate watchdog then led us to the front door, which opens on an inner-courtyard, and barked until I heard the bolts being drawn."

"An embarrassing moment."

"It was! I stood there trying to think of a suitable opening sentence but as usual in a crisis my French deserted me. You remained unconscious, blood trickled from your scalp on to the steps, the dog sat beside us like a good gun-dog waiting to retrieve."

"The door opened, and . . ." prompted Marylda.

"Disclosed an ancient retainer wearing corduroy trousers and a coat of livery, red with silver buttons and braid. No doubt he had dressed somewhat hurriedly. In his right hand he held a revolver, in the other a candle—to be exact two candles in a silver stick."

"Prepared for the reception of either guests or burglars, the costume *en tout cas,* like the parasols which can serve as umbrellas in a sudden shower. I trust he realized the revolver was redundant?"

"When he saw the dog was acting as our guide he hastily thrust his weapon into a pocket of his tailcoat and ushered us into the hall. He gave some order to the dog which caused it to lope off down a cavernous passage, and then insisted on taking your feet while I kept a firm hold of your shoulders. An unsatisfactory method, for you sagged like a hummock, until we laid you out on a couch."

"I was still unconscious?"

"Out like a light, but your pulse wasn't bad."

"One is reassured; but the state is not becoming."

"You didn't snore—only breathed heavily. The retainer brought brandy, but I didn't give you any—it's not wise when one's been knocked out."

"I hope you had some yourself," she said hospitably.

"I did—about half a pint, which I think slightly shocked the old boy. You're not really heavy, but the hill is exceedingly steep."

"What then?"

"I tried to make him understand that there had been an accident and you required a doctor, but either he's stone deaf, or gaga, or both; for all he did was to say that everything here belonged to the English and that we were quite safe and would be hidden until we passed on to the next station."

"Underground—this must be one of the 'safe houses' where the English, *and* the Americans, were hidden during the war."

"Correct: I found that out from Honorine. Apparently her husband, whose name is Torbayon, is a bit hazy about time and apt to think the war's still on. She had nursed several of

our people who had been shot up or made a bad landing, and she insisted that you were not seriously hurt and would be all right in a few days. You came around then, while she was washing your face . . . so you know the rest."

It was obviously no use to hedge. "Candidly I don't remember anying until Honorine brought in the breakfast."

"You don't remember *anything?*"

"No, does it matter?"

"Well, it's a bit awkward." He paused and then said reassuringly, "Of course it doesn't matter, don't give it another thought," and before she could ask any questions, he added, "I'll go and get dressed, if Torbayon has brought my clothes back; he lent me this dressing-gown while they were being dried."

Marylda was not pleased at being left so abruptly, and decided that it would be as well if this extraordinarily attractive young man could be made to lose some of the self-possession that she found impossible to share.

III NO EXCITEMENTS

THERE WERE STILL five cigarettes in Rowan's case, but instead of going back to offer one to Marylda he decided that first he required time to think how much she need be told. He did not want to cause her unnecessary embarrassment, but if he lied it would be awkward if she suddenly regained her memory. Damn it, what else could he have done? She had seemed quite coherent. She had not even winced when Honorine insisted on dabbing iodine on the cut and pulling the edges together with sticking-plaster. Torbayon had brought a bowl of broth and then gone upstairs with his wife to light a fire and make up the beds.

Marylda had drunk most of the soup and kept on assuring him that she was perfectly all right and did not need a doctor. She had tried to walk upstairs and then had to admit she was too shaky, so he had carried her: when he told her to put her arms around his neck, so that he wouldn't jolt her, she had seemed to think it perfectly natural. Honorine had put hot-water bottles in the bed and laid out a nightdress, a voluminous garment with tucks and lace and little buttons at the neck and wrists. Of course he thought she would stay to look after Marylda. He had been an ass not to explain that the accident included meeting Marylda for the first time, but

he had been too concerned about her to embark on explanations, especially in French.

How could he have expected Honorine to say, "It is better when one is a little confused to be alone with some one familiar. Monsieur's room is next door. I will leave Madame now, for she will be safe in the care of her husband," and to leave the room before he had time to protest?

Marylda had started to apologize for being a nuisance. He ought to have realized that being repetitive was a symptom of concussion. But he had to make sure she took off her wet clothes, for her teeth had begun to chatter with cold. He tried to make her promise that she would undress and get into bed the moment he left the room. Perhaps he sounded impatient instead of desperately worried about her, for when she bent forward to unlace her shoes she said like a child, "My head hurts, and I'm so cold I can't think properly . . . oh please forgive me for being such a nuisance . . . please don't be cross."

So what else could he do but take off her clothes and wrap her in a blanket and sit with her on his lap by the fire? She hadn't seemed to mind anything except that she cried, so he had told her an entirely imaginary story about how he had been bomb-happy in Italy and wept on the shoulder of his sergeant-major.

She had said, "You have a very comforting shoulder," and so he had told her not to waste it. Then she had cried a little more and laughed at the same time, but this was only because she was beginning to relax, not through hysteria . . . or if there was a shade of hysteria it was only a very natural reaction.

He didn't know much about her, except it was obvious she had been terribly lonely, because she had said, "I haven't cried on any one since I was seven, I'm twenty-three now so that makes sixteen years of not letting any one know what I really feel."

So he had kissed her, for why let her go on being lonely a moment longer than was necessary? She had fallen asleep suddenly, like a small child or a puppy. It had been rather difficult putting a nightgown on without waking her; he had had to leave some of the buttons undone. She woke only when he tucked the bedclothes around her. Surely she must remember kissing him good night?

While he dressed he considered a plan of action. Unfortunate, very, that Marylda wasn't Scottish, for Georgina was ridiculously prejudiced against Americans. But he was tired

of being the docile grandson of Georgina, so she would have to stop disapproving of Americans. How could Marylda help being born in the same country that had bred his grandfather's first wife, the heiress who had brought disaster to Cloud and of whom Georgina had always been jealous?

Georgina would also be difficult because of Janet, the cousin he had been expected to marry . . . a good sort Janet, but not at all the kind of woman he had secretly hoped to find. Well now he had found her, and proved that the tradition of love at first sight could be maintained by a hard-headed Scot!

Come to that, he was practically married already; for under the old Scottish law it was sufficient for a man and woman to declare before two witnesses that they were man and wife. Was Marylda already married? Georgina would be even more annoyed if there had to be a divorce.

It was typical of Sir Rowan Cairdrie, fourteenth baronet and twenty-third laird of a small but belligerent clan, that it never occurred to him after finding his lady that she might object to being carried off to Castle Cloud.

People who tried to come between them would require sympathy; if they were masculine they might also require hospitalization. He almost hoped that Marylda had a husband who must be vanquished or at least a couple of suitably disagreeable brothers. There are few aspects of chivalry which the true Highlander does not cherish in his heart.

He wondered if Marylda liked fishing? If not, he would teach her, and the first salmon she caught would be stuffed and hung in the gun-room at Cloud. A tap on the door broke the thread of this pleasant anticipation. Honorine entered and announced, "Doctor Chavaigne is with Madame. I sent a message to him by the postman."

Rowan abruptly returned to immediate realities, and silently cursed himself for not having foreseen this complication. He had forgotten that Marylda had amnesia. Was it possible that she might also have forgotten that they were in love with each other? Perhaps she had told the doctor they had met only last night. He might insist on her going to the hospital. Relations might appear and try to take charge of her, try to keep them apart. . . .

"Monsieur must not alarm himself," said Honorine kindly. "Monsieur le Docteur will, I feel sure, tell him that in a few days Madame will be herself again."

She opened the communicating door, and Rowan saw a small man with a gray, pointed beard standing beside Ma-

rylda, who was rendered speechless by a thermometer. The doctor looked up and gave a formal bow.

"How do you do?" said Rowan, trying to get some clue from Marylda's expression as to his role. Could he ask her or did the doctor speak English?

The doctor removed the thermometer and gave a little cluck of satisfaction. "There is no fever," he said happily. "In these cases the fever is an indication that all is not as it should be."

Damn, thought Rowan, he does speak English. Now what do I say? He gestured to Marylda behind the doctor's back, trying to tell her to take the initiative.

She lay back on the pillows, a smile lurking at the corners of her mouth.

"How is her pulse?" said Rowan, playing for time.

"Pulse?"

Rowan thumped his chest and then pointed to his wrist. "Pulse," he said more loudly as though emphasis would make his meaning clear.

"Ah, that too is good." The doctor beamed: it was seldom he had so pleasant a duty as to reassure such a handsome and no doubt gallant young man.

"Her head?" Rowan pointed to his own to remove any doubt. "Her head is good too?" adding to himself, "Stop speaking pidgin English, you fool!"

"We must be careful for the head. Two, three days of complete quiet—with such injuries there can be complications. Yes, complications," he repeated. "They must be watched or bad headaches, and worse things, may follow."

"It would be unwise to move her?" said Rowan hopefully.

"It would be a folly! Madame la Marquise would be desolated if you were to go away before I give permission." He chuckled. "Madame la Marquise and I always consulted before one of her unexpected guests could leave the Château in safety. Her hospitality to the English does not cease with the war. They did so much to give back France to us, are not our houses always open to them?"

"It's very good of you," said Rowan formally. "I am sure we appreciate it most sincerely." He sounded so much like the captain of a cricket side receiving a cup that he lapsed into silence. He decided Marylda was laughing at him. Why didn't she give him a lead? She hadn't, so he would take the initiative and leave the explanations to her if he made things difficult.

"My wife," he said, "is sometimes disobedient. You must

tell me what she may do, or else I shall not be sure she is carrying out your instructions."

"With our wives we must be firm—they are so charming and at times so careless of their health!" exclaimed the little man.

If Rowan thought he had scored, Marylda was not going to let him know she agreed.

"But Monsieur, you must impress on my husband that I may not be bullied. He is at times a little impatient. I know it is only a way of hiding his anxiety for me, but . . ." She gave a delicate shrug suggesting burdens endured without complaint.

The doctor bristled. "But Monsieur, I insist that Madame is treated with the utmost consideration. She must be indulged in every way, her slightest wish must be your law."

"You are so kind," murmured Marylda. "I know he will listen to you—I shall thank you properly when I am less fatigued."

The doctor drew the curtains across the window. "It is well that you should try to sleep now. If the head pains, you will take the little sedative I have left for you." He turned to Rowan. "Perhaps Monsieur will come down to the car with me?"

The butler was waiting for them in the hall, holding a silver tray on which were a decanter and two glasses.

"Torbayon never forgets," said the doctor contentedly. "A glass of Beaujolais is excellent for the constitution." He prodded Rowan with a brisk finger. "One understands that you and your most charming wife have had a little disagreement. Even at seventy one remembers what it is to be newly married, but for a few days there must be no excitement! No quarrels, and above all no reconciliations. I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," said Rowan, cursing the embarrassment which he was unable to conceal.

"An admirable wine; a little young, but one must not complain in these days," said the doctor, convinced that he had done his duty.

With quick, short steps which made him look as though he had springs concealed in the heels of his old but still dapper cloth-topped boots, he went down the wide steps. Rowan followed him across the inner courtyard, through the formal garden where a broken rose bush marked his earlier progress, to the ancient Peugeot outside the great gate.

The doctor started the engine and leaned out to deliver his final instructions. "I shall visit Madame before the end of the week. But meanwhile, no excitements!"

IV TEAM WORK

ROWAN WATCHED the car rattle down the avenue of giant plane trees. He turned back to see Honorine picking herbs in a narrow garden adjoining the massive gate house. "To flavor soup for Madame," she said. "For lunch she shall also have an omelette. Madame is sleeping now?"

"Madame is sleeping and must not be disturbed. When she wakes, please tell her that I have gone for a walk and shall not be back until after lunch."

Honorine looked surprised. Certainly the English were at times difficult to understand. Why go for a walk when natural anxiety should keep him at his wife's bedside?

"Madame will be well looked after by me, you may rest assured," she said with thinly disguised reproof.

Madame needs a thorough spanking, thought Rowan, but it must wait, for there was just a chance that the ridiculous little doctor knew his job.

He looked so depressed that Honorine relented. "There is a garage in the village," she said. "No doubt it may be necessary to arrange repairs to the car. The postman says it appears to be enormously damaged. But the luggage is safe; it has been brought up to the house. If Monsieur gives me the keys I will unpack."

Mayrlda's luggage. How could he explain why there were none of his things in the car? He pretended to search his pockets. "The keys must have lost themselves last night. I will look for them. . . . I shall go to the village, to the garage."

He set off briskly before she had time to make any other awkward suggestions. Now what should he do? Marylda's car could be towed to the garage, but how to prevent any one knowing that there were two cars? If only he had thought of it sooner they could have made up a story that they were driving the second car for a friend. Marylda's name would be on her car papers. Could he pretend they had married in France and forgotten to alter the documents? Or was it illegal to use your maiden name? After a smash would they—"they" being a faceless battery of bureaucrats—insist on examining passports?

Anyway, he must try to keep the two cars separate. It would mean taking Marylda's to the local garage and getting his to a town in the opposite direction.

A boy of about fourteen sat on the damaged wall regarding the Citröen with interest. "The car has injured herself," he remarked politely.

"Evidently." Rowan was in no mood for idle pleasantries.

"It should go to the garage," said the boy, as one stating a rare and unlikely truth.

"You would no doubt like to push it there!" said Rowan.

"The car is too heavy. The lorry which picks up cars is broken. Mimi and Auguste are required.

"Mimi and Auguste?"

"The oxen of the Château. I, Pierre, have informed them that they are to be docile."

Rowan's view of his companion underwent a rapid change. Here was no idle spectator intent on making idiotic suggestions, but a potential ally, rich in local knowledge.

"The garage is far, many kilometers?"

"Three kilometers," said Pierre, "unless the day is very hot, and then it appears farther. It is also sometimes a greater distance in very cold weather." He looked up at the clear sky. "But today it will be three kilometers exactly."

"Three is agreeable to Mimi and Auguste? We may borrow them without permission?"

"But certainly," said Pierre. "My grandmother says that you are the guests of the Château. My grandmother lives at the farm and does the laundry, unless her rheumatism is very bad."

"We will collect the oxen," Rowan said, now restored to good humor. "Ropes will also be of use."

"A chain will be better," said Pierre. "I have already borrowed one from the blacksmith."

Only some one who has tried to attach a car to a pair of uncooperative oxen can fully understand the niceties of the problem. Fortunately the steering was not entirely inert or there could have been no fruitful outcome of the expedition. But it was past noon when they reached the village, and Rowan saw the harbor beacon of a rusty petrol pump. The garage was closed, and no one came when he banged on the locked doors.

"But, Monsieur, it is after twelve," said Pierre, for the first time displaying surprise at his companion's behavior. "Naturally there will be no one here until two o'clock," adding hopefully, "every one is at *déjeuner* between twelve and two."

Rowan was not slow to take the hint: he too was hungry, and had acquired a thirst it would be ascetic to ignore.

"We will lunch together," he said. "An expedition such as we are achieving requires proper attention to the welfare of its soldiers. Napoleon rightly insisted that an army marches on its stomach."

"Napoleon was a great man," agreed Pierre. He scrabbled the dust with a bare toe, searching for words which would be suitable to a comrade in arms and yet not appear acquisitive. "We could drink beer at the Cheval Blanc, and they will sell us soup and bread. It is usual to bring something to eat with the bread, such as a piece of sausage. I was foolish not to ask my grandmother to provide us with something for our journey."

Rowan took his cue. "Undoubtedly this is one of the occasions which demand celebration. There must be a restaurant in which we could pass the next two hours in pleasurable contemplation of one of the glories of France which will soon return to us all."

"Monsieur means that he would like to eat well, and will not mind that it will be expensive?" said Pierre, excitement vying with the desire to appear disinterested.

"We must both eat well; today we shall not concern ourselves with the amount of money which must pass to provide us with our requirements."

Pierre turned a cartwheel and then blushed at his display of exuberance. "There is a hotel, a large and famous hotel, outside the village," he said formally. "Foreign motor cars go there, with the very rich." He looked anxiously down at his faded blue dungarees. "I do not look like the people who go there—they wear fur coats, and rings."

If Madame la Patronne of the Chapon Fin was momentarily dismayed when a young man, wearing a jacket of Harris tweed and gray flannel trousers which had a large tear in one knee, accompanied by a bare-foot boy, rode into the courtyard of her hotel on oxen, she concealed it immediately. She recognized the English accent of her elder guest. It was obvious that he did not need to advertise his right to command the best service. Like the French aristo, the English milord could no longer afford a large motor car such as was necessary to vulgarians: he had the "air" and she the wit to recognize it.

"One always attends first to the faithful steeds," said Rowan, and before entering the hotel they led Mimi and

Auguste to the stableyard and saw them provided with an armful of hay and an *apéritif* of turnips.

Madame la Patronne hurried to the kitchen. "You will do the best the house can provide," she announced to the chef, for on this important occasion she must think of him only as the chef, not as her nephew who had displayed an aptitude for cooking. "We have guests of the first quality. An English milord who is so rich that he can afford to ride an ox. He will undoubtedly possess a palate."

"The *pâté*," said the chef, "which was too good to waste on the barbarians who pollute the dining-room. We have four trout which Marcelle caught only two hours ago—*truite meunière*, and their skins shall be a miracle of crispness!" He looked at his aunt with sudden authority. "You say it is an occasion. In the cupboard beside your bed is a bottle of Grand Marnier, no more than half-empty. Give it to me and I will create a *soufflé* to the honor of France! I shall also require seven eggs—no, eight. The artist must not be curtailed by circumstance! *Eight* eggs, it is understood?"

"Eight eggs and the Grand Marnier," agreed his aunt with a proper humility he rejoiced to hear.

Madame replaced the faded marigolds on the window table with a vase of plumbago hastily gathered from the south wall of the garden. The occupants of the glossy Delages who had paused here on their way to Paris from the Côte d'Azur, nudged each other: evidently people of importance had also decided to lunch at the inn they had so fortunately discovered. Two professional cyclists ran a quick comb through their brilliantined curls and adjusted their gold signet rings. Rowan and Pierre entered and were bowed to their table amidst curiosity which only native politeness could conceal.

"Madame has perhaps an old bottle, which would be a worthy companion to the meal whose choice we leave entirely to her?" said Rowan.

If any more was required to give Pierre a hero of which he would dream it was this. But there was more to come. Rowan poured out the Moulin á Vent and waited for Pierre to pronounce upon it before he gave his verdict.

Pierre would have sniffed his wine with greater confidence had he known that Rowan was in imagination also fourteen years old, tasting for the first time pot-still whisky in a crofter's cottage. His host on that occasion was a poacher, a hero who could catch a salmon in dead water, who could shoot a capercailzie by moonlight, to bury her in the earth until she

lost the flavor of pine needles and was ready to be cooked on a brush fire in the hide of a stone wall on the mountain that guarded Castle Cloud.

V FAÇADE

When Honorine brought in the tray, Marylda felt sharp disappointment at seeing only one bowl of soup, one plate beside the covered dish, one wineglass.

"Monsieur has already lunched?"

"One can only hope so," said Honorine. "He has taken the car to the garage. With foolishness I forgot to advise him that he will eat well only at the Chapon Fin, which is beyond the village."

"Monsieur looks after himself very well," said Marylda, "one need have no anxiety."

"We must hope he looks after himself better than he does after Madame's keys! He tells me they are lost in the field. A search has been made but as yet without success. Torbayon has a box of keys, perhaps we could find one to fit your suitcases?"

Marylda was about to say, "But the keys are in my bag—you brought it up with the suitcases," when she realized why this added complication was necessary. Even a Frenchwoman would not be able to demand every inch of space in the marital luggage. Perhaps Rowan could pretend that he had left a suitcase behind—should she plant this story or leave it to him?

"It would not please him if he has found the keys to discover we have managed without them."

Honorine smiled. "Ah, Madame is wise, she knows already that men are disappointed as children if one does not admire their little successes!"

"One humors them," said Marylda, hoping she gave the correct impression of indulgence suitable to a bride. Was she supposed to be a bride, or had Rowan embarked on further embroidery and endowed them with several children? What other details had they overlooked? The weddingring! Surely Honorine must have noticed she was not wearing one.

She paused with a piece of omelette poised on the fork. "It will be good for Monsieur if he does not find the keys. Only yesterday he was most unsympathetic when I suffered a sad loss. He said I was careless. He was angry instead of

trying to comfort me! How should I have guessed the basin had no strainer under the plug? How could I be blamed for what after all is a concern of the plumber?"

"Assuredly it was not Madame's fault!" exclaimed Honorine, mystified but eager with sympathy. "One knows that plumbers are idle incompetents. What my niece suffered when they installed a *cabinet* at her hotel is beyond imagination! First no water, then a flood which destroyed the trousers of the first guest to pull the chain. It was a disaster of the first order!"

Marylda would have liked to hear further details, but thought it necessary to lead the conversation back to the point for which it had been originally designed.

"I left my ring on the basin and it fell into the water and was swept away. Imagine my feelings and how I longed for comfort instead of a scolding."

"Monsieur must have been angry because you took off your weddingring. It is known to be unlucky." She held out her hand. "Look, mine has not been off my finger for nearly forty-three years and now, it is so tight that I could not remove it even if I wished."

"He insisted on giving me a diamond weddingring," said Marylda hastily. "I tried to explain that I preferred gold, but you know how difficult men are when they get an idea, however foolish, into their heads!"

"Then the fault is his entirely and I shall tell him so!" said Honorine, delighted. "There is an excellent jeweler in Mâcon. Tomorrow Torbayon must go to Mâcon to make certain purchases. Monsieur can go with him in the carriage and buy a new ring. It is not proper that you should not wear one, for instance it might lead certain people to have unworthy thoughts—not of course those people who have eyes in their heads, but there are those whose minds are little better than manure-heaps!"

She picked up the tray. "I shall explain to Monsieur that he must guard you better. It is one thing to drive you into a wall, with a car anything can happen. But the ring," she made a sound indicating pungent disapproval, "that is not to be tolerated!"

Marylda contained her laughter until the door had closed. That was a fast one! Will Rowan be quick enough not to miss his cue if she lies in wait for him? She obviously noticed I wasn't wearing a ring and had decided to be tolerant—now she feels guilty for having unjust suspicions! Dear Honorine, we must never let her know we've deliberately deceived her.

What are we going to do about the luggage? Why did Rowan go off before we could make a proper plan? The doctor told him I mustn't be allowed to fuss, so it was most inconsiderate to leave me alone all day.

"You appear to be gaining all the less attractive habits of a wife," she said severely. "You have invented stories to gain sympathy against your husband. Now you are rehearsing a typical scene of the confirmed nagger. If you go on like this you will probably remain a spinster."

This prospect now seemed appalling. Yesterday she had no intention of marrying any one, but now her outlook had undergone a drastic change.

You had better start learning not to be so bossy. It won't be easy after two years of acting the competent executive, and much previous experience as the spoiled darling of what is usually described as café society. At least all the trouble of changing your name to Lovell, so that you could have a chance of being a person instead of the owner of the Blenkinsop millions, hasn't been wasted. But to play safe, you had better maintain the deception until you are quite sure of him—for he might be too proud to marry an heiress.

What shall your income be? What do people live on without being at all rich? Ten thousand dollars, or is that too much? You had better have no income, only a little capital which you have been spending—that will explain your clothes. Or shall your clothes be cast-offs from a cousin? There is something rather touching about being a poor relation.

No, that will involve more explanations. I borrowed the name Lovell from Nannie, so she can be my aunt: then I shan't get muddled if I have to talk about my background. I will give her a brother who can father me. I had better be an orphan, which after all is quite true—there is no point in inventing unnecessary lies.

What was my father? A soldier killed in the first world war? She giggled. Hardly, considering that I wasn't born until 1924! Miss Lovell's niece, brought up in a cottage in Maine, wouldn't be able to speak French. How can I hide the English governess and the dreary French Mademoiselles who educated me with such determination?

Father shall be a college professor: he taught languages. What college? One which is very obscure, though Rowan probably hasn't heard of any except Harvard and Yale, and possibly Princeton. Mother died of typhoid when I was eight —Father in 1943: better stick to facts so far as possible.

It now only remains to be decided whether I am going to

stay in bed until Rowan comes back or if I should be discovered reclining languidly on the terrace—there is sure to be a terrace, probably with clematis as a background. My violet Shiaparelli would look nice against Clematis . . . Bother, I can't wear it until I can produce my keys.

She went into the dressing-room and inspected the chartreuse-green suit which Honorine had brought back after the doctor left. There was still a faint blood stain on the collar. She caught sight of herself in the long mirror. The improbable nightgown was definitely becoming. The decision had made itself: she would be wiser to stay in bed.

VI WANTED ON THE VOYAGE

With the excuse that he had to go to the nearest town to change money at the bank, Rowan left Pierre standing disconsolately beside the oxen and caught the afternoon bus to Mâcon. Pierre had tried to conceal his eagerness to share the next stage of their adventure: it would have been magnificent to go with this English milord who was so rich that he not only ordered the best wine and paid nearly two thousand francs for lunch, without argument, but announced he was going to get more money as casually as an ordinary man might purchase a kilo of onions. He had made hints so broad that they were almost a direct plea to be invited: Mâcon was an important town where the advice of a native of the department would be of the greatest assistance; Mimi and Auguste would be content to spend the afternoon in the stable-yard, and he would fetch them in the evening, they would prefer to go home after sunset. . . .

In the knowledge of Pierre's disappointment, Rowan had nearly relented. But caution insisted that it would be ridiculous to rely too much on the discretion even of so staunch an ally, and a story which would satisfactorily explain the presence of a second car was beyond his immediate powers of invention.

The garage proprietor was also a little hurt that the offer of his taxi was refused; however, if Monsieur preferred the economy of taking the bus it would be discourteous to protest.

Wedged between an old woman with a live hen in a basket and a workman who apparently subsisted entirely on garlic, Rowan found the journey unattractive. The bus made

frequent stops, and the driver exchanged gossip with departing passengers, while yet more people managed to squeeze themselves and their packages on board.

By the time Rowan was disgorged with the rest of the human torrent in the main square he was finding it increasingly difficult to believe that the Citröen would be in working order by the end of the week. The wings could be straightened out, the dents in the rims of both front wheels might respond to no more specialized treatment than anvil and hammer, the headlights could be replaced when the car reached Paris: but surely more fundamental damage would reveal itself to an expert eye?

However, a drink would probably cast a less sombre light on the situation, and it was a consolation that the French do not permit the petty restriction of licensed hours. He entered an *estaminet,* ordered a double cognac, and consulted the barman as to the best garage.

Before going there he found his way to the post office, and after several false starts dispatched what was for him an unusually verbose telegram to his cousin Duncan:

"CIRCUMSTANCES PREVENT DRIVING CAR TO ENGLAND STOP COLLECT FROM GARAGE MORELLE IN MACON WIRE AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION BOULOGNE ALTER RESERVATION AUTOCARRIER STOP CARNET WITH GARAGE PROPRIETOR STOP SORRY UPSET YOUR PLANS BUT MATTER URGENT WILL EXPLAIN LATER—ROWAN."

He then went to the garage, made arrangements for his Alvis to be repaired and stored there until collected, and accompanied the tow car to the field where he had left his car the night before. He unlocked the doors, removed his suitcases, decided to leave his golf clubs with the car, and set off at a fast pace towards the Château.

The garage hand, to whom Rowan had given a substantial tip, returned to Mâcon with renewed conviction that the English were undoubtedly mad. Why had he been given a sum which would have more than paid to hire a car for about fifty kilometers, and yet his offer of a lift had been politely, but firmly, refused? Such speculation was a waste of effort: sufficient that tonight he would take his wife to the cinema after they had eaten to capacity at the Restaurant Tuileries. Perhaps, he decided, the English enjoy carrying heavy suitcases. That the afternoon was unusually hot for May probably gave an added zest to the exercise.

He would have been surprised if he had known the distaste with which Rowan regarded this expedition. The suitcases had belonged to his father, and were a relic of the spacious days when the weight of luggage was of secondary importance to its appearance, and of no concern to its owner. No lorry passed from which a lift could be requested, no foreign car whose driver would be unlikely to ask awkward questions. Whenever vehicles of local origin appeared, whose occupants might be likely to mention, in quarters where such items might reasonably get back to the Château, the unusual spectacle of a young man carrying two heavy suitcases, Rowan had to repeat his Commando tactics of rapid concealment. It was essential that he reached the site of the accident without being observed, so that he could pretend his suitcases had been locked in the boot of the Citröen, and that he had hidden them among the nettles while Pierre was fetching the oxen.

The last three hundred yards of the main road were in sight of the Château. The only cover was a low wall. Rowan had to proceed in a crouching position, and when a car passed pretend to be kneeling to tie his shoe lace. It was with considerable relief that he clambered over the gap and advanced across the open field with the need of concealment passed.

Honorine met him at the front door, and apparently found nothing odd in his explanation of the extra luggage. "Pierre tells me that Monsieur had been to Mâcon," she said, with a smile which he realized was intended to be conspiratorial. "I told Madame that I must scold you, but now it is I who must apologize for thinking you heartless! You found the best jeweler, in the main street leading down to the river?"

"Jeweler?" said Rowan. "I went to the bank."

"But, Monsieur, how could you be so cruel! Imagine Madame's feelings! Was it her fault that the plumber did not properly construct the basin?"

Rowan tried to conceal his bewilderment. "One must not try to lay burdens on the shoulders of those who have, er, nothing to do with it," he said severely. What had Marylda been inventing now? What was all this about plumbers?

"No weddingring!" said Honorine indignantly.

So Marylda had admitted they were not married! He'd carried the damned suitcases for nothing, had he? She was trying to make a fool of him!

"You think she deserves a weddingring?" he said bitterly.

"But of course! Is it her fault she let it fall down the drain?

Must she be punished for so sad an accident?" Suddenly conscious that she might sound impertinent she put a tentative hand on his arm. "Please, Monsieur, do not be angry. I told her you would go to Mâcon to buy her a good ring, not a diamond one this time. We must not disappoint her. . . ."

He felt almost dizzy with relief, and she took his hesitation for a conflict between forgiveness and hurt pride. "Please forgive her, Monsieur."

"Tomorrow I shall return to Mâcon. I will buy a ring which she will not be likely to forget."

"And she will never take it off," said Honorine contentedly. "I have told her it is unlucky to do so."

"She will not take it off," said Rowan, adding to himself, "After I put it on her finger in front of the proper witnesses!"

VII DÉCOR

MARYLDA WAS asleep when Rowan came to her room, for her head had ached sufficiently for her to take one of the capsules the doctor had left, and it had proved unexpectedly strong. He stood looking down at her, and then walked silently to the open window, and scribbled a few lines on the back of an envelope. "I've said I found your keys so you can produce yours. Ask Honorine to let me know if I can come back later, or whether you'd rather not be disturbed. You look very charming asleep, and you don't snore."

He propped the note against a vase of flowers on the bedside table, and went to his room to unpack. Several times he listened at the communicating door, but he heard nothing, for Marylda had been careful to make no noise when she went to her dressing-room.

While Rowan changed into a dinner jacket, he considered it was odd to find how rapidly being in love destroyed self-sufficiency. For the first time he was thoroughly bored with his own company. Should he wait up here or fill in the hour until dinner by exploring the house? Might as well explore, Marylda might be interested to hear what he discovered.

The dog met him at the foot of the staircase, and put its forepaws on his shoulders while attempting to lick his face. Then it trotted along a wide corridor, and waited for a door to be opened; obviously it was more efficient as a guide than a guard. The room was evidently a library, for two walls were

lined from floor to ceiling with books in tooled leather bindings. On each side of the massive fireplace were Boule cabinets of dueling pistols, which Rowan, finding them congenial to his mood, examined with interest. He then opened one of the four windows, each in a deep embrasure for the walls were nearly six feet thick, and looked down at a sheer drop to where the Château merged into the natural rock of the crag on which it was built. To his left he could see another of the round towers with conical red-tiled roofs. There were seven in all, of which three were part of the house and the rest guarded the walls which defended the place from the north where a spur of almost level ground joined it to the steep hillside beyond.

With a momentary feeling of disloyalty he admitted that this castle had some advantages over his own. Providing the water supply was adequate, and the original builder must have made sure of that, it could withstand a siege almost as well today as when it was first raised. He toyed with the pleasant thought of pouring boiling lead on the heads of armed men who came expecting to wrest Marylda from him, then grinned at himself for being too romantic. Why bother with lead when there were plenty of swords hanging in the hall, and Torbayon's revolver as a last resource?

"We are almost too well defended against unwelcome callers," he said to the dog, "no wonder you don't take your duties seriously. We will now continue our conducted tour."

He found nothing of particular interest in the drawing-room, though he thought that Marylda might like the chairs, which reminded him of the ones in the housekeeper's room at Cloud. They were in fact very similar, being covered with *petit-point* whose flowers and fruit were as vivid as when they had been embroidered in the reign of Louis XIV. He hoped that Marylda wouldn't think Cloud was a little shabby; if she wanted to do it up a bit he would have to persuade Georgina to agree to spend capital. Yes, it was quite time he exerted himself. After all it was his own money!

He heard footsteps, but not the ones for which he had been hoping. Torbayon, now wearing full livery, came into the room and announced pontifically, "Monsieur, I have laid dinner in the yellow sitting-room. Honorine considered that you would forgive the informality."

Rowan followed him to a room panelled with Chinese brocade that matched the curtains and their elaborately draped pelmets. The ceiling had been painted by Bouchier; the carpet was an even finer Aubusson than the one upstairs.

But Rowan did not notice any of these details, for Marylda was lying on a Recamier couch by the open window. He had been prepared for an invalid, and even then it would have been difficult enough to remind himself that she must be protected from any emotional disturbance. But how was he going to act as the aloof, considerate stranger to this incredibly beautiful woman? Being inexperienced he did not guess that Marylda had taken the trouble to find out the color scheme of the room before deciding that the garnet-red satin from Dior would be even more enchanting than the gray Balenciaga.

She put down the book she had been pretending to read, smiled at him and said, "Darling, how nice to see you. I thought you were going to be late for dinner."

Torbayon coughed discreetly, "Madame thought you would prefer champagne to Beaujolais, even though we have no ice."

"Madame, as usual, is entirely correct," said Rowan.

VIII EQUIPAGE

Torbayon was in the saddle-room polishing harness. His only regret was that Ponosse, the chauffeur, was not here to see him acting both as coachman and as host to the English guests. The journey to Mâcon must be undertaken with fitting dignity, and for this nothing less than the landau would be suitable.

At last his well-worn jibe, so often hurled at Ponosse, "Automobiles are like nervous men who cannot perform their functions unless they are full of alcohol," had been well proved. Horses do not require the permission of bureaucrats, the authority of petrol coupons, before they can carry out their duties. He hated cars with an intensity surpassed only by his feeling for the Germans; it was his personal opinion that only the Boche could have been sufficiently evil to invent such machines.

He savored old grudges until they demanded expression. He went to the coach house, lifted the dust sheet which covered an ancient Delage *coupé-de-ville* and spat with ceremony on one of its carefully pipe-clayed tires. "That for your automobile, Ponosse!"

Satisfied that he had won the argument, though his opponent remained invisible except to the inward eye of cherished enmity, he filled a measure with corn and went to the loose

box to confer with Delphine, the bay mare who was the last survivor of the stables over which Torbayon used to rule as a benevolent autocrat.

Delphine munched placidly while she was groomed with an intensity which she had not experienced for several years. Sweat had soaked through Torbayon's shirt before the final gloss was achieved.

He stood back to admire the success of his efforts and then went into the adjoining loose box, cautiously to extract a bottle of *eau-de-vie* from the manger where it had been concealed under hay. He took two mouthfuls, hesitated, and decided that he might require a little more after he had enjoyed a few moments rest. It would be wiser to go back to Delphine, so that if suddenly disturbed he could pretend that he was too occupied to do whatever other job Honorine had found for him.

Surely he deserved a rest, had he not been polishing the landau since dawn, or if not dawn, certainly since very early?

He took another mouthful and remarked to Delphine, "Consider my horror when I discovered a quantity of hen droppings on the cushions of the landau! Undoubtedly some misbegotten relative of Ponosse introduced poultry into the coach house."

Delphine pretended to nip his ear, a long established token of affection. No doubt the old man would fall asleep when the bottle was empty. He could do so in the knowledge that she would take care not to tread on him and might even decide to lie down and rest her nose on his thigh. After all, Torbayon was the first thing she had seen on emerging from her mother some twenty years before. Had he not wrapped her in a blanket and stayed all night in the deep straw while the mare slept, soothed by bread soaked in good wine?

Delphine indicated that she was about to assume a recumbent position. "No," said Torbayon getting rapidly to his feet. "It is already time we prepare ourselves for the expedition." He slipped the bridle over her head and led her to the coach house. When the equipage was satisfactory to his critical eye, he went back to the saddle-room to fetch his top hat, sleek with careful ironing though the cockade was green with age, and the double-breasted overcoat of blue English cloth, with silver buttons blazoned with the arms of the family his own had served for three generations. The coat was too tight for comfort, and too thick for summer, but he was not to be deprived of the full pleasure of now infre-

quent glories, though he had the foresight to remove vest and waistcoat before putting it on.

He called Pierre to inform the guest that they awaited his pleasure at the main gate. Rowan realized that Torbayon's expression of aloof dignity was at least partly due to stimulants perhaps unwisely absorbed on such a hot morning. He climbed with inward reluctance into the ancient carriage and permitted Pierre to arrange a rug over his knees.

Torbayon cracked his whip. Delphine, who understood that by no chance would she suffer even a flick on the flank, entered into the spirit of the undertaking. She started off at a spanking trot, and then, somewhat to her own surprise, broke into a canter. She would keep up the pace until they reached the end of the avenue. From long experience she knew there would be several pleasant halts on the road by which she conducted Torbayon every second market day. Frequently she brought him home on her own initiative while he snored placidly behind her.

IX ALL FORLORN

"You MUST NOT disturb yourself, my little rabbit," said Torbayon to his wife who was helping him clean the silver. "It is not our concern how guests of the Château conduct their intimacies."

"If they *had* intimacies I should not be so indelicate as to wish to know the details," said Honorine reprovingly. "But I ask you, how could one be so heartless as to see the poor child suffer neglect without trying to discover a remedy!"

"I don't see anything wrong with the way he treats her," said Torbayon. "Very courteous he always is when I'm in the room. Attentive, too, I should say."

"But the pillows," she reminded him, as though he had not been told about them too often already. "I put the pillows from his bed on to hers, but did he take the hint so delicately expressed? No! The first night he slept with his coat rolled up under his head and the second night he must have taken his pillows back. Three more days have passed and they are still on his bed: it is an outrage!"

"You mean it is not even the second cousin of an outrage," said Torbayon with a broad wink.

"You are an obscene old man," she said with a show of indignation.

He patted her fondly. "But at their age I was not neglectful, give me my due. It is probable the English have different habits. They come from a cold country, perhaps they breed with the pitiful detachment of fish—one has heard stories . . ."

"And none of them fit for my ears unless you've changed your companions," she said severely. "What stories?"

If Marylda had known the scope of Honorine's sympathy she would have been even more dismayed. When either of the servants were in the room Rowan continued to play the rôle of the attentive husband, but when alone they might have been two members of a house party, content to engage in trivial conversation but with no wish to pursue their relationship beyond Plato. She could not have been given a more helpful background, and what had she done with it? Nothing! And, she reluctantly admitted, it was not for lack of trying!

She had found a stone bench on the lower terrace. Behind it a pale red bougainvillea covered the mellow wall: she had taken her violet dress down there, while Rowan was in Mâcon, to make quite sure that the color contrast of silk and teeming flowers could not be improved, that she could find no more becoming setting in which to be discovered. There had been a gleam in Rowan's eyes when he saw her there which had seemed to justify her effort: yet he had given her the ring casually, as though it were no more than a stage prop. When they left the Château, tomorrow probably if the doctor came back and said, as he obviously would, that there was no reason for her to stay any longer, would the ring be no more than a souvenir of a chance meeting which Rowan did not wish to prolong?

In printed linen from Jacques Fath she had gathered roses while he held the basket. Then she had arranged them in careful disorder in white and gilt urns for what she already thought of as "their" sitting-room. He had fetched water for the vases, swept up the litter of stalks and discarded leaves, admired the effect she had created—but he could have said no less to any woman who had asked him to share such a charmingly feminine activity.

She had been boyish, in lettuce-green shorts and a white, open-necked shirt, climbing down through the steep fields where vines were already in leaf; sure-footed, competent, yet not neglectful of the hand he held out when a terrace wall proved unusually difficult to negotiate. They had taken lunch with them; slices of terrine and cold chicken, crisp salad wrapped in a damp napkin, raspberries in a blue china dish, a

bottle of Montrachet. They had reached a stream where Rowan cooled the wine by sinking the bottle to the neck in running water. She had taken off her shoes and paddled—surely he could not help noticing that there was nothing wrong with her legs? But all he had said was that it was lucky there were so few midges, and then spent an unnecessarily long time lighting his pipe.

She had tried the appeal of the delicate female who requires a strong man to protect her, and pleading a headache had spent dull and restless hours in her room with the curtains drawn. She hoped that he would be anxious about her, and thoroughly bored with his own company. But at dinner he retailed at length the fishing expedition which he had shared with Pierre. Apparently they had borrowed a boat on the Saône, and their joint efforts had resulted in several fish. It was only with difficulty that she maintained an expression of alert interest while he described in detail their weight and characteristics.

She had been remote and mysterious in gray chiffon with a cluster of dark red roses at her breast. There was even a full moon to give the wide view of folding hills and beckoning valleys a still greater enchantment than it held from the sun. The moon also made of Marylda's profile a pale cameo against the night sky, as she leaned on the balustrade beside Rowan. A young wind stirred the heavy leaves of magnolias and brought the scent of the flowers down to them. A nightingale sang, and another answered.

"As you had a headache this afternoon you'd better turn in early," Rowan had said. "I think I'll go for a stroll. Good night," he added abruptly, and walked away from her, whistling for the dog who always ranged free after sunset.

She had been *ingénue* in white muslin; the cultured sophisticate in black velvet; *gamine* in a playsuit from the most exclusive shop in Nice; wistful, efficient, gay, serious. What more could a man want?"

Only the Eden approach remained unexplored—the nymph discovered bathing in a forest pool. No, she had already tried paddling without success. . . .

There was a short cut to the village, by worn steps which led down the west face of the rocky spur, that was never used except by some one who could unlock the postern door which opened from an underground passage. Torbayon had showed her where the key hung, when he had taken her down to see the dungeons. She had mentioned it to Rowan; it was at least fairly likely that he would go that way when he went to find

out if the car was ready. He had said he would leave about eleven so as to be back for lunch.

Halfway down, the steps widened into a narrow bay, little more than a ledge protected by a low wall. Marylda, carrying two cushions and a quilted spread which she had taken from one of the other bedrooms—after careful consideration that its pattern of marguerites and wheat-ears embroidered on a vivid blue ground could not be improved—was there soon after half past ten.

She had wakened several times during the night, afraid that she might hear the sound of rain—nobody could sunbathe convincingly under a gray sky. Once she had even leaned out of the window to make sure that the rustling was only leaves tapping against the shutter, and not the first heavy drops which preceded a summer storm.

After all, she *enjoyed* sunbathing; even if Rowan went a different way she would not have wasted the morning. Yes, she would; it was no use deceiving herself. She might have suggested going with him—they could have lunched at the hotel where he had been with Pierre. If he saw admiration in other men's eyes he might realize how much he was deliberately missing. Perhaps it wasn't too late to change her mind. If she ran back to the house would there be time to put on the only dress Rowan hadn't yet seen and meet him, apparently by accident, in the courtyard?

As she stood up, uncertain whether to put on her clothes or to continue with her original plan, the postern door opened on protesting hinges. She lay down, one arm outstretched, the other curved as a frame for her face. Should she pretend to be asleep, or feign a maidenly confusion at being discovered naked? He'd seen her asleep often enough already, and little good it had done her!

He saw her, said, "Sorry, I didn't know you were here," and ran on down the steps.

Marylda methodically tore her handkerchief into strips: at least it was better than crying into it!

When Honorine told her that Dr. Chavaigne had sent a message to say he would call at the Château at noon, which by tradition meant that he would stay to lunch, Marylda was not even disappointed. What use to pretend that this week was not only another proof that she who could buy everything would never get anything she wanted? She might invent some symptoms that would keep her here for a few more days, but why continue the suspense when the least she could do was to be a good loser?

People either fall in love or they don't. It wasn't Rowan's fault that his feelings were different to hers. If he had been like the other men she had met he would have amused himself at her expense instead of having the decency to pretend he was unaware of her interest. For God's sake don't start lying to yourself, Marylda! Don't say "interest" when you mean "love"—real, agonizing, ridiculous, illogical love. You must never let him know you've been hurt; the comedy must be played out with conviction.

Somehow she must produce the courage to say goodbye to him lightly, as though they had done no more than share a compartment in a train and parted at the station, with mutual, fleeting, gratitude that a dull journey had been made agreeable. Would he prefer to go to Paris with her in the Citröen, or to wire Duncan that he had decided to drive his own car north? It would be easier to say goodbye in an impersonal setting. They could dine together, for the last time, at the Tour d'Argent. She would arrange for a window table; it would be easier to be gay and brittle against the theatrical backdrop of the lights of Paris, remote as constellations of stars.

She would order dinner, a little indulgent that he knew so much less than she did about the niceties of the gourmet. If sufficiently impressed he might ask her advice on the wine list. He would suggest champagne, and she would say it was a little banal—better to have Corton with the duck *à la presse*, Château Climens with the *fraises du bois*. She might take him to the Ambassadeurs—they had never danced together. Or would that be a mistake? If he danced well, it would be still more difficult to appear gay and aloof; if he plodded around the floor she would probably still love him too much to enjoy the sense of superiority.

She stubbed out the fifth cigarette she had lit since reaching the temporary haven of her bedroom. You are a greater fool than I suspected, Marylda, if you let him break your pride. What has really happened? You ran into a wall on your way to Paris, you met a rather dour young man whom you are stupid enough to want to marry. He has been exceedingly courteous, but he doesn't happen to want you except as a casual acquaintance. How can a few days upset all your preconceived notions as to what you expect from life? Why not think like the sophisticate which is one of your acts? You will exchange Christmas cards; probably he will send you snapshots of himself and his wife, and each year there will be another stage of their children: girls with freckles

and fat legs like their mother, boys—no, don't let the boys be like Rowan, that would be too unfair.

She heard a familiar horn and ran to the window. The Citröen was coming up the steep lane that led from the main road to the farm, and then by a still more rutted track to the avenue. Rowan must be very impatient to show her that the car no longer provided an excuse to stay here, or he would have taken the longer way. Even her own car was in league against her, surely it should have taken another few days to repair? If the gesture had not been too dramatic, she would have liked to take it to the edge of a cliff and watch it slide over the edge to crunch into a mass of futile metal.

She ran into the dressing-room and scrutinized her face in the mirror. At least she had had enough sense to deny herself the luxury of tears—puffy eyelids would have been too much to bear.

She made up her face with the anxious concentration of an actress about to play the first performance of a character part inadequately rehearsed. She lit another cigarette; stubbed it out. Pulled the printed silk dress over her head, and threw it into a corner. Dragged on a pair of slacks and a blue shirt. It was easier to feel detached and competent in trousers.

She walked down the staircase, humming a tune she had learned as a child from Nannie Lovell. Rowan and Dr. Chavaigne were waiting for her in the room where the roses she had gathered already were beginning to shed their heavy petals.

X NIGHTINGALES SANG

For Dr. Chavaigne, a visit to the Château was an event, even in the absence of the family. Honorine, whose opinion he had come to respect when they acted as colleagues in the Resistance, had informed him that more than a blow on the head was wrong with his patient.

He kept up a flow of reminiscence, broken only by polite interjections from Rowan and Marylda, except when it was necessary to give his verdict on the first serving of each course and enlarge the compliments, which he knew Torbayon would relay to Honorine, at the second helping.

Marylda was glad he was there, for it was easier than being alone with Rowan until she was sure her façade of indifference could be sustained. But need he eat quite so

slowly? Was it necessary to speculate on the exact size of the clove of garlic that had been inserted beside the bone of the *gigot*?

Her impatience was replaced by a fresh anxiety. If the doctor departed too early, Rowan might decide they could leave this afternoon. Tonight she might be alone in a hotel while he drove his own car towards Calais. Tomorrow there would be the sea between them.

She pressed their guest to a third *crêpe flambé*, which he accepted after protesting that at his age he should have learned more respect for his digestion. She saw Rowan frown. So he was so impatient to get away that he grudged the poor little man his lunch! She toyed with a segment of pancake while her left hand clenched in her lap until the nails dented the palm.

After coffee and yellow Chartreuse, Dr. Chavaigne insisted that he must now make the decision as to whether he could still consider her a patient. He seemed to take it for granted that Rowan would stay in the room, until noticing her embarrassment he quickly suggested that he would prefer to see her upstairs.

He took her blood pressure, sounded her heart, shone a small electric torch in her eyes, assured himself that there was no tenderness on her head or back, that the wound required no further attention.

"Madame has had a most fortunate escape. It is a loss to France that I must reluctantly admit that there is no longer any reason to prevent you accompanying your husband to England." He made a small, deprecatory cough. "There is perhaps another matter on which you would like my advice?"

For a moment Marylda thought he had seen through their deception, that he was offering himself as a benevolent father confessor. "No," she said, "there is nothing—it is very kind of you, but there is nothing you can do for me now."

He smiled. "One understands that it cannot be my pleasant duty to give what help may be required—that will be for some other doctor, in the New Year."

This is too much, thought Marylda wildly. What would he say if I told him I was suffering from virginity not pregnancy!

"I'm not having a baby," she said flatly.

"Many women do not conceive in the first few months," he said consolingly. "I must tell your husband not to worry too much: these things occur in their own good time."

"For God's sake don't do that!" Then, seeing she had

offended him, she added, "You see, my husband is not fond of children, he thinks there are too many people in the world already—he would be angry with me if you mentioned the subject."

The doctor made a sound indicating a nice blend of sympathy and disapproval. "You must have the patience to wean him from these wrong-headed opinions. If the human appeal is not enough you must remind him of his duty to his country, tell him to consider how France already suffers from the tragic fall in her birth-rate!"

She pressed his hand, hoping that he would take it both as a sign of dismissal and a token that she was so deeply moved by his sympathy that she could not express her gratitude in words.

He bowed, kissed her hand, blew his nose with violence for she had moved him to tears, and left the room, closing the door with exaggerated care.

Marylda felt inclined to stay in her room until dinner time. At least Rowan could not be so boorish as to go without consulting her, or so inconsiderate as to expect her to leave without adequate time to pack. But this attitude was rank cowardice; the sooner they parted the sooner she could go back to being the competent young woman who had trained herself not to be dependent on any one—the Marylda who could *buy* anything she wanted and was too sensible to ask for what was beyond the range of money.

She applied powder and fresh lipstick, filled her cigarette case, and reached the courtyard in time to overhear Rowan say to the doctor, "It's a great relief to know she's all right—no restrictions, can do anything she likes."

At least he need not have sounded so horribly glad about if! If he wanted to say, "Thank God I needn't stay cooped up with a woman who nearly ran over me and has been an intolerable nuisance ever since," he could have concealed his feelings. If she spoke to him before recovering her temper she would probably be excessively rude—and he was probably sufficiently intelligent to know that no woman bothers to insult a man in whom she takes no interest.

She ran down the steps that led to the lower terrace and realized too late that there was no escape from there. Last time she sat under the bougainvillea Rowan had given her a weddingring. She twisted it on her finger. "You would be the first lady of Reno if you went there and said you'd worn a ring only a week, not even long enough to make a pale circle against your sun tan."

She heard him calling for her. Let him call! If he wants to tell me the exciting news that we are no longer chained together, he can shout till his lungs burst or search for me until his feet are so blistered that blood runs out of the eyelet-holes of his shoes!

Rowan appeared at the head of the steps. "Oh, there you are," he said. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

He sat down on the stone bench beside her, and stared at his shoes as though they were of supreme interest.

"The doctor says you're all right. Nice little chap, gave him a couple of thousand francs for his hospital—wouldn't take a fee, very decent of him."

She restrained herself from remarking that two thousand francs must seem cheap if it meant release from intolerable boredom.

"We can go to Paris tomorrow," he added, "your car is running quite well."

"You wouldn't prefer to take *your* car?"

He glanced at her as though startled. "Oh, no. Duncan's thoroughly reliable. He'll have got my wire and will deal with it in his own time. He's a bit vague, but you'll find he's no fool when you get to know him."

"If I ever meet him, which is somewhat unlikely," said Marylda, hoping she sounded effectively indifferent.

"Not meet Duncan? Of course you will. He's my cousin and his place, Dalloch, marches with Cloud." He became more vehement. "You'll *like* Duncan, bound to. Damn good chap."

There was a long silence. "It's been a tricky six days," said Rowan. "Tricky for me, I mean."

"Has it?" said Marylda. "It seemed very pleasant: the weather has been perfect and the Château is really charming."

He ceased contemplating his shoes and looked directly at her. His expression was a little severe as though he were trying to bring himself to scold her. "Darling, I know you're very innocent, and, mind you, that's only as it should be, but you do try a chap a bit high!"

His voice took on a new note, as though a grievance demanded airing. "It's all very well with me, though I didn't find it any too easy, but it's lucky for you that one has a certain kind of background. 'Manners Makyth Man' and all that, you know."

He blushed; after all one shouldn't quote the motto of one's school, even though one has belatedly learned the

range of its implications. Not all men have been to Winchester, and foreigners are notorious for taking unfair advantage. Innocence was all very well, but Marylda must be told that snakes exist in grass.

"In future you've got to be a lot more careful," he said sententiously. "I nearly kissed you on the terrace last night. You have got to recognize that the combination of you and a moon and a couple of nightingales, which were almost the last straw, is more than most men could take without reverting to the primitive."

Marylda was speechless. Was it possible that he hadn't realized what she had been desperately trying to do? He took her silence for a sign of mute dismay at the inexplicable lusts of the male.

He exploded. "You didn't even lock your door! Was that really fair? After all, women should have *some* consideration!"

"But why did you pretend that I meant nothing to you, nothing at all?" she said. "Why did you make me think that you were bored, why did you take no notice?"

He threw away the leaf he had been systematically tearing to shreds. For some extraordinary reason he was required to explain something which even to her must have been glaringly obvious. Though not from personal experience, he understood that women are unpredictable: he would use small, exact words so that there could be no misunderstanding.

"That officious little doctor, not that he didn't mean well, told me you were to have no excitements: no worries of any kind. How could I ask you to marry me, when either we'd both have plenty of excitement or else you'd be worried at being in a hellish awkward situation!"

The moon and the sun shone at the same time: nightingales sang with thrushes: the castle became a bower beyond the grasp of thorn.

"Are you by any chance proposing?" inquired Marylda.

"But of course! Surely you knew I fell in love with you that first night—when you went to sleep on my lap?"

"No, darling, I didn't. I thought you were going away tomorrow."

He regarded her with awe. "You have a lot to learn, my darling. And I will not again be sufficiently a fool to behave as though I felt chivalrous."

There was nothing in the disarrangement of the pillows which even Honorine's discerning eye could find inadequate.

Marylda and Rowan had even the courtesy to oversleep, so that she could take vicarious joy from the sight of her head on his shoulder. Honorine drew the curtains very quietly, leaving the sun to wake them to their new day.

XI KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOR

Rowan drove with one hand, except when the road twisted through high hills and a sharp corner required that he borrow the other from Marylda.

"Happy?" he asked.

"Gloriously, irresponsibly, incredibly happy! Isn't it an odd feeling, being happy, I mean?"

"New to you, too?" He tried not to feel glad when she told him she had never been happy before.

"It's so lovely that we fell in love without knowing anything about each other, it makes everything so beautifully private," she said. "No relations leaving us tactfully together, no ghastly wedding presents, no arguments as to where we ought to spend our honeymoon, no bridesmaids quarreling about their dresses. By the way, darling, how do we get married in France?"

"I've arranged all that. When I bought the ring in Mâcon I rang up a cousin at the Embassy. Found it a bit difficult to make him understand, the line was bad and people kept trying to cut us off, but though Malcolm's rather slow he's efficient once he gets an idea. He'll arrange all the formalities for us; the license and so on. I told him to pop around to the American Embassy to fix your side of it."

She laughed. "Darling, how I admire you! And to think I was sure you were being no more than polite. Did you go so far as to inform your relatives of the new addition to the family circle? For instance, will your people be pleased, or shall I find an irate chieftain flourishing a claymore when I get to Paris?"

"I'm the Chief of Cairdrie." He swerved to avoid a goat which had strayed on to the road. "My father was killed in a car smash the day I was born and my mother died six months later."

"So we're both orphans," she said with quick sympathy.

"Your father must have been a very interesting man. I've a great respect for scholars, not being clever at that sort of thing myself."

Ought she to tell him that the gentle professor had never existed? No, she could keep that until after they were married, when she told him that his wife brought with her a dowry of—how many million dollars was it? Only the trustees could understand the lists of figures and taxes, bonds and shares. For her it was sufficient that money was the one thing she could pay other people to worry about.

"How lucky we are to have no in-laws," she said happily. "Or have you a quantity of fierce aunts lying in wait for me?"

"No aunts, no uncles. Only a grandmother who's a bit of a martinet." He tried to sound casual.

"Grandmothers are easy," she said contentedly.

He glanced down at her head so comfortably close to his shoulder, and wondered whether he should warn her that this was a far too optimistic view of Georgina. Why worry her? They would face Georgina together, when it could no longer be avoided.

They lunched together in Saulieu, and instead of taking the road again, wandered hand in hand along deserted streets in the shadow of ancient houses. They came to a church beside a little square where a fountain gave cool sound of running water through the sleepy heat.

"I want to go inside," said Marylda. "It would be only courteous to say thank you for so many blessings."

"You're not a Catholic?" he asked quickly.

"No, are you? Does it matter to what creed one officially belongs? I'm not anything really, except, I hope, a Christian."

He held the door open for her, and they went from the blare of sunlight into a quiet dusk. She dipped her fingers into the stoup and paused a moment as though surprised. Then she touched herself on the forehead and mouth and kissed him. "There," she said, "now we have shared a blessing."

The significance of the gesture, which to her had been spontaneous, escaped him. Sufficient that she felt grateful for the improbable fortune that had brought them together. He was glad that the nave was dark as a pine forest: he could not let even Marylda guess how close he was to tears. He wished he had a sword in his hand, the great sword which Ewan Cairdrie had carried in the service of Prince Charlie. He would have knelt with the naked blade on his outstretched hands before the altar to dedicate it in the name of his lady.

He felt his armor of materialism becoming thin, and he needed it now more than ever before. He was taking a bride

to Cloud, a bride who might share the fears that had driven a boy to walk alone down forsaken corridors and shout "Who goes there?" in defiance of ghosts who would not answer. But he was no longer a boy; he was a man who could protect his woman, because he no longer believed in things he could not understand.

"What's the matter, darling?" she said gently.

So even his memory of the days when he had been afraid of Cloud had caused her anxiety. "We must be getting on if we're to reach Paris before dark, our headlights don't work." He looked at his wrist watch. "It's nearly three; we've wasted too long already."

She wondered what had made him cross; surely it wasn't because she had brought him into a Catholic church? No, for if he had been particularly religious he would have asked her before to what sect she belonged. She sighed; men were difficult even when you loved them very much."

XII THE OTHER AVALON

On his way south, Rowan had spent two days with Duncan at a small hotel in Montparnasse. They had gone there because Duncan preferred the Left Bank and Rowan had heard it was cheap, which for him was usually the first consideration. Economy had been preached as a stark religion by Georgina; every extravagance was represented as a theft from Cloud; every shilling saved, an increase in its protection against the rising flood of taxes that gnawed at diminishing income. Capital was something sacred, to be guarded for future generations and used only in dire emergency or when honor demanded. It had rebuilt a farm that was struck by lightning and so was not covered by fire insurance; it had bought an annuity for a ploughman who had been gored by a bull; it provided a ticket to Australia for a third cousin who brought discredit on the name and had to be induced to leave Scotland.

One pound each term was all that Georgina considered necessary as pocket money for Winchester. Rowan's clothes had come from Inverness, ready made. When he protested, she said, "Sir Rowan is not a vulgarian who must pretend he has more money than he is free to spend."

"But it's difficult, Georgina, being different to the other men," the boy had protested.

"If they offend you, fight them," was the only comfort she gave him. So he had fought, until a record of broken noses and blackened eyes earned him a healthy if grudging respect. He became Captain of "Our Game," a particularly belligerent variety of rugger peculiar to the School. That he would have much preferred to play racquets which he could not afford was a fact he kept strictly to himself.

He accelerated until the needle of the speedometer steadied at a hundred and twenty kilometers, a gesture to show that he was no longer to be restrained by councils of expediency which would have reminded him that the tires were worn.

Marylda had accepted that they must reach Paris tonight: Rowan liked making plans, and once made they became a rigorous master. It would be unwise to try to teach him a more comfortable way of life too soon. So she was surprised when he swung the car into the courtyard of a hotel in Avallon.

"Avallon, what could be more suitable for us," he said. "King Arthur and all that—though the other Avalon has only one 'l'."

"Guinevere is your most devoted spouse. But no tourneys, dear Arthur. I refuse to sit in my box above the tilt-yard, twisting a moist handkerchief in my lily hands. I should leap down to nobble your opponent's horse, or at least scream to put off his aim. Women no longer have the courage to remain spectators!"

Rowan, after his prolonged joust with the image of Georgina, during which he had driven so fast that Marylda's knees had trembled with the effort of leaving her legs relaxed instead of bracing them against an imminent accident, was in a mood both benign and exhilarated.

"This appears to be a most admirable dump," he affirmed, as they left the car and went through the courtyard into a walled garden, where stone seats were set with foresight of lovers in arbors discreetly hidden by flowering shrubs. "We will drink champagne and then consider whether it would not be foolish to drive farther."

The champagne, Cordon Rouge, was brought to them in the garden. They drank it in the presence of a Venus who clasped her marble draperies with no more than token modesty.

"For you, my darling, I will again pit my strength against the demons which infest French telephones. It is for you to decide whether we drive for several hours, with me becom-

ing riddled with anxiety that we shall not get to Paris before lighting-up time."

"I should much prefer to stay. It would be only polite to say a meaningful good morning to this Venus."

"That remark is only permissible after dark, for the bushes here are not yet sufficiently substantial to provide the privacy for which they have been considerately planted. The answer it deserves is also restricted by the waiter, who is observing us from what I take to be the door leading to the cellar."

Madame la Patronne, who at sixty had not lost her eye for a personable young man, insisted on showing Rowan each of the three available bedrooms. He had forgotten to ask Marylda whether they should share one or if he ought to take another for himself and visit her discreetly. No, he had not really forgotten, he had simply taken it for granted that conventions would be respected until they were legally married. But since his mental defiance of Georgina he took a different view. He chose a room with poppies on the wallpaper and a crimson satin eiderdown on the double bed. He filled up both registration slips, and wrote "Lady Cairdrie" with a flourish.

He decided it would be a waste of time to put trunk calls through to Paris. He wrote out two telegrams. One to the small hotel, canceling the single rooms he had booked by wire the same morning, the other to the Ritz, reserving a suite. The price would be appalling, but he was going to give his bride a honeymoon in which they should have everything they had never had before! They would have champagne whenever they felt like it, he would buy her clothes and flowers and jewels. Caution momentarily reasserted itself: no, not jewels, for the heirlooms would at last come out of the bank where they were kept to save insurance. But certainly flowers, and why wait until they reached Paris?

He found a flower shop in the square and bought an armful of roses, carrying them back with some embarrassment, for he realized they did not fit with the picture of the staid married couple which he had tried to convey.

Madame la Patronne was so touched when she saw him hurrying up the outside stair which led to their room that she made a mental note to reduce the bill.

He had meant Marylda to think that a suite at the Ritz was nothing out of the ordinary, that it was as natural for him to go there as it would have been for Hector, his grandfather, the man who had always been held up as the hero without flaw, to emulate although impossible to equal. But

when they were lying awake, for it seemed a waste of time to sleep, Rowan forgot to be the experienced man of the world and became the boy who had at last found the complement from whom no secret of loneliness need be hid.

She dare not yet tell him how closely his childhood resembled her own. She too had lived in a castle with many closed rooms—a house on the Hudson built in the 'seventies, an imitation French Château, of the most unfortunate period, which had cost Grandfather a million dollars. A spiteful governess had once told Marylda that it had also cost the lives of more than two hundred thousand pigs which had been slaughtered and buried in the tins which carried the label "Blenkinsop's Super Sausages" from Chicago to the world.

As a child, Marylda used to wake in the night and crouch under the bedclothes, trying to shut out the sound of rain falling on the gravel sweep. If she looked out of the window she would see that it was not rain, but the patter of little pointed trotters of orphan piglets who had come to visit the tomb of their parents. One day they would break down the front door and pour in a pink flood up the stairs, along the corridor, past the doors of four empty bedrooms, until they came to her door. Then they would press against it, until, very slowly, the hinges were driven out of the thick mahogany and the brass door knob fell to the carpet. And she would be pounded to death by the impatient feet. Then people would come and shut her in a tin—only they would call it an urn and make it of gold, and leave her in the vault next to the other gold urn in which Father had brought Mother home after she died of typhoid in Rome. When the fantasy was at its height, Marylda was sure that typhoid was only a polite way of describing "death by pigs."

Now, at last, all that money would become kind, and useful, and safe. It would stop Rowan being worried; it would protect all the people who were dependent on him, and build houses for them, with bathrooms and central heating. It would pay the gardeners and the servants, and buy everything he wanted. Rowan had casually mentioned that Cloud was over a hundred thousand acres. She was rather vague as to what an acre meant, but it would certainly need a lot of gardeners to mow the lawns and clip the shrubs—or whatever gardeners did in Scotland. Perhaps this would be the right moment to tell him, so that they could start making plans. . . .

"So you see, darling," said Rowan, "it is an enormous com-

pliment to you that I've suddenly stopped being afraid of extravagance. Instead of being ashamed that I've never stayed at a really slap-up hotel—and I damn nearly tried to bluff you that I knew the Ritz instead of only having been in there for a drink with Duncan—it is a new adventure for us to share. We shall walk in and be very grand, and pretend we are not in the least impressed by the hangers-on. And we'll have champagne sent up to our suite and I shall complain that they ought to have put flowers to welcome you."

He warmed to his theme. "Even if there *are* flowers, I shall say they are not good enough for you. I shall demand roses—a plethora of roses. Or would you prefer something else?" He went on without giving her time to reply. "I shall wire Duncan and tell him to come to Paris at once—he can be my best man."

"Does he always do what you tell him?"

"Of course," said Rowan. "He's a Cairdrie."

Marylda smiled and was glad it was too dark for him to see. Darling Rowan, excited as a child with the idea of staying at the Ritz, and yet who took it for granted that people who happened to be called Cairdrie were automatically obedient to him.

"It was an enormous relief when you told me about your aunt," said Rowan, "and the kind of life you had in the cottage in Maine. How awful it would have been if you were rich, if the Ritz was obvious instead of being new for us both. There is nothing worse than giving a present to some one you love, which you think is going to mean a lot and then finding they don't want it. I once saved up for eleven months to buy Duncan a pocket-knife, and then I found he had bought a far better one for himself the day before, with three blades and a corkscrew, and a thing for taking stones out of horses' hooves. I felt as though he had deliberately cheated me. It was nearly two years before I really liked him again."

That he had said something which to Marylda was horrific he remained contentedly unaware. She knew only too well how much the pocket-knife had meant. Hadn't she given a dressing-case with gold fittings to a friend to whom she had been a bridesmaid and overheard her say, "Of course it doesn't mean anything from Marylda, she's so disgustingly rich"?

Rowan yawned and gathered her more closely into his arms. "We'd better get some sleep," he said.

Marylda saw the dawn through the window before she

was too tired to think any longer about what would happen when she could no longer prevent the little pink pigs from coming back to try to trample down her happiness.

XIII WEDDING BREAKFAST

THE WEDDING breakfast was held in a private room at Laperouse. The only other guest, and second witness, was Malcolm Cairdrie, the kinsman who had been entrusted with the somewhat complicated formalities which are necessary before citizens of two different countries can be married in a third. Duncan had arrived with the Alvis the night before, seeming not at all put out by Rowan's casual acceptance of the trouble he had taken to change his plans twice in the course of a few days with no more reason given than a telegram. Marylda had liked him on sight, and after the three of them had dined together he had told her that she could count on him to help Rowan slay any dragons who threatened to breathe fire on their romance. She gathered that this was a roundabout way of assuring her that in the probable battle with Georgina she could count on his support.

The toast to the bride and bridegroom was drunk in Glenlivet, of which a bottle had been summarily commandeered by Malcolm from a fellow Scot at the Embassy. "Luckily the fellow had the decency to realize nothing except real whisky was worthy of the occasion," he explained. "And white heather was easy enough, though the kind that can be bought in pots is a poor substitute for the proper thing."

Rowan in the company of his kin seemed to gain in stature; it was not that he spoke differently, but he assumed authority natural to one who believed unquestioningly in the power of leadership conferred by blood. She was happy to see him so even tempered, for only this morning he had been annoyed because she had insisted that their marriage was kept secret until they returned to Scotland. "It will be much easier if your grandmother doesn't know about me until we are nearly home. Old people always worry—it would be cruel to give her time to think too much about what I'm like. Please, darling, please let us have a real, secret, romantic elopement!"

How could she risk the trustees seeing a paragraph in the papers which would have caused a deluge of cables? There was always a chance that the identity of Marylda Lovell was

not so secure as she believed. If there was a photograph of her a reporter might recognize it. "American Heiress marries Highland Chief. Tartan for Blenkinsop's Super Sausages."

"Darling Rowan, we mustn't risk being in the French papers. Honorine might see it, or Doctor Chavaigne. I couldn't bear them to know we'd deceived them."

"I hadn't thought of that," Rowan had admitted, his frown clearing. Now he could avoid writing to Georgina. No use pretending he had not been dreading breaking the news to her. He was no good at writing letters. Much better wait until she saw Marylda and realized what nonsense it would be to look on her as another American bride who was going to bring disaster to Cloud. Hector had picked a loser, and no one could really blame Georgina for hating her husband's first wife, but Marylda mustn't be allowed to suffer for an ancient jealousy.

He had stopped staring out of the window and taken Marylda in his arms. "Of course we won't spoil our elopement. Damn all interfering relatives! I will carve up any one who dares to snoop. Bring me my claymore so that I may spill the rat brains of reporters."

He had peered under the bed and into the cupboards: then crept up to his sponge which, he affirmed in a whisper, concealed a very small camera man.

"Got him," he had shouted, swatting a fly. He balanced the corpse on a piece of soap and addressed it sternly. "Summary justice, I admit, but not excessive. You were going to publish a picture of us in the bath. 'Laird takes tap end while lady bathes with him before wedding.' "

He had turned to Marylda in mock dismay. "Is there nothing at which these types will boggle?"

"Nothing," said Marylda.

So she had won the first round against the pigs. She was married to Rowan, and somehow she was going to make him so happy that he would go on trusting in love even when she had to tell him she had lied.

Champagne followed the Glenlivet, Corton the champagne. She learned that the Scottish head is not overrated, for no one showed any signs of having absorbed a considerable quantity of liquor.

True to convention, Malcolm had ordered a sweet for her. Marylda realized it would have been an error to say that she also would have preferred the Brie.

"Though I says it as ordered it," observed Malcolm, "it has been an admirable lunch. Of course there should have been

haggis, but Rowan didn't give me time to have one flown out. I tried to explain to the chef how to make it, but he didn't take kindly to the idea. 'First get a sheep's pluck,' I said, 'with oatmeal and assorted innards.' He must have confused haggis with black pudding, for he shouted 'I will *not* serve pig's blood!' . . ."

The stem of Marylda's wineglass snapped and a red stream ran across the white cloth and fell in heavy drops to the floor.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said breathlessly. "Please forgive me . . . I don't know how it happened."

Duncan saw how white she turned. Surely Rowan doesn't bully her? He sprang to the rescue with his napkin.

"Darling, it doesn't matter," said Rowan, hoping he did not show he was annoyed that she should be agitated by so trivial an accident.

Malcolm, slower to react but always the diplomat, said heartily, "Nothing luckier than breaking a glass. Old Polish and Russian custom. Always provide cheap glasses when we entertain their people."

The tension was still acute, so he decided that a more dramatic gesture was required. "To the Lady of Cloud," he said, and threw his glass over his shoulder.

Duncan, because he could think of nothing else with which to break the sudden silence, passed a large bundle of mille notes across the table to Rowan. "Tell me if you want more," he said, embarrassed that he had made the transaction in public, instead of in the decent privacy of the lavatory.

In spite of Duncan's protest that there was no hurry, Rowan took out his check-book and borrowed a fountainpen from Malcolm. Marylda made another mental note: one is not indebted even to one's kin.

"Marylda wants to sell her car," said Rowan over his shoulder to Malcolm. "No good to us, left-hand drive and there would be trouble exporting it. Get rid of it for her, will you?"

Malcolm asked the mileage of the Citröen, the condition of the tires, what further repairs it required. He made penciled calculations on the back of the menu and then said, "Should be worth about two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Do you want it in cash or paid direct into her account?"

"Cash," said Marylda quickly. The bank might be another possible danger. "Cash is easier in shops that don't know you—they are sometimes difficult about checks."

Rowan smiled fondly at her. He had already forgotten the incident of the spilled wine, and found it ingenuous of her to imagine that his wife's checks could ever be questioned.

Bride and bridegroom went back to the Ritz in a taxi. Duncan stayed to settle the bill. Lucky chap, Rowan, he mused. But she's not going to have an easy wicket, unless she can cure his glooms and tackle Georgina—and who could?

Malcolm, deciding that exercise was indicated before returning to the Embassy, walked briskly along the quays, Brigg's umbrella in hand, black homburg meticulously adjusted. From a flower shop in the Faubourg St. Honoré he sent orchids to the lady to whom he now owed fealty.

XIV HONEYMOON IN PARIS

MARYLDA HAD always been impatient with people who bought something they could not reasonably afford and then whined about the cost. She had bought at least temporary joy, a kind of joy which she had never expected to find, and she had bought it with lies because there was no other way to get it. She was not going to let it be spoiled by futile anxiety: perhaps Rowan would understand and not even be angry with her—he might realize it was really a compliment that she was so eager to play the begger maid to his Cophetua.

They were in youth and in love, and if sometimes they were irresponsible only by a deliberate effort this was no more than a speck on the mirror of the bright present. They went to Longchamps and Rowan won four thousand francs on an unlikely looking horse which he backed because it was called Lochinvar.

"Which proves that it is much better to follow a hunch than to bother with probabilities," he said as they walked arm in arm to the paddock from the tote where he had collected his winnings. That he lost it all on the next race without a flicker of regret was another sign of how much he had learned in three weeks.

They went to Luna Park, and she was suitably impressed when he drew an admiring audience at the shooting gallery; and he felt a wave of almost unbearable protectiveness when she clung to him as they swept down the giant racer.

They explored the Quartier Latin and stood in front of a little shop which displayed students' pictures, arguing about the rival merits of what appeared to be a lemon on a soap dish, a long way after Picasso; and a pink lady about to slide off a sofa, who was even further behind Matisse. They went up the Eiffel Tower and had ices in the café. They had sup-

per at the Bal Tabarin, and Rowan became a little pompous after the second bottle of champagne and insisted on explaining to Marylda exactly why she was so much more beautiful than any of the exotic young women who pointed their charms with ostrich feathers and small nets of brilliants. He became argumentative as to whether her skin had the texture of a gardenia or whether she was correct to accuse him of exaggeration.

She thought he had forgotten all about it until she came back from the hairdresser the following evening and found he had bought ten dozen gardenias and spread them on the bed as a background for her. The correlation of the evidence proved so satisfactory that they were two hours late for the table they had booked at Maxim's.

At Fontainbleau, they neglected to visit the Château, because after lunching at a restaurant which pretended to be a hunting lodge, it seemed more appropriate to play nymph and shepherd in a secluded forest glade.

In the Palace of Versailles, Rowan pretended to be a history student from Aberdeen and proceeded to make pungent comments until the attention of the guided herd of American tourists shifted from the monotone recital of their temporary controller. In a stage whisper Rowan enlarged on the peculiar virtues—"though mind you, the more solid members of the Kirk might call them by a different name"—of entirely apocryphal ladies who had inhabited these vast and echoing rooms. "Bed curtains, you will notice," he said sententiously. "A heathen practice required by those who have too many privacies to conceal."

The guide, resigned that he would not get even his usual twenty francs from these foreign *bourgeois,* eyed them with disfavor as they hung back to let the rest of the crowd disperse. Suddenly the young man at whom the girl smiled as though there was no other *Roi Soleil,* became the Englishman to whom it was automatic to touch his cap; which startled him even more than the five hundred franc note that appeared on his outstretched palm.

"Worth it," said Rowan, his hand under Marylda's elbow as he steered her past the huddle that were dutifully inspecting the Hall of Mirrors. "Seldom enjoyed myself more."

There were other occasions she did not find so restful, though they further increased her devotion. They had followed the river, below the lighted avenues bordering the Seine, close to the water which kept its secret darkness even at the heart of the city. Two men standing beside a barge

made no more than a casual remark about the girl who passed them. In their own argot it was even complimentary.

Rowan swung around and said in a careful, clipped French, "I suggest you repeat that remark. Slowly, so that I cannot misunderstand."

If it had not been for the presence of a friend, the bargee would have said he was only remarking on the admirable contours of a plane tree on the opposite bank. But the assurance of being in the majority made him overbold and he repeated his remark, spitting on the cobbles to show he was not to be intimidated.

Fists can be quicker than knives. At the second splash Rowan adjusted his coat, panting a little but well pleased. Already a boat hook had appeared on the far side of the barge, and in the light from the hatch two heads appeared, swimming at least strongly enough to be retrieved.

"Darling, need you do that very often?" said Marylda, who in those few seconds had seen Rowan knifed, watched while he died, mourned by his bier and suffered the ultimate shame of having stood helpless while he did battle in her name.

Rowan put his arm around her shoulder and sucked the bruised knuckles of his other hand. "As nice a right and left as I've seen for years," he said contentedly.

"My darling, wasn't it naughty to hit them quite so hard?"

"You couldn't expect me to let that remark pass? It wouldn't have been decent."

So now I know, he thought, why I fought so bloody hard at school. If not, how could I be strong enough to guard her? But being a Scot he only said aloud, "I think we've earned a drink."

In the Boulevard St. Michel they found a bar still showing a light, and a bottle of real whisky waiting to be opened for them.

Though Rowan disliked shopping, he preferred accompanying Marylda to being deprived of her company. He wore the ties she bought at Sulka, and let her choose a new dressing-gown for him, in claret-colored brocade with his monogram embroidered on the pocket. She had no idea how difficult he had found it to complete the gesture by giving his ragged foulard to the valet.

"If I was a Mohammedan I should still require no other wives," said Rowan, who, after rowing the boat they had hired at Senlis, was basking on the warm gravel of an islet in the Seine. "In your most delightful person you contain a

harem. Should I be in the mood to act the buffoon you echo it; if a head waiter does not immediately recognize your quality and conduct us to the best table, you become an Empress and he abject."

"Do I?" she said. "Darling, how clever of me—I never knew!"

"Consider the Ambassadeurs. We went there with no more than a chit from Malcolm; they had reserved for us an inconspicuous corner in which we could be no demerit to the establishment. What did you do? Nothing! That was the beauty of it. You raised your eyebrows a trifle, but those eyebrows gently indicated that you were a little amused that even when slumming your incognito had been effective."

He did not notice that she shivered, as though a sudden cold wind disturbed the long leaves of the drowsing willows.

"You are not constrained by the obligations either of mortality or of Olympus," he said contentedly. "You accepted two pernods from a taxi-driver in that unsavory joint where we found ourselves at about 3 A.M., two days ago, in a manner which made him feel an honored host. And here's another reason why we are happier than any other lovers—whether married or not. We both like the same kind of food, we both agree that conversation early in the morning is barbarous—unless it is very early, when of course it comes under a different set of laws."

"You flatter me, or yourself, too much!" she said. "Have I ever shared those eggs, that bacon, those impermeable omelettes? Have I ever asked for more than coffee, a cigarette, and a decent interval in which to wake?"

He grinned. "One has a certain convention to maintain at home and abroad. For what reason the inherited digestive tract should demand sustenance at a certain hour is not my concern. Why do Scots eat oatmeal? Why should it be consumed in an upright position, with salt, rather than in the manner of the Sassenach, seated, with cream and sugar? Why is cold grouse better before nine in the morning than at any other hour? One is not expected to produce answers: sufficient that one accepts."

"Have I got to eat grouse for breakfast in Scotland?"

"My darling, for you I will break down the last bulwarks of the Highlands. You shall have coffee—and in bed."

"After all," said Marylda, not realizing how great a concession she received, "I think it is not altogether usual for you to picnic on slices of garlic sausage and cherries, thin

beer and undistinguished cheese from a paper bag! But have you ever enjoyed a meal more?"

"Never," he said. "But then I must admit that on no previous occasion did I have for an *apéritif* the sight of you swimming."

They drove back to Paris through a dove-gray dusk, for they had found a little *auberge* which it would have been absurd to pass. A blue rectangle was propped against a vase of phlox whose red and pink and purple they had brought home the morning before from the flower market on the Isle de la Cité.

"It's a telegram," said Marylda, who since it was addressed to Rowan was not alarmed—probably it was from Duncan who was staying with friends near Orleans.

Rowan tore it open, and she saw him suddenly stiffen. He read it twice and then handed it to her.

"HEAR EXTRAORDINARY RUMOR YOU ARE MARRIED. PLEASE DENY OR RETURN IMMEDIATELY.—GEORGINA."

"Well, she had to know soon," said Marylda. "Though I suppose we ought to have told her. Had you better ring her up?"

Rowan exploded. "Good God, explain to Georgina on the telephone—with the entire village listening in! Didn't you notice that it was sent from Inverness? She drove fifty miles before she'd even risk a telegram."

"Well, send a noncommittal reply and explain in a letter. I'll write too, if you think it will help."

"Can't you read?" It was a Rowan she had never seen before who shouted at her. He tore the telegram from her hand and underlined the words with the nail of a forefinger which scoured into the paper. "Deny or return immediately."

For a moment he realized she was frightened and his own fear receded sufficiently for him to become almost conciliatory. "We can't deny it, and neither of us want to. You aren't ashamed of having eloped with me, are you?"

"But of course not! Rowan darling, this isn't anything really important . . . nothing that can affect *us*. Only an old woman who doesn't understand, to whom we must be a little gentle until we've had a chance to explain."

He picked up the telephone and demanded the hall porter. "Get me two seats on the morning train . . . Where to? London, of course. It leaves at eleven? Good. Wire London and

book two sleepers to Inverness—either on the train leaving Euston at nineteen hours or the midnight mail."

Marylda, who at first had shared his anxiety, was now annoyed. Really this was a ridiculous fuss to make about a telegram from a testy old woman. How silly of Rowan to make all these ill-considered plans without having the courtesy to consult her. However, it would probably be salutary for him to discover that she could on occasion be far more practical than he.

She sat in an arm chair in a pose of deliberate negligence, her ankles crossed, a cigarette held in carefully flexed fingers. "Darling, wouldn't it be more intelligent to ring up Boulogne? We've a booking on the Auto-carrier in ten days and we may be able to get one sooner. Surely Georgina wouldn't expect us to abandon a perfectly good car?"

His immediate acceptance of her advice made her feel guilty at having offered it with sarcasm. He seized the telephone again and demanded to be reconnected with the hall porter.

"Cancel those train reservations. Get on to Boulogne and ask them whether they can take my car tomorrow . . . The office doesn't open before ten? When does the passenger boat sail? All right, then call us at six-thirty."

He slammed down the receiver. "If we can't get a passage for the car we'll have to leave it with the A.A. there and they'll ship it when they can and arrange for some one to drive it north."

"Is all this really necessary?" said Marylda, with what she considered remarkable calm. After all, she had three dresses which would not be ready until the end of the week. They had booked rooms at the Westminster in Le Touquet where they had arranged to stay for a couple of nights before returning to England. Had none of her plans any importance against the whim of an old woman in Scotland?

"You'd better get on with the packing."

She was Rowan's wife; what right had he suddenly to speak to her as though she was no more than his valet?

"We must not leave later than seven." He glanced at his wrist watch. "It is now after midnight. Any luggage which is not ready will be left behind."

He began to throw things into his suitcase. "You'll never get it shut if you don't fold them properly," she said. "Wouldn't it be simpler to ring for someone to do it?"

"I happen to object to asking people to work at ridiculous hours," he said coldly.

"But there's a night staff . . ."

"Then I suggest you ring for the waiter and order a drink—it might make you more amiable."

"How many shall I order for you? A couple of bottles or would it take even more to turn you back into a reasonable human being?"

"If I was unreasonable would I keep my temper instead of telling you how unattractive I find a wife who at the first crisis refuses to pull her weight? *Will* you stop standing there looking at me as if you thought I'd gone off my head!"

"Haven't you?" She lit another cigarette with deliberate slowness. For a moment she thought he was going to shake her. Then he snatched up his hat and flung the door open. "I'm going out," he said. "You can make up your mind whether to start packing or if you're going to follow by a later train—if you intend to follow at all."

The door slammed. Marylda's legs were shaking so much that she stumbled before she reached a chair. He had warned her he had a temper, but surely he couldn't behave like this for no real reason? Why should everything become cruel and ugly because of a telegram from a selfish old woman? How *dare* he start a row and then run away in the middle! How could she climb down without making him despise her? She would go to the George V for the night and show him once and for all that she refused to be bullied!

Stop crying you fool! Of course if he has to choose between you and his grandmother you'll win. But will you? Would his pride let him stay here until you rang up from another hotel, when every one here would know you'd had a quarrel? It wouldn't: he's said he's going to leave for Boulogne at seven and he won't change his mind. Are you going to risk losing everything just because you haven't learned to be even a little tactful?

She dragged her suitcases from one of the cupboards and began to pack. Everything must be finished before Rowan came back, for if he watched her and she thought he was gloating, the row would flare up again. Shoes seemed to deliberately take more than their ordinary space, dresses refused to go into their natural folds. The stopper from a bottle belonging to her dressing-case rolled under a chest of drawers and she hit her head when she grovelled for it. Her own packing took her over an hour, for even as the inconspicuous Miss Lovell she had nearly always found a maid to do it for her.

What had happened to Rowan? Had he quarrelled with

some one else and got into a fight? She ran to the window in case she might see him coming home. The Place Vendôme was deserted except for a girl in a white evening dress who was laughing up at the man beside her. That girl might have been me if the telegram hadn't come. Where is Rowan? She imagined his body drifting down the Seine—or did bodies drift if they were only just drowned?

Don't fuss, Marylda. You've got to pretend that nothing's happened. You must make it only a lover's quarrel—lovers *do* quarrel or it wouldn't be a cliché. What else could she do to stop thinking? Pack Rowan's suitcase, he'll be pleased at the evidence of a dutiful wife. The feel of his clothes made her want to cry again as she struggled to fold the coats properly. Please let Rowan come back soon—but let me get everything tidy first. No, that doesn't matter; nothing matters except having him safely back.

The electric clock silently jerked forward with no regard for the realities of time. It couldn't still be only half past two? It was twenty-five past when she last looked at it, nearly an hour ago. She picked up the telephone and asked the time. *"Deux heures et demi, Madame,"* said a sleepy voice. So there was nothing wrong with the clock.

What else could she do? Rowan's suit, the one she thought he would wish to wear for traveling, was neatly laid out on a chair. She went into the bathroom and ticked off on her fingers the other things he would want in the morning; razor, shaving brush, shaving soap, tooth brush—he can use my toothpaste.

She was wearing a dressing-gown cut like a man's in heavy turquoise silk, the revers piped in scarlet. Everything else was packed, except the things she would wear tomorrow—and her new nightdress; white chiffon which she had meant to keep for Le Touquet.

Already the rooms had become impersonal. The neat luggage, the phlox which had begun to wilt. She pulled them out of the vase and thrust them deep into the waste-paper basket so that they could not remind her of walking in the hot, scented shade of the flower market with Rowan. They looked like the blank, inquisitive faces of a crowd who had gathered to watch a stranger's funeral. She crushed them down under a pall of tissue paper. Her hands were slimy from the stalks, and she ran into the bathroom to scrub them clean under running water.

Even the clock agreed that it was now after three. She forced herself to take off her makeup, slowly as though this

was the ordinary routine of going to bed. Cream first, wipe it off with a face tissue. Tonic lotion, then a light dusting of powder, and pale lipstick carefully rubbed in with the little finger so that it won't smudge. A touch of Lelong Gardénia behind each ear—they had bought it after the ten dozen gardenias. . . .

She put on her nightdress and tried to take comfort from the sight of herself in the mirror. Widows wear white in China. Don't panic. Can't your husband go out for a couple of hours without you turning it into a crisis? He went through the war without getting hurt, didn't he? Can't he buy himself a few drinks in Paris and still get home safely? Or even go for a walk without getting lost?

She lay in the wide bed watching the clock. At least it doesn't chime. It would be too much if I had to hear it telling me over and over again that Rowan doesn't love me any more—that he will never come back. Come back, oh please come back!

She heard the key in the door. Pretend to be asleep! He mustn't know you've been lying awake. Oh *dear* God, thank you so much for letting him come back!

Under her lashes she watched him tiptoe into the sitting-room and then heard the sound of the shower. He came in with his hair dripping. "Hello, my darling," she said, as though just wakened.

He climbed into bed beside her. "I'm a filthy tempered oaf. I am also beastly drunk. I ought to sleep on the floor."

"My darling, oh my darling, I'm so sorry I was disagreeable. I love you so much."

"Which proves miracles still happen. Sure you've forgiven me?" Already his voice was drowsy. "Going to have a mammoth hangover in the morning, so you'll have to see we get off by seven."

When he was asleep, Marylda carefully slid his head from her shoulder to the pillow and went to unpack the Alka Seltzer. "You're growing up," she said to the girl who smiled at her from the mirror. "I think you've graduated from bride to wife."

PART TWO

I CROSSING THE BORDER

THE TRAIN, which before the war used to be called the Royal Highlander, plunged into a tunnel and woke Marylda from an uneasy doze. Rowan was lying asleep on the opposite seat, for since Crewe they had had the carriage to themselves. She wondered if they had reached Scotland yet, and wiped the misted window with her handkerchief. She tried to see what type of country they were traveling through, but it was still too early to find anything except her reflection in the dark glass.

In spite of their efforts to leave Paris by seven, it had been nearly nine before the car had been brought around from the garage. Rowan had become increasingly angry; the hall porter had telephoned repeatedly only to reaffirm that some one had put the key of the car in the wrong place and nothing could be done until he came on duty. Marylda had tried to persuade Rowan to have breakfast and at last he had reluctantly accepted a cup of black coffee. He drove out of Paris at a speed which earned the respect and profanity of several taxi drivers. Marylda prayed that she would not make a mistake in map reading, but failed to take the correct fork at St. Denis and so wasted another ten minutes. They could still have made the afternoon boat if they had not had to stop twice to clean the plugs and then had a puncture outside Amiens. Rowan changed the wheel. The tire was flat. Some one had stolen the pump.

"Perhaps we shall be able to get on the Auto-carrier tomorrow," she said consolingly.

"I ought to have left the bloody car in Paris. Duncan could have brought it over. We ought to have caught the Golden Arrow instead of trying this idiotic scheme."

"It's more of an adventure this way," she said, hoping that she would not produce a further outburst of wrath. But for

some unlikely reason he experienced a sudden change of mood.

"Darling, you're wonderful! Even when I'm intolerable you must never forget that I adore you: any other woman would be furious at an idiot husband who hadn't even the sense to check over the tool kit, but you've not even grumbled!"

"Want any help?" inquired the driver of a lorry who had pulled up at the unusual sight of a couple embracing on the running board of a car with a G.B. plate. He pumped up the tire, refused a tip and drove on with the reflection that the English were less phlegmatic than he had been led to believe.

They reached Boulogne in time to see the Auto-carrier leaving the harbor. The A.A. agent had already left, but they discovered him in a café and he obligingly returned to his office to confirm that there was no booking available for a week. He phoned through to Calais and found there was no vacancy there either, but advised trying to get on the morning boat in case some one failed to keep a reservation.

Marylda suggested they might spend the night at Le Torquet, but Rowan refused to risk a further delay. The hotel in Calais was full, and they had to go back to St. Omer before they could find a room.

At six in the morning they were at the docks. The authorities were kind but firm: it was definitely impossible to take another car but they would see it was sent across when there was a vacancy. Rowan handed the car papers to the A.A. man, and carried the luggage, which Marylda had increased by seven suitcases and a hat box, to the *buvette* on the quay, there being another hour to waste before they were allowed on board.

"It is undoubtedly going to be a rough crossing," said the barman cheerfully, as he put two cups of coffee on the marble table in front of them. "You would perhaps like a cognac?"

Rowan looked at the drab shelves and his interest quickened. "Marylda, unless I am seeing a mirage there appears to be champagne. It would be heartening to split a bottle."

In a few minutes they began to feel more confident. "Are you a good sailor?" inquired Rowan. "If not I will get hold of the purser before the train arrives and insist on a cabin."

"I'm usually quite reliable, but I don't know if the Channel has any special horrors . . . one has heard stories."

"Darling, of course—you've never been to England. How extraordinary!"

"Quite a number of people are born in other parts of the

world," she said demurely. "They are called Foreigners and swing by their tails from trees."

"But you are not a foreigner any longer. You must admit there are advantages in being married even to a lugubrious Scot."

"Every advantage! Let's get a cabin anyway, and take another bottle with us, to toast France where we found each other, and my—my new country."

The barman had not been unduly pessimistic about the weather, but Rowan managed to conceal that he was far less confident a sailor than his wife. He sent a radiogram to Georgina: "MARRIED ARRIVING TOMORROW ROWAN." It was brief, but redundant words in telegrams was another of the things likly to annoy her. Perhaps it would have been wiser to break the news by letter: no, he would have been a fool to allow anything to spoil his honeymoon. How would she react to Marylda? Too late to worry about that now; he'd find out soon enough!

At Euston, Rowan was mildly annoyed to find there were no sleepers available, but already his normal attitude towards money had begun to reassert itself and he decided it was well worth sitting up all night to save nearly six pounds. Marylda being unaware of this consideration was relieved that he was not upset by this further flaw in the plans he had made from the Ritz.

He had remained cheerful during dinner in the restaurant car and even made the surprising remark that it was good to get back to English food. In view of the cardboard soup, mackintosh fish, and pink blancmange she thought he was joking, but realized in time that it was a serious comment.

Until they had the compartment to themselves he remained inert behind *The Times*, while she wondered whether she would ever learn to think *Punch* funnier than the *New Yorker*. Was talking to strangers in trains another English taboo? If so it must be very dull unless they always traveled in pairs. She smiled to herself: they ought to have train hostesses so that people could be properly introduced. Could he really have meant what he said about the dinner? Would she be able to choose proper meals, or would the cook be very set in her ways? Probably all the servants would be family retainers and resent any change in their routine. She would have to be careful not to offend them. Or would they still only take orders from Georgina?

Why was Rowan frightened of his grandmother, or was it only the tradition of maternal authority? American mothers

were often disgracefully possessive, especially of only sons—perhaps grandmothers were worse with only grandsons.

Would Georgina meet them at the station? No, for they were due at seven and it was fifty miles by road—too far for an old lady so early in the morning. She probably faked heart attacks if she didn't get her own way, which would account for Rowan being afraid of upsetting her. She must be very old-fashioned to be prejudiced against foreigners just because her husband's first wife had been American. She probably always wore black, like Queen Victoria, after being a widow for—how long was it? Rowan had said his grandfather died in 1902, the year his father was born. She would be small with delicate bones, have white hair, parted in the middle and screwed into a tight little bun. She would walk with an ebony cane, and always wear a cameo brooch that was really a locket with a strand of her dead husband's hair inside. She tried to feel kindly. Wouldn't any one be jealous if a strange young woman tried to take away one's only grandson?

The train rattled over points and Rowan opened his eyes. "What's the matter darling?" he said sleepily.

"I was hoping I shan't be jealous of my grandson," she said.

He laughed. "Darling, aren't you missing a generation? Oh damn, why is this a corridor train!"

II THE GATES OF CLOUD

THEY WERE MET at the station by a tall, black-browed Cairdrie in plus-fours whom Marylda presumed to be a relation. It was only when he carried the luggage to the shooting-brake that she realized he was a kind of chauffeur. Had she done the wrong thing in shaking hands with him? However, Rowan had seemed pleased with her.

Had she known it, he was congratulating himself at not having warned her that to do less would have been an insult. Trust Marylda to do the right thing; in future he would not be so pompous as to expect his wife to require instructions.

Marylda was making further mental notes: a shooting-brake is cousin to a station-wagon. The chauffeur is called Sandy, which is not a nickname for some one with red hair, but is short for Alexander. He was Rowan's batman during the war, and is old Robbie's grandson. Old Robbie is apparently some one very important to Rowan, and is something called a ghillie. What are ghillies?

The scenery absorbed her attention. The Moray Firth, brilliant under the sun; blue water with a blue symphony of hills beyond. . . . Gradually the tempo of open moorland quickened to streams urgent among granite. Silver birches poised like ballerinas in the wings before the high pass opened to disclose the pageant of the Cairngorms.

"Like it?" said Rowan, secure that no one could travel the world except to return with homage to his Highlands.

"I thought it always rained in Scotland," she said. "But the air is so clear, as though the light came out of the hills. . . ."

"Wait till you hear the curlews in the mist—then you'll love it even more. And winter, when there is an almost unbearable cleanness of snow under the high sky—and you climb our mountains and stand on the summit alone with the eagles. We still have eagles," he added, shy to have revealed such intense feeling for his own place.

The road took them into a sharp cleft, raw stone that closed their sight of the sky. She saw a lake among bare hills, desolate even in the clear sunlight. The ruins of a castle were gray on an island of the sleeping water.

"Not Cloud," he said, "but it belongs to us. We took it back as a dowry from the Coynachs."

"She must have been glad to leave such a draughty home," said Marylda, leaning forward to look again at the fallen stone. "It must have been a small dowry she brought with her."

He laughed. "Her husband's skull and considerable cattle."

"A *skull*?"

"Yes, the Luck of the Cairdries, though it doesn't look important since Thunder Hector's father had it made into a fruit dish. We only have it out on special occasions—the last time was when I came of age. The tradition is that if the Coynachs get it back our luck will go and they will prosper."

"You must forgive me for being an uneducated barbarian, but is it usual to use your neighbor's skull as an ornament to the dinner table? Should I have brought one in my suitcase?"

"Fortunately you have no brother who wished to oppose our marriage! The Coynach fell in love with Alys, the Cairdrie's sister, so he carried her off to his castle, and she was happy as his wife for a year. Then the Cairdrie got annoyed that his sister had married without permission, so he called out the clan—I expect he was a bit tight—and they raided the Coynachs and burned the castle down. He brought

back his sister and her husband's head. That's why we've still got it."

"What happened to the bride?"

"Oh, she was shut up in Cloud till she died. It's a largish room with a battlement walk, so she could take exercise in the fresh air when she liked. It must have been quite healthy, for she lived another thirty years. One view is that her brother kept her shut up as a punishment for bringing disgrace on the family, but she was probably sulking."

"A long sulk," said Marylda, "but perhaps Alys thought it churlish to cut off her husband's head. It is fortunate I have no intention of taking lovers; it would appear to add a substantial premium to their life insurance."

"They would require a hundred per cent," said Rowan. "We have not yet become effete." He laughed as though it were only a joke, but she noticed that there was a sharp edge to his laughter.

"There is no doubt a special cemetery for unsuccessful cuckolders?"

"Don't make funny remarks about lovers when Georgina's about," he said quickly. "You see, there was an occasion when a Cairdrie broke the tradition. Hector's first wife ran away with a chauffeur, a *French* chauffeur. He let them go —perhaps he was glad to get rid of her at any price. He didn't even divorce her. So don't say much about France; Georgina has never been abroad, and she associates foreigners with all the troubles which happened to Hector. She was his cousin and had been in love with him since she was a child, so you can't blame her for being jealous when he married some one else."

"No," said Marylda, "you can't blame her—but she mustn't blame me for being born in America—after all, so were millions of other people!" She changed the subject to conceal that she found it annoying to be patronized. "When do we get to Cloud?"

"We've been here for the last ten miles."

"It's very—big," she said.

He smiled. "A hundred thousand acres is quite a lot of land—though it's nothing compared with the real landowners —Seafield or Mackintosh or Moray."

They came to a wood. It was dark among the pine trees. Rowan leaned forward. "You'll see the house in a minute." She shut her eyes, afraid that sudden foresight might be real. How did she know that there would be a river on the left of the road, and then a single span bridge; beyond it two stone

pillars with elaborate iron gates? Why were the gates important . . . ?

The bridge echoed as the car crossed over it. She forced herself to look. There were no gates. A stain of rust had spread down the pillars from the empty staples: rust, the color of old blood.

"Frightened, darling?"

"No," she said, "only . . . excited."

The drive curved up through an avenue of beeches. Between the smooth gray trunks she saw the south face of the Castle, three rows of windows staring from their brow of battlements and guarded by massive round towers. I must have seen a picture of it, she thought; that's why it seems so familiar.

For a moment her view of it was cut off by a plantation of dark conifers where the drive divided, the right fork leading towards farm buildings higher on the slope, the left sweeping around to an archway between the north towers.

They drove under the portcullis into a paved courtyard and she realized that the Castle was a hollow square.

"Like it?" asked Rowan. "We used to keep our best cattle in here when the neighbors showed signs of being acquisitive." He drew up before wide stone steps sentineled by heraldic eagles. "Like it?" he repeated.

"It's—it's quite a castle!" she said breathlessly.

As they went up the steps she wondered if Rowan would carry her over the threshhold. No—no, don't expect it! It isn't the custom. . . . She felt a surge of embarrassment as though at a still painful memory of a humiliating blunder.

Rowan was introducing her to a maid who had opened the door, a middle-aged woman in a print dress, who shook hands with her and said, "Welcome home, milady."

"What's the form, Agnes?" said Rowan.

She glanced over her shoulder. "Not as good as it might be, but no worse." She smiled at Marylda. "Nothing that a little time won't mend, and now I've seen your lady, the time will be less than I feared."

Then in a louder voice, "Her ladyship's at breakfast, Sir Rowan."

He took Marylda by the arm and steered her across a hall so large that a refectory table that could have seated twenty looked inconspicuous. He gave her a quick kiss and whispered, "Now we're for it," and opened a door on the right of the cavernous fireplace.

This couldn't be Georgina! This woman wore tweed knick-

erbockers, there was a cigarette between her nicotine-stained fingers, and her short stubborn hair was the color of an old airedale. She said briskly, "Good morning, Rowan. Hadn't you better introduce me to your wife?"

"Georgina, this is Marylda," said Rowan.

III THE BRIDE COMES HOME

GEORGINA, AFTER a few remarks to Marylda—"Was the train late?" "Did you have a tiresome journey?"—ignored her and proceeded to talk to Rowan about estate matters. Rowan—surely he was behaving like a caricature of himself—stood by the fireplace eating oatmeal. Apparently he found grouse disease more interesting than ordinary courtesy to his wife.

Marylda tried to swallow resentment with the kidneys and bacon which in obedience to a casual, "Help yourself?" she had found in a silver dish on the serving-table. If this was a Highland welcome to the bride, how did they treat the week-end guest?

She patted one of the black labradors, who had left their bench in the corner to greet Rowan and then had retreated under the table in the hope that the stranger might be unaware that they were being deliberately disobedient. The weight of a black satin head on her knee was comforting, and she offered a piece of cold bacon which was politely accepted. At least the dogs were more civil than the hostess! A warm tongue licked her hand, and she responded with the rest of the bacon.

"Jock, Lassie! Corner!" said Georgina. "The dogs are not fed at meals," she added, as though explaining rudimentary manners to a child.

The labradors thumped their tails on the carpet and crawled from the shelter of the cloth, trying to pretend they had done no more than explore a covert which in spite of their faithful endeavors had proved barren.

Rowan frowned: silly of Marylda to invite a snub. She took a cigarette out of her case and waited for him to give her a light. When he remained oblivious she went to the serving-table and lit it from the spirit-lamp under the breakfast dishes. Was she supposed to sit at the table until Rowan finished his second boiled egg?

"Paper," he said, and offered her *The Scotsman*. At least it gave her an excuse for silence, and behind it she could take

a detailed view of the room. Who could have chosen the dark red wallpaper—surely even Georgina should have realized it was hideous? Four large oil paintings displayed a quantity of dead animals. Which was the most depressing? The stag with its back broken, apparently through a fall from a precipice in a fog, or the tangle of birds who improbably shared their bier with three salmon? As though this highly colored mortuary were not enough, the black marble mantelpiece provided a stuffed owl and an equally imperishable stoat with a rabbit in its mouth, both under glass domes.

Rowan considered whether he wanted another scone and decided against it. "The first decent breakfast I've had since I left home," he said contentedly.

Georgina smiled. "I expect Marylda would like a bath. Take her up to her room and then we'll go see Robbie."

Clever of her, thought Marylda. I'm to be sent upstairs while the grown-ups discuss matters of importance.

"We're in my room?" said Rowan.

"No, of course I've given you the Laird's Room. Marylda must forgive me if I have left anything of mine in the somewhat hurried move." She smiled acidly. "You did not give me much notice."

"Georgina, you shouldn't have changed your room." Rowan was obviously embarrassed.

"If you forget I am now the dowager, I have more respect for your wife! Your mother, naturally, had the Laird's Room; I returned there only when she died."

But I'm not going to die so conveniently! thought Marylda, and wished she had the courage to speak the words aloud.

"Jolly decent of Georgina," said Rowan, as he took Marylda up the great staircase and along a gallery where Cairdries looked down from their portraits at the new link of their generations. "Of course, I knew she would be pleased as soon as she saw you, but I thought the first day or two might be a bit tricky."

Oh, my darling, are you really so guileless? said his wife's heart. Yes, you are, which is one of the reasons why I love you, and must be clever enough to fight for us both.

A woman in a white dress, with a knot of clove carnations in her hand and a lamb at her feet, regarded Marylda from a darkened canvas. "So you are another bride of Cloud," she seemed to say. "You will require the subtlety of carnations and the strength of the lamb—which is the only strength by which they can be disarmed."

Rowan was pleased that his wife appreciated the painting.

"It's supposed to be a Romney, though it's not signed," he said. "She married my great-great-great-grandfather."

They went along a wide corridor, ranked with dower-chests. Suddenly Marylda felt she was coming to a room that would be a haven against implacable tradition. There would be white furniture, a wardrobe with three long mirrors, a dressing-table draped with muslin and knots of ribbon, chintz curtains—white chintz with rosebuds in precise gaiety.

She paused with her hand on the door. "I know what this room will be like," she said, "I'm coming home."

"Of course," said Rowan, "you're my wife."

She opened the door. The sunlight was pale between draperies of green serge that matched the curtains of the massive four-poster bed. She saw a mahogany wardrobe with Victorian Gothic carving; a dressing-table with dual ranks of drawers flanking the heavy mirror; green wallpaper that clashed with the more virulent greens and yellows of the Axminster carpet.

"But this isn't the right room!" she exclaimed.

"I'm sorry you don't like it," he said stiffly.

"I didn't mean that, darling. It was only that I imagined it was going to be—different."

"We can have it altered a bit," he said, mollified. "Not yet, of course, or Georgina might think we didn't appreciate her gesture in giving it up to us."

"We mustn't offend Georgina."

The note of bitterness escaped him. "This is our first real bedroom. I was born in it, and so was my father—and Hector."

She wanted to ask, "And do all the Cairdries die in it too?" How long would it be before she could make it look like an ordinary, kindly room that belonged to two people instead of two links in a chain?

A rat scuttled across the floor above. She shivered involuntarily.

"Cold, darling? I'll see if the water's hot."

"No, not cold." She managed to laugh. "Something must have run over my grave."

IV THE LAIRD'S ROOM

". . . AND SO we got married in Paris." Rowan, sitting beside Georgina on the edge of a cucumber frame in the kitchen garden, waited for her to speak. She had deliberately avoid-

ed any mention of the weeks he had spent away from Cloud, until he had found the suspense unbearable and blurted out his story like a schoolboy making lame excuses for the last term's report.

"How romantic," she said. "It reminds me of one of the novels the under-housemaid used to lend me when I was fourteen. They had highly colored paper covers and cost ninepence. I found them absorbing, which may have been because they were a privilege of the Servants' Hall, like strong tea in the middle of the morning, but strictly forbidden in the schoolroom."

"Romance has quite a respectable literary tradition—Malory probably didn't feel he was cozening the back stairs when he wrote *Morte d'Arthur!*"

"But, of course! I think it's so brave of you to flaunt convention! What on earth does it matter that the people here are bound to be a little disappointed that they couldn't come to your wedding? We must find an excuse for a party for them—sports perhaps and a bonfire, as we had for the Jubilee."

"You mean I ought to have married Marylda here? That we should have waited until a respectable quota of presents had been received?"

She patted his knee. "I think that under the circumstances you acted very wisely. Marylda is your wife and will be accepted as such—no one will be so impertinent as to inquire into her antecedents. If they do you can be sure I will make it clear that I find their morbid curiosity distasteful."

"You still find it difficult to accept a granddaughter-in-law that you didn't choose?"

"My dear, what business of mine is it whom you marry? I only want you to be happy. You can't blame me for regretting that you couldn't find your happiness in the way every one expected. There is something very reassuring about a boy and girl friendship which ripens into marriage."

"You mean, Janet?"

"Who else? If you had been more frank with me I shouldn't have cherished the hope of having her for the mother of my grandchildren. But you always seemed so pleased to see her. . . ."

"I'm very fond of Janet," he said defensively.

"But fondness is not enough? It should teach me not to think I'm discerning, for I could have sworn you were on the brink of a proposal."

"And so I was," said Rowan with unintentional honesty. "I

didn't expect to find what you are pleased to call 'romance.' I thought marriage was no more than another stage of friendship; a good, solid background of living; but nothing magical. Oh, Georgina, *can't* you understand?"

The appeal in his voice touched her more than she liked to admit. "I know that it is impossible, and somehow faintly disgusting, for the young to believe that their elders have ever been in love," she said, in a voice that was curiously unlike her usual decisive tones: "but I'm not entirely inexperienced."

"Then you must be glad that I haven't missed the real thing."

"Why should I be? Is it unnatural to wish to protect your young from being hurt?"

"But loving doesn't hurt!"

"My dear child! Oh, my dear child, how wonderful to be able to say that with such confidence!"

"So you were hurt? Georgina, I didn't know."

"It doesn't matter any longer. There are advantages in being a tough old woman of sixty-seven; one has acquired a certain fortitude."

She blew her nose with unnecessary violence. "It is ridiculous to be sentimental at my age. Give me a cigarette, I left my case on the breakfast table."

For a few minutes they smoked in silence. "Now, Rowan," she said briskly, "you've got to be honest with me, and if I ask you a straight question you must give a straight answer and not explode into one of your Highland tempers!"

"Fair enough. Shoot!"

"You may recall that on the few occasions when you've made an ass of yourself, and had the courage to be frank with me, I've always helped you to get out of it."

"Like the time I was caught shooting salmon with a .22?"

"Exactly. And the even more discreditable occasion when you put gunpowder in the French master's tobacco at your prep school and blew off his moustache—I had to grovel, and provide substantial compensation, to prevent you being expelled."

The incident was still vivid. The small boy who had been locked in a box-room and told that he was going to be sent to prison, and probably hanged if his victim died. And then Georgina had arrived and everything was suddenly all right.

"You're a wonderful ally, Georgina!"

"And an uncomfortable enemy—you mean that too, though you are sufficiently civil not to say so. And you're

as nervous as a cat on hot bricks because you can't make up your mind which side I'm on."

"At times you display an uncomfortable perspicacity . . . which is tiresome of you, for I thought I was carrying off a tricky situation with admirable *savoir faire.*"

"You wouldn't be a Cairdrie if you didn't—at least none of you lack what your generation inelegantly refers to as 'guts.' Tradition maintains that Ewan made the Devil so nervous that he sent him to St. Peter, who is still trying to win back his halo at dice. However, why digress?"

"Why?" agreed Rowan.

"Face facts, and alter them if they don't come up to your expectations. If you make a fool of yourself, admit it."

"This is not a discussion on abstract philosophy."

"Now, no tempers—they don't impress me, and are a waste of time and energy."

It was a new experience to find Georgina hedging, and Rowan began to enjoy himself. "Are you trying to suggest, most honored grandmother, that I fell a victim to the demands of my lower nature and then behaved like a little gentleman and married the girl?"

"Exactly," said Georgina, relieved to have been spared the necessity of stating her case so bluntly. "You married, where other men would not have thought it necessary. However, it is not irrevocable."

"You mean if I wish to divorce Marylda you will put no obstacle in my way?"

Relieved, she failed to notice the dangerous calm in his voice. "Exactly! Thank goodness you're going to be sensible. Old Andrews is a fool, we must get a competent lawyer from Edinburgh: fortunately Scottish law observes the decencies. You can be free in six weeks."

"There is, however, a snag," said Rowan.

"Because you were married in France? Must be a way around that. We'll get the best opinion and be damned to the fee!"

"The snag," said Rowan, slowly and deliberately, "is that I happen to be in love with my wife. If any one tries to come between us it will be most—unfortunate. If any sniveling little lawyer tried to poke his ferret face into our affairs I shall have extreme satisfaction in slitting open his pot belly, drawing out his intestines and strangling him with them. I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," said Georgina. "I thought this was to be a

friendly discussion. Marriage is obviously beneficial. You have kept your temper."

He laughed, and the sound nearly convinced them both. "So, now you know I am not the innocent victim of a woman's wiles, we can start talking sense. The trouble with you is that those paperbacked ninepennies gave you ideas about svelte enchantresses in tight black satin, who compromise innocent young men who venture abroad. You must curb your imagination which has gorged itself on pulp fiction! As a matter of interest, and off the record, why did you make up your mind I must be rescued from Marylda?"

He said it lightly in an attempt to skirt the sharp edges of a quarrel they both wished to avoid, and was unprepared for further revelations.

"It is difficult to remain calm when you see a pattern apparently repeating itself. We agreed on honest question and answer: if you find me embarrassing, at least give me credit that I would have continued to keep my mouth shut unless I believed it would be sheer cowardice not to speak. You know that your grandfather married twice?"

Rowan nodded. Surely Georgina wasn't going to bring up that old story about Hector's disastrous marriage with an American as an excuse for mistrusting Marylda! Could he stop her by pointing out that this was his first morning at home, that he wanted to introduce his wife to every one on the place, to share Cloud with her?

But Georgina spoke with a sincerity that even made him forget that Marylda must be lonely without him.

V THE BRIDESMAID

"I WAS A plain child," said Georgina, "and in due course I became a plain girl. When people tried to be kind they said I had nice hair, ignoring the fact that it was straight for all its yards of length. They also said I had a good skin. Only some one who has suffered from freckles has any idea quite how much that hurts! I washed my face in sheep's milk, which was remarkably difficult to get, for sheep resent being milked, especially into the unlikely receptacle of a straw boater—one could not risk being seen carrying a bucket to the moor. The applications of strawberries, furtively gathered and mashed with the handle of a tooth brush, proved equally ineffective. The courage required to climb to the Wishing Stone at midnight of midsummer was also not inconsiderable."

She paused to light another cigarette from the stub of the last. "Perhaps I underrate the Wishing Stone. My real prayer was always that Hector would marry me—the desire to have curly hair and no freckles was never more than a means to an end. I can never remember a time when being noticed by Hector was not more important that being approved by God. The first thing I can see, looking back into that awful loneliness called early childhood, is Hector, who then must have been about twelve, holding me on the rocking horse because the leathers were too long for my fat legs.

"The first trout I caught was a tribute to Hector. I was eight, and whenever there was a thunder storm I knew that it was God shouting that I had lied when I told him—Hector, not God, though at the time they were indistinguishable—that I caught it on a dry-fly instead of tickling it on a hot day when the poor fish thought itself safe in a shallow pool.

"Before I was sixteen I was allowed my own butt on the Twelfth—and women didn't shoot in those days so it meant more than it would now. But my father had no son and brought me up to wear the kilt and pretend that I was as good or better than a man. It was the fashion to despise the feminine when I was young. 'You are only a girl' was a taunt that stabbed deep. I suppose it sounds funny that I still ate crusts to make my hair curl in the same autumn that I got my first Royal—I stalked him for seven hours, and then to my shame was sick when I saw him gralloched.

"I was presented at Holyrood and my coming-out ball was at Cloud. Every one seemed to take it for granted that eventually I would marry Hector. There was a lot of entertaining at Cloud in those days. Vicky came the year before Hector's mother died, and her bedroom was specially decorated in tartan, even to the carpets. Although I was rather too young, Thunder usually asked me to be hostess, and was annoyed if I didn't spend most of my time at Cloud. Hector always treated me as his young cousin, but no one expected anything more intimate until people were formally engaged.

"Then he went to London, and stayed on for a season. He wrote to me; gay, casual letters describing the balls he had been to, gossip about house parties where the Prince of Wales was staying. He always referred to the Prince as 'Eddy Tum-Tum;' Mrs. Langtry was the reigning beauty and it all sounded very daring and remote. But I didn't worry, because it was taken for granted that young men sowed what was politely called 'wild oats' which were a necessary preliminary to matrimony.

"Mother took me to Edinburgh and bought me some clothes which I considered enormously elegant. She was quite pleased with me that summer, for I gave up what she called 'my hoydenish ways' and took an interest in housekeeping and infinite trouble with my appearance. I always wonder if she knew I used to put on three pairs of woollen combinations and run uphill in a vain attempt to improve my figure. But all that happened was that I got still more sturdy and was driven to sleeping in corsets, laced so tight that I could hardly breathe, in the hope of reducing my waist to the longed-for eighteen inches. I could never make it less than twenty-two and that only by a martyrdom of hunger. Eventually Mother became alarmed at my 'lack of appetite,' and I had to take a tonic which made me even more ravenous. I got to the stage when I used to dream of buns, plump with cream and jam. Sitting at meals was a torture—with course after course refused as an offering to elegance. It was only another stage of the anti-freckle prayers and the crust marathons, futile sacrifices on the altar of Hector.

"When I was seventeen there was to be the usual house party for the Twelfth. I planned the menus, read Mrs. Beeton as a bible, kept Thunder in a good temper, which was no small task when his gout was bad; made sure there would be enough smilax to go with the sweet-peas—we Victorians had an almost religious reverence for smilax, and no dinner table was complete without it; and ticked off the days on a calendar I kept hidden in my glove box. It was a most revealing document: 'Days until I see Hector again' decorated with a garland of wild roses in water color—the only artistic achievement I had managed to learn.

"Hector wrote to say that he was bringing an American and his daughter, 'to whom he owed hospitality.' I was excited at the idea of entertaining Americans; I was not sure whether they would expect covered wagons to meet them at the station and a tribe of Indians whooping outside the window to make them feel at home. So you see I was entirely unprepared for Emilie.

"She was not very tall but supremely elegant. She brought five trunks, and two hat boxes, and a crocodile dressing-case with gold fittings. Her clothes came from Worth and Revillon Freres and Callot. She had a beautiful voice, and sang, after people had pleaded for her to sing, when the men joined us after dinner. She was enormously rich, at least her people were which came to the same thing.

"For the first few days I tried to pretend that Hector

couldn't be in love with a woman who didn't understand Cloud. I thought when he remembered how we could fish and shoot, and how we belonged together, he'd forget Emilie. But I had to arrange all the details of the ball which announced their engagement. It was on the twenty-first of August, 1897. There were eleven courses, and the freezing-salt got into the raspberry ice. She sat on Hector's right and I on his left. She wore white lace with the Cairdrie rubies that Thunder had given to her as an engagement present. I had on Prussian blue watered silk, which was a little too tight across the bust, but every one knows that blue is so becoming to red hair. Mother lent me her seed-pearl necklace. I think she realized that it wasn't a very easy evening for me.

"I tried to curse Emilie, but it was just as futile as the freckle-cure. If she had been jealous I think it would have been less impossible, but she was so intolerably *kind*. She insisted on treating me as though I was her dear little sister-in-law. She taught me how to use face powder, and a little rouge, applied with discretion and a rabbit's foot. It was thought in those days that ladies did not 'paint,' but most of us did, with less skill than the others who were called 'demi mondaine' and despised with a spice of envy.

"When Thunder saw the marriage settlement he forgot any plans he may have made for me as a daughter-in-law. Chicago is more substantial than a favorite niece when it comes to repairing the gaps made by intensive gambling over fifty years!

"She asked me to be her chief bridesmaid. I was allowed to choose the bridesmaids' dresses, or to be more accurate, I looked at the sketches that had been sent by Worth, and she, very tactfully, let me agree to the ones she had already selected.

"They went to Paris and the South of France for their honeymoon. She sent me a box of candied fruit and two dozen lace handkerchiefs. I had five picture postcards from Hector.

"In many ways Hector was extraordinarily guileless. He asked me to arrange the formalities of their return to Cloud, two months later than they had at first intended, for Emilie wanted to see Florence and Naples. I put four vases of daffodils in their bedroom, and almond blossom on the mantelpiece. There were primroses for the blue bowl on the chest of drawers in Hector's dressing-room.

"I thought they would come by train, but then Hector telegraphed to say they were arriving in an automobile. I

could only prevent offence to Mr. Grant, the stationmaster, by asking him to join the party of welcome at the Castle. A car was still an event in the district, though it was understood that the Laird would not require a red flag on his own land.

"All the tenants wore their best clothes and were assembled in the courtyard. Three of the stable-boys were posted on the road to gallop ahead and warn us of their approach. Thunder asked me to stand with him by the front door. He was excited to see Emilie—he believed in her too. 'Fancy Hector bringing home a wife,' he kept on saying. He became a little senile before he died; gout and whisky are not a sensible mixture.

"And then the automobile came through the Great Gate, with a stranger steering and Emilie sitting beside Hector, smiling as though she were royal and yet shy of it.

"She only made one mistake. She took, very prettily, the bouquet a child gave her—I made it myself with pink carnations from the greenhouse—and then she waited at the steps for Hector to carry her over the threshhold—apparently it's an American custom which of course he had never heard about. He said, 'What are you waiting for?' and every one stared at her. She blushed and I thought she was going to burst into tears. Then she ran into the hall and up to her room; and we all had to wait until she came back before the factor could read his address of welcome."

In the distance a gong boomed: "Lunch," said Georgina. "I have been disgracefully garrulous!"

"What happened then?" said Rowan.

"Some other time—if it becomes relevant. I only told you all that to make you understand that it will not be easy for Janet. She is coming here today, to stay for a few days. I should have warned Marylda. It may be awkward if they meet before I explain that I haven't told her you are married."

VI HIGHLAND WELCOME

MARYLDA MANAGED to fight off the depression that had settled down on her when she saw her room, until Rowan went to find Georgina. Then she unpacked, hoping that the sight of her own things on the dressing-table would make it seem less hostile, that the cupboards when full of her clothes might have less suggestion of being the abode of skeletons.

She tried to cheer herself by thinking how Grummie would have reacted to the bathroom. Would he have demanded Sani-flush for the curious toilet, that operated by pulling a lever through a secondary hole in the mahogany seat, or considered the entire décor worthy of a museum? The Victorians had a passion for mahogany; even the bath was enclosed in this melancholy wood which gave it an unfortunate resemblance to a coffin.

However, she might as well be frank with herself—even though she could not afford this luxury in public, it was the welcome that had been the most bitter disappointment. What actually had she expected? She and Rowan would have arrived by car; a very old-fashioned, open car that went at walking pace up the drive because a piper was playing them home. When they entered the courtyard she would have seen the steps ranked with servants. The outdoor servants would have worn kilts and there would be footmen in livery . . . green livery with yellow waistcoats. There would have been lots of maids; the older ones in black with high, starched caps that had black ribbons hanging down the back, the others in print dresses, white sprigged with mauve, and under their mob-caps their faces would have shone with goodwill and soap.

When she got out of the car, for some odd reason she wore a long tussore coat with buttons from neck to ankle, a child ran forward to curtsey and present her with a bouquet of pink carnations. Georgina, a very different Georgina, was waiting by the open door. An old man was beside her, a very welcoming old man who was a relation . . . for a moment she thought he was her father-in-law, which was silly for he had died when Rowan was born.

She paused at the top of the steps waiting to be carried over the threshhold; and this was a ghastly mistake for the custom wasn't known in Scotland. She wasn't quick enough to conceal how humiliated this made her feel, so she ran upstairs to take off her hat and veil. . . . No, that's silly, she wouldn't be wearing a veil when she came back from her honeymoon.

The contemplation of this other homecoming threatened to be even more depressing than the reality, so she forced herself to put it out of her mind. At least she needn't endure these hideous decorations a moment longer than it took her to find a way of telling Rowan that she could only too well afford to change them. It would be fun altering everything, much more fun than finding it already beautiful. If Cloud

had been like the Château there would be nothing for her to do, and if Rowan hadn't been poor there would have been no point in her bringing money to him.

She began to feel more cheerful, and even the wallpaper, betraying by faded patches that Georgina had even removed the pictures, was no more than a trivial annoyance. She would have to tell Rowan soon, or else there would be no chance of installing central heating before the winter. But why worry about the winter when it was only the end of June?

A clock, tombed in black marble, occupied the center of the mantelpiece above a grate whose precise paper and three lumps of dusty coal defied any one to light them. The clock had stopped at twenty to four, and the hands made a disapproving mouth that seemed to sneer under the keyhole eyes.

"You'll dislike me even more when I've hidden you in the attic," said Marylda. "It would be cruelty to send you to a jumble sale for some one might be rash enough to buy you!"

She tugged at the curtains, trying to draw them farther back so as to let more sun into the room. The harsh serge with its bobble fringe reminded her of the sickening texture of woollen gloves which she had been made to wear as a child. She tugged harder, and the brass rings clattered angrily on the wooden pole which had a gilt pineapple at each end.

She looked at the bed and wondered if its curtains smelt as stuffy as they looked. Was the mattress straw or feather? Perhaps Georgina had thoughtfully added a couple of anti-personnel mines! She took a running leap and landed on it, laughing for the first time since her arrival at Cloud. I've misjudged dear Grannie; no explosions and it's not really at all uncomfortable. I wonder if she used to draw the curtains and play wigwam with Hector? Do they draw, or has no one been able to undo the cords which look strong enough to tie a victim to a stake?

She lay back and contemplated the canopy. They must order serge by the mile. Shall I burn it, or give it back to the family sheep so that they can have little green coats to wear, like Pekingeses' on Park Avenue, after they've been shorn?

Had any one unpacked for Rowan or was she expected to do it? She went through the bathroom, which communicated with his dressing-room, and found that his suitcases had been taken away and the contents neatly arranged in

furniture which had been made at the same unfortunate period as that in the Laird's Room. She presumed correctly, that it had been chosen by Georgina's mother-in-law.

How careful she would have to be not to do the wrong thing! For instance, before going out, Rowan had changed into a kilt, and when she had asked why he hadn't worn such a romantic costume in France, he had replied, rather coldly, that naturally no one who had the right to a tartan would wear it south of the Border. He had then embarked on an elaborate explanation of the precise differences between the Cairdrie and that of several clans which resembled it sufficiently closely for the uninitiated eye to be confused. It appeared that she was not only expected to remember that the Cairdrie "hunting," which they wore in the daytime, was predominantly green and blue with a scarlet line, but that the "dress tartan," a much more colorful affair, worn when less complex mortals were content with a dinner jacket, was apt to be confused with the Cluny MacPherson, if one was sufficiently obtuse to ignore the subtle yellow line that further complicated the red and gray. Native wit saved her from telling him that though the exact pattern seemed irrelevant, she was delighted that he wore what she considered a most becoming fancy dress.

She had not bothered to open the curved door in the corner near the fireplace, for the wardrobe was so large that further hanging space was redundant. It now occurred to her that it might lead to a powder closet, but instead she saw a circular stone stair lit by the arrowslits of the southwest tower. But why had the steps leading up to the room above been shut off? It had been done comparitively recently, for where the wallpaper had begun to peel she could see brickwork that was certainly not part of the original building. Against rats or less substantial tenants? she wondered; and tried to find the alternatives no more than interesting local color.

At the foot of the stair, a postern door stood open to a wide apron of stone flags, edged by a balustrade. She strolled along, looking in through the tall mullioned windows. The rooms Georgina had given up to them were over the library. On the far side of the hall was a sitting-room which obviously belonged to Georgina, and then there were three more windows which were closed by interior shutters. She knew they must belong to the drawing-room, which Rowan had told her had not been used since his coming of age ball. Its

six east windows were partially obscured by a thicket of laurel that merged into a plantation of dark conifers.

She noticed carved pinnacles thrusting up between the fir trees. Curiosity aroused, she forced her way among the interlaced branches until she came to a carved buttress. By it she pulled herself up to peer through the stained glass. Cobwebs hung down like a ragged chiffon curtain and she could gain only an impression of emptiness and desolation. Had it been a chapel? Surely not, for even Georgina would not have let it fall into such neglect. She tore a strip of ivy from one of the elaborate mullions and realized that stone so little weathered must be much more recent than the rest of Cloud.

Perhaps she had misjudged Georgina: planting these trees so close to the house was not stupidity, only an attempt to hide errors of taste made by some one who had fallen under the influence of the Victorian Gothic revival. Would Rowan prefer it to be pulled down, or was it large enough to turn into a tennis court? There would be time enough to decide that after she had removed some of the more urgent horrors —the stags' heads in the hall would have to go, though she knew that such trophies were not the easiest things to exile with wifely tact.

She sat on the balustrade enjoying the genial warmth; happily unaware that it was considered a phenomenal heat-wave by the inhabitants. Discontent at the interior of her home gradually gave way to pride in its setting. Yew hedges linked four levels of herbaceous borders, neglected but still brilliant with peony and poppy, delphinium and late lupins. Beyond the ranks of flowers, which were protected by a fence from the white Highland cattle that drowsed under park timber, the ground fell steeply to the river that was bright as polished metal on the green valley. Four or five miles to the south the mountain range reared up from the foothills, the peaks streaked with snow even at midsummer.

A small open car came down the road beyond the river and crossed the bridge. Marylda watched its approach with annoyance. Was she supposed to cope with callers or could she trust Agnes to send for Rowan or Georgina? If some one stayed to lunch it would spoil the afternoon as effectively as Georgina had contrived to spoil the morning.

A few minutes later a girl came out of the postern door, saw Marylda and said, "Oh, hello, I didn't know any one was here."

She was tall and rather heavily built, with hair of the

color which can be described either as red-gold or carroty according to the eye of the beholder. Marylda decided she could do no less than appear hospitable and said, "Rowan's gone off somewhere with his grandmother. They are sure to be back for lunch, and of course you'll stay for it."

"Of course; in fact Georgina's asked me to stay for a fortnight."

Oh, has she, thought Marylda. Another of Grannie's happy little schemes! Perhaps I'm being unfair; she may be a secretary or something. Further inspection of the girl's clothes convinced her that this more charitable view was probably correct; there is nothing to be feared from some one who wears a tweed skirt of ginger brown and adds to it a shirt cut like a man's, with a tie held down to an ample chest by a brooch of a bird's claw set in silver.

Had Marylda been able to read the thoughts aroused by an equally critical inspection of herself she would have felt less amiable. How on earth did this female get asked to Cloud? I suppose some men might think her quite attractive, if her ridiculous clothes didn't put them off! The white angora jersey is all right, but violet corduroy slacks! Surely Rowan didn't invite her? Darling Rowan, at times he is such an ass! Still one must be civil.

"Cigarette?" the girl offered, dragging a battered packet of Player's from the pocket of her skirt.

Marylda smiled, trying to put this uncouth stranger at ease, and flicked her gold lighter into flame for them both.

The girl blew smoke down her nose and inquired, "Have a good journey?"

"Not at all bad. We only arrived this morning."

So Rowan had traveled north with her. She must have cadged an invitation, but she wouldn't stay long. "Rowan's been in France," she said.

"I know. I met him there."

"Must be beastly hot in France. The rivers are low enough here: salmon almost scrape the bottom, and trout are too lazy to take a fly. You fish?"

"No," said Marylda. "Should I?"

"Lots of people prefer shooting. Dull for them between February and August, unless they are amused by rabbits."

"I haven't been really amused by rabbits since I was eleven, then some one left the hutch open and they escaped. I'm afraid I don't shoot, or fish, or even hunt."

This was excellent news: Rowan would be bored in a week with a female who was not only entirely useless, but

boasted of the fact! Better temper the wind a bit. "I'm afraid you'll find it rather dull here, but the scenery is magnificent . . . if you like that sort of thing."

"I am *devoted* to scenery," said Marylda, and then realized that the sarcasm was wasted. Or was it? For the girl seemed to find the silence embarrassing.

"By the way, in lieu of introduction we can exchange names. I'm Janet Cairdrie."

"I am Marylda Cairdrie."

Of course! Duncan had written a postcard from Paris saying he had met a new cousin; probably one of the remote branch that had emigrated to Canada. She was Duncan's problem not Rowan's; damn lucky I didn't drop a brick. "How naughty of Duncan not to tell me you were coming to stay here until he gets back to Dalloch!" Janet was almost arch. Dear old Duncan; how she and Rowan would tease him! "Duncan is driving Rowan's car north next week; it broke down in France."

"It didn't break down. There was no room for it on the boat, so Rowan left it at Calais."

For a moment Janet was resentful that this woman presumed to know so much about Rowan's affairs. Then her frown cleared. Rowan must have told her in the train. They had to talk about *something*, and it must have been pretty tricky for him to find topics that she could understand. Rowan couldn't like her much or he wouldn't have left her alone the morning she arrived. Would Georgina look after her, or would she be left on their hands until Duncan got home?

They heard a whistle. "There's Rowan," said Janet, instinctively tucking a wisp of hair into place.

The gesture was not lost on Marylda. Perhaps it would have been kinder to break the news that she was Rowan's wife. But why should she have done, when Janet had deliberately tried to point out that she was not the kind of person who belonged to Cloud!

Rowan walked towards them along the terrace, trying to convey a nonchalance he did not feel. It was idiotic of Georgina to let Janet come here without giving him a chance to tell her about Marylda. Ought he to kiss her? They'd drifted into the habit of kissing when they met—not that it meant anything, a mere cousinly gesture, but Marylda might not understand.

Janet saved him the decision. She had no intention of letting this newcomer be under any illusion as to her status.

After all, they were practically engaged, though Rowan hadn't made a formal proposal. She ignored his outstretched hand and kissed him with greater warmth than she had previously allowed herself to display.

Over her shoulder Rowan saw Marylda smile. Thank God, she hadn't taken it the wrong way! But had she told Janet? No, she couldn't have done or Janet wouldn't have been so tactless. Or was the old girl playing up to show they had nothing to hide?

He sat on the balustrade between them. The silence became increasingly solid. He broke it with undue heartiness. "What do you think of my wife, Janet?"

Marylda saw the color drain slowly from the other girl's face. Oh, Rowan, that was brutal! No, it's my fault, I ought to have given her a chance to hide her feelings. What would I feel like if I'd heard Rowan say that about some one else? It would be like being told by a doctor that you'd got leprosy.

"So you're—married," said Janet. My voice sounds quite ordinary. This must be what it feels like to be badly wounded; a knowledge that it's happened, but one still doesn't really believe it.

"We were married in Paris," said Rowan.

"Georgina didn't tell me."

"She didn't know—until yesterday."

"I see," said Janet. "Of course you'd have to tell Georgina before any one else. How did she take it?" Was her voice all right? Mustn't sound too casual. Try to pretend you're talking about two other people—interested, amused, excited at being allowed to share a new bit of gossip.

"Georgina's in very good form. I told her we stayed at the Ritz, and instead of asking what the bill was, she said, perfectly amiably, that it must be a good hotel, because Hector went there when he was in Paris."

"He must have been on his honeymoon, too."

"Yes," said Rowan, "I suppose he was." Stupid of him to mention Hector. The last thing he had meant to do was to say anything that could make either of them associate Marylda with the other American wife. How could he change the subject without being obvious?

"Isn't it nearly lunch time?" said Marylda.

Trust Marylda to say the right thing! "The gong went ages ago," he exclaimed, as though declaring the relief of a siege.

Georgina was carving a leg of mutton at the sideboard when they reached the dining-room.

Marylda wondered whether she was supposed to sit at the head of the table. Rowan had not decided this point either. As his wife it was her proper place, but would Georgina resent being ousted from her usual chair?

They stood in embarrassment, watching Georgina carve, until she said over her shoulder, "Marylda at the head of the table."

Marylda hesitated, uncertain whether she was expected to protest. Rowan saved her further indecision by drawing out her chair.

Only Rowan enjoyed the mutton and new potatoes, the peas and mint sauce, being greatly relieved that the three women appeared to be settling down so well together.

Georgina took a second helping of raspberry tart, a gesture to show that nothing should be allowed to upset an excellent digestion. Also it was a good example for Janet, though she knew very well how difficult it must be for her to swallow, against tears that pride could not allow to fall. Curious how even trivial things maintained a pattern. The freezing-salt in the ice at Hector's engagement dinner: and now the cream for the raspberry tart was slightly turned. She must tell Mrs. MacTaggert to be more careful.

I believe Georgina understands, thought Janet. She won't offer sympathy—unless it's decently done. Whisky in my bedroom tonight, but nothing will be said. Georgina had to wait for Hector; she will help me to be clever.

Marylda found the long silence disconcerting, having yet to learn that in Scotland trivial conversation is not considered a useful accomplishment. She watched Janet accept a second helping of pastry and decided that if the girl had been in love with Rowan she couldn't have retained such a hearty appetite. Or was it British phlegm: that extraordinary capacity for appearing unmoved in a crisis which made them so difficult to understand?

Rowan wondered whether it would be possible not to include Janet in the plans for the afternoon and reluctantly decided that to do so would be tactless as well as ill-mannered.

"We'll take Marylda to the kennels," he said as they got up from the table, "and we can pay our respects to Robbie at the same time."

He held open the door for the younger women to leave, knowing that Georgina would stay behind to see that the

scraps from the plates were collected for the dogs. Damn, he ought to have warned Marylda not to smoke between courses . . . not that it mattered but they had better walk warily until the ice was rather less thin. That he was doing his best to make the thin ice even thinner was a fact of which he was fortunately unaware.

"Are the puppies ready to wean yet?" said Janet as they crossed the courtyard. "Robbie thinks they're one of the best litters we've had since we mated Cairdrie Bracken to Strongheart of Cloud."

"I haven't seen them since I got home," said Rowan, "but anyway you're to take your pick."

"Would it be rude to ask who Robbie is, and what breed of dog we're going to inspect?" inquired Marylda who found it irksome to be excluded from the conversation.

"Golden retrievers," said Rowan.

"Robbie is a very important member of Cloud," said Janet. "Don't be upset if you find him rather brusque, he is always a bit difficult with strangers."

Rowan was annoyed with Janet for what he considered a typically tactless remark. "Robbie in the old days was the family piper and head ghillie. Then he became the only ghillie, and now he looks after the dogs. He's quite famous in these parts as a trainer. The Cloud strain does pretty well at field trials and on the bench. Janet takes the dogs to the shows; don't know what we would do without her."

Marylda would have liked to retort. "Well I can promise that you'll find out before long!" but managed to remain silent.

"Oughtn't we to translate?" said Janet. "How can Marylda be expected to know our barbarous language! A ghillie is the same as a keeper only to do with fishing."

"We have keepers in America too—and not only in lunatic asylums. We also have fish," said Marylda.

"And bagpipes?" said Rowan.

"We are familiar with the principle—we have *most* educative advertisements for whisky."

"And nearly all the whisky!" said Janet sharply. "It is difficult not to be a little bitter that it has to be sent abroad."

"For our dollars. I understand how you feel."

"Economics are quite beyond the capacity of any normal brain," said Rowan firmly. "And I refuse to take sides."

Oh, do you! thought his wife. Even when she is deliberately trying to insult me?

Surely you're not going to allow yourself to grovel in front of this female, thought Janet.

Rowan, an arm linked with each young woman, considered he had been a master of diplomacy to have smoothed over an incident which had looked like developing into a tricky situation.

Robbie was sitting on a bench beside the front door of his cottage. A path, edged with stones meticulously matched and whitewashed, divided his front garden into two exact halves. On the right were precise rows of vegetables, and on the left a border of marigold and stock, nasturtium and migonette, lineal descendants of those planted by his wife who had been dead over thirty years.

He pretended to be surprised to see his visitors, though his pearl tie pin, worn only on occasions of ceremony, was proof that he was awaiting their arrival. Marylda's most vivid impression was a handclasp of real friendship and blue eyes that in spite of a setting of wrinkles had a remarkable discernment. He led the way into the parlor where whisky and glasses were set out on an oak table by the small window.

"We will take a dram to drink her ladyship's health," he said hospitably, "and I hope she will overlook the fact that I was not at the Castle this morning to pipe her home."

So I was not wrong to expect a different welcome, thought Marylda, and Robbie would have been the piper who walked in front of the car. . . .

"Thoughts worth a penny?" asked Rowan a little sharply.

She realized that Robbie was holding out a glass filled to the brim with whisky. He was also looking at her very intently, as though aware of her abstraction yet not offended.

"I was wondering how long I must wait before I can hear the pipes . . . if Robbie is kind, it won't be very long."

Robbie smiled; obviously she had said the right thing. "There'll be plenty of time for that," he said cordially. "But I know Miss Janet would prefer to see the puppies."

He led the way to the kennels, which were close to his cottage. Each had a tiled yard enclosed by iron railings. The puppies, still woolly as teddy-bears, occupied Janet's attention. She picked up each in turn, discoursing learnedly on their points.

In the end kennel a young golden retriever pawed at the gate, whimpering to be let out. "How's she coming along?" asked Rowan.

"She's as pretty a bitch as we've bred for five years," said

Robbie, "but gun-shy. At the sound of a shot, down goes her tail and there's a yellow streak running for home."

"Good enough for show?" asked Janet. "If so I'll take her home with me, and get her used to the bench."

Robbie hesitated. "We have never shown a gun-shy dog yet. I doubt if it would be a good precedent."

"Well, I'll take her anyway," said Janet. "There are some new people who've bought the white house on the road to Dalwhin; they've got children, and I've heard they're looking for a pet. It's a pity she'll never be any use, but we ought to get six or seven guineas for her."

Robbie unlatched the kennel gate; Janet clicked her fingers, but the bitch ran to Marylda and jumping up tried to lick her face.

"Sit!" commanded Janet, but the bitch took no notice. "Shall I sell her, Rowan?"

But it was Marylda who replied. "No, you won't. She is mine. You see I happen to prefer a dog who isn't expected to *do* anything. I think she's an angel, so I shall call her Angela."

"You can't do that," said Janet patronizingly. "All her litter have names beginning with S. It makes it easier to keep track in the kennel book."

"Angela and I couldn't know less about the kennel book! From now on she will sleep in my room, and have no traffic with the kennel dogs . . . who would only annoy her by making sneering remarks."

"Dogs don't sleep in the house," said Janet, delighted at this opportunity to point out another social error.

"Angela will therefore have the chance to set an example. I always had dogs in my bedroom until I came to Europe."

"Lap dogs are different," said Janet, with scornful indulgence. What a fool the girl was to suppose Rowan would be tolerant of pekes and dachshunds!

"I hardly consider boxers can be described as lap dogs," retorted Marylda. "We Americans need large, fierce dogs to guard us from the immigrants. No doubt in Scotland you rely on the thickness of your castle walls—or the thickness of your skins!"

She turned on her heel and left them, the dog leaping at her side.

"I can consider myself thoroughly snubbed," said Janet ruefully, trying to conceal how pleased she was that Marylda had played into her hands.

"Well, you bought it!" said Rowan, who had been pre-

pared to be annoyed with his wife, but was not going to allow any one else to gloat.

"You're not really going to let her have a dog in her bedroom?"

"In *our* bedroom. Hasn't it occurred to you that I may be glad to give my wife anything that pleases her?"

She shrugged. "It was hardly a gift . . . she merely announced that she was taking her."

"And why not? Everything I have belongs to Marylda too, so it was entirely unnecessary for her to ask."

"But it would have been more tactful . . . or has she trained you to be less touchy?"

"I hardly think you are in a position to give lessons in tact! Understand this: if Marylda wants a dog in the house it stays in the house . . . and any one who doesn't like the new arrangement can leave!"

"Georgina won't like it!"

"Oh, damn Georgina!"

Rowan went to find his wife; Janet to the woods to cry in decent privacy. Robbie managed to conceal his elation until they were out of sight, and then returned to his cottage to drink another toast to the Lady of Cloud.

Robbie knew what had happened to the other American bride; this time his friendship could be more effective. He smiled to himself, content that Rowan, whom he loved better than his own children, had found a wife who was not only more than a match for Janet and the old lady, but would rouse him until he no longer permitted himself to be bullied.

Robbie gave the matter further consideration. The two women would do their best to make things difficult for the bride; however, he was not without influence. Tonight he would summon those who could be trusted to respect his judgment and tell them that they were to do everything in their power to smooth the path of the newcomer. The people he could rally to her defense carried considerable weight: Mrs. MacTaggart, his daughter, who ruled the housekeeper's room, though now she was also cook with a single kitchen-maid. Agnes, his niece and the parlor-maid. His grandchildren; Elsie the housemaid, sister to Sandy who had already reported favorably on the Laird's choice.

Should Anderson be included in the conference? He was only a brother-in-law, but under these special circumstances he could be regarded as kin. But Anderson would require a bait before his cooperation could be assured. Robbie chuckled. He would tell Anderson that the new lady of the house

would regain his status in local flower shows instead of being no better than a mere grower of fruit and vegetables for sale. The other three gardeners would not require instruction; Anderson was not tolerant of indiscipline in the ranks.

He took his pipes and paced up and down the path, playing the Welcome of Cloud.

VII EMBROIDERY

"YOU'RE BEHAVING like a fool, Janet," said Georgina crisply. "If you can't be reasonably intelligent the sooner you go home the better."

Janet glanced at the door of her hostess's sitting-room to make sure it was firmly closed; to be scolded by the one person she had counted on as an ally was bad enough, but to be overheard would be the last straw. "All right, I'll go," she said sullenly. "I thought you *wanted* me to stay."

"I wanted you to help me to show Rowan that his marriage is unsuitable. It *is* unsuitable and the sooner he comes to his senses the better; better for every one, including Marylda. Her title, which she will no doubt continue to use after the divorce, should ensure a substantial marriage for her in America."

"What have I done wrong? God knows I've tried hard enough!"

"You've been consistently rude to Marylda in front of Rowan; which has had the effect of rousing his protective instincts, of which she has taken every advantage."

"But she's been rude to *me!* I maneuver her into ridiculous situations, and she wriggles out of them by unfair, female means."

"Well, she is a female, and, unlike us, is not above employing her natural weapons. Rowan probably wouldn't have noticed that red velvet dress she wore last night unless you had drawn his attention to it by saying you hadn't been told we had been asked to a ball and should you run up and change. Really, Janet, that was nothing less than idiotic!"

"I can't bear the way Rowan looks at her!" She sniffed and blew her nose violently. "It's indecent, Georgina. He might be a spaniel drooling for its dinner!"

"Which you would not consider in the least indecent if you were the dinner! Which is vulgar, but we must face facts."

Georgina looked at Janet and for the first time wondered whether she had been unwise in selecting her for a granddaughter-in-law. She was not unsympathetic; no one knew better than herself what the girl was suffering, but surely *she* had never been quite so inept. No, of course she hadn't, otherwise Hector would never have married her. But this time there must not be three years in which the invader could leave her mark indelibly on Cloud. She must be driven out *soon*, before Rowan became dependent. That what she really feared was Rowan becoming independent, she in all honesty did not recognize.

"Duncan likes her too," said Janet miserably. "When I asked him to help us he lost his temper and told me to stop being a jealous little bitch!"

"Really, Janet, there are times when I wish you were young enough to be slapped! You know perfectly well that Duncan idolizes Rowan, and hasn't the sense to know what's good for him. Now I shall have to go over to see Margaret —he may listen to his mother, and try to put matters right. It is really most annoying."

"I'm sorry I'm not so clever as you are," said Janet bitterly. "Probably Marylda is much more attractive than Emilie was, so it's more difficult for me!"

Georgina opened a cupboard and poured out two glasses of sherry, a luxury seldom permitted, but on this occasion necessary to conceal how disturbing she had found Janet's last remark. Did she dislike Marylda because she had even a facial resemblance to Emilie? Was that why Emilie now occupied her thoughts more than she had been able to do for years?

Janet drank her sherry disconsolately and was surprised when the glass was refilled. It was some comfort to know that Georgina, for all her ability to appear unmoved, was also finding the situation difficult.

Georgina felt her resentment towards Janet diminish: the girl certainly had a knack of putting her finger on the aching tooth. This superficial likeness had been enough to remind her of the past: there was no other reason for the odd illusion, experienced several times since Marylda's arrival, that she could actually *hear* the song with which Emilie had entertained the gentlemen after dinner . . . "Sing me home, said the long-lost lady; sing me home to my own rooftree." A silly little tune; even more silly to think that its echo could still disturb her. Yet how extraordinarily powerful is the association of ideas . . . two, no three glasses of sherry in the

morning were enough to make her, Georgina, believe that the actual words had drifted in through the open window. She got up from her chair and said briskly:

"Run along, Janet, and don't forget what I've told you. Be civil in public, but if you should happen to cause Marylda to go crying to Rowan for sympathy . . . well I have taught him to take the proper action against sneaking." She went to the desk and opened the household account book: adding up figures is an excellent antidote to sentimentality.

"Sure there is nothing more?" said Janet, reluctant to leave the one room where Marylda would be sure not to find a welcome.

"You should powder your nose thoroughly before you come down to lunch," said Georgina decisively. "And if your eyes are red you had better ask Mrs. MacTaggart to give you sandwiches . . . I shall tell the others that you've gone fishing."

Janet looked furtively out of the postern door, and saw Marylda cutting flowers from the herbaceous borders, so she decided to retreat upstairs until the gong rang. Had she noticed that among the delphiniums and campanula in Marylda's basket there were also some of the yellow roses that grew only on the wall between the windows of Georgina's sanctum she would have felt needless alarm. Marylda had not heard the drone of their voices, for she had been singing a song that Nanny Lovell had taught her when she was a child.

After lunch, Georgina walked over to Dalloch to see Margaret Cairdrie. Even to herself she did not admit that she wanted consolation from a contemporary, who, having an only son, might be expected to understand the difficulties attendent on this unfortunate marriage. Margaret must be told that Duncan's apparent partisanship was due only to Janet's lack of tact; it would then be up to her to see that his influence on Rowan was exerted in the right direction.

Margaret, during ten years of marriage, had learned both to respect the Cairdries and to have a lively sympathy for their wives. As a widow she had been able to impress something of her vague but kindly personality on her house, and the flowery chintz and bowls of pink and mauve sweet-peas in her drawing-room were a sign of her private revolt against the harsher fabric of life as represented by Georgina.

She was under no illusions as to the purpose of the call, in spite of the excuse that Georgina had come to see her only to discuss the work of one of the committees which she had

been forced by the elder woman to join. Georgina put up the subject with the determined persistence of a spaniel working covert. It was rare to see her at a disadvantage, so Margaret refused various tempting leads until she was ready to take the initiative.

"I want to give a little party for the bride, but I thought I had better consult you first so that our dates don't clash."

"What dates?"

Margaret pretended not to understand. "The dates of your arrangements, dear. Are you going to start with a dinner, or have a dance so that every one can be invited? I was thinking of a garden party, it seems a pity not to use this glorious weather. I shall give them iced coffee, so much easier than tea, and unrationed."

"I haven't decided what I shall do yet," said Georgina gruffly. "I suppose I shall have to ask Alistair over to lunch, but nothing formal. After all, why should I do anything to support this clandestine affair?"

"But don't you *like* Marylda? My dear, I thought she was charming when Rowan brought her over to see me yesterday; such a lovely figure and those magnificent dark eyes. I think Rowan has been so clever to find her, think how dreary it would have been if he had married Janet."

"Why should it have been dreary? Janet is a thoroughly decent girl. She'd have made Rowan a good wife, and given him plenty of healthy children with no nonsense about them."

"But still dreary; why shouldn't the poor boy enjoy himself? If you hadn't kept him on such a short rein he might have grown out of the desire for glamor." She laughed, a tinkling sound which Georgina always found irritating. "I think, dear, that you must admit that I have been wiser with Duncan, encouraging him to go to London and the South of France, and always making his friends welcome here—but we're talking of your problem, not mine. If you want my advice, and you know I always hesitate to give it, I think you would be most unwise not to entertain for her; after all, if you don't, people will start to think you have something to *hide*. Marylda is quite respectable . . . isn't she?"

"I suppose so," said Georgina grudgingly. "Her father was a professor in some obscure town in the Middle West, wherever that may be . . . Chicago, I suppose."

Mrs. Cairdrie's determination to say nothing which might increase Georgina's hostility began to waver. "She doesn't look like a professor's daughter . . . they are wretchedly paid, and your Elsie has told my Hannah that she has won-

derful clothes . . . all with Paris labels and the best material, and silk stockings by the dozen."

"Rowan paid for most of them . . . I hope. At least he managed to spend over six hundred pounds in France; I did not inquire how he managed to convert it into francs."

"Duncan managed that for him," said Margaret complacently. "Duncan is so clever, the dear boy."

"In our day clever and criminal were words with different meanings: however, I suppose we shall be accused of being reactionary if we try to maintain the decencies."

"Has she *no* money of her own?"

"She's been living on capital, a few hundreds from an aunt; at least that's her story."

"Very rash, or very brave, whichever way you look at it, to have invested in a mink coat. She *has* a mink coat; I noticed it in the back of the car when Rowan brought her over to play tennis. You don't think it was a *present?*"

To Georgina this was sufficient. Not only had her grandson been inveigled into marriage, but he had accepted what her generation referred to in whispers, as "damaged goods." No wonder Marylda had insisted on a hasty marriage abroad!

"I think we understand each other, Margaret," she said, hoisting herself out of the low sofa as a preliminary to departure.

Duncan came into the room as soon as she had gone. "What's the form, Mother. Struck a blow at the dragon?"

Mrs. Cairdrie twisted her handkerchief with sudden anxiety. Had she been firm enough with Georgina and at the same time entirely discreet? She tucked uncomfortable doubts aside. "Yes, darling, I think I've helped to put her mind at rest. I told her we old people must never try to interfere with our children."

Duncan patted her plump shoulder. "There's a good girl," he said affectionately. "I knew you'd recognize a thoroughbred when you saw her. Georgina'll come around if we give her time."

When he went over to Cloud the following day, by the short cut across the moor, he saw Marylda, with Angela beside her, lying half hidden by heather.

"Where's Rowan?" he inquired. "I thought the four of us were going to Dalwhin for tea."

"He's gone with Janet. I said I had a headache."

"Janet being difficult?" he asked sympathetically.

Marylda rolled over and regarded him with her chin

cupped in her hand. "Sorry if it's a rude question, but which side are you on?"

"Yours . . . I told you that in Paris."

"Then do you mind if I have a good grumble? If I try to go on registering sweetness and light I shall explode. And Rowan, poor darling, has enough to contend with already, without me blowing my top."

"Grumble away; and nothing you say will go any further." He sat down and began to light his pipe, giving it undue attention so that she could have time to collect herself.

"It's not Janet I mind so much; quite honestly, she's no more annoying than midges, and I can beat her with one hand tied behind me. But Georgina's got me worried, and the house gives me the willies."

"What's wrong with the house?" he asked rather too quickly.

"Well, it's *odd*, with a kind of oddness I haven't met anywhere before. I've tried to talk to Rowan, but the subject seems to annoy him; almost as though he had something to hide. He tells me hair-raising stories about family ghosts, that unfortunate girl Alys who is supposed to inhabit the room at the top of the southeast tower where the cozy Cairdrie shut her up for thirty years after cutting off her husband's head, but he seems to think that *funny*. Yet when I asked him why the room on the opposite corner, the one above ours, is closed, with a seal across the keyhole in case any one should try to pick the lock, he got cross, and said it was none of my business and the room was shut off because the floor is unsafe."

She sat up and looked at him intently. "Duncan, is there some one shut up in there?"

"Of course there isn't!"

"Well that's a relief. Now I can believe it's only rats running across the floor above me. We don't have rats in many American houses. Maybe that's why I didn't know that rats, or owls, sound like a man crying."

She did not notice how much her remark disturbed him, for she was staring at the mountains with her eyes very wide open to hold back tears. "Try not to think about the sealed room," he said. "Actually it's a sore point with Georgina. She thrashed Rowan and I when we were silly enough to be caught trying to pry off the seal with a hot knife."

"Duncan, is Georgina crazy?"

"Crazy? Good God, no! she is almost unbearably sane. Why did you ask?"

"Well, last night she behaved like it. I had been poking around in the lumber-rooms, and in an old trunk I found a piece of half-finished embroidery . . . a chair-seat in *gros point* rolled up in a towel with hanks of wool to finish it. The trunk was covered with dust so I knew no one could have opened it for years, anyway Rowan told me that everything in the house was mine as much as his. So I took it; I thought it would help if I had something to do while they have their interminable conversations about things I don't know about. To be honest I thought the picture of me as the little woman stitching by the fire would appeal to Rowan, and help to offset some of the dirty cracks I've had to take from Janet."

"But the sight of you quietly stitching misfired?"

"And how! Georgina suddenly leapt up, shouting 'What have you got there?' snatched the thing out of my hands and threw it on the fire. Now if that isn't crazy what is?"

"What happened then?"

"There was another of those hideous pauses which seem to be the main basis of conversation in these parts, and then Georgina stamped out of the room."

Had Marylda known, even at that moment Georgina was for the hundredth time blaming herself for this display of emotion. That it had caused a quarrel between herself and Rowan did not make her any more fond of his wife. Why had the sight of Marylda holding a piece of embroidery which she recognized as having been started by Emilie produced this ridiculous outburst? One must be fair; the girl had been perfectly civil and apologized for taking it without asking permission. Or had this humility been only another example of her cleverness?

Georgina squared her shoulders and lit another cigarette. The girl could not be blamed, clever or not. It was her own fault for having overlooked this trivial relic of Emilie which must have been put away and forgotten long before she ran away from Cloud.

VIII TOWN AND COUNTRY

THE KNOWLEDGE that she had a friend in Duncan, and his assurance that Georgina was sane, gave Marylda increased confidence. At least the servants were allies, who in many small ways showed that she could rely on them to help when they could. That this unexpected attitude of the indoor and

outdoor staff further increased Georgina's conviction that she was a dangerous interloper was fortunately outside the scope of Marylda's anxieties.

She still found it difficult to sleep, but to prevent herself from worrying she occupied her mind with schemes for the restoration of the house. She amused herself by drawing plans, and was pacing the area between the drawing-room windows and the L-shaped wing when discovered by Janet.

"The maps are kept in the third drawer of the desk in the estate office, if you're interested," said Janet. "Or are you merely taking a walk out of the wind."

"If you want to know, I'm wondering why any one could have been so silly as to plant this gloomy thicket so close to the house. I must remember to ask Rowan to have it cut down."

"I shouldn't do that. It's rather a delicate subject with him and Georgina. But of course you know the reason; sorry I was so tactless as to mention it, one keeps on forgetting. . . ."

"Forgetting that I'm almost the typical 'stranger to the district,' why not be frank? However I'm not too dumb to learn. Why were the trees planted; obviously I was wrong in thinking it was only to hide an error of taste."

"You weren't wrong; in fact an error of taste is an understatement. That wing was built by Hector's American heiress; apparently she thought it would be amusing to have a banqueting hall, and several more spare bedrooms . . . as though Cloud wasn't big enough already! However she was so disgustingly rich that she had to find some way of spending her money. I believe the statues in the Italian garden cost fifty thousand, and the greenhouses something nearly as fantastic."

"No doubt her money came in handy," said Marylda. "The Cairdries must have got through it fairly fast, for according to Georgina the most strict economy is necessary."

"Emilie ruined Cloud!" said Janet with passionate indignation. "It's her fault that half the crofts are empty, her fault that Cloud employs a tenth of the people who used to work here!"

"It is a little difficult for the foreigner to understand. So far as I have discovered, and I am fully aware that there is a lot of which I am abjectly ignorant, Hector married an heiress who makes what she, and presumably he too, considers improvements. You can't blame either of them for following the taste of their generation. Surely it's rather unfair to blame her for the decline in the family fortunes; or did she claim

to have better securities than she actually produced? Even so, if an oil well suddenly ran dry or something equally tiresome, wasn't it the fault of the family lawyers, who ought to have been more canny over the marriage settlements?"

"I expect it's difficult to comprehend Highland pride unless you happen to be born with it," said Janet crushingly. "But when Emilie ran away with the chauffeur, Hector insisted on returning the entire dowry to her family." She laughed bitterly. "They must have been pleased with their side of the bargain: a discreditable daughter off their hands and the money they had used to buy a title returned with six per cent interest within three years. I am sure they considered it an excellent investment!"

"Perhaps not such a good investment for her—or she wouldn't have run away."

"He was probably very good looking: the man was French."

"I expect you know Frenchmen better than I do," said Marylda sweetly. "I've only been two years in Europe and I was too busy to notice their special capabilities."

Janet flushed. "I've never been to France—except through it on the way to Switzerland, before the war. Anyway, she can't have been a romantic or she wouldn't have taken the Cairdrie emeralds with her—they were heirlooms so it was worse than ordinary theft. But Hector was too proud to ask her to send them back—of course he ought to have prosecuted! I believe he quarreled with his lawyers when they tried to make him deduct their value from the dowry he insisted on returning to America."

"I'm rather obtuse, but I still don't see why returning a dowry can have made any real difference. Or do you mean Hector *had* to marry an heiress and picked the wrong one?"

Janet made a sweeping gesture which included the wing whose carved pinnacles the trees could not entirely conceal, and the gleam of glass beyond the long gray wall of the kitchen garden. "She spent nearly half a million on the place. Obviously Hector couldn't send twenty hothouses and a hideous building back to America. He insisted on cash—and it very nearly broke him. So you see, Georgina is somewhat prejudiced against Americans."

"I gathered that," said Marylda with feeling. "So the trees were planted to hide the work of the vandal—wouldn't it have been more thorough to pull it down?"

"Too expensive. Why should she cost Cloud more than she had already? But I mustn't gossip all the morning,"

she said briskly. "I've got to divide the old illustrated papers into bundles—we collect them from various people and then send some to our cottage hospital and some to Inverness. Georgina ought to have done it weeks ago, but she's been too busy."

So Georgina preferred to tell Janet to help her than to ask her granddaughter-in-law! However, it was essential to appear oblivious of slights. "Can I help you?" Marylda tried to sound eager.

"Do you mind? There's rather an accumulation and I'd like to get them finished before lunch."

Rowan saw them walking side by side towards the turret door that led into the drawing-room, which was used as a convenient dump for anything not immediately required, and dodged behind a tree until they were out of sight. Now that they are getting on so well it would be a pity to interrupt: Marylda needs a woman friend, just as I need Duncan. Good old Janet, sorry I've been so sharp with her.

On the dusty parquet were stacks of the *Illustrated London News, Punch, Country Life, The Tatler, The Sphere,* and a few old copies of *Life, Town and Country* and *The New Yorker,* which had been contributed by one of the neighboring houses where Americans had been billeted during the war.

Janet briskly sorted them into two neat piles, binding each dozen with string. Marylda, for whom old illustrated papers had a fascination, leafed through some of them, pretending she was only making sure that duplicates did not get into the same bundle.

Town and Country for July 1944 fell open at the center page. The caption announced: "The beautiful Miss Blenkinsop at her estate on the Hudson." She saw herself rolling bandages in the yellow drawing-room; pensive beside the sundial; playing with her two boxers—Dot and Dash.

"Found something interesting?" said Janet sharply. Surely it was permissible to be a little severe when the girl had asked to be allowed to help! If she started reading the magazines they would never get finished in time.

"Sorry," said Marylda. "I was only looking for the date —and became a little nostalgic for America. There's only one *Town and Country* so I'll keep it in my lot, but here's two *Spheres* for you. I'm sorry if I'm being slow—if only I had another knife I could cut my string instead of having to borrow yours."

Janet got to her feet. "There is another knife in Rowan's

desk," she said, pleased to be able to tell Marylda something else which displayed long association.

Marylda watched her go out of the room. As the door closed she tore the double page from the magazine, and thrust it down the front of her sweater. The glossy paper was harsh against her skin.

"The beautiful Miss Blenkinsop . . . Miss Blenkinsop . . . Miss Blenkinsop . . ." the paper seemed to echo the insistent rhythm of her pulse.

Would any one notice that there was a center page missing? What if they did? Any one could have torn out a page before passing on the magazine to the hospitals. Her bundles were going to Inverness—no one there would even be interested in the history of the girl who had married Rowan Cairdrie. And if they *were* interested? They would ask him, and he would say, "My wife was called Marylda Lovell."

"Well, that's done," said Janet, sitting back on her heels. "We'd better get tidy for lunch."

On the empty hearth of her bedroom Marylda held a cigarette lighter to a crumpled page. The glossy paper was reluctant to accept the fire. Slowly, the smiling Miss Blenkinsop darkened, then lost reality and curled into gray ash.

IX THE SEALED ROOM

THREE DAYS LATER Marylda again experienced the abrupt transition between deep sleep and intent wakefulness. The rapid beat of her heart was insistent as though she had been running . . . but running from what?

She tried to reason with herself. Don't be silly, Marylda. You are perfectly safe. Open your eyes, and if the room is still dark you can switch on the light.

She could hear Rowan's regular breathing, feel his shoulder warm under her cheek. Why did she always expect to see the room which belonged to the dream that was so clear until it suddenly escaped when she was fully awake?

If only she could remember the dream she could cure herself of this irrational fear.

Please, when I open my eyes let it be daylight! She moved, and Rowan instinctively tightened his arm around her. "Darling," he murmured, "I forget to tell you how much I love your right ear. . . ."

Everything was again secure. The morning gray with rain

beyond the open windows; her traveling clock affirming that Elsie would bring in the morning tea in half an hour—precisely at eight. Angela climbed out of her basket, stretched, brought Marylda a shoe and waited expectantly to be invited to jump on the bed.

Before going to turn on the bath, Rowan surveyed the sky. "It's going to be wet all day," he said judiciously, "which is a nuisance, for I promised Robbie to go around the butts on the low ground. It's the best part of ten miles, and it will be heavy going. Would you rather not come?"

What did he want her to say? Would it mean being left with Janet, or worse, going out to lunch with Georgina?

"What are the others doing?"

"Georgina's got her own plans, and I suppose Janet will insist on being hearty."

"Darling, I thought you *liked* hearty women."

"If I did I should tweak you out of bed and throw you into a cold bath to harden you off. I prefer my wives glamorous and highly decorative."

He came back to kiss her. "Now we shall be late for breakfast—and you've so undermined my morale that I'm delighted."

The second gong was no more than the distant voice of ineffective grownups.

She decided to spend the morning doing flowers, an art in which Janet had given up trying to compete. The library was the only room which had not suffered from Victorian decoration, and she would use the four white Bristol urns which she had found neglected on a high shelf of one of the pantry cupboards. They would look well on each side of the twin fireplaces, by Grinling Gibbons, and lighten the room, which in spite of four south windows was somber with the calf-bound books that lined the walls from oak wainscoting to molded plaster ceiling.

Anderson joined her while she was cutting flowers from the borders which flanked the wide paths of the kitchen-garden, whose walls enclosed some eight acres. He even allowed her to take tendrils which had sprung up beside the roots of the vines which were his special pride, for since discovering that she was not ignorant of his craft, and had a real enthusiasm for flowers, he had become unusually genial. He carried the baskets to the house, and on the excuse of asking her opinion as to varieties of carnations she would prefer (a courtesy, for he had already made up his mind and had no intention of altering the list he had selected), stayed

to watch her fill the urns with a satisfying arrangement of white flowers.

"They are very effective," he said sententiously, "I would not have believed that anything could be nicer than sweet-peas and asparagus fern, though some prefer gypsophila, except carnations in silver vases."

From Anderson this was high praise, and received with such warmth that in a glow of new allegiance he went to the kitchen to inform Mrs. MacTaggart that they had done well to listen to Robbie. So Mrs. MacTaggart provided poached eggs on spinach in addition to the remains of the Sunday joint which Georgina had considered sufficient for Marylda's lunch.

"What shall we do with the afternoon?" Marylda said to Angela who had shared this solitary meal. "We might tell Agnes to light a fire in the library, and indulge in a good book . . . Boswell or Walter Scott. If this proves boring there is always the one of volumes of the *Badminton Magazine* by which we could improve our knowledge of sport."

Angela gazed pensively at the sideboard until Marylda took the hint and gave her a third hunk of mutton. "However, we are not going to spend a cozy afternoon on the sofa nor am I taking you for a walk. We are neither of us very brave, but at least we prefer to tackle something tangible than to lie awake imagining horrors which probably don't exist. Rowan refuses to tell me why the room above ours is taboo, and Duncan also avoids the subject. I have thought of a way to get in there and find out for myself; and we will *not* consider what happened to Mrs. Bluebeard when curiosity got the better of her!"

Angela barked, intending to show that she was prepared to share any reasonable adventure.

Marylda decided she was trying to protest. "Darling, I'm not being unreasonable. Consider the plan of the house. The best rooms face south, for who in Scotland would neglect the smallest chance of sun? In the third story above the terrace there are excellent rooms; but they are all used to store what Georgina calls 'lumber,' being unaware that most of it consists of extremely valuable antiques which in due course I shall rescue. There is a valid excuse for not using the room that adjoins the east battlement walk, for Alys is said to be still in occupation—which I doubt, for I tried hard enough to feel anything odd in there. But what could have happened in the room at the other end of the corridor which was sufficient to cause the evacuation of all the others?"

Angela barked again, delighted that her previous attempt at conversation had produced a response.

"You want to know how we're going to get into that room? As you have probably noticed, though the south side of the house has three storys, the rest has only two. From the outside you wouldn't know it, for there are battlements that allow a narrow walk between them and the roof, which, as you can see by looking up from the courtyard, slopes to a central ridge instead of being flat like the south side.

"We will go to the battlement walk through the door in the east tower, and if we meet Alys we will bow politely and hurry past her—or *through* her if that wouldn't be discourteous. And when we reach the west tower we shall probably find that the key from the east tower fits the lock—for I've already discovered that several of the bedroom keys are interchangeable. And if the lock of the tower door is sealed like the one opening into the corridor, we will go to Inverness and buy some purple wax and borrow Rowan's seal—and risk any one noticing until we've had time to produce a convincing forgery. I am sorry to have to do it without telling Rowan, but I am not going to go on having nightmares without trying to find out why."

Angela recognized the underlying fear in her mistress's voice and whimpered in sympathy.

"No, Angela, we are not in the least afraid, nor do we feel guilty. Rowan is trying to hide something from me because he thinks I should be frightened if I knew it. But he will tell me sometime or other, just as I shall have to tell him that I have also had to lie. But if I know the truth I shall be able to make it easier for him—I shall know exactly what to say, instead of hurting him because I haven't had time to be tactful. We are doing this *for* Rowan, not against him. If we remember that, we shan't try to run away. And as we've made up our minds we'll go up there now, before we have a chance to change them!"

With Angela close at heel she ran up the stairs of the east tower and went briskly along the stone battlement walk. She was so confident that it must continue around three sides of the Castle that for a moment she could not accept that on the north the battlements were part of the main wall—that the narrow walk was a cul-de-sac. On her right was the mock Gothic roof of the American wing, and on her left the smooth leads of the Castle roof sloping up to a ridge.

"Then I shall have to go along the flat roof above the ter-

race," she said. "As the wall beside the tower is ten feet high I shall have to find something to stand on."

Angela snuffled happily among the sheeted furniture in Alys' room, convinced that her mistress was cooperating in a mouse hunt, while Marylda dragged a chest out of the tower door. She went back to look for a stool to give the extra height she needed, when she suddenly realized that her chosen route was impossible.

It would be easy enough to let herself down at the far end, but how could she get back again? She dare not risk being marooned on the other battlement walk, and even if she could be sure of opening the door of the other turret it was more than likely that the sealed room would be empty. If she had a ladder she might be able to drag it with her; but it would be far too dangerous to be seen carrying a ladder up here, even if she knew where to find one.

But what about the lower roof? She crawled up it, her rubber-soled shoes finding precarious purchase on the smooth surface, damp soaking through the knees of her slacks. She grasped the ridge and pulled herself up until she could look down to the courtyard. The roof sloped to a gutter; beyond it, a parapet about eighteen inches high was all that could protect any one from a fall of over thirty feet. But if that some one had a good head for heights, crawled along the gutter, and then climbed over the opposite roof, she would reach the west battlement walk—and the door to the sealed room.

Her hands were slippery with sweat that was cold as the drifting rain. In a moment she must let herself slide down. But could she prevent herself going too fast? If she rolled would she lodge in the gutter or go over the parapet? It seemed so much steeper, now that she felt the drag of vertigo.

She swung her legs across the ridge and let herself hang by her hands, involuntarily shutting her eyes as she began to slide. Please, God, don't let me go too fast! Her feet jarred against the parapet and she fell sideways into the shelter of the gutter.

Now it was easy—now she had only to crawl along until she came to the opposite side of the courtyard. . . . Don't look over the edge. Keep your head well down so that no one can look up and see you.

It was difficult turning the corner, for the gutter was choked with leaves, black with decay, and she had to scrape them away before she could pass. With almost overwhelming relief she saw, close to the northwest corner, a series of

iron rungs driven into the leads. Looking back she saw there had been a second inconspicuous ladder on the east roof which she had been too agitated to notice. . . . They must have been put there to give access to the gutters when some one has to come up here to clear them.

Climbing the rungs was more difficult than she had hoped, for they were red with rust and felt alarmingly brittle. How long had they been here? Would they take her weight? She counted them . . . eighteen. It would be easier coming down if she knew the exact number.

It was luxury to let herself slide down into the shelter of the west battlement walk, that was green with moss, secure as turf between yew hedges. The key of the west tower which she had hung around her neck was cold between her breasts. It must fit the lock, it *must!*

Her hand was trembling and it was difficult to fit the key into the opening in the heavy oak. It won't turn! Try again, it must be very stiff. She pressed on the key until the iron dug into her hands. Suddenly it gave with a sharp sound like a dead branch cracking. But the door would not yield until she threw her full weight against it, bruising her shoulder. The hinges screamed as though in urgent protest.

A dead bat lay in the dust on the steps which she knew led down to a brick wall. Across the circular landing the brass handle of the inner door gleamed in the pale light. The door had been painted, white flakes had fallen to the faded carpet, showing the gray oak beneath.

Did she want to open it, or would it be so much wiser not to disturb this secret of Cloud?

"Losing your nerve?" She was startled by the sound of her voice. "You'll feel pretty silly if you find that Rowan was telling the truth—that the floor is rotten and you've got nothing more to fear than the risk of falling through the ceiling of your own bedroom! Why didn't I remember to bring cigarettes with me? It's no use waiting here. Either go back, and admit you're a coward, or open the door."

Her first reaction was acute anti-climax. The room was only a bedroom, and the furniture not even antique—it was painted white, with blue medallions, copies of Wedgewood placques, and silver handles twisted into bows.

She sat down on the chaise-lounge at the foot of the double bed. So all you've found is another of Georgina's attempts to hide the traces of her rival. How ridiculous of her to be so dramatic. Why not have sent all this to a

second-hand furniture dealer instead of bricking up the stair and sealing the lock!

She felt indignant, as though Georgina had deliberately laid a trap for her and would be highly amused to discover she had fallen into it. The thought of falling was a sharp reminder that unless she could find a way of opening the outer door she would have to return by the same perilous route. Perhaps the turret key will fit this too . . . if it does I shall be all right, for the seal only covers the keyhole, it doesn't go from the door to the frame. Oh *please* let the key fit!"

Only when she had fetched it did she realize it was far too large, and then with a surge of relief she saw another key that was almost hidden by dust that had drifted under the sill. So Georgina pushed it under the door after she locked it. For once Georgina wasn't so very clever!

Now that a safe exit was assured, she could afford to give her full attention to the room. A wardrobe with four mirror-paneled doors filled most of the west wall. How silly to put it in front of the fireplace. The fireplace must be there, above the one in her room below.

She opened one of the doors. Evening dresses, satin and Lyons velvet, flounced and embroidered, looked curiously modern, as though they waited on their padded hangers for her to choose among them. She shut the door abruptly and forced herself to open the central pair. Skirts depended by ribbon loops from the wooden pegs. Above them on shelves were blouses, the sleeves held in shape with tissue-paper. The fourth side was full of hats; adorned with flowers and ostrich feathers, with artificial fruit and stuffed birds. A straw boater—the gay ribbon flaunting unfaded color held her attention. She tried it on and found it becoming.

I wonder if Emilie and I could wear each other's clothes? Why not see? I shall have to find her corsets to pull in my waist.

The corsets were in one of the chests of drawers that still held the faint perfume of—what was it? Lily of the valley. She stripped off her jersey and slacks, holding her breath while she pulled in the laces. What did one wear next? Further search provided knickers, fine cambric with open-work embroidery threaded with pink ribbon, and a camisole and princess petticoat to match.

She hesitated between the rival attractions of an emerald-green walking dress, trimmed with black velvet, and a piqué skirt and high-necked blouse with "leg of mutton" sleeves. She could not fasten the top hook of the skirt, so wore it

with a wide petersham belt that had a double clasp of Indian silver.

She must dress up for Rowan one day, when neither of them were afraid to talk of Emilie. It would be amusing to play croquet again. . . . She went out to the battlement walk, eager to decide where the lawn should be made. She stayed there only a moment or two for the rain was cold, and did not see Georgina who was returning to the Castle through the beech wood which crowned the next rise.

She felt a fresh surge of resentment that her furniture and her clothes had been shut away in what used to be the old nursery. They hadn't even troubled to take the rocking-horse away, the rocking-horse that one day her son would ride.

She stroked the harsh mane, and suddenly felt afraid. It was no longer a joke against Georgina to have found a way into the room. . . . Why had she thought it amusing to try on the clothes of a dead woman!

Her hands were shaking so much that the rusty hooks seemed to resist her. The brittle fabric of the blouse ripped as she struggled out of it. She was crying before the corset strings at last broke and let her free.

Pausing only to snatch up her own clothes she ran into the corridor, and dressed hurriedly in one of the abandoned rooms where the furniture was hidden by dust-sheets. She sat on the window-seat trying to regain composure before going downstairs where some one might see her.

Why had she been so frightened? Was it only because she had subconsciously realized that everything in Emilie's room had been terribly familiar? She tried to make herself believe that this was only because the furniture resembled that which had been in her childhood home . . . the house where she had been so troubled with nightmares. But she knew this was spurious comfort: everything had been too exactly as she had expected to see her bedroom when she first came to Cloud, even to the carpet with its white fleurs-de-lis on a blue ground. How did she know it had been bought in Paris and was a copy of one that Emilie had seen in a French château? How did she know that there were seven pillows on the chaise-lounge at the foot of the bed and that Emilie used to rest on it before changing for dinner?

Georgina was frightened of Emilie; it wasn't only jealousy that had made her seal the room . . . it was fear, not anger, that had made her throw Emilie's embroidery into the fire. Georgina would never be afraid of a dead woman—unless

the woman was still here: even Georgina's strength could not protect her against a ghost.

Now that she no longer tried to deny that there was a ghost in Cloud of which even Rowan refused to speak, Marylda's fear subsided. It was almost commonplace for a castle to be haunted, and why should a modern ghost be any more unnatural than the conventional kind, like Alys, whom every one seemed to consider rather quaint? But the ghost of some one so close to her own time seemed far more disturbing. Why was Emilie still here? Was she trying to tell her, the second American heiress, why she had run away from Cloud . . . to warn her why she had had to come back?

X THE CROQUET LAWN

MARYLDA FELT an increasing sympathy with Emilie. She decided that it was more than probable that the stories about her were inspired by jealousy, and that she had run away with Gaston only because the Frenchman had taken the trouble to be kind to her. The Italian garden was further evidence in Emilie's favor, for a "vulgarian" would not have conceived the thickets of rhododendron and azalea, chosen the flowering trees, planted the *Lilium auratum,* and so made of the natural amphitheater a retreat which seemed to belong to a more genial climate.

A stream flowed down over a series of waterfalls beside shallow stone steps. At each level there would be drifts of flowers in spring . . . narcissus and daffodils, polyanthus and scarlet anemones; Marylda was sure of this even before she identified them by the leaves. She was equally unsurprised to find that there were lily-of-the-valley and Solomon's Seal clustered thickly under a crag that was half-covered by winter jasmine.

She sent for nurseymen's catalogs and made lists of further shrubs, to be ordered as soon as she found a way of telling Rowan that she could afford to employ as many gardeners as they needed. The broken fountain, that had known three centuries of sun in Italy, would be brought to life. If only Emilie was not so unpopular, that could have been done now; for all that was needed was to replace a section of the lead pipe which used to bring water to it from a spring higher on the hillside.

After spending a pleasant morning there in Angela's com-

pany she decided to return to the house through the beechwood which as yet she had not thoroughly explored. The dog ran ahead, tunneling through the drifted leaves in pursuit of imaginary rabbits. Marylda ran after her, laughing with the exhilaration of going too fast downhill, until she had to clutch at a low branch to prevent herself falling over a sudden drop which had been invisible from above.

The bank had been cut away to form the back of a small pavilion, its lattice fallen into decay, and the roof overgrown with ivy. In front of it there was a bench, and two chairs beside a round table; rustic ironwork, that had once been painted white. She glanced at her watch; it was earlier than she thought, no need to go back to the house yet, and it would be pleasant to be lazy in the sun. She sat in one of the chairs and wondered idly if they were another relic of Emilie. Perhaps Emilie used to play croquet here, wearing the same clothes that she had found yesterday. Could this have been a croquet lawn? Try to imagine what Emilie would have seen.

The picture formed without any sense of effort; all she had to do was to pretend to be Emilie. . . .

The white hoops were brilliant against green turf. A man in a red-and-yellow blazer was taking careful aim with his mallet. She heard the click of the blue ball hitting the striped post. A girl got up from a chair on the far side of the lawn and walked briskly to the black ball that was lying close to the third hoop.

Why will Georgina never learn to walk gracefully, she thought with a touch of annoyance. Probably her corsets are laced too tight, which is why she looks so flushed. She's wearing the skirt I gave her and she was too proud to let Julie alter it—the poor child insists on pretending our waists are the same size. It's really quite pathetic. I've done my best to help her, but what can one do when she behaves like a tomboy! I've told her a hundred times that men do not like masculine women, yet she refuses to take the hint.

She sighed. Really at times it is difficult to be patient! Even Hector is becoming rather a bore, one would hardly recognize him as the same man who was so attentive on his honeymoon. How I wish I could persuade him to spend the winter abroad! Father offered to take a villa at Cannes for us, so it wouldn't cost anything. And why shouldn't I spend my own money instead of having to use it here?

I wonder if Drummond has remembered that I ordered iced coffee instead of tea? He ought to be glad not to have to

carry the kettle out here, but he will probably deliberately pretend to have misunderstood my orders. Hector won't hear a word against Drummond. How tiresome these family retainers can be! Thank goodness Julie and Gaston realize that they are *my* servants: even Hector had to admit that a lady's maid and a chauffeur have to be French. As soon as I can get rid of the cook without unpleasantness I shall insist on a chef. . . ."

Angela, her hackles up, thrust a cold nose into Marylda's hand. "Darling, how you startled me! What's the matter?"

The dog, whimpering with fear, ran a few paces up the hill and then slunk back to her mistress.

"We'll go away if you're frightened. But there's nothing here. Look, not even a rabbit on the lawn. . . .

"Now that's very odd. I could have sworn there was a lawn down there—but it's only rough grass." She rubbed her hand across her eyes. "I suppose I was day dreaming. But was there ever a croquet lawn here? I must ask Rowan —we could turn it into a tennis court."

Then she suddenly hugged the dog close to her for comfort. "Angela, darling, I don't blame you for being frightened. I'm frightened too, but I'm not going to admit it to any one, not even to myself. This time I didn't just put on Emilie's clothes, in some way I don't understand I put on her *self*."

She stood up and lit a cigarette. "But, Angela, we're not going to think about it. We're going to be very ordinary, feet-on-the-ground people. To prove it, I shall show Janet this afternoon that she has not been very clever to presume I can't play golf!"

She found consolation in the thought of Janet's discomfiture. It would not be entirely easy playing with borrowed clubs, but even when out of practice the winner of the State championship, at the age of nineteen, should not find it beyond her powers to put Janet, whose handicap was eleven, into a better perspective!

She found the others drinking sherry on the terrace. "Where have you been, darling?" inquired Rowan. "I thought we might have lunched at the golf club, but I couldn't find you."

"I wanted to find out if it would be easy to mend the fountain in the Italian garden. I traced the pipe down from the source, and then grubbed about until I found where it's broken—there's a section of the lead missing as though it had been cut through with an axe."

She saw the look on Georgina's face. Oh why did I say

that! It was cut on purpose, and Georgina did it. She hated Hector's wife so much that she couldn't spare even her fountain.

"I expect one of the men wanted a bit of pipe for something else, and remembered there was a free supply there," said Rowan easily. "The fountain hasn't worked since I can remember, probably got frosted, and no one could be bothered to mend it."

"No doubt it can be put in order if Marylda wishes," said Georgina gruffly, "though it seems a waste of money when there are so many more urgent repairs required."

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed impulsively. "But it doesn't matter—I only thought it would seem more alive." Oh dear, I've said the wrong thing again. Of course she doesn't want anything belonging to the other woman to be alive.

"Have some sherry," said Georgina. "At least the cellar hasn't run dry yet, though most of the bins need drinking. I found the Château-Leoville '98 was running through the corks—had to send eight dozen to the hospital to save it going to waste."

"Old Drummond must have turned in his grave!" said Rowan. "I think having to hand out the best port to the tenants at Christmas was the real cause of his stroke! Whisky for the men and port for the women is the rule," he added to Marylda. "And it's a test for the hardest head, for you have to take a nip at each croft."

Marylda pretended to appear attentive to what he was saying, while she tried to bring back the association that "Drummond" had brought almost into focus. Drummond . . . how did she know that he had been very tall, very unbending, that he limped slightly?

"It's going to be hot on the golf course this afternoon," said Duncan. "Sure you wouldn't rather come over to Dalloch and play tennis?"

"No," said Janet quickly. She wasn't going to lose the opportunity of seeing Rowan's wife at a disadvantage—and Marylda claimed to be "fairly adequite" at tennis which was probably a deliberate understatement. And anyway, she looked far too attractive in shorts.

"Let's have a tennis court here," said Marylda, "where the croquet lawn used to be."

"You're confusing Cloud with somewhere else, darling. We've never had a croquet lawn," said Rowan.

"Oh yes, we did," said Georgina. "She seems to know the place better than you do."

"It was in the hollow below the beech wood?"

"Quite right. Croquet used to be very popular in Cloud when," she hesitated, "when I was young."

"Darling, you must have looked enchanting in a straw boater, swinging your little mallet," said Rowan lightly.

Marylda felt a sudden need to protect Georgina from mockery. "Of course she did."

The old woman smiled. "It's very kind of you to say so, my dear. I always felt rather foolish when I tried to be elegant. But one still tried, until it was no longer necessary."

XI THE GLORIOUS TWELFTH

THE EVENING before the Twelfth, that sacred August day which opens the shooting season, Janet asked Marylda's advice as to which of two evening dresses, illustrated in *The Lady,* she should order from Edinburgh.

In Marylda's opinion both were dowdy, so instead of deciding between them, she said, "I've got some American material that I meant to have made up in France—I'd love to give it to you."

"Are you sure you can spare it?"

"Of course I can. There's some black velvet and a really lovely olive-green satin—you ought to have it, for it's much more your color than mine."

"There's a dressmaker in Inverness," said Janet hesitantly, "but she's not much good except at copying."

"I've got plenty to lend you. Let's go and see which suits you best."

Is she really trying to be nice, or patronizing me? thought Janet, as they went upstairs together. In any case, why not learn what I can from her? If Rowan likes clothes the sooner I become intelligent about them the better.

So Marylda found an unexpectedly attentive audience while she discoursed learnedly on color and line. Poor girl, it is bad luck for her never to have been able to buy anything becoming. Later on I might take her to London and get her some proper clothes.

In the glow of prospective philanthropy it was easy to forget that until now there had been nothing except smoldering hostility between them, so she remained oblivious of how annoying it was for Janet to try on dresses that were always too tight across the hips and made her bust look even more bulky.

"You're taller than I am," she said consolingly.

Janet with difficulty managed not to retort. Why not say "fatter" and be done with it!

But Marylda had now assumed the rôle of fairy-godmother and was concerned only with producing a startling improvement in her reluctant subject.

"Do you mind if I try a new hair-do? It's naughty of you to cram it all into that bun."

Mistaking grudging permission for shyness, she sat Janet in front of the dressing-table and pulled the pins out of her hair. "You'll have to get some one really good to design a coiffure for you—but I'll do my best."

After several trial efforts, during which hairpins frequently tried to impale her scalp and the comb appeared to have abnormally sharp teeth, Janet saw herself with a crown of braids which she reluctantly had to admit was a decided improvement.

"And you must use mascara. You've got lovely lashes, but they're too fair to show."

"I'd look a fool with black stuff running down my face whenever it rains!"

"Then have them dyed. And you must pluck your eyebrows a bit—especially across the bridge of your nose. And use an eyebrow pencil, dark brown, of course, not black."

That Janet, far from being pleased, was bitterly resentful at being used as a doll, escaped Marylda's attention. "You've a lovely skin but you ought to choose your powder and lipsticks more carefully." She opened a box in which two or three dozen gay enameled tubes were arranged in graduated colors. "Here, try this one. No, put it on carefully—smooth it with your little finger. . . . Yes, that's right. And here's another to wear with your yellow dress. . . . Of course you're to keep them—I brought masses back with me."

"It's awfully decent of you," said Janet, feeling like an awkward schoolgirl dark with hatred for sophisticated grown-ups.

Marylda, a little embarrassed that a casual gift should have produced such keen emotion in the aloof Janet, took a suit from the wardrobe.

"You can copy this too, if you like. Balmain made it for me before we left Paris. I think I'll wear it tomorrow."

Janet studied the pale blue "spectator sports" with an eagerness she tried to conceal. Could Marylda really be so ingenuous as to wear pale blue on the hill? Would it be too indecent not to warn her against so hideous a gaffe?

"This cyclamen sweater goes with it—I think it's rather gay, don't you? Rowan came with me to the fitting, though, poor darling, he loathes dress shops."

So she patronized Rowan too, did she! Well, let her make a fool of herself—and be sent back to change!

"I think you'll look lovely in it!" she said fervently.

Marylda found her enthusiasm rather touching.

The next morning, confident that the blue could not be more becoming, Marylda was on her way to join the shooting party already assembled in the hall when Duncan met her at the top of the stairs.

He looked startled and exclaimed, "You can't go down like that. I know it sounds damned rude, but you *can't!*"

She drew back. "What on earth do you mean?"

"You're wearing blue, *pale* blue!"

"My dear Duncan, it's charming of you to take so much interest in my clothes, but I honestly don't consider it's very important if I happen to choose a color you dislike."

"Has Rowan seen you in it?"

"Since you're so interested, he chose it himself."

"I mean, has he seen you in it *today?*"

"How could he, when he went down before I was awake? Funnily enough, being free, white and twenty-one, I am capable of dressing myself without supervision. In case you think my taste is not up to Highland standards I may add that even Janet approves—I told her that I was going to wear it."

"I'm surprised she could be quite so bitchy! That garment is more unsuitable to the hill than pink at a state funeral!"

He took her by the arm and hurried her along the passage to the bedroom. "What else have you got?" He flung open the wardrobe: "Bright colors would scare every grouse for miles. Here, this will do. He flung a gray-green tweed on the bed. "Hurry up. You don't want Rowan to know that she nearly made a fool of you."

She pulled off the blue suit while he looked for a jersey, discarding several until he found one sufficiently inconspicuous.

It was difficult to dress in a hurry when she was trembling with anger and humiliation.

"Is that all right? Oh, damn, now my hair's untidy."

They heard Rowan's voice, "Marylda, buck up, every one's waiting." They came out of the bedroom together, Marylda agitated, Duncan obviously embarrassed. "Helping her to dress? Kind of you!" he said, and turned abruptly on his heel.

"I was late," said Marylda breathlessly. "He only came up to tell me to hurry."

"I've already thanked him," said Rowan stiffly. Behind his back Duncan smiled at her to show he was not disturbed by her husband's flare of temper.

She found it difficult to be civil to Janet, who had not been quick enough to conceal her disappointment at the failure of her plan.

For the first drive Marylda went with Rowan. The semicircle of turfs which made the butt would have been a comfortable shelter if there had not been three inches of water in the bottom. Having been told that any unnecessary noise was to be avoided, Marylda did not venture on conversation. Rowan broke the silence by suggesting that she might act as loader, and showed her how to insert cartridges into his second gun.

So there was no taboo against talking—he was just being sulky. She wanted a cigarette, but decided not to light one unless it was offered. She balanced herself on her shooting stick and tried to enjoy the prospect of heather and hills. Should she venture a comment on the scenery or would this be more out of place than picking wild flowers in a bunker during a serious golf match?

She could see a line of boys, waving sticks to which white rags were attached and occasionally uttering discordant cries, advancing across the moor.

"Sandy's got the flankers too far out," said Rowan impatiently, a remark that obviously required no answer. She gathered that flankers were the two keepers, one at each end of the line of beaters, who waved larger white flags.

She heard a few scattered shots from the farther butts that were hidden by a rise of ground. "Sounds as though Georgina's getting some over her," said Rowan.

Towards the end of the drive, he took a single bird too far in front, missed, got it with his second barrel, a following shot. It lay beating its wings thirty yards behind the butt.

"It's not dead," she whispered urgently.

"Mark it—may be a runner."

He thrust the empty gun into her hands and snatched up the other she had put down on the turf ledge in front of her.

The wounded bird still fluttered. "Rowan, you *must* finish it off! Surely you can't miss it from here."

"Be *quiet*," he snapped.

A bird came fast down wind and he put up his gun. The

trigger clicked on the empty chamber. He broke the gun, and found she had forgotten to load.

"I'm sorry, Rowan—I forgot. I was watching the wounded bird."

"You might at least *try* to be efficient."

He reloaded, putting the second gun on his far side to show he expected no further assistance.

Janet in the next butt got a right and left, the first bird falling with a thud in front, the second towering and then plummeting into the deep heather behind her.

"Good shooting—she's better than most men!" he exclaimed.

A wounded hare tried to break back towards the beaters, jinked twice, then fell over on its side and screamed before it kicked spasmodically in dying. The sound reminded Marylda of a child she had seen run over by a tram in a French town; there had been the same note of agonized surprise as he had stared at his severed leg, still standing upright in the little buttoned boot.

The beaters closed up. The guns and their women came out of the butts and began to pick their birds. Lassie and Jock displayed their disciplined intelligence, a little scornful of the visiting spaniels but accepting Duncan's labrador as an equal.

Lassie brought Rowan's wounded bird to him and he crushed its skull with a quick pressure of his thumb. "Some keepers bite the heads," he said, annoyed with Marylda for refusing to share his enjoyment.

"How charming! The cozy, unspoiled primitive in them I suppose."

"It's not particularly clever to be sarcastic about a sport you don't understand. Rather go with Duncan for the next drive? No, better stay with me, you might put him off."

"Oh, Rowan, stop being so disagreeable!"

"Well, try not to look so bored."

"Bored! I don't think even Belsen could be called *boring!*"

In silence they plodded through the tall heather to the next line of butts. Marylda's right shoe was already waterlogged. She gave up trying to keep the other foot dry and deliberately trod on a patch of brilliant green which squelched underfoot and splashed her stockings to the knee.

"Want to try loading again?" he asked grudgingly.

She practiced breaking the gun and slipping the cartridges smoothly in and out. "Don't put it down like that! If you let

dirt get into the end of the barrel it might burst when it's fired."

Her feeling of sickness increased; to the scream of the hare was now added a picture of Rowan hideously wounded because she had been careless. She noticed a whisp of white in the mud. It was one of her handkerchiefs. So this was the same butt where Rowan had made love to her only a week ago. It was difficult to recognize it as the same place—more difficult to recognize him as the gay lover.

"Go back! Go back! Go back!" cried a grouse urgently. "I wish I could," she answered in silence.

The party, who except for Marylda were in excellent humor, collected beside one of the shooting brakes for lunch. Janet helped Georgina to ladle out stew from tin containers kept hot in felt-lined wicker hampers. Marylda handed buttered scones, reminding herself that here they were not called "biscuits," for biscuits were crackers. A black haze of flies hovered over each steaming plate or drowned in gravy. The morning's bag was laid out in a neat row, wet feathers and blood-stained beaks of forty-three brace of grouse, blood on the noses of three and a half couple of hares, a gray hen that some one had taken by mistake. Every one agreed it was an excellent start, that the moor was at last coming back after the neglect of the war years.

Marylda tried to eat a hunk of Mrs. MacTaggart's special plum cake which she had absentmindedly accepted from Duncan. She managed to get rid of it to one of the spaniels, and took a mouthful of whisky from Rowan's flask. Even the water from the burn was disagreeable today: metallic as the plated cup, one of a series that fitted into each other in a leather case.

If only some one would start a conversation in which she could display an intelligent interest, but shooting bores were worse than golf bores. It was obvious that none of the guests regarded her as the hostess; she was a foreigner whom they tried to put at ease. How could she be expected to cope with the three women who marked birds for their husbands with the abject devotion of spaniels, who talked of people of whom she had never heard? Even Duncan was apparently absorbed in conversation with an elderly man who was a crony of Georgina's. Some one ought to have told him he was too stout to wear a kilt with decency—much less with elegance! Was she supposed to call him Alistair, or Lord Dalwhin; not that it was in the least important, but why give Janet unnecessary opportunities to gloat?

Did every one realize Rowan was indulging in Highland gloom, or had they decided he was already bored with his wife? How often did this nauseating performance take place? She had a vague idea that Rowan had said it was a "four-day moor." Did that mean four days in the season or four days every week?

Rowan came over to her. "Tired?" he asked, suddenly contrite that she looked so forlorn.

"No, darling." She smiled, a plea for their quarrel to end.

"Then we'll go off first. I've drawn the top butt—it's always a bit of a pull after lunch."

He tucked his hand under her elbow. "Sorry I was a pig this morning. Don't know what came over me—everything seemed to go wrong."

"I was a clumsy ass. But I'll be more efficient this afternoon, really I will."

She jumped down after him into the butt. He glanced over his shoulder to make sure no one was in sight, then spread his coat for her to sit on. "I'm a jealous moody bastard—but I love you much more than I'll ever be able to tell you."

Duncan saw him kissing her. "So the old boy's got over his gloom," he thought with relief. "I'll wring Janet's neck if I catch her trying to make trouble again. Rowan's damn lucky—I hope he's got the sense to realize it!"

XII FIRE AGAINST MIST

MARYLDA, THOUGH not usually superstitious, decided that the "unlucky thirteenth" was not unfounded, for the next morning, when Janet was due to leave in an hour, her mother rang up to say that one of the housemaids had developed mumps.

"Of course you must stay on—it would be pointless to risk it," said Rowan. And Janet made half-hearted protests, forcing Marylda to press the invitation.

During the next few days she produced a more subtle attack, leaving Rowan alone with his wife so pointedly, being so obviously "tactful" that he worried because she felt an unwanted third and blamed Marylda for not being nicer to her.

Rowan regretted that Duncan had guests of his own, for it would have been easier with a foursome, though that would have left some one out after dinner when Georgina expected her rubber of bridge.

Marylda could not decide whether Rowan was remarkably obtuse or deliberately shutting his eyes to a situation he found embarrassing. But surely he realized what Janet was trying to do! This morning she had excelled herself, arranging for Marylda to be left behind while she went with Rowan and Georgina to shoot at Dalwhin.

It had rained heavily during breakfast, a meal Marylda now attended to maintain her status as the dispenser of tea and coffee in her own house. The telephone rang and Janet said, "I expect that's Alistair canceling the drive—it's far too wet to shoot." When it proved to be only the butcher inquiring whether Mrs. MacTaggart had ordered two haggises or three, she was clever enough to make Rowan anxious that Marylda would catch a chill if she stood all day in the butts; so that it was he who suggested she should stay at home.

Janet's quick kiss on the cheek as she went out to join Georgina and Rowan in the car was a triumph, worthy of the "Darling, how I shall envy you cozy by the fire when I'm *frozen*. But I can't disappoint Alistair when he's short of guns."

"Enjoy yourself," Marylda answered sweetly, thinking, what we'd both like is tommyguns at short range. And I was so guileless that at first I pitied her!

At least they haven't got a monopoly on walking in the rain! She rang the bell and told Agnes she would be out to lunch and wanted sandwiches.

Before she had gone more than a hundred yards she began to regret her decision, but she could not turn back now without loss of face. Anyway Angela would enjoy the walk. Where should they go? Up towards Ben Dhuie, where there was a dry cave which would make this lonely picnic less intolerable. She trudged through the heather, her hands thrust into the pockets of an old mackintosh she had taken from the collection in the gun-room.

Somewhere behind her a nailed boot rang sharply against stone. She caught hold of Angela and pulled her into the shelter of a granite outcrop. "It's only one of the keepers," she whispered. "We'll let him go past."

The dog's coat was reassuring to her cold hand. It smelt of wet Harris tweed, like Rowan when he came back to her out of the rain.

"Mar—yl—da." The shout echoed among the rocks. She recognized Duncan's voice.

"Here!" she shouted back.

He loomed out of the mist. "Agnes said you'd gone towards Ben Dhuie so I thought I might catch you up."

"I'm so glad to see you, and so is Angela. She thought you were a leopard that was stalking us."

He fondled Angela's ears. "She won't admit that she mistook me for a rabbit that might make rude faces."

"Rowan's gone over to Dalwhin with Janet and Georgina."

"I know. That's why I thought there was a chance of finding you alone."

"If sandwiches will do will you stay to lunch? We have a wide choice of dining-rooms—a redundance of heather and the cave—if you will come so far."

"I can offer alternative accommodation, an abandoned croft which has still a roof and a fireplace."

The croft clung to a steep field of turf in the shelter of rowan trees. The door had fallen from its hinges and was held in place by a twist of rope. There was a stack of wood and dry gorse beside the hearth.

"It's sometimes used for shooting lunches—when they drive the high ground," he explained.

She watched the quick flame surge up: he was clever to make a fire so easily against the mist. He put on larger wood and the wide chimney began to hum with warmth.

"That's better," he said, sitting back on his heels. "I can contribute a flask of whisky and four pears—Mother sent a basket of them to you."

"To me or Georgina?"

"To you, not to Georgina *or* Janet. Mother's on your side."

It was comforting that he did not pretend there was no conflict.

"I have quantities of sandwiches. Mrs. MacTaggart always overrates my appetite, or else thinks Angela less fastidious than she really is." She put the open packet on the floor between them. "Angela has an ancestral memory of the time when dogs of her quality were never offered less than shin of beef."

"Angela is a person of discernment. She will never accept less than her rights."

"Meaning that I am a fool to let Janet get away with so much?"

"Yes, if you wish me to be blunt. You let her turn your pride against you. She flatters Rowan, so you refuse to give him the same compliment. Don't you realize that all men need praise? He wants you to admire his shooting, to give him the masculine satisfaction of teaching you to do things

that he will always do a little better. But you deliberately play into Janet's hands—you won't go to the butts with him, you get Robbie to teach you to fish, you are far too pleased when you beat him at golf."

"But I loathe seeing things killed—and surely he saw enough blood in the war! He despises inefficiency, so why should he watch me being the blundering amateur with a rod! And if he hadn't been so sure that I couldn't play golf I wouldn't *want* to win."

"It's something more than ordinary female jealousy that's upsetting you. Don't tell me about it if you think it's none of my business, but if you need a friend—well, I'm here."

"One doesn't starve a friend, so have another sandwich."

He took it, then unscrewed the top of his flask and held it out to her. "Have a swig of whisky—you're cold."

"To Duncan and Marylda, for Rowan against the rest," she said.

He heard the break in her voice. "To Rowan, and the devil take his enemies."

"So you know I'm afraid of losing Rowan—and that I'm losing my nerve?"

"I knew the first—and also that you've got nothing to fear there. And guessed the second. What's the reason? Spooks?"

He took a brand from the fire and lit his pipe with deliberation, as though his full attention was on getting a steady draw through the tobacco he had tamped down so carefully with his forefinger.

"Why spooks—surely you don't believe in them?"

"Oh yes, I do—and so, I think, do you, though you're finding it rather an uncomfortable jolt to the materialism you've tried to cultivate. You're scared, and you'd better tell me about it because otherwise you'll tell Rowan—and I don't think that would be a good idea."

"But how do you know I'm scared?"

"Because your eyes have a look that wasn't there when we met in Paris. And I happen to have seen the croquet party too—so when you talked about it, I knew you'd got the 'sight.' And if you saw that, you've probably been aware of several other 'extras' in Cloud. If you go on trying to make yourself believe it's only imagination you'll start thinking you're going off your head. I know that's uncomfortable, for it happened to me before I learned more sense."

"Does Rowan have the sight too?"

Duncan hesitated. "He *used* to have it, and most appalling nightmares, when he was younger."

"Yes, I know," she said. "He told me about them once—when he was half asleep."

"I don't think it's healthy for him to be reminded too much—at least not at the moment. He's one of the bravest chaps I've ever met, but he has always been afraid of ghosts. It was largely Georgina's fault: instead of explaining that they were quite *ordinary*, she pretended he was deliberately telling lies—and when that didn't work she made him sleep without a light in the room, and sent him alone into the worst parts of the Castle to try to harden him. So you see, tell me, but don't tell Rowan . . . at least not yet."

"So you really believe ghosts are real—not just time getting muddled or something scientific."

He laughed. "Reality and science are not opposites—and materialism is out of date even among conservative professors. My personal view is that a ghost can be anything from a complete personality, whose physical body happens to be dead, to a fraction of a personality the rest of whose attention is elsewhere."

"So you mean that a ghost could be part of some one who is still alive?"

"Why not? But we needn't discuss generalities. I believe that Hector's first wife still lives in Cloud, that Georgina is perfectly aware of the fact, and was not even surprised when you saw her too. So long as she remains here there is going to be tension in the house. If you've the courage to do it—and I'm not underrating that it requires a considerable amount, I think you should try to find out why she came back. I've tried myself, but I can't get enough to work on. One thing I can warn you against—on two occasions I've heard the most damned awful sound of a man sobbing in the sealed room. But why a man? Is it Hector?"

She laughed a little shakily. "I think this deserves another snort." She lifted the flask. "To de-spooking Cloud and God bless our conspiracy."

"God bless you," he said gently.

XIII THE RIVER

ALTHOUGH MARYLDA no longer tried to shut out unlikely experience, but instead made deliberate effort to become more sensitive to it, she had nothing to report to Duncan until the end of August. Because on her arrival at Cloud there had

seemed something odd about the entrance to the drive, she went several times to look at the empty gateposts; but they were no more than pillars of weathered stone, stained with rust from the iron that once had been the pivots of hinges.

She was on her way to the village, sunshine after rain was making the puddles brilliant as polished silver, when without surprise she saw between the lichened stone, a pair of gates, their iron tracery elaborate as birch trees in winter. Every detail remained clear until a car passed along the road beyond the bridge, when they instantly retreated to their own dimension.

But they had stayed in focus long enough for her to make from memory a drawing of their intricate design. She found in the library a folio of Italian art of the eighteenth century. The style was sufficiently similar to suggest the gates were either of the same period or careful copies.

She took the sketch and the folio to Dalloch and showed them to Duncan.

"Ever been in the loft above the Great Barn?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"They keep hay up there: but there's something more interesting than hay. I'll drive back with you—we can tell Rowan you met me on the road."

"Rowan's gone out with Georgina—they won't be back until after tea."

It was dark in the loft until Duncan opened a door through which bales were swung up from the yard on a pulley.

"I'll have to get a pitchfork," he said, leaving her in the musty warmth while he climbed down the ladder through the square opening in the floor.

He tossed the hay expertly until a corner of the loft was free. Half hidden in chaff were the gates.

"I've often wondered why they were here," he said. "I asked Georgina years ago. She told me not to be inquisitive, and then said they had been taken down because they were unsafe."

He compared their pattern carefully with Marylda's drawing. "It's far too accurate to be a coincidence. The sea horse motif doesn't appear in any of the illustrations in the folio."

"So we've got one step farther," said Marylda, half-glad, half-fearful of her accuracy. "We know that Emilie must have bought them, probably at the same time as the statues in the Italian garden, and that either Hector or Georgina hid them up here after she had gone. We know they hate

her, so why did she want to come back to the place from which she ran away?"

"That's what we've got to discover," said Duncan. "And until we do, we must be careful that no one finds out that we, like the Elephant's Child, are suffering from insatiable curiosity!"

For nearly a fortnight nothing else occurred. Since Janet had gone Marylda and Rowan seemed to have recaptured the carefree happiness they had known in France. Even shooting was less repugnant when he so obviously enjoyed himself more in her company. She no longer felt alien; for the permanence of Cloud, the grandeur of hills, the constellation of trees, the secrecy of woodland paths, gave her a new security.

She was fishing, on a drowsy evening when even the water over the fall seemed to have forgotten its usual tumult, when she looked up to see a woman standing on a flat rock in midstream, leaning back against the pull of a salmon-rod. She wore waders, and a Norfolk jacket of Cairdrie tweed to match her deer-stalker. There was something familiar about her . . . too familiar.

Don't run away. Be very quiet and try to get close to her. Remember, if you let yourself be afraid she will vanish, as though you were looking into still water and fear was the stone that shattered the reflection.

Marylda dropped her rod and walked quietly along the bank. The setting sun glittered on the sliding water that, below the rock on which the woman stood, churned slowly above a deep pool. . . .

She felt the line slacken and began to reel it in. This might be the same fish that Hector lost yesterday—he said it had been all of twenty pounds.

The fish plunged and the line whirred through the reel. Where was Robbie? She called him, he must have the gaff ready.

The salmon had only feigned exhaustion; with a surge he was off up-river. The rod bent to the drag of the line. She braced her feet and leant back, setting her weight against the power of the fish. He turned, and in the sudden slackening she lost her footing on the slippery rock, fell backwards. The rushing water closed over her. She tried to swim, but the heavy waders were full of water holding her down. She made a despairing effort to get free of them. . . .

Marylda found herself lying on the bank, her head on Robbie's knee. She gulped, and then said unsteadily, "Oh,

Robbie, you must have come just in time. I nearly drowned. And I lost the salmon!"

"Was it a fine fish?"

"I believe it was the same that Sir Hector lost yesterday."

"Maybe we shall get the better of him another day. And how did you come to fall in?"

"From the big rock—it was difficult to keep my footing in waders."

"Which you are not wearing, and why should you, when there has not been a salmon in this river since I was a young man?" said Robbie quietly.

She sat up, looking down at her brogues, her tweed skirt dark with water. "But I *did* fall in!"

"Yes, you fell in, and it was lucky that I heard you call before you got worse than a wetting. It was from the same pool that I pulled out Miss Emilie forty-eight years ago. She nearly drowned, though I was so close at hand, for her waders dragged her down."

"Robbie, you must tell me the truth. Did I do anything *odd* before I fell?"

"Well, if it's the truth you wish, can I be sure you won't speak of it to those who may prefer not to understand?"

"You can be sure. But please tell me. I need to know."

"You were standing on the rock, leaning back with your hands up, as though you were holding a rod with a strong fish pulling against you."

"But I had no rod?"

"You had no rod—except perhaps Miss Emilie's, that Sir Hector burned after she went away."

"But she came back. Robbie, do you know why she came back?"

"I have always hoped to help her find her rest before I die. You see, I have always been in sympathy with Miss Emilie, for she told me her troubles when she was too proud to speak of them to any one else. She asked me to call her 'Miss Emilie' because she was homesick at times."

"Miss Emilie"—why did that name suddenly have a new significance? Nanny Lovell had said "Miss Emilie" long ago when Marylda had asked why there was a name heavily scored out in the family Bible. "Your father had an elder sister who brought disgrace on the family and no one speaks of her now." Nanny had added, "I loved Miss Emilie," but had refused to say any more. A child's curiosity had not endured against careful silence.

"I had an aunt called Emilie, but she died long before I was born," said Marylda slowly.

"It's not an uncommon name. And now you must go back to the castle and take off those wet clothes, for here is Sir Rowan come to look for you."

She saw her husband running down the bank. "Darling, what's happened? You're soaking."

"She slipped trying to cross by the stones," said Robbie placidly.

"It was idiotic of me," Marylda said quickly. "I misjudged the distance between two rocks and thought I could jump farther than I can." She managed to laugh as though it had been no more than a trivial accident. Oh, why did Rowan come before I could ask Robbie the surname of Miss Emilie! It mustn't be Blenkinsop. Please, please don't let it happen that I'm not only another American heiress—but that I'm *her* niece.

XIV GRANDMOTHER

GEORGINA MET Marylda and Rowan in the hall and was startled by the girl's extreme pallor. "The child's frozen—take her up and put her in a hot bath immediately," she ordered Rowan. "I will fetch a whisky toddy with lemon, it's the best thing for a chill."

In other circumstances Marylda would have enjoyed their solicitude, but it was difficult to appear grateful when she longed for a chance to go to Emilie's room to search for a clue that would end her suspense.

Rowan sat on the edge of the bath, holding the steaming glass from which he made her take frequent sips.

"Darling, no more or I'll be tight," she protested.

"And what of it? Your teeth are still chattering though you ought to be parboiled by now."

"I'm all right, really I am. You pop downstairs and have a drink, and I'll be with you in half an hour." She could slip upstairs in a dressing-gown. There must be letters in the desk, some clue to the surname.

"You're having dinner in bed," he said firmly.

"Truly, darling, I'm making far too much fuss."

He found her attempt to make little of the accident very touching. Poor darling, it had been a frightful shock. And he wasn't going to leave her in the bath—she might faint. She

wanted to come down to dinner so as not to be left alone. It was always beastly being alone after a bad fright. He felt very protective.

"You're going to get out now and I'll rub you down and then tuck you into bed—perhaps you ought to go between blankets."

"Not blankets, they tickle."

"Then two hot-water bottles."

From Rowan, who considered even one hot-water bottle excessive, this was a tribute. She thought of protesting and then realized it would be easier to get to Emilie's room while they were safely at dinner.

She sat on his lap enveloped in a towel while she dried her hair. "It's still very damp," he said judiciously. "You'd better wear my thick dressing-gown and stay by the fire for a bit."

He wrapped the eiderdown around her and sat on the floor with his head against her knee. "Darling, you must be careful not to fall off rocks again. I used to get so annoyed when Georgina fussed, but now I sympathize. How difficult it is to love without anxiety."

How closely he echoed her own thoughts! Did he love her enough to go on loving even if Emilie was Emilie Blenkinsop, or would the dark gods mock at the transient happiness of mortals?

Georgina came in with a bottle of aspirins, which she considered a powerful drug to be used only in emergency. "I think two now and perhaps two more last thing," she said. "And another toddy straight away. Mrs. MacTaggart is sending up strong mutton-broth and steamed turbot in half an hour."

Georgina was a little surprised at her own anxiety, but to her there was no half-way house between robust health and real illness. Marylda was certainly suffering from shock if nothing worse, and therefore she required all the resources needful to the invalid. Fortunately these were at hand: whisky, aspirins, broth and steamed fish being the medical repertoire. Except for bread and milk and castor oil, neither of which were at present indicated.

The second toddy, into which had gone half a tumbler of Islay Mist, induced a grateful warmth and a gradual decrease of tension.

Marylda stood up and caught hold of the mantelpiece. Rowan carried her to bed, took off the Jaeger dressing-gown, and with some vague memory that flannel was supposed to

be beneficial, insisted on putting her into a pair of his winter pajamas.

"I'm having dinner up here with you, I thought it would be more cozy," he said, when Agnes brought in a tray, followed by Elsie, pink with excitement, for a vivid account of the mistress's narrow escape from drowning had already been relayed to the servants' hall. Marylda, who looked very young with the sleeves of Rowan's pajamas rolled up above her elbows, heard herself expressing a real gratitude. I ought to be worried that I can't get up to Emilie's room, she thought. I must find out who I am, I mean who she is—or was. But it doesn't seem to matter at the moment. Nothing matters except being warm and safe—safe with Rowan.

He sat on the edge of the bed, feeding her with spoonfuls of broth. She's very flushed, he thought anxiously. Has she got a temperature, or was Georgina a bit lavish with the whisky? How soon does it take to develop pneumonia? People die of pneumonia. No they don't, not since the sulpha drugs. Ought I to ask Garvie to come tonight? Awkward if he says she's only a bit tight, poor darling.

She felt deliciously sleepy, though the room had a tendency to revolve in drowsy circles. . . . If the circles get faster they will spiral upwards like the stripes on a barber's pole and then this room and the one above will be in the same place. And then I needn't go upstairs—I can just lean out of bed and open the top drawer of the desk . . . no I can't reach it from the bed, but I can go very quietly across the carpet without any one hearing me, and then I shall find the photograph album . . . and if there is a picture of Father in it I shall know he is my brother . . .

When Rowan was sure she was asleep he put the trays outside the door, undressed with elaborate caution, and crept into bed beside her. Her pulse was too fast, or was his own pulse unusually slow? But her forehead was cool. He left the bedside light on so that he could look at her in the night to make sure he was being absurdly overanxious.

It was three in the morning when he awoke, this time to hear her muttering in her sleep. "Don't let me get too close to her again. . . . She'll make me fall and then her waders will be too heavy for me to swim. . . . Janet says she drowned herself in the Seine, so she might make me drown if I get too close. . . . But I must find out why she is still here. . . . I must go up to Emilie's room. . . ."

She tried to get out of bed, her eyes tightly closed as

though she was trying to shut out a vision of fear. Her voice droned on—waking in him vivid memories of his own deliberately forgotten terrors.

Dare I leave her for a moment while I fetch Georgina? I don't know whether it's only a nightmare or delirium. If she's delirious she may be dangerously ill. We must get Garvie at once. If only Georgina and I weren't so disgustingly healthy we shouldn't be so ignorant about illness.

She was talking again when Georgina came into the room, repeating the same phrases Rowan had already heard. A lifetime of discipline enabled the old woman to conceal her agitation. This was not delirium, it was worse, proof that Emilie was not content to haunt one generation of the family, but was trying to take Marylda from Rowan as once she had taken Hector from herself. But at all costs the boy must be protected. She put her hand on the girl's forehead.

"If she has a temperature it is not high enough to be alarming," she said with a confidence she was far from feeling. "It's shock and whisky—nothing that a day in bed won't cure. And if there's any cause for anxiety we'll send for Garvie in the morning."

"Ought we to wake her," said Rowan, "and keep her awake for a while so she doesn't slip back into the same nightmare?"

"Much the best thing. I'll slip down and heat some broth, and a sandwich with it might be a good idea. You ought to eat something. I saw the tray you sent down untouched."

He waited until he heard Georgina coming upstairs. "Wake up, darling, wake up," he said gently.

Marylda stirred and slowly opened her eyes. "What's the matter?" she asked sleepily. "Is it morning yet?"

"I think you should have something to eat. Georgina's gone to fetch it."

"She's very kind. I never really loved Georgina until tonight. Wasn't that silly of me? But I do love her. . . ."

Georgina heard her as she brought in the tray and had to blink to hold back sudden tears. Oh, the poor child! She's been as frightened as I have so often been and I've done nothing to help.

"It's well worth falling into the river to have such a beautiful looking after," said Marylda, safe and content between two people who loved her. "Nobody's ever really minded about me before, until I found Rowan, and now I've got a grandmother too."

Georgina, to whom even so small a token of affection was a luxury long denied, bent down to kiss her. "I always

hoped for a granddaughter, and now I've got what I want," she said, in a voice that Rowan had not heard her use before.

XV NO OSTRICHES

When Rowan opened the door of Georgina's sitting-room she was seated at the desk, resolutely adding a column of figures in the estate account book.

"Busy, Georgina?"

"No dear. Did Marylda sleep?"

"Yes, and she's had breakfast. Only coffee and orange juice, but she didn't want anything else. She says she is going to be lazy this morning. I left her because I think she'll doze off again if she's alone."

Georgina screwed the top on her fountain pen, glad of the small respite of this trivial efficiency, and said, "Marylda wasn't delirious last night. She mightn't have been so honest without the shock and the whisky: but it was honesty—nothing more."

"So you're not trying to bluff me any longer? I hope you realize how much that means—lying to some one you love is never easy, and it's a luxury neither of us can any longer afford."

"I apologize, very humbly, for being a fool and a coward. We are Highland—it was the act of a parvenue to pretend we could avoid the responsibilities of the 'sight.' And there are other ways in which I have been a fool. . . ."

"You mean when you tried to make me marry Janet?"

"It is not a very adequate excuse, but I thought she would be so reliable."

"You thought I would rather be bored than haunted?"

"I did. I have already admitted that I acted with the minimal intelligence."

"Janet was to 'laugh me out of my fancies?' Dear Georgina, how could she, when you have failed to laugh yourself out of your own!"

"You underrate my efforts! I read a quantity of books, which varied from standard works of psychology, usually written in a phraseology which might well have been an inept translation from the Sanscrit, to the vaporings of assorted 'isms' which offended all canons of taste. Fortunately I had the wit to recognize that neither school had the authority of

empiricism! But I must admit that for a while I almost convinced myself that I suffered from no more than an obsession, built up from my jealousy of Emilie. In some of the more massive tomes there were heartening references to 'hypnogogic visions,' which are supposed to be due to a repressed idea which eventually bursts out of its neat little pigeon-hole and appears objective. That was the theory of a psychoanalyst whom I consulted years ago. He asked me impertinent questions, and expected me to visit him frequently at an exorbitant fee. He had a wart on the side of his nose and remarkably damp hands. He patronized me, and I nearly invited him to Cloud so that he could have a thorough haunting and be frightened out of his futile little wits!"

"Emilie would probably have ignored him, and he would have left even more complacent!"

"Then he could have gone to Dalwhin and spent the night with Lady Fiona and her black goats! I'm sure Alistair would have opened the East Wing for his special benefit!"

"This, Georgina, is definitely an occasion," said Rowan. "Do you realize that for the first time we are being honest with each other? It requires a celebration, an honorable snort."

For a moment Georgina reverted to the behavior pattern she had so laboriously constructed. "It's not yet eleven. Sherry and a biscuit if you wish, but not what you meant by a 'snort.' "

He laughed, and she heard him run down the cellar stairs to return with a glass jug of whisky drawn from the oldest cask. "Do you want water with yours?"

"Your grandmother may be nearly seventy but she is not yet senile!" They clinked glasses. "My apologies for having been a damn fool for a considerable number of years. I was also a snob. If you had been content with seeing the old haunts I don't think I should have minded so much. But a ghost in a straw boater, a ghost one personally disliked—it was too much! I resented Emilie dead even more than I hated her when she was alive."

"Poor Emilie—I'm afraid we have been very inhospitable. It must be bleak to continue as an unwanted ghost."

"I confess it did not occur to me that any one who was not a Celt could have the sight. When Marylda became aware of Emilie I felt guilty—like the unfortunate people who suddenly discover they are typhoid carriers."

"Gargle or you'll catch my ghost? Thank God that at last we can joke about it."

"I didn't find it amusing! I tried to dislike Marylda, as

though she was usurping a privilege, a Sassenach wearing our tartan."

"Georgina, we've got to make up our minds what causes all this—until we've got it clear ourselves we can't help her. Do we, or do we not, believe in ghosts?"

"Do we, or do we not, wish to play ostriches?" said Georgina briskly.

"We don't. From now on ostriches are out. But is there an alternative explanation? I've read quite a lot about it, rather naturally. The easiest theory is that strong emotion can register on the atmosphere of a place in much the same way that sound waves can be impressed on vulcanite—certain types of people act as the needle to the gramophone dics."

"Alistair brought a woman here about three years ago. She wanted to see the skull. She was so remarkably accurate that I thought she'd got the data from Alistair, and was showing off. But when it came to explaining, she only said it was 'psychometry'—which didn't really mean anything. Alistair is convinced she is genuine, he says her findings are far too often right to be only coincidence or fake."

"Why shouldn't Marylda be a psychometrist without realizing it? Let's accept for a moment that ghosts are only a kind of emotional strain, beyond the range of ordinary awareness but available to those who have a wider sensitivity. After all, dogs can hear a whistle too high-pitched for the human ear to register."

She shook her head. "I'm afraid that won't do. I tried to psychometrize, but nothing happened. On the other hand, Alistair's female had never seen a ghost—I think that rather annoyed her."

"Then there must be different kinds of awareness which don't necessarily overlap. But if Marylda sees Emilie, why doesn't she even feel anything in Alys' tower? Why is Emilie so much more solid than our respectable family ghost?"

"I don't know," said Georgina reluctantly. "If it comes to that, why don't I see Alys? Visitors quite often did, before Thunder gave up putting any one in her room. Hector and I used to be delighted when they came down to breakfast and admitted they'd had an uncomfortable night."

"Did they see Alys merely because she was a conventional haunt—what could be more typical than a woman carrying her husband's head? They all knew the story, so she was relevant. But she wasn't relevant to *you*. She was just part of Cloud's tradition."

"But for some reason Emilie is relevant to Marylda?"

"Yes, and I don't know why—but we have got to find out. You heard her talking last night. If she only *saw* Emilie it wouldn't matter. But she fell off the rock because Emilie fell—she nearly drowned because the weight of Emilie's waders were dragging her down."

"I realized that," said Georgina. "I remember only too well how close Emilie came to being drowned. Robbie rescued her, as he rescued Marylda. The only difference was that yesterday I thanked God that he came in time, and before I wept with disappointment because I thought death would have been sufficient to remove her—it was very ingenuous of me. Have there been any other—'incidents?' "

"Certainly one, probably more that I didn't notice. We were out for a walk after dinner, there was a full moon and we went to the water-lily loch. Suddenly she said, 'Let's swim across, and this time I won't make a fuss.' There was nothing odd in wanting to swim, for it was a hot night. But I knew she hadn't been there before, so it gave me a bit of a shock when she said, 'Don't you remember how nice I look swimming naked, when the brown water makes my skin look gold? And if I get caught in the lilies, I shall swim very fast instead of crying to you to rescue me.' What really shook me was that she called me Hector."

"Emilie swam with Hector there. She used to joke about it; I gather he had laughed at her for thinking the slimy stalks of the lilies were eels."

"So you realize why I'm afraid? I don't suppose I'd have admitted it, even to you, unless I had a bit of whisky inside me. Marylda is becoming a kind of mirror for Emilie. What happens if she can't help reflecting her?"

"You are afraid that Duncan will play the rôle of the chauffeur?"

"No," said Rowan, and found it surprising that he really meant it. "I know it sounds conceited, but I don't believe Marylda will ever want to leave me. It isn't only that Duncan is my friend and I trust my wife—it's something deeper than that. I don't believe it is part of the pattern."

"She *did* run away," said Georgina. "She is buried in Paris —I went there to make quite sure, after Hector died. A suicide, buried in a Christian cemetery with Highland gold—a donation to the church was enough to convince the authorities that she had fallen into the Seine by accident."

"I thought you never crossed the Channel."

"So does every one. I said I was going to London to buy

baby clothes for Hamish—no one knew I spent two nights in Paris. I wore a veil and traveled second-class, both quite unnecessary and most uncomfortable. I went there because I believed that suicides stayed either in the place where they died or where they are buried—but I couldn't find Emilie."

"But why did you want her?"

"I thought she might be able to comfort Hector—I knew he was still in Cloud though I never saw him."

"But you *heard* him," he said quickly. "It's Hector whom I used to hear crying. But why should he still be here when he died in a shooting accident?"

"But he didn't. He hanged himself." She was surprised that her voice could sound so normal. "It happened on the evening of the day Hamish was born. Only three people ever knew—Robbie and I, and Rhoderick, Duncan's uncle, who died in the Boer War. They decided that it would be better for the secret to be kept—so that Hector could be buried in the church, and Hamish would never know his father was a suicide."

She paused, uncertain whether it was necessary to tell him more. "Please go on," he said gently, "unless it still hurts too much even to talk about it."

"After Emilie ran away, Hector was very—odd. He wouldn't see any of his friends. He drank too much, even for a Highlander. I stayed in the house, because he didn't seem to resent me and Mother said he couldn't be left entirely alone. Then one day, it was the seventeenth of April, he told me that he had received a letter from a hotel in Paris, saying that a woman who had been staying there had gone out one night and never returned—they had found his address among her papers and wanted to know whether they should communicate with the police. He went to Paris by the next train. When he came back he told me he had identified her body in the Morgue and arranged for it to be decently buried. He said that if I didn't believe him I could go to the British Cemetery and see the stone that marked her grave.

"In June he asked me to marry him. He was very honest; he didn't pretend to be in love with me, he thought I would understand that it was sufficient he must have an heir for Cloud—so how could I tell him that I would have wanted his child just as much if he had been a crofter?

"He was very gentle with me during that year, even when I took three months before I could reassure him that he had not married for nothing. Sometimes I even let myself believe

that he might fall in love with me when I was the mother of his son.

"I was twenty-two and very healthy, but it took twenty-three hours for Hamish to be born. Hector came into the room after the doctor had gone. He stood at the foot of the bed, there was one of these glasses in his hand, and the nurse, being sentimental, had put the baby beside me.

"I knew how Emilie would have looked: her hair loose on the pillow and her breasts very white through the lace. My hair had been plaited by the nurse in two red pigtails which strained back from my high forehead. Mother had sent me cream flannel nightdresses that buttoned close to the neck. The doctor had smeared vaseline on my nose and mouth before he gave me a little chloroform—and no one had remembered to wipe it off.

"Hector kissed me on the forehead. I wanted to throw my arms around his neck, but I had learned to contain my demonstration of affection. Then he dipped his finger in the whisky and made the sign of the Cross on the baby's mouth. 'If you see anything which your intellect denies, never admit it, my son,' he said. Then he went out of the room, and the nurse came to take the baby away. Very small and red he looked against her starched apron. She told me I cried because I was tired. She gave me a cup of tea and two pink tablets she said would make me sleep. I stayed awake in case Hector came back. He sometimes slept in my room when he was afraid. But Hector never admitted to fear unless he was very drunk, and that was seldom, for two bottles a day couldn't make him sway on his feet.

"I heard him in the room above—the room where everything which belonged to Emilie was taken the day after she ran away. He kept the key in his safe, and had the stair bricked up after he found me trying to get in by the other door. He never found out that I could go there by climbing over the roof to the battlement walk—the same key fitted the outer door of both towers. He used to put flowers in her room, and sometimes I would find her clothes laid out on the bed as though she was just coming up to change for dinner. When I heard him up there I used to make sure there was a full bottle of whisky in his study—there was nothing else I could do.

"I thought he had only gone to tell her that his son who should have been her own was born. When I heard the thud of the rocking-horse I was afraid he had fallen and perhaps hurt himself. I tried to get out of bed, but the nurse came

back. She said I was hysterical and gave me an injection that forced me to sleep. I let her do it because I knew Hector would never forgive me if I betrayed his secret. I thought the creaking sound was only the door of the wardrobe swaying in the wind. It was not until three days later that I knew it was the rope rubbing against the iron ring in the beam above the overturned rocking-horse—the rope he had used to hang himself.

"Until the day of the funeral I made myself believe the story they told me—that he had forgotten to unload his gun while climbing over the wall between the birchwood and the moor, and that his face was shattered. They said it, the two Cairdries who guarded his secret, so that no one would insist on seeing him. It was Robbie who gave me the truth: he knew I could not be consoled by lies. Robbie knows Hector and Emilie are still in Cloud, that she cannot be kept away by the weight of a foreign stone or he find rest under the aisle of the church his great-grandfather built. But even with Robbie I have kept my silence."

"My father—his was a real accident?"

"Oh yes. I never had to lie about Hamish. The front tire of the car burst when he was fetching the doctor for your mother. I think both you and Hamish being born on the day your fathers died made me afraid of—coincidences."

"We are not a very lucky family!"

"You mustn't say that," she added vehemently. "We are free to choose our destiny—it is wicked to become only an echo. You and Marylda are going to make a *new* pattern. . . ."

"We might be really original and have a daughter instead of a son." He saw the question in Georgina's eyes. "No, not yet—I thought we ought to wait until she is less—nervy."

"You mean until we can get rid of Emilie."

"We've got to! Oh, God, Georgina, how are we going to persuade her to go away?"

"How are we to bring peace to her—and to Hector?"

XVI MOUNTAIN PATH

THE ALBUM, bound in red satin, hand painted with aggressively purple wisteria, was in the middle drawer of Emilie's desk. Marylda stood with it in her hands for several minutes before she could make herself open it. Painting in oils on satin had been one of her mother's hobbies. It was almost

an anticlimax to see her writing on the title page: "To Emilie from her devoted sister-in-law,' to turn the stiff cardboard and discover a faded photograph of her father, a young man about to mount a bicycle on the gravel sweep in front of the house on the Hudson, and under it, in a more flowing hand, "My brother Edward, April 1897."

She went slowly out of the room, pausing to wedge the door again—and then deliberately left it open. Why bother to lie any more when the truth she must tell Rowan was so much worse than she had expected even in her greatest anxiety? How should she say it? "I've lied to you. I am Marylda Blenkinsop, Emilie's niece." He and Georgina would think she had known all the time, that she had just been waiting to show them that the Cairdries couldn't get on without the Blenkinsop money that they had been too proud to keep. Could she make them understand that she had more reason to fear Emilie even than they themselves? Would they pity her—why should they? Their code was not pitiful of deceit. They believed in heredity—how could they trust the niece of the woman who had betrayed Hector?

"But Emilie didn't betray Hector!" She was startled by the sound of her voice which cut across the thread of thought. She ran into one of the spare bedrooms and sat on the sheeted bed—no one would think of looking for her in there.

Why did I say, "Emilie didn't betray Hector?" How do I *know* that; why am I suddenly certain that Emilie will never be able to rest until she can make some one understand what really happened? But I was going to do that—I told Duncan we must find out why Emilie came back.

"I never went away!" She swung around as if some one else had said the words, and then realized that it was only herself again speaking aloud. Or was it? Was she *hearing* Emilie for the first time?

An echo of a familiar song was in the room—"Sing me home, said the long-lost lady." Nanny Lovell's tune—the tune that she must have taught Emilie too.

"Please don't be afraid of me—I am only Marylda, the daughter of your brother Edward."

She sat very still waiting for an answering voice. "I can't hear you," she said gently, "but we are going to help each other—until the two Miss Blenkinsops have no reason to be afraid in Cloud."

She would confess to Rowan before the evening, but first she must have time to seek the right words. She would tell

Agnes that she had a slight headache and had decided to go for a walk; it would be impossible to make trivial conversation at lunch.

She heard the murmur of voices as she passed Georgina's sitting-room. There was a mist of rain driving down from the moor, and the soft air was plaintive with curlew. Beyond the vivid moss and the white tufts of bog-cotton on the low ground, the path began to mount between heather, gray with moisture.

Familiar granite loomed through the mist—the place where Rowan had found white heather for her on a day when they had laughed together in the sunlight. She shivered and thrust her hands deeper into the pockets of her mackintosh.

She crossed a stream that ran loud among boulders and began to climb the west face of Ben Dhuie. Beside the sheep-track the ground fell away in a steep slope of glassy turf. If the mist clears when I reach the crest I shall see Cloud small as a toy in the distance—no one can be afraid of a toy. She thrust forward against the press of the hill as though by physical effort she could dispel the brume that prevented her seeing clearly.

If only I could tell Rowan why I am sometimes afraid of Cloud. But Duncan is right, it would be cruel to remind him of terror he has been able to forget. If I could tell him he might forgive me for having lied to him. Will he ever understand why I had to go on lying? The first lies were so easy, and then I went on day after day, because I was afraid of losing him—because I have always taken the easier way.

Will he ask me to leave him when he knows the truth? Did Emilie confess some lie to Hector, and then ran away because she could not bear to watch the disillusion in his eyes?

But she didn't run away. You mustn't let yourself believe the stories that people have invented to conceal a truth they dare not understand. How can you expect Rowan to believe you if you won't believe Emilie?

You came here because no one else would believe her. That is why she was so glad to welcome you: why she tried to make you share the happiness she found here, so that you wouldn't be afraid, so that you could love her enough to take her from the exile of a ghost. It was Emilie who told you what it felt like to swim among water-lilies under the moon—she wants you to put her gates back on their hinges, to bring living water to the fountain of her garden.

A fall of scree rattled down the hill and nearly swept her

from the track which had narrowed to a rock shelf. She forced herself to sit down until her heart resumed its normal rhythm, to light a cigarette and smoke it slowly before going on.

If I had fallen and broken my neck, for no better reason than that a silly sheep somewhere above me in the mist lost its balance, where should I be now? In heaven—what do I know of heaven, save a vague belief that people who love each other are not separated by time or space? So my heaven would be in Cloud with Rowan—and if he would not accept me it would be my hell. Are heaven and hell no more than places of desire where that part of us must go which does not recognize a new horizon? Is a ghost a soul who cannot share the freedom of its spirit?

"Each shall return to its own kind." Is Emilie's ghost seeking Hector's ghost? Then how can I, who am most human, make them aware of me? "Man is composed of body, soul and spirit." Therefore I must learn how to know Emilie's soul with mine—for I suppose that not having a body is no more than being naked.

Perhaps being afraid of ghosts is as ridiculous as being disconcerted by walking unexpectedly into a nudist colony and feeling disgracefully overdressed. So all I have to do is to learn to treat my body as I do my other clothes—as convenient but not essential. It will probably take time to learn the technique—but I am not entirely unwise if I really try.

"Which is one of the reasons why all this is happening to you," she said briskly. "Everything has been too easy for Miss Blenkinsop. So rich, so versed in the social graces. Now you must, somehow, prove to yourself that the aristocracy of your money, which you inherited, and the aristocracy of lineage, which by marriage you have acquired, are pitiable unless you give them validity by an aristocracy of spirit."

XVII MISS BLENKINSOP

NEITHER Rowan nor Georgina was hungry, but meals were part of the routine; so they ate cold grouse and salad followed by apple-tart. He knew she shared his anxiety, for twice she said, "It's very sensible for Marylda to go for a walk—it would have been silly to stay in bed when she's got nothing worse than a headache. But I hope she remembered to take some biscuits with her."

"I'll stroll out to meet her after lunch." He tried to sound casual. "Did Agnes happen to notice which way she went?"

"Mrs. MacTaggart says she went towards the kitchen-garden, but Anderson hasn't seen her. So she may have gone down to the river or turned up through the birch wood."

"Probably down to the river—it would be typical of her to go to the place where something unpleasant happened, just to prove to herself that she isn't frightened."

"I hope she's not fishing."

"She's not. I looked in the gun-room and her rod's still there."

Georgina watched him stride across the park, and knew he was forcing himself to keep an unhurried pace until he was out of sight of the windows. Two village boys were beside the White Pool, but neither of them had seen Marylda. He went upstream, his voice echoing back from the mist when he shouted for her.

He realized he was running and made himself stop to light his pipe. Three matches went out before he could draw steadily instead of watching the brown spate driving down between the rocks.

Emilie drowned herself, but Marylda isn't Emilie: this river isn't the Seine. She was never afraid of the Seine: we used to lean on the parapet of the bridge to watch the lights reflected in the water. If she had felt Emilie there she would have been afraid.

Should I have warned her about Emilie before I brought her to Cloud? But I asked her if she believed in ghosts, even before I told her I was in love with her. She laughed, as though I was joking—she said that the only thing missing in the Château was a romantic haunt. How could I have known that I would bring her into danger?

Of course she is not in danger—unless I allow myself to believe that her destiny is linked with Emilie's. There is a link, but I have got to break it before she realizes it exists. Poor darling, she must have felt alien here at first and so she associated herself with the other American bride. That's what has happened—every time she hears anything about Hector's wife she feels it's a dig at herself. Damn Janet—it's mostly her fault! What a bloody fool I was to let her stay here when I first brought Marylda home. Duncan tried to warn me but I wouldn't listen. Too stupid to take any advice and now I've hurt her.

I'll never find her in the mist. If she's not home by five, no by four-thirty, I'll take every one to look for her. We'll

quarter the ground until we find her. Angela might follow her trail—no, that fool dog couldn't find a grouse at ten yards.

When we find her I'll explain that I was worried in case she'd slipped and sprained her ankle. No, don't say you were afraid she might have had another accident. Did Emilie get lost? Dare I ask Georgina? No, the old lady has got enough on her plate at the moment without adding to it. Can't have been easy to keep quiet for nearly fifty years, and to lie through her teeth because she thought it would help.

I mustn't start the search before four at the earliest, or else Marylda will feel she's being watched. Cloud would feel like a prison if she couldn't even go out for a walk without feeling she had to explain.

I'd better hurry back to the house. She's probably there already, having tea with Georgina in the library. Unless I keep calm it's going to be much more difficult for both of them. I mustn't let either of them know I'm windy.

When Georgina heard him come into the hall she snatched up a book. He mustn't realize I'm worried. We can have tea early. She rang the bell, lit a cigarette, and threw it away when she saw her hand was shaking.

"Marylda back yet?" he asked as he opened the door.

"No, but she'll be in soon. I'll tell Agnes to be sure the water is hot—she may want a bath as soon as she gets home."

He watched her warm the teapot, measure three spoonfuls of tea from the tortoise-shell caddy, pour water from the silver kettle that bubbled over the blue flame of the spirit-lamp. They each ate a scone, and put the covered dish on a trivet by the fire.

"She'll be back soon," said Rowan.

"Of course, dear. Remember how you used to scold me if I dared to fuss when you were out late?"

When they heard Marylda coming along the passage from the gun-room, the relief was so sharp that to relax required a deliberate muscular effort.

She came into the room, her hair still bright with water drops. "No, I don't want any tea—I'd like a drink, later, after I've told you my hideous secret." She tried to say it lightly, but they both saw how tense she was. "If you turn me out of the house I won't blame you—but please will you give me a chance to explain?"

Rowan put his arm around her shoulders. "Darling, whatever it is, get it off your chest, and as for turning you out—well, if you try to go I'll haul you back by your hair."

"Don't be nice to me or I shall crack. I've lied to you both —and you despise liars."

"Nonsense!" said Georgina. "Every one lies, and any one who says they never do is either a conceited prig or a proven liar. I've been telling Rowan some of my lies today. I'm an expert!"

"What have you been doing, darling?" said Rowan. "If you've murdered any one we'll pop out and dispose of the corpse, and if it's only larceny, who could be more helpful than Georgina and I who come from generations of cattle thieves?"

"My real name isn't Marylda Lovell."

"Of course it isn't, it's Marylda Cairdrie," said Rowan. Then he stiffened. "You mean you were married before?" and with an effort added, "But lots of people make a dud first marriage. Were you a widow or divorced?"

"Neither," she said, and managed to smile. "No, darling, you are my first and only husband—and my first and only lover too, if that's any comfort."

"It is," he said fervently. "I can't see that anything else is really at all important."

"That's just the point—it isn't important if only you'll believe it."

"As an accomplished liar I'm not such a fool as not to recognize truth when I see it," said Georgina. "And I'm not nearly so stuffy as I pretned to be, nor so blind—ask Rowan if you don't believe me."

"You can tell anything to Georgina," he assured her. "To be honest I didn't realize it till this morning, but it's a fact."

They watched Marylda compassionately. She was about to tell them she had seen Emilie. They must both be very careful to say exactly the right thing—better take it as quite natural but never let her know it was dangerous.

"Well," said Rowan gently, "out with the hideous secret."

"I'm not poor, I'm quite disgustingly rich. I lied about it because I thought Rowan wouldn't marry me if he knew."

"Well, I'm damned!" exclaimed Rowan.

"I think it was most sensible of you," said Georgina calmly. "And entirely justified. If Rowan had known you were rich he'd have been off like a scalded cat—and at the risk of trying to appear clever after the event, I'm not in the least surprised."

"But how did you guess?"

"My dear, only some one brought up in the habit of money would treat a mink coat as though it were rabbit!

When you first came here, and I was trying my hardest to dislike you, I thought you probably hadn't bought the coat yourself." She chuckled. "Janet was convinced you were an adventuress—Janet is frequently a fool."

"But it's worse than being rich," said Marylda forlornly. "I changed my name to Lovell because it was so horrid being an heiress and never having a chance to be liked as a *person.* That's why it was wonderful when Rowan fell in love with me—I couldn't make myself tell him the truth in case he was cross."

"And so I should have been," admitted Rowan, "until you taught me that loving leaves no room for false pride."

"Darling, oh, my darling, you are so wonderful to me!"

Georgina watched them kiss each other, with gratitude that they didn't mind her being there. And I tried to drive her away, she thought, when it would have killed the boy to lose her. "Money is very useful," she said. "No one knows better than I do how difficult it is to cope with the drab inelasticity of shillings!"

Rowan sat down and pulled his wife on to his lap. "So you're an heiress, married to a poor devoted Scot who adores you. Isn't that fun! I'm not going to be in the least pompous, we'll spend your improbable wealth and enjoy every penny. After we've mended the roof, will there be enough to buy a new car?"

"I'm an *American* heiress, darling—plenty for lots of cars and acres of roofs." She looked at Georgina with affection and mock severity. "You rubbed it in, my being American—if I'd admitted being the second American heiress it might have been the last straw. At times you made me feel like a Hottentot with a ring through my nose."

"I was a bitch," said Georgina. "An expression I seldom use, for I consider it insulting to Lassie and Angela."

"It isn't an insult—not in the way it applies to you. A bitch defends its young, and you were trying to defend Rowan against me—we only fought because we didn't realize we'd both defend him against *anything.*"

"What about me doing a bit of defending too?" protested Rowan. "Keeping you two from each other's throats hasn't been easy, and if you doubt my capacities, you'd better consider how Jock tore into the sheepdog that came sniffing around the kennels!"

"No sheepdogs—promise," she said. "At least not unless you throw me out when I've told you who I am." Was she playing it wrong, deliberately letting herself treat this con-

fession as comedy instead of the high tragedy she had expected?

"Well, who are you? No, who were you—not that it matters a damn. You are my wife, and we love you."

"And you are my granddaughter," said Georgina.

"But I am also Emilie's niece. I was Marylda Blenkinsop."

"Oh, my poor child," said Georgina, "oh, my poor, dear child!"

"I didn't know until this morning—when I went for the *second* time to the sealed room. I found a photograph of my father in the desk."

"Did you climb over the roofs and get in through the tower door?" asked Georgina.

"Yes, but how did you know?"

"I used to—though I haven't done it for a long time."

"You don't hate me for it? You understand?"

"I understand." Georgina's voice was very gentle.

Marylda looked into her clear eyes, thinking, Can it be so easy as this? All that terror, all those lies, suddenly no more substantial than mist when the sun climbs high?

"You know I was Miss Blenkinsop and you still love me?" she said. What courage it required to make that clear cut demand!

"Of course we love you." Rowan kept his arms in exactly the same position with a meticulous control of muscle. Mustn't let her know he was terrified to discover that the link between her and Emilie existed even in heredity; mustn't let her know that from now on he would be afraid to let her out of his sight in case she was caught up in Emilie's vortex. So that she should not see the fear in his eyes he bent down to unlace her shoe. "Darling, your stockings are soaking! You'd better pop upstairs and boil yourself in a bath—I'll come up and take the tap end."

She slid off his lap, pulled off her other brogue, paused at the door. "I love you both enormously," she said, "which is an example of British understatement."

They were silent until they were sure she had reached the staircase.

"So now we know why the link between them is so strong," said Georgina.

Rowan went across to the cupboard that Hector had made behind one of the bookshelves, poured whisky into a glass, came back to stand in front of the fire. "I believe," he said, "that providing one loves enough there are no impossibilities. I believe praying really works—which I admit sounds non-

sense considering the hours we have wasted mumbling in the kirk. I am going to drink a toast, and for the first time I recognize what a toast implies—a loyalty which demands more than logical fulfillment."

He raised his glass. "To Miss Blenkinsop. May God give freedom to her soul."

Georgina took the glass from his hands. "To the Misses Blenkinsop—and in their name, to Cloud."

PART THREE

I INVITATION TO A BALL

THE LATE October gale would have driven most people to shelter, but Rowan and Georgina lingered in the chill dusk to watch the last of the trees which had been planted to conceal the influence of the first Miss Blenkinsop being hauled to the Great Barn.

"Georgina, had your command of strategy been recognized earlier, Eisenhower would have made you a general—it would have been a gross neglect of talent to do less."

"Meaning that you are not displeased at the facility with which I have caused certain people to fall in with our plans? It is salutary to discover how antiseptic honesty can be, when properly applied! However, one dare not partake of what is labeled 'for external use only.' "

"We bluff the others, but we do not allow ourselves to be lulled into false security?"

"Exactly—but that doesn't mean that we may not permit ourselves a pat on the back for what is already achieved. We have removed the taboo on Emilie's memory, and Marylda is no longer embarrassed at being her niece. And what is so encouraging is that the dear child is cooperating—if quite unconsciously. You have more guile than I ever gave you credit for, to have made *her* suggest most of the moves we planned."

"You put the ideas into her head, by being so clever about breaking the news of—the second Miss B."

Georgina took a packet of cigarettes from the pocket of her jacket, and lit one with a gold lighter which Marylda had given her. "You must not give me undue credit for the things I enjoyed. It was most stimulating to find myself sufficiently intelligent to make even Alistair think I had deliberately deceived him—instead of allowing the 'stuffies' to laugh at us. Without undue conceit, I think the touch about Malcolm telling me, in strict confidence, that he had discovered Marylda's real identity from the American Embassy,

while arranging the formalities of your marriage, and asking whether he should leave you in ignorance until after the ceremony, was quite masterly. That you decided to let her be patronized as a little nobody, until we thought the joke had gone far enough, was an example of pawky humor that even the least of our neighbors can appreciate."

"No one except *you* could have carried it off. And, God forgive me, I used to think you the last bulwark of Edwardian smugness!"

"The Edwardians were not in the least smug! Their morals, within their own stamping grounds, would shock you young moderns—if only you knew what really went on. But we had a certain code of actual freedom and outward formality, which, unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to share." She laughed. "What one does for one's children! I have learned to use the telephone for purposes of gossip: an instrument I consider unworthy of more than instructions to the tradesmen. That Jean was undoubtedly listening in to every word became an added incentive to histrionic powers I belatedly discovered—at least I was assured of an enthralled audience of one—instead of being indignant that so avid an ear listened at the mechanical keyhole. Sometimes I could hardly resist congratulating her on the discovery that there are compensations in being a telephone operator in a village where the usual grist to the mill of conversation is no more than an argument about a discrepancy of a penny in the grocer's book!"

"I hear that Jean has had three proposals of marriage, having hinted at the missionary dance that her 'intended' might discover what was going on at the Castle!"

"We've gone too far to draw back, but are we sure that leading Marylda to think kindly of Emilie is quite—safe?"

"I think so," he said slowly. "I've had moments of funk, but she seems much less nervy. When I suggested treating the new wing as an amusing example of Edwardian taste instead of a skeleton in a cupboard. . . ."

"Not if I may say so, a tactful metaphor," interrupted Georgina.

"I know—but the point is that it didn't upset her! She laughed and said, 'Poor skeleton, let's teach her to dance again,' and she couldn't have said that if she knew Emilie was horribly alive."

"So you're not worried at the prospect of a tenants' ball in Emilie's banqueting hall on New Year's Eve?"

"No, not really. I think it's the most antiseptic thing we

could have possibly planned—and somehow we made Marylda suggest it. There won't even be the echo of other gatherings, for she is having ridiculously expensive food sent from London, and quantities of hired waiters, and champagne in ice-buckets—and surely the most tangible ghost would withdraw in face of a pimply waiter from Soho carrying an out-of-season pineapple."

"Alys would ignore them, but Emilie might feel entirely at home," said Georgina with severity not unmixed with trepidation. "Emilie would probably give every female guest a corsage of orchids, but the orchids available in midwinter in the more remote Highlands are minimal."

"I shall tell Grummie to have orchids flown over—we must be sure even the little details will make Emilie feel it's *her* party."

"Excellent," said Duncan, who was sitting with Marylda in his car, which, as the weather grew colder, they found a more convenient headquarters than their usual rendezvous in the abandoned croft. "You've done a magnificent job with Rowan and the old lady—I believe they think the ball was their idea." He relit his pipe with care. "Protect me from the subtlety of women!"

"What you mean is, 'Protect me *with* the subtlety of women,' for until we've got Hector and Emilie settled neither of us can afford the comfortable ignorance which is one of the masculine luxuries!"

"Shake, partner!" He took her hand and then bent to kiss it. "My dear, if I have ever been stupid enough to belittle female courage, forgive me."

For a moment he stared through the window which made an ephemeral division between the illusion of security and the wind driving down from the hills. "The Scot conquers in the recognition of his femininity—it was not for nothing that the kilted regiments of my father's war were called 'The Ladies from Hell.' But we are afraid of that side of our nature, and so maintain prodigies of endurance which make us honored in the enginerooms of ships and feared in the market places. Rowan and I, bloody proud of being 'brave'—and we had to land the real danger on you, because we couldn't face up to it."

She laughed to hide the tremor in her voice. "You can watch a gralloch that turns me up, and I take the easier way of looking at a spook."

"But it isn't easy," he said vehemently. "My God, how I

hate letting you go on with this thing. If only Cloud wasn't Cloud I'd tell Rowan to sell the damn place and take you away."

"I doubt if Emilie would find the new owners more congenial."

"Sorry—I know you're right, that we've got to think of her and Hector, but unless you're with me I'm too selfish to worry about any one except you. Are you sure it's not getting too tricky?"

She deliberately pretended to misunderstand. "It's getting easier, now that I'm deliberately trying to get close to her instead of pretending she isn't there. There are times when it's not entirely cozy. The day I went into the closed wing for the first time—but there's no point in dwelling on horrors."

"Tell me, you must tell me," he said urgently.

"Darling, don't get fussed—honestly it was nothing really bad. When I first went into the rooms that were never finished it was only like going into one of the 'period homes' that are so carefully preserved in America which had been abandoned before it was ready for the public. The passages were cluttered with rusty radiators and lengths of pipe that had never been connected, baths were lying on their sides, like dead hippos. Rolls of carpet, hangings, wallpaper—and everywhere was quiet with dust. There was even a bag of tools and the remains of a red, cotton handkerchief that had held one of the workmen's lunch. Luckily I don't mind rats much.

"I didn't feel anything really odd until I began to wonder what color the curtains would have been in one of the new bedrooms. Suddenly I knew that the suites were to be called after flowers, and that the curtain fabrics, glazed chintz, had been specially printed to match the wallpapers. The flowers were daffodil, rose—that one had a trellis with very thorny roses of a particulorly hideous pink—wisteria, fat bunches of it with each flower more solid than a hothouse grape, and lily—Madonna lilies with acid-green leaves, and water-lilies in a frieze.

"I went to the room where I had seen the rolls still in their original sackng covers. I had a knife with me and as I ripped them open I knew what I was going to see—and I did."

"But the gates should have warned you not to be surprised."

"The gates were different. I saw gates that had been there, but it was quite impersonal, the time element was the only odd factor. But when I was looking at the wallpapers

I felt two quite distinct reactions to them. I, Marylda, thought they were rather pathetic examples of outmoded and unjustified taste, but *she* thought they were beautiful and enormously chic." She laughed shakily. "You see, Duncan, I was thinking as me and as Emilie at the same time—and both of us were sure we were right. Then I went downstairs again and into the banqueting hall—and somehow I got more Emilie-ish; for I thought the stained glass windows and the ghastly yellow oak minstrel-gallery, and the paneling that looks as though it is embellished with gigantic, petrified parsley, were magnificent—I felt enormously self-satisfied at having designed it all! Another thing I didn't like—when I became Marylda again. I remembered that while I was admiring the room there wasn't any dust, and the sun was shining through the east windows and making colored patterns on the floor, which of course was impossible because of the trees. But I didn't notice anything odd about that until nearly an hour later when I found myself sitting in the Italian garden, making plans for a New Year's Eve ball. I knew the rooms that join the banqueting hall to the Castle couldn't be finished in time, so there was to be a covered way leading from the drawing-room. The house party would dine on the dais under the south window which would later be used for the orchestra. That's why we're having Emilie's dance all over again, because I know that the thing she's too afraid to remember happened just afterwards. *She* doesn't know why she came back here, that's why I have got to live through it with her."

He looked at her without speaking. What could he say when he longed to tell her he would never let her go back to Cloud, that he wanted to take her away *now,* to Dalloch, to the ends of the earth. But if he let her know he was in love with her she mightn't trust him—she'd have to fight this thing alone, for it was Rowan she loved—he was only "dear old Duncan," the faithful confidant.

"You agree that it's the only sensible thing to do?" she said.

"Sensible! Oh my God, *sensible!* I think it's so incredibly brave that I'm speechless. But you can't do it, my darling. Don't you realize that you are deliberately risking a split personality? It's still under your control—you can stop being Emilie. But say she won? You might live as Emilie, think as Emilie—be lost in a pattern that has been passed by half a century of clock time but is still valid in its own dimensions."

"Emilie doesn't want to stay in her—hell. She's trying to

pretend it's a heaven, that's why she won't make an effort to face whatever has made her so afraid that she prefers to go on being a ghost."

"Oh damn Emilie! Think of yourself—and Rowan!"

"I *am* thinking of myself—in a funny kind of way I feel more than just her niece. If it's only heredity, which quite candidly I don't believe, I'm not going to risk my children inheriting it. So you see I'm being quite selfish."

"I think you are being . . . no, skip it."

"Silly?"

"No, not silly." With an effort he patted her hand and said briskly, "When I told you, months ago, that Rowan was damned lucky—well, I meant it."

He glanced at the dashboard clock. "We'll have to hurry or you'll be late."

The lights of the car shone ahead of them against the mist.

II SECOND SHOT

During the first week of November, Marylda went over to Dalwhin with Rowan and Georgina who were to shoot capercailzie with Alistair. The last stand of the day was in an open glade of the pine woods, and the light of the setting sun seemed almost solid between the somber trees.

Marylda, balanced on a shooting stick beside Rowan, was a little bored, and wondered idly whether Emilie had ever been here with Hector. She had been surprised that only at certain times was it easy to share experience with Emilie, until she learned that the shift of attention never occurred unless she happened to be thinking of an almost identical situation. Since her fall into the river she had tried to be careful never to become so caught up in the other woman's pattern that she echoed it instead of remaining only the intent observer.

There was only one occasion when this had failed. She had been sitting on the window seat of her bedroom, polishing her nails, when Mrs. MacTaggart came up to ask for the orders for dinner. It was only when Marylda saw the cook's astonishment that she realized she had dictated a menu of seven courses which belonged to the capacious days of Mrs. Beeton. She had pretended it was a joke, that she had been reading one of the old cookery books that collected dust on a high shelf in the servants' hall. Mrs. MacTaggart stayed to

gossip and departed contentedly with the assurance that the cockieleekie soup, the roast venison and red current jelly, the cheese-straws, on which she had already decided would prove satisfactory.

Lean back a little: relax, not too much or you'll topple over. Yes, it was working very well. If she looked down she might see the clothes that Emilie had worn . . . would it be the tweed knickerbockers that she had so daringly chosen for the river? No, it was a skirt, sage-green cloth with a leather hem. Even with a skirt so short that it showed the second button of her boots it often got draggled with mud when she followed Hector over plough. The leather had been Julie's idea: it was smart and so much easier to sponge clean than fabric. Not that it really mattered if Julie had to do rather more than was strictly necessary.

The last time Hector shot caper he took a white owl by mistake. She had had it stuffed, to remind him not to be so impatient when some one mistook a gray hen for a grouse. Hector insisted on putting it on the dining-room mantelpiece; which was most tiresome of him, for it spoilt her arrangements of dyed pampas grass and varnished bullrush that looked so well in the Chinese vases.

It was exceedingly tiresome to have to provide an admiring audience for Hector, but if she didn't come with him he'd ask Georgina instead. A castle in Scotland was not really so exciting as she had expected; in winter it would be deadly dull unless she could persuade Hector to include some of her friends in his house parties.

Papa had warned her that she might find a Scot a tough proposition, and suggested, rather crudely, that if she wanted a title, an Italian Count or an Austrian Baron might be a better bargain. But she wanted Hector; she still wanted him, and even if she didn't she would never let any one know, least of all Papa who, as he inelegantly expressed it, "had no sympathy for a sucker."

Perhaps Hector would be easier to manage when he knew she was having a baby: but she wouldn't tell him yet. Even if he fussed over her she would never be sure that it wasn't only because he was anxious that nothing should interfere with the well being of his heir. He might even refuse to let her wear corsets, for already he had made sarcastic remarks about women who tight-laced and then were surprised when they got out of breath if they tried to walk uphill at a reasonable pace. She would never be able to get into the dress Worth had made for the New Year's Eve ball unless she

laced; she could tell Hector afterwards, when there was nothing to be done about it except resign herself to five months of boredom. The least he could do after she'd given him an heir would be to take her to London for the Season. And of course it would be a boy; it would be quite devastating to produce a girl, and have to go through it all again—and he'd probably insist on calling it Georgina!

I shall get Hettie Lovell to come over and be the nurse. No, she'll probably have to be the nursemaid until she learns how a British nanny behaves. Hettie is the only one of the servants at home who was really sorry when I married abroad. She thinks I am wonderful; and the servants here are worse snobs than Hector's friends. It is very lucky that none of them can afford to despise my money, or the things it buys. I thought Hector would be pleased with the gates. I didn't mean to tell him how much they cost, but he had to be made to realize that I have the grand manner too, that it's not only modern things I can appreciate. The gates cost five thousand dollars, a ridiculous price for old iron, but I said I wanted the best that money could buy. I learned their pedigree by heart to impress Hector, even the dates of the various families who might have visited the villa near Florence where they had been for over three hundred years. But he only laughed, and said that if spending money amused me it was none of his business so long as I didn't do anything too drastic to Cloud. So I had to insist on the new wing, to *make* him believe that everything I am doing here is an improvement. I don't think he'd have let me build it unless I had pointed out that he would be deliberately refusing employment to his precious Highlanders.

My son will be called the Master of Cairdrie. I shan't allow Hector to bully him. He ought to be very good looking. It's lucky I didn't marry an ugly man, for children sometimes take after their fathers. It's odd, but since I started this baby, I don't like seeing things killed. If I told Hector, he might say it was a pity I didn't inherit a stronger stomach from Grandfather who began his fortune in the Chicago meat market. But of course Papa doesn't have anything to do with that side of the business: it takes a Scottish aristocrat to enjoy killing his own meat!

A roe-deer trotted out of the shelter of the dark trees, stood with one forefoot lifted to sniff the evening wind. Behind him the hind waited, a fawn at her side. A gun shattered their security. The stag sank slowly to his knees, his

head turning from side to side in a last despairing effort to find the source of the danger which threated his family.

A girl ran across the glade to kneel by the dying animal. . . . The man who had fired the shot tried to lift her to her feet. She hit him across the face, "You filthy murderer!" she cried out hysterically; then before he could answer either to comfort or condemn she fled from him into the wood.

Rowan turned on his heel and strode off in the opposite direction. "Damned extraordinary thing," said Alistair to Georgina, "only other time I saw a woman behave like that was when Emilie slapped Hector—and now I come to think of it, that unfortunate exhibition took place here too."

"What happened afterwards? Alistair, try to remember. Where did Emilie go?"

Odd for Georgina to sound so worried; bound to be a bit upset at her grandson's wife making such a disgusting scene, but she ought to be angry instead of fussed. "So far as I remember she went off home, in the car with that chauffeur feller. Hector stayed with us for a couple of days, gloomed around the place and made a nuisance of himself."

"You mustn't blame Marylda. It's not her fault that she . . . that she is Emilie's niece."

He patted her on the shoulder. "Getting very tolerant in your old age, aren't you, my dear? Hope Rowan takes the same view; always sorry to see young people making a mess of their lives."

"Keep Rowan for dinner; tell him I've got a slight headache and Marylda has driven me home. Say that I want to see him immediately he gets back. You've got that quite clear, *immediately* he gets back?"

This was the Georgina he understood; brisk, authoritative. He made a mock salute. "Very good, milady; any further orders?"

"No, that's all; but for God's sake don't make a muddle."

He laughed. "I'll try! As I'm five years older than you I may possibly have reached the years of discretion. But I like being bullied by you; makes me feel the young cub you were always too busy to notice."

When Georgina was out of his sight she began to run. Had Marylda gone down to the road? If she was still thinking as Emilie she might be hit by a car . . . cars went so much faster than they did fifty years ago. Would she remember slapping Rowan? She hadn't said anything about Emilie until she was dreaming about it, after the fishing accident. Somehow they must try to convince her that nothing odd

had happened. The poor child would be so ashamed if she knew what she'd done.

She reached a gate and could look down across a plowed field to the lane where their car and the shooting brake were parked. Marylda was sitting on the running board of the Alvis, smoking a cigarette. She saw Georgina and waved, and the elder woman hurried towards her.

"Rowan's staying to dinner, but do you mind driving me home? I've a bit of a headache."

"Of course not, darling. I'm feeling a bit wilted too. It's been a long day and the midges were monstrous."

She can't remember, otherwise she'd be worried about Rowan, thought Georgia. But I wish she wouldn't drive quite so fast. What would happen if she suddenly got caught up in Emilie while she was driving?

The speedometer flickered between sixty and seventy. Thank God Emilie never learned to drive, thought Marylda. I wouldn't sound very convincing if I said in a police court that I'd jammed on the brakes and skidded because I was afraid of running over a man with a red flag. I must be more careful at letting myself tune-in to my dear aunt. When I ran off to avoid seeing the gralloch I almost believed I'd hit Rowan: in fact, let's face it, until Georgina appeared, I was not at all sure that I hadn't echoed Emilie far too solidly. Georgina would be furious if I'd made a scene, so its obvious that nothing awful happened. But I'd better make quite sure: I might have *said* something.

"Rowan wasn't peeved that I sloped off by myself after the last drive?"

How fortunate I've become such an expert liar, thought Georgina. "I don't think he noticed you'd gone. He was looking for a bird that had fallen rather far back."

"You mean after he shot the roe-deer?" She accelerated to conceal her agitation. Had she asked the wrong question? Did the deer belong only to Emilie's time?

Georgina hesitated. Should she admit the stag? She noticed a streak of blood on Marylda's skirt. "He went to look for the bird after the stag, when you'd gone to the car."

Better pretend to be frank. "You're sure no one noticed that I suddenly felt sick when I saw it dying? Rowan doesn't like me to be squeamish."

"No one noticed anything odd." Did I say that too vehemently? No, I think she is convinced. I'd better telephone to Rowan to make sure that he doesn't say anything tactless. Bother, that inquisitive child at the exchange is sure to listen

in. Mustn't risk that happening. We'll go to bed early and then I'll come downstairs again to wait for Rowan.

Marylda would have preferred to stay up until her husband returned, but as Georgina asked her to come and say good night after her bath it would have been tactless to refuse. Until she was alone it was not safe to consider the full implications of what she had learned today. So Emilie was having a baby, Hector's baby; which made it quite certain that she hadn't run away with the chauffeur. Emilie's baby had never been born. She must be very careful not to start a baby herself until she knew she was no longer vulnerable to the past. Rowan would be disappointed, he might even be angry. But she had to protect him and the children they would have when everything was safe.

But now nothing was safe. Today the echo had become so real that she had nearly allowed the pattern to repeat. What would happen if the pattern which kept Emilie here was too strong for her to break? Dare I tell Duncan? No, I've got to take this entirely alone. Duncan thinks he's fallen in love with me; I mustn't let him tell me or it will make him feel disloyal to Rowan. He'll try very hard to pretend he feels no more than ordinary affection, but if he knows I'm frightened he might say something silly. He might even threaten to tell Rowan that it's not safe for me to live in Cloud. I've been trying to make everything here more and more like it was in Emilie's time. But now I must impress *myself* on the house. I needn't go into her wing unless I know I'm in full control of the situation. The rooms we live in must be *my* rooms . . . even the Victorian furniture is associated with her, for it was put back to try to pretend she had never existed.

She heard a car come up the drive. I wish I hadn't put the gates back, but it's too late to change my mind now. How can I alter everything in this room, and the drawing-room, and the dining-room, before Christmas? The library doesn't matter. It used to be Hector's study and Emilie never went in there . . . she said it was because she didn't like the smell of cigar smoke.

III HOUSE WARMING

"God bless Mr. Grummet!" said Rowan, who with Georgina had just waved goodbye from the terrace to Marylda's senior trustee, whom she was driving to Inverness to catch the

London train. "When he arrived I thought he was no more than a tiresome little lawyer, but what a marvelous stroke of luck that he turned out to have a passion for antiques and gave Marylda a hobby. She's been quite all right since he came, I mean no more Emilie trouble."

"It's done the child a world of good. At first I was a little worried that she insisted on having everything done so quickly. I thought she might be trying to fumigate the rooms that Emilie had lived in, if you can imagine any one trying to get rid of a ghost as though it was no worse than black beetles! But then I realized it was only their American hustle, and I suppose it's better to live with the smell of paint and varnish remover highly concentrated for weeks instead of being less disturbed for months!"

"She's decided to have the new wing pulled down in the New Year. I think that's a good sign, though of course she agrees that it's hideous. But why have the dance there first? Why not in the drawing-room?"

"Rowan, you'll have to be careful on New Year's Eve; more careful than usual."

"Why? You mean because every one is apt to be a bit tight and it would be extra tricky if Emilie butted in?"

She avoided answering until they were back in the library, and to conceal renewed anxiety he put logs on the fire with elaborate care. "Why special attention to New Year's Eve?"

"That was the night it happened."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. Early in the evening Hector was annoyed because she danced three times running with Rhoderick; she ran up to her bedroom and locked herself in, I heard him arguing with her through the door. I thought they had made it up, for she came downstairs and seemed very gay. . . . It wasn't until after supper that I missed her. Hector must have had more to drink than I realized, for he was very odd when he explained to the guests that his wife was feeling ill and had asked him to make her excuses. When I offered to go to see her he was angry and told me that I was to leave her alone. He said the illness was only an excuse and that she wanted no one with her. I realized later that they must have had a second, far more serious, quarrel."

"Didn't she ever tell you about it?"

"How could she," said Georgina flatly. "I never saw her again."

"You mean she ran away that night?"

"In the morning she had gone, and so had Gaston and the

car. Hector was terribly upset. He wouldn't see any one and I had to tell the house party that they both had ptomaine and the doctor had forbidden any visitors. It was Hector who had everything belonging to her taken up to the old nursery. I was surprised that he was so sure she would never come back. At the time I was fool enough to be glad he didn't wait for her to ask his forgiveness; I thought it meant he was glad to be rid of her."

"And wasn't he?"

She tried to smile. "He wasn't rid of her. At first I thought it was only that he couldn't put her out of his mind, but then he started to talk to her, when he was drunk and alone. I know, because I used to listen at the door. He used to say, 'My God, will you never leave me in peace!' It got worse after he came back from Paris, though it was before he had the letter that he bricked up the staircase and sealed the door. Once he tried to joke about it, and asked me, soon after we were married, whether I objected to living in a *menage á trois*. I pretended not to understand what he meant. I thought he would grow out of it in a year or two and prefer to think I had never noticed what was happening.

"Several times I nearly asked Rhoderick if he knew anything, but he avoided coming to Cloud unless Hector gave him an express invitation. . . . I suppose he felt guilty at the part he had played in breaking the marriage. He went to South Africa soon afterwards and died of enteric in the second year of the war."

"So you're afraid that Marylda might confuse Duncan with Rhoderick?"

"No, dear, but I want you to remember that if she is—provocative, it will not be her fault but Emilie's. If you quarreled . . . well, I'm probably being absurdly apprehensive but I want you to promise not to lose your temper."

He produced an unconvincing parody of a light laugh. "A quiet evening on cold tea just to be on the safe side? Pity I can't warn Duncan to watch his step too, for if I catch him playing Rhoderick to Marylda's Emilie I might be a bit brusque. The old boy's more than half in love with her, as any man would be who wasn't deaf and blind, but I'm sure he'd never tell her, even if he was tight."

"I wish Janet wasn't coming to the dance," she said wistfully.

He put his arm around her shoulders. "Darling, that's nonsense. You underrate yourself if you think that Janet could remind anyone of you at nineteen."

She smiled at him. "Far too kind a compliment for an old woman who is proving herself senile by the most ridiculous fancies. I'm ashamed of myself! Of course, you are perfectly right. This party will be Emilie's positively last appearance, and then we can pull down the wing and forget all about her."

"Except as the legendary great-aunt of your grandchildren . . . and what could be more innocuous!"

"What could!" agreed Georgina, almost as though she meant it.

As Marylda and Mr. Grummet came to the crest of the hill above Inverness she drew the car in to the side of the road and switched off the engine, so that he could appreciate the view of the Black Isle and the mountains beyond the Firth.

"Scotland is a remarkably beautiful country," he declared. "I am glad that you live here, though I must admit that when I heard of your precipitate marriage I was more than a little alarmed. The former alliance between Blenkinsop and Cairdrie had not been, shall we say, entirely satisfactory."

"Darling Grummie; but you're quite happy about me now?"

He cleared his throat. "Your husband and his excellent grandmother have put my doubts to rest. And the way in which the clan have rallied to carry out the redecorations which were so urgently required, is nothing short of miraculous."

"Admit that you thought Georgina must be a barbarian when you first saw the attics!"

He blushed. "Was I so ineffective in my efforts to conceal my feelings?"

"Utterly, darling! But they thought you were only a little overwhelmed."

"I was, my dear, I was! Seldom have I experienced such horror as when I saw the scandalous neglect of what are virtually priceless treasures; how fortunate that ignorance saved them from the saleroom! Consider the set of sixteen Queen Anne chairs with the original needlework. Three in the housekeeper's room, fortunately protected by slip covers of an abominable cretonne which I gather was chosen by Mrs. MacTaggart; four more in the attics because they required some trivial repair. One can only hope that the Royal Society of Needlework will be able to restore the ravages of mice! The rest relegated to rooms once occupied by footmen."

"I thought you reacted even more strongly to the gesso

console-tables we discovered in the saddle-room, or the walnut bureau which some one had thoughtfully concealed under five layers of mustard-yellow paint."

"When your husband told me that this almost unique specimen had come in very handy for storing nails I was only saved from a severe attack of gastric trouble by a double dose of alkali! He seems oblivious that the pedigree of his furniture adds greatly to its value, and admits that it would have been sold long ago to repair the farm buildings if it had not been entailed. Quite casually he mentions that many of the pieces were given to an ancestor by Queen Anne, and adds that 'Probably no one took the risk of offending the old girl by producing anything but their best stuff.' I must frankly confess that after our initial discoveries I contemplated an immediate return to the States, to avoid further shocks which might easily have brought on a recurrence of my stomach ulcer."

"But if you'd gone we'd never have been able to wangle all those priorities. It's wonderful what influence will do when used in the right quarters. It was genius to recognize that by paying in dollars we could not only help Britain, but also get immediate delivery of everything we needed."

"If I may say so, I think I helped to smooth over the trivial inconvenience caused to your new relatives by such a horde of workmen, when I suggested a way of lighting not only the castle but most of the farms as well, by means of an adequate electrical installation run by water power."

She smiled. "The children may be rather dubious about the bathrooms, but the women are looking forward to electric cooking stoves and electric irons, and the farmers are delighted at the prospect of giving up milking by hand. By next year we should be able to find work on the place for three or four hundred people, most of them Cairdries. Rowan's full of schemes for making us virtually self-supporting. We're putting lots more land under cultivation, and we're going to start making tweed and Ayrshire cheese and special hams. We shall sell them to the best shops in London and build up a snob clientele, so even if dollars lose their value we shall be secure in our Highland fastness. I think, darling, that I'm learning how to use money properly at last."

"I told you before, my dear, if I may remind you, that it was useless to run away from your inheritance. You had to use it, instead of letting it abuse you."

"Dear Grummie," she said affectionately, "I've been a

great trial to you one way and another. But I'm far more grateful than you'll ever guess."

He took off his pince-nez and polished them vigorously on his handkerchief before replying. "I am exceedingly fond of you, and strictly between ourselves, I was devoted to your Aunt Emilie; in fact, I never entirely recovered from the shock of her death for which I considered myself partly to blame."

"But how was it your fault?"

"I should have been more courageous; gone to Paris and assured her that her father's anger would spend itself in due course, that she had nothing to fear in coming home. When I think of her, alone and friendless, driven to take her life because she believed that her own people had cast her out without even giving her a chance to defend herself . . . well, I become so agitated that I have to take luminal to calm my nerves."

"Even if she had gone back to America I doubt whether Gaston would have been welcome. If Grandpa Blenkinsop was anything like my father he must have been an appalling snob . . . clasping the errant daughter to the family bosom is one thing, but welcoming a foreign chauffeur as a co-respondent would have been too much."

"So they never told you! My dear, that was very wrong of them! I blame your father, he had no right to conceal the truth"

"What truth?"

"Emilie did not run away with Gaston. The moment the letter came from Sir Hector informing my firm, the family lawyers, that her dowry was being returned as she preferred a chauffeur, I was convinced that Emilie would not have acted in such a way. It was obvious that she intended to join some other man: if she had merely found Cloud intolerable she would have come home. My father preferred to believe the story; he dismissed my faith in her good taste as the sentimental vaporings of a boy in his early twenties. I pursued my inquiries, and discovered that Gaston had sailed from Glasgow to Canada five days after Emilie left Cloud. On the same day that I made this vital discovery we received the news that Emilie had been buried in Paris. I tried to make the family admit that they had sorely misjudged her. I quarreled with my father, who threatened to cut me off with a dollar. I even argued with old Blenkinsop in his own house, a formidable undertaking. They all took the view

that as Emilie had brought a scandal on the name and increased it by suicide the least said about it the better."

"Oh, poor Grummie, it must have been awful for you."

"Thank you, my dear." He blew his nose, the small, precise nose which was the keynote of his neat, formal person. "I took fencing lessons for several years. I pretended it was only to keep myself fit; actually it was because I cherished the hope that one day I should discover the name of Emilie's betrayer and run him through. However as he must now be over seventy even if still alive I have decided that such romantic dreams are no longer practical. . . . But I still dream about it at times."

He drew out his gold half-hunter. "I have talked quite enough; and unless we hurry we shall be late for my train. The Scots, I am glad to find, are a punctual people, unlike most foreigners."

She smiled and let in the clutch. For the first time she found it odd to hear the Scots described as foreigners; "home" no longer meant America but Cloud.

IV CHRISTMAS TREE

THROUGH A CASUAL remark of Alistair's, substantiated by the visitors' book at Dalwhin, Marylda found that Emilie had never spent Christmas at Cloud. This festival is not considered of particular importance in Scotland where they celebrate instead on New Year's Eve, but both Georgina and Rowan were pleased when she insisted on at least having a party for the tenants' children. Anderson declared himself willing to decorate the house a week before he had intended; for his restored hothouses, the quantities of carnations ordered without stint, the ten new gardeners over whom he now ruled, had increased his previous acceptance of Marylda to the point almost of idolatry.

She woke early, and crept out of bed without disturbing Rowan. The hall was spicy with the smell of evergreens, and garlands of holly replaced the reproachful stags' heads which used to congeal the gaiety of more sensitive guests. She switched on the lights in the drawing-room, a subdued glow under the pelmets of the white satin curtains. This evening there would be only candles; candles on the tree which reached to the Adam ceiling, candles in the wall sconces of Waterford glass between each of the eight win-

dows, candles in the twin chandeliers which Mr. Grummet had found in rat-gnawed trunks, abandoned since Thunder installed gas mantles. Smooth surfaces of pale green paint gleamed like peridots as a background for Venetian mirrors and echoed the embroidery of the dress worn by an ancestress of Rowan's when she was painted by Allan Ramsay in 1747. The Christmas tree was brilliant with parcels: cellophane and tinsel, lacquered paper and bright ribbons. Presents on the tree, presents half hidden by clumps of jonquil and scarlet tulips which seemed to grow from the bank of moss that spread below the branches.

She had tried very hard to find out exactly what each child wanted, for the memory of her own disappointments was still at times uncomfortably real. Only Grumrnie had taken the trouble to choose her presents with care instead of being satisfied if they were suitable and expensive. The puppy he gave her when she was eight had made up for the scale model of an Atlantic liner, that ran by real steam, which her father had provided; his wigwam restored the childish dignity that had suffered by the gift of a French doll on her eleventh birthday.

Content that everything was ready for her first attempt at Santa Claus, she went to the dining-room for a biscuit, there still being an hour before Elsie brought the morning tea. It was difficult to recognize the room as the one in which she had watched Rowan consume oatmeal on her first morning in Scotland. Instead of dark red paper there was the original paneling which had been found in the loft over the stables; serge curtains had been replaced by coral silk damask; Georgian silver enhanced the Sheraton side tables, for Rowan had willingly agreed it need no longer remain in the strong-room now that there were plenty of people to keep it polished. Four family portraits, one of them a Lely, reigned instead of the Victorian "still lifes," which had been presented to the village institute, with the exception of an early Landseer that had been sold for a surprisingly substantial sum to a gallery in Glasgow.

Neither Rowan nor Georgina had inquired how Marylda had disposed of Hector's white owl. Had they done so, she would have been at a loss to explain why she had burned it and crushed the glass dome under a stone in running water.

Marylda still found it surprising that Georgina had made no protest at the sweeping alterations. She did not know how difficult it had been for Georgina on one occasion, when she decided to have the original four-poster bed, with the cur-

tains of Charles II stump-work, put back in the Laird's Room. Twice Georgina had seen it banished to the attics. Once by Emilie, to be brought back by Hector on his second marriage; again by his widow, who could not bear to sleep in it after she had drawn the curtains close to try to shut out the sound of the lament when his body was carried to the churchyard.

Georgina heard Marylda come upstairs, and undid the top button of her flannel pajamas to draw out the Cairdrie pearls which Hector had given to her on their wedding day. She had worn them for six weeks to restore their lustre, dimmed by lonely years in the bank. She put the double row in their blue velvet case, wrapped it in tissue paper, tied the parcel firmly with pink satin ribbon.

Even the ribbon held memories; it was part of the layette that Rowan's mother had chosen. She sighed, regretting that she had not been more tolerant of her daughter-in-law. Poor Deirdre, so colorless and so eminently suitable for Hamish! Deirdre had wanted the baby to be a girl; proving that she had no proper sense of responsibility. How typical of her to die of scarlet fever before her son was a year old!

Marylda was back in bed before Rowan woke. "Happy Christmas, my darling," he said, taking from under his pillow the parcel he had wrapped for her the night before. She untied the tartan bow on which he had spent several anxious minutes, carefully unfolded the layers of holly-patterned paper he had chosen at a stationer's in Inverness. She disclosed a red morocco-leather case stamped with the Cairdrie arms.

"Guess what it is," he said eagerly.

Should she guess right? Yes, he had probably told her about the emeralds when he took some of the other family jewels from the bank to give them to her as a wedding present. "It's a necklace . . . an emerald necklace because you know they are my favorite stones."

He tried to hide his disappointment. "You're a rotten guesser. You'd better open it and see if you like rubies too."

She hoped he did not notice that her hands were shaking as she opened the case. Oh, why had she been such a fool! Janet had told her, the day when they sorted the illustrated papers, that Emilie had taken the emeralds with her. "I only pretended to like emeralds because I'm really a bit superstitious about them and I wanted to be on the safe side. Oh, darling, how lovely! I never thought I should own a tiara . . . and such a magnificent one!"

She hugged him and then ran to the dressing-table to try it on.

As he watched her his sudden flare of anxiety subsided. She couldn't be so gay if she had really been remembering the emeralds . . . no, of course she couldn't.

She turned, laughing, towards him. "Do you like your wife in a tiara?"

"Darling, no woman has ever looked so lovely as you do, with a jeweled crown and your hair loose and the rest of you so gloriously dressed in nothing. You ought to appear like this at the ball. In fact I should demand it if I had the stamina to vanquish all the male guests in your defence!"

"May the Lady of Cloud wear her tiara for breakfast?"

He pretended to consider. "Only if she agrees to partake of the meal in bed. We will inform Georgina that we shall hold audience in our *Lit de Parade*. Why should you accept less homage than the Queen of France?"

"Part of my present to you is so small that it could go in a match box . . . and I ran out of colored paper so I left the rest of it downstairs."

He pretended to be disappointed. "But I love unwrapping parcels. Couldn't I have had a little bit of newspaper and a foot or two of string?"

"There is lots of string. But first you will have to find the clue, for your present requires a treasure hunt."

He tore off the gilt paper and opened the green leather case. It held two gold keys; one with his initials, the other with her own. Again he joined in the game, pretending not to know what kind of keys they were.

"The keys of your heart?"

"How can they be? I gave you those on a certain stormy evening in France."

He jumped out of bed and pulled her with him. "I refuse to be tortured by curiosity. Do we need more than a dressing-gown?"

She went to draw back a curtain. "Definitely more, it's snowing."

"So it's an outside treasure? Shall we require a spade to find it?"

"I hope not; unless the snow is very deep."

Still wearing the tiara, she put on red fur lined boots and a mink coat while he dived into a gray sweater and buckled his kilt. Hand in hand they ran downstairs and across the courtyard. The double doors of the Great Barn were closed with a tartan sash.

"It's a very small key for such a large door!" He pretended

to search for a new lock in one of the knot holes of the ancient oak.

"You have to untie the bow first, and you mustn't cut it for Georgina lent it to me."

A vast white shape loomed out of the dark cavern of the barn. That she had given him a Rolls Wraith, silver gray with scarlet leather upholstery, perfect in every detail even to his crest on the driver's door, he found less moving than that she had wrapped it in linen sheets and tied them with scarlet cords.

They took Georgina in the car with them when, with the traditional offering of whisky for the men, plum cake for the women, they made the rounds of every farm and croft on the estate. Whisky and cake in quantity, for it would have been an insult to refuse hospitality, are not a judicious preliminary to Christmas lunch; but so that Mrs. MacTaggart might not feel they neglected her turkey and plum pudding, the dogs were allowed to ignore the usual discipline and ate until even Angela politely refused and flung herself down beside Jock and Lassie in front of the fire.

"Oh, more than lovely wife, why are you so energetic!" groaned Rowan, who was lying full length on one of the drawing-room sofas. "Why must I be asked to go and see whether the blue crackers or the yellow look better on tables that stagger already under the weight of cake and jelly, and all manner of confections which would have inspired me to gluttony in my youth and now instill awe not untinged with horror."

"You'll feel better when you see the children enjoying themselves," she said happily. "Before the evening's out you'll be playing with the trains I'm giving to Anderson's eldest grandson and probably wearing a paper hat!"

"I am allergic to paper hats. I haven't worn one since I was two and I immediately came out in a rash and every one thought it was smallpox and the Castle was in quarantine for six months and several of the household starved to death."

"Then you can blow a squeaker; it's good for you to learn to be democratic."

"You don't believe in democracy any more than I do, you—you Santa Claus!"

"Next year we might have reindeer," said Marylda. "I expect Grummie could arrange it and they would be quite happy living in the park with the Highland cattle. I don't

suppose it's any colder in Lapland or wherever reindeers happen."

"I believe she means it," Rowan remarked to Georgina who was standing on a step ladder tying yet another parcel on the tree; an electric blanket for Mrs. MacTaggart who suffered from chillblains.

"And why not? I should be delighted to welcome a reindeer. Or shall we have at least two so that they have some one to talk to until they learn the Gaelic?"

At four precisely the children arrived, seventy-three of them. Marylda, who was not yet entirely familiar with Scottish punctuality, did not know that they had assembled in the courtyard and waited for the stable clock to strike. Silently they took off their coats, silently they trooped into the dining-room and stood behind their chairs. It was Georgina who realized they were waiting for grace to be said before they sat down. Even after her hurried improvisation, there was no sign of the outburst of excited chatter that Marylda expected. They ate with sober concentration; accepted what was offered, refused a third helping of ice-cream until they learned from the more adventurous members of the party that such indulgence would not be considered excessive. The cautions as to the good behavior which must be scrupulously maintained while at the Castle began to seem slightly less urgent. Two children pulled a cracker, others followed suit. But the excessively clean faces remained solemn even under paper hats.

Can these be the children who are usually so forthcoming? thought Marylda as she led them into the drawing-room. It is possible that the influence of the Sunday kilt, the kirk dresses, can be so strong?

The children arranged themselves in methodical ranks; girls on the left, boys on the right. Obediently they played oranges and lemons, musical bumps, hunt the slipper. Occasionally a hastily stifled laugh rang out, or a child yelped at a pinch furtively delivered by some one who had threatened to make it disgrace itself at the party.

Rowan and Marylda called the children to the tree to receive their presents. Surely, she thought wildly, they'll loosen up now. I should have had the tree first, then they could have forgotten their shyness playing with their toys.

Each child received its present, said "Thank-you-milady-thank-you-Sir-Rowan," and walked primly back to its place carrying the parcel, which it made no attempt to open. The

servants did the same, returning to stand in a group by the door.

Marylda turned on the radio. At the sound of a Highland Fling, a small girl began to jig up and down until admonished by an elder sister. In a silence between records the sound of the stable clock bore down on the frosty air. The children fell into line, processed up the long room. "Good night milady, good night Sir Rowan; thank-you-very-much-for-asking-me to-the-party." Each shook hands with the host and hostess. The candles flickered in the draft as the hall door, after an interval in which outdoor clothing was resumed, opened to release the guests.

Marylda sank down on one of the sofas trying not to burst into tears.

"Darling, no wonder you're exhausted," said Rowan fondly, "but it was worth it, the children had the time of their lives."

"Do you need to be sarcastic?"

"Sarcastic? What on earth do you mean?"

"Then patronizing, if you want to split hairs! I didn't believe that any one, least of all me who is supposed to be good at this kind of thing, could possibly make such a complete flop."

He called to Georgina who had gone into the hall. "Come here and tell Marylda whether you think our guests enjoyed themselves."

"Doesn't she know it?"

Marylda stared at them resentfully. "Please don't try to comfort me. After all, what does it really matter? I happen to be silly enough to give several children a hideously boring couple of hours, and choose such dud presents that they were not even worth looking at. But take no notice, next year I shall probably make a better show—if I've the courage to have any of those damned children in the house again."

Rowan instead of being contrite roared with laughter in which Georgina joined. "My darling, you sound like Santa Claus bemoaning because he thinks that no one gets anything down his chimney except a quantity of soot. What you've seen this evening is a collection of Highlanders enjoying themselves. Enjoying themselves so much that they daren't let any one know how close they are to giving way to their feelings. If they'd let themselves go, they'd have kissed you instead of repeating the phrase which their parents have been teaching them to say for days . . . and that would have been disastrous."

"You *must* be lying: children couldn't behave like that unless they were miserable!"

Rowan saw that this was an occasion on which demonstration was worth hours of argument. "Put on a coat, and you'd better wear gum-boots because you're going to do a bit of stalking and the drifts may be deep."

Then minutes later they approached the barn where the children had assembled. By the light of two bicycle lamps the parcels had been unwrapped. Railway lines were being linked for the speed of clockwork trains; a future professor of chemistry was making his first experiment with the phials of colored powders that had been contained in a wooden box; a Red Indian was stalking a moose through a trackless forest; a small girl was holding her doll upside down and saying to her elder sister, "It's not only that her eyes open and shut but she's got real breeks under her skirt!"

A boy, who was already certain that he would become an engineer who could make a better bridge than the one that spanned the Firth of Forth, was proving the fact to himself with a set of Meccano. He paused long enough to say, "It's a lucky man the Laird is to have such a wife . . . she must have the sight to know that this is what I needed."

"She was a princess in her own country," remarked the chemist, with authority.

"They don't have kings and queens in America," said the bridge builder regretfully.

Anderson's grandson quelled all controversy with the assurance of empirical knowledge. "Of course she is a princess . . . didn't I see her this morning wearing her crown?"

"Satisfied, darling?" whispered Rowan, who was finding a crack in the wooden wall a chilly observation point.

"So very honored . . . and so more than usually certain that one needs at least second sight to understand our Highlanders."

V NEW YEAR'S EVE

THE SEVEN American guests whom Marylda had invited to the New Year party imagined they were enjoying a standard of hospitality commonplace at Cloud. This was an unconscious tribute to teamwork which, as Rowan said to Sandy, was worthy of the tradition of D-day. It was the pride of the staff, inside and outside, that the arrangements appeared

smooth as a skater's waltz, and only within the closed circle was it admitted that at times the ice had been perilously thin.

Even the Scottish guests must not be told how narrowly minor disasters had been avoided. The Mexican band, which was to play between the reels for which six pipers had been lent by Rowan's old regiment, had left the London train at Aviemore instead of Inverness, and been rescued from a chilly exile in the waiting room by a flying squad of the Rolls and the shooting brake. The orchids sent from America by Mr. Grummet had gone to the wrong airfield and been brought to Cloud by Duncan. One of the hired waiters had arrived so drunk that he had been given in charge of Anderson until he could be put on the train, with no more than a third-class ticket and a black eye for his trouble.

Sandy, now raised to the status of butler, had trained two footmen with a precision that would have been respected even by a sergeant-major of the Brigade, who might not have thought of the nicety of making recruits run downstairs carrying two raw eggs on a silver tray and fining them sixpence for every broken shell. They were too big for the livery which had been stored away for nearly half a century; so Agnes, now head housemaid of three, and Elsie, who had become Marylda's lady's maid, added a rider to their prayers that no one would notice the difference in the shade of green where seams had been let out and holes meticulously darned.

Only Mrs. MacTaggart was unruffled. At first she had inwardly rebelled at the invasion of two chefs hired from a famous London restaurant; but under her compelling eye they had abandoned their Italian accent, learned in a school in Soho, and become her obedient, if unwilling slaves. Let them make their flummery of spun-sugar and ice pudding: to her was the honor of the dinner, haggis and grouse. In comfortable security of a position successfully defended she permitted herself half an hour's relaxation in the housekeeper's room. Her black glacé slippers, whose buttoned straps were too tight for her swollen insteps, stood precise by the polished brass fender, and a pot of strong tea was convenient on a table beside her arm chair.

Elsie, who had proved by intensive reconnaissance that the underclothes of her lady were superior to anything the foreigners could produce, was in the Laird's Room, laying out Marylda's white satin dress. Sandy was in the cellar, counting for the fifth time the cases of champagne to make

sure that none of the intruders had managed to discover where he had hidden the key—under the cellar-book, instead of on its customary nail behind the door of the butler's pantry. Robbie was giving an extra spoonful of black treacle to his pipes and making sure that the reeds of his drones were exactly tuned. He then gave himself a dram of whisky so that there should be nothing lacking in his performance when at last he again assumed the rôle of family piper.

The house party were having tea in the drawing-room: Marylda carrying out the elaborate ritual of silver kettle and the tortoise-shell caddy, Queen Anne teapots and sugar tongs, as though this were a daily occurrence instead of a technique recently taught to her by Georgina. Rowan was trying to pretend that he found the recital of fox-hunting in Virginia, recounted with a plethora of detail by Henry Byrne III who had once been a suitor of Marylda's, of absorbing interest; and hoping that no one guessed that at the same time he was mentally ticking off a list of things which had been given into his care over a fortnight ago . . . See boiler is made up every hour . . . will the hot water hold out? Whisky for band . . . but not too much before supper. Remind Sandy to have bread, salt and coal ready for the dark man to bring in at midnight. Must ask Janet to dance the second foursome with me and remind Marylda that she must ask Mr. Henderson . . . she might think that ministers don't dance reels but he fancies himself as an expert. Need I ask the American women to join in the reels or would they know they were making asses of themselves? Tell Sandy not to let Mrs. MacTaggart put too much nutmeg in the mullet claret and to use only the Algerian. . . .

Georgina, who found some of the guests uncomfortably reminiscent of Emilie, had spent the afternoon fishing and still wore her plus-fours. She stood in front of the blazing fire, steam rising from her damp tweeds, and embarked on a detailed and highly technical description of a recent stalk. Maizie Hohler, at whose villa Marylda had been staying before she met Rowan, leaned forward to listen, with an air of absorbed interest, which made Georgina admit, a little reluctantly, that American women had better taste and manners than previous experience had led her to expect. She was fortunately unaware that in fact Maizie was mentally rehearsing the story to recount at future parties, in which such phrases as "a stag in velvet" would lose nothing in the telling.

A civil child, thought Georgina. Too much makeup of course. But should I put on a little, a very little, rouge to-

night? Dear Marylda, it was so thoughtful of her to give me a dress from Paris. But shan't I feel a guy in violet velvet? She assembled her courage. My dear Georgina, if you could carry off Prussian blue watered silk when you were seventeen you can certainly play the dowager in velvet at nearly seventy. I must remember to tell Agnes to clean my diamonds with methylated spirit and a tooth brush.

Sandy, with his footmen in attendance, came to clear away the tea. He noticed with disapproval that because the foreign guests had spent the afternoon playing backgammon instead of taking the opportunity of filling their lungs with good Highland air they had done less than justice to the baps and hot scones for which he had polished the covered silver dishes.

From five-thirty until six there was a somnolent interlude of spasmodic conversation, while those familiar with the tradition waited for the drinks' tray to arrive and the others wondered whether there was time for a nap before dinner. Marylda chatted with Maizie, recalling incidents of their début until she found that memories of the house on the Hudson were evoking Emilie. She hastily switched the conversation to the difficulties of housekeeping in countries still restricted by ration books.

"Maybe, Marylda, but you've done well for yourself," said Maizie, proud of her relationship and a trifle envious.

Marylda looked at Rowan, whose tweed coat was nearly as old as the kilt of moss-dyed hunting Cairdrie, yet who wore them with a distinction that none of the guests who had been born in cities could equal. "Yes, I've done well," she said, and added to herself, "Please God let me do as well for him."

Sandy brought in the silver tray of before-dinner drinks: sherry, Tio Pepe and Amontillado in Waterford decanters; Glenlivet, for today no lesser whisky should be offered; water in a jug which family tradition maintained had been used by Prince Charlie. A footman followed with a cocktail shaker, and the gin, vermouth, ice and lemon peel that Marylda had insisted was no more than her friends could rightfully expect. This lesser tray was placed on a side table, decently obscured by an arrangement of pink and white azaleas.

Jock and Lassie, resenting this influx of strangers, whose smell showed they were more familiar with the greenhouses in which dogs are unwelcome than with the moors where decent canines are respected, followed Sandy to the kitchen where their dinner would be waiting for them. Angela

wagged her tail a little wanly, hoping that her mistress would take this as a sign that for her there was no urge to routine which could separate a properly affectionate dog from the object of her selfless devotion. Marylda scratched her behind the ear, which Angela took, correctly, as a sign that her lapse after a gorge of chocolates which had caused her to be precipitately sick behind a bank of chrysanthemums, had been attributed to a visiting dachshund.

The dressing gong resounded through the house. Rowan smiled to himself, knowing that one of the footmen would be reprimanded by Sandy in the butler's pantry for beating it as though it were a fire alarm. The women began to drift upstairs while the men settled down to another round of drinks. Marylda went to the kitchen, to be assured by Mrs. MacTaggart that everything was in order, and then hurried to her room to make sure of a really hot bath before the supply could prove itself unequal to the strain of thirty extras. Before getting into the pine scented water she took two triple bromides to stave off the steadily increasing tension. Not until after midnight need she see what Emilie's ghost refused to recognize: if she allowed the virtue to enter her too soon she might run out of energy. So far everything had gone according to plan. No signs of fussage in either Rowan or Georgina, and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. Even the slight hitches in the arrangements had been all to the good, for they had prevented her from thinking too much about the real purpose of the party.

Half an hour later Rowan found her lying on the bed. "Headache, darling?" he inquired anxiously.

She stifled a yawn. "Only a bit sleepy, so I thought I'd rest for a few minutes to cool off after my bath. You'd better pop in yours in case the boiler doesn't stand the strain."

"It ought to! There's a fire that could run an express train from here to Edinburgh without restoking."

"Party still going well?"

He grinned. "They seem pretty cheerful: which isn't surprising as they'd got through seven bottles of gin and three whisky, not to mention sherry, since tea. Did you see Sandy's face when one of your chums asked for 'Scotch?' He drew himself up and inquired icily whether by chance he wished for Drambuie, 'which is sometimes referred to as the Scottish liqueur.' You could almost hear the quotation marks."

The stable clock struck seven. "Oh, bother, I suppose I must get dressed. You'll have to do me up, darling; my dress has an almost Edwardian complexity of hooks."

"Where's Elsie?"

"I sent her to look after Maizie, who's quite helpless without her maid. Anyway I'd rather have you to help me tonight. But you mustn't come in until I call you because I don't want you to see me until I've decided on the right hair do to go with my tiara."

He reluctantly left her and she heard water gushing into the bath. In fact there was no decision to make as to the style of her hair, for in Emilie's desk she had found a sketch of the dress made by Worth for the other New Year's Eve ball. On the back of it had been several suggested coiffures, one of which had a pencil note beside it, "Shall use this one." It was this same sketch, with slight modifications, which Marylda had sent to Christian Dior as inspiration for the elaborately draped white satin which Elsie had so carefully laid out on the arm chair by the fire.

She was pale, but decided to use no rouge; only the lipstick which had been carefully matched with her nail polish to echo the rubies. The Edwardian hair suited her . . . how lucky that the present fashion made it possible to dress the part of Emilie without seeming eccentric. Now don't start thinking of Emilie yet or you will be so fussed by midnight that you won't be able to cope. Cope with what? Don't be silly . . . you've got to find out what happened to Emilie after *her* party. Until you make her recognize what keeps her here you'll never be able to have this place as you want it to be . . . you'll never be yourself instead of the niece of a ghost.

She made herself concentrate on pinning her hair until the triple mirror assured her that no improvement could be demanded, then, still in her green velvet dressing-gown, she lit a cigarette to wait for Rowan. It was the first time she had seen him in full dress, and for a moment she thought she was seeing Hector whose portrait hung in Georgina's sitting-room. Silver buttons shone on the black velvet doublet, diamonds sparkled in the folds of the lace jabot and the hilts of dirk and skean-dhu, the red, gray and yellow of the dress tartan were repeated in the dice pattern of his stockings.

"Darling, how magnificent you look!"

He kissed her hand with ceremony. "The men of Cloud are hard put to it to be worthy of their women . . . and none of them ever had such cause to be proud."

"Wait until you see my dress."

A slight delay was caused by his insisting on kissing several of her vertebrae before completing his duties of lady's

maid, and the clock chimed the half hour before they were ready to join their guests. "Goodness, we're late," she said. "Dinner is due in a quarter of an hour, so as to give them time to clear before the people arrive."

"Leave the staff work to me and Sandy. You and I are going to make a suitably dramatic entrance, so he's going to slip up to tell us when every one's assembled in the hall. I told him to serve the champagne cocktails there, but I thought a private glass of the Krug '28 would serve us as a head-starter, so I told him to put a bottle in my dressing-room."

Oh, my darling Rowan, he knows I'm nervous! But I mustn't let him guess it's more than ordinary party panic. They drank to each other, standing in the firelight which flickered on the embroidered curtains of the great bed in which eleven generations of Cairdries had been conceived and born: that few of the men had died in it was also according to the family tradition.

A discreet knock on the door announced Sandy, who in a conspiratorial whisper announced that the people had all been shepherded to their correct position. With her hand on her husband's velvet sleeve Marylda walked slowly down the oak stairs. Below her the Great Hall seemed a blur of upturned faces . . . I know how an actress would feel on a first night if she suddenly realized that she hadn't read her lines for the third act. None of the other actors know they are on a stage: but I must go on acting . . . no one must guess that I am afraid of what may happen before the curtain falls. Rowan felt her hand tighten on his arm and felt a wave of such intense protectiveness that he almost resented the absence of an enemy whom he could challenge in her defence.

The women, according to their capacity, honored or envied Marylda for a superb entrance. The men affirmed a secret faith in their several fashion. Sandy experienced the same devotion which had caused him to follow Rowan through enemy cross fire; Georgina felt a twinge of panic that not Marylda but Emilie was coming down the stairs on the arm of her grandson; Janet, in momentary freedom from jealousy, was glad that Rowan could be so proud of his wife. Only Duncan, with the agonizing perception of the unheeded lover, knew how difficult it was for Marylda to play the rôle of the unruffled hostess.

Rowan saw Duncan look at her and felt an exultation of which he was immediately ashamed. Poor old Duncan, he's in love with her, and who wouldn't be? But tonight I can feel

the blood of my forebears running fast in my body, and I almost wish he was a real rival so that I could laugh and boast and glory because the man I love as a brother lusts after my wife and cannot have her for I am stronger than he.

Marylda, being female and accomplished in the more subtle strengths, laughed with her guests and made even her husband believe that she had no greater anxiety than that some detail of the menu might be imperfect.

The decorations of the banqueting hall were faithful to the influence of Emilie. The dinner table, covered with a white damask cloth that had been specially woven in Belfast when the new wing was built, was set on the dais under the stained glass window in which the eagles of Cloud found uneasy eyries among foliation unknown to the College of Heralds. Each of the four epergnes supported twelve candles in addition to the six silver dishes loaded with pear and pineapple, walnut and grape. Harsh tendrils of smilax joined silver bonbon dishes to gilt menu-holders, writhing between silver vases which bore yellow carnations and maidenhair fern, and by the side plate of each woman was a corsage of orchids.

Maizie, in the place of honor as Marylda's only kin, was at Rowan's right; which he found somewhat distasteful as she had told him, while they walked down the canvas tunnel, lined with potted palms, which led from the postern door outside the drawing-room, that he looked "Absolutely darling in fancy dress." She read aloud from the menu in front of her. "My, my! And I thought you Scots hadn't gotten beyond oatmeal and raw birds! Cocquille St. Jacques, grouse, haggis . . . is haggis a thing you shoot too? Soufflé Surprise . . . it surely is a surprise to find how well you do yourselves in your mountain fastness. Angels on Horseback . . . well this angel's not going to do any horseback riding. I've already ripped my best nylons parading the home park."

"No doubt Marylda can provide you with a pair of stockings," said Rowan, with what he considered commendable restraint.

But Maizie remained oblivious that she had done more than help over the sticky patch which is always liable to occur at the beginning of a party. She patted his bare knee affectionately, "I'd rather have a pair of yours; I adore all those gay colors."

"I am most flattered by your approval," said Rowan.

"It's not a gag; I really mean it. Marylda was my bridesmaid the first time I married, but that marriage didn't take.

So next time I'm going to pick a Scotchman—so that I can wear a plaid skirt and a dagger in my sock and a furry thing over my muff."

Rowan raised his glass to her, "My dear lady, is it wise to make such a statement when there are . . ." he paused to catch the eye of those on whom the full beauty of the remark was not lost, "when there are several Scots who may find it difficult to contain their natural ardor? The doors of Cloud are thick: but who can dare to back their strength against the onslaught of a Highlander?"

She giggled. "You mean I ought to lock my bedroom door?"

He sighed elaborately. "Our house is of a certain age: my ancestors grew weary of knuckles bruised against unyielding oak. There are secret passages, and if you should scream when a panel slides open in the wainscoting no one will hear you, for our walls are built so thick that the cries of reluctant maidens do not disturb the sleep of dullards." Again he paused to allow the remark to sink in. "I apologize that the sliding panels are in the wainscoting. It is *lése-majesté* for the members of my house to bow their heads, a pitiful demonstration of economies of which you have no doubt read, which forces us to enter the rooms of desire in all fours. However you must be tolerant of our limitations."

Alistair, on Marylda's right, spluttered. She looked at him with becoming gravity. "A crumb, Lord Dalwhin? Permit me to pat you on the back: it is said to be most effective when a foreign body is lodged in the windpipe."

Behind the shelter of his napkin he whispered, "My dear child you've wrought a miracle here. Georgina, God bless her, is no longer afraid of being a woman, and you've taught Rowan that if he can laugh at himself he needn't fear any one laughing at him."

The emotion which surged up through the surface compliment moved him to the edge of tears. Good God; surely he wasn't becoming senile! But he loved this girl of Rowan's: no, more than loved, he honored her. A very different proposition from her aunt . . . and better looking; not that Emilie hadn't been a good enough looker to give any man ideas which were not at all suitable about another man's wife . . . especially if that man were Hector. Not a bad thing to have a toast between courses. Keep up the party spirit. Damn good party, but have to keep it going. Why wait for Robbie before giving them a chance to let off a bit of steam?

He rose to his feet, lifted his glass. "To Emilie, God bless her."

Only Duncan knew how difficult it was for Marylda to smile as though the shouts of "To Marylda" were in echo to words spoken in the present hour.

Pipes, at first no more than a vibration on the frontier of sound, became increasingly insistent, as Robbie paced slowly backwards and forwards outside, waiting for the signal at which Sandy and his carefully drilled second in command would fling open the doors for his entrance.

Alistair noticed that his hostess gripped the arms of her chair until the knuckles were white under the skin. So the pipes move her, he thought fondly; she has to hang on to herself, same as I do, in case any one sees how close she is to tears.

Marylda's orders to herself were so sharp that for a moment she thought she must have spoken aloud. "It's happening . . . but you mustn't let any one know. Yes, Emilie used the same vases . . . but her carnations were pink instead of yellow. How cruel of her to give Georgina that hideous blue satin. There were none of Emilie's friends here, for all the men are in kilts. Alistair was a very handsome young man in spite of his side whiskers. The man who is sitting in Duncan's chair is called Rhoderick . . . Hector is jealous of him."

She tried to make herself come back against the drive of the pipes, but although she could feel the carved oak hard under her hands she could still see Rhoderick. . . . He is taking a sip of wine. I wonder if it is the same as we are drinking. No, our wine won't be pressed for another twenty years. Rhoderick still looks quite real: part of me is thinking that it would be pleasant to let him kiss me; but Marylda knows that next year there is going to be the Boer War and he is going to die of enteric. If Emilie knew that too could she warn him not to volunteer? None of them would listen to a woman against the sound of the pipes.

The double doors were flung open and the surge of the pibroch filled the room. Why did I think that Robbie was old? Robbie is the only person who doesn't resent my being here . . . the only person who isn't afraid of the Emilie that every one else pretends to ignore.

She watched him slowly pace three times around the table and then stand behind the chair of his liege. Sandy stepped forward with the glass of neat whisky which is the due of the piper. Robbie gave the toast of fealty and handed Sandy the now empty glass. Rowan, the Gaelic smooth and authori-

tive in his mouth, affirmed their loyalty to a shared heritage.

Applause broke the tension which Marylda had found almost unendurable. The present rushed back, as water smoothes footprints from sand. She saw Robbie, the pipes tucked under his arm, stride out through the door held open by his servitors. The clapping dwindled: even the most obtuse foreigners realized that in some inexplicable way they had committed a breach of taste.

"They clapped," said Alistair, in what he believed to be an inaudible whisper, "they clapped as though Robbie was a bloody cabaret!"

Conversation sprang up, like weeds which strive to conceal the indecency of rubble.

VI THE ROCKING-HORSE ROCKS

THE AMERICANS were bewildered that although at nine-fifteen only the house party were assembled in the hall, at nine-thirty they had been joined by another forty men and women who were obviously close friends of the host. To add to their difficulties, the men who wore the same tartan as Rowan were usually introduced by the name of their house: Cairdrie of Finlarig; Cairdrie of Rothie; Cairdrie of Balimachan, and the others had equally unpronounceable though glamorous titles. The three American men, who until now had bolstered their social courage with the comfortable patronage of grownups at a children's fancy dress party, fingered their white ties and regretted that they could so easily be mistaken for waiters. Their social unease increased when each was assigned a partner. Were they expected to dance the Lancers, and if so how was it done? Maizie made up her mind to tell Marylda that in future she could at least tip off her relations as to the proper drill among the curious barbarians into which she had married.

At precisely nine forty-five Sandy opened the front door and the tenants streamed into the house; three hundred and twenty-seven of them.

Led by the pipes of Robbie, they joined the procession through the main rooms of the Castle; the strangers feeling a little foolish as though they had been unexpectedly invited to join in a game of Oranges and Lemons.

As they reached the ballroom the skirl of the pipes was taken up by the six pipers waiting on the dais and the two

hundred who had been warned that they were to join in the first eightsome reel took their places on the floor, while the rest sat primly on the hired gilt chairs which lined the walls, men on one side of the room, the women opposite. Maizie was relieved that Marylda had told her that there were other chairs in the musicians' gallery where those who preferred to watch from this vantage point could retreat. She frankly admitted that for color and movement she hadn't seen anything until she came to the Highlands. No wonder their women are obedient, she thought ruefully, when the men can outdo them even in clothes . . . not that Marylda doesn't dance as well as any of the others but I bet she had to practice plenty.

"It must be a paradise for chaperones," said Marylda to Alistair, who was unashamedly mopping his forehead after a courageous attempt to master the rhumba.

"Don't you believe it! I remember my wife looking through the window of the room where our tenants have their monthly dances. One of my ghillies, who didn't recognize her, patted her on the shoulder and whispered, 'Run away home my lassie, or you'll be stretched upon the gorse.' And true enough, for there's a hot fire under all their formality . . . as no doubt you've already discovered with that husband of yours."

She laughed, "Certainly I have not been neglected."

He kissed her hand, "And if ever you are, you let me know and I'll give the boy a few words to remind him what he's missing."

"Don't they ever loosen up in public? Sandy told me a few minutes ago that they've got through four dozen whisky already . . . and that's nearly a quarter of a bottle per head, for the women are drinking port or champagne cup."

"By midnight most of them will be adequately drunk, but I shall be most disappointed if any outsider could know it. But try not to dance a reel, except with one of us whose cellars have permitted us to practice holding our liquor, after midnight; for I remember the bruises on my wife's arm after an eightsome with one of our ghillies . . . it's the sharp corners of the four buttons on the sleeve that are very destructive to a woman's bare arm when they twirl you around. Emilie was so cross when it happened to her that she went upstairs in a sulk. Damn it, perhaps that was the last straw, which made her run off with that dreadful fellow Gaston."

He mopped his forehead again, embarrassed at having forgotten that in speaking of Hector's wife he was also reminding Marylda of her aunt.

"There's champagne in Georgina's sitting-room for those of us who need a refresher," she said lightly, and hoped that he didn't guess that this mention of Emilie could not have been made at a more difficult moment. The clock had again reminded her that there was little time in which to steel herself for an ordeal in which she must be free of time. In half an hour she must stand at the great door with Rowan to welcome the New Year. But it must be a real New Year . . . free of ghosts, free for a son to be born who could walk even at midnight down a dark corridor without fear.

As though aware of the timber of her thoughts. Alistair said, "Who's going to bring in the New Year?"

She had intended to ask Bruce Coynach: his eyes and hair were dark enough, and he was sufficiently stolid not to be affected by the undercurrents manifest in the house. But she heard herself saying, "Rowan's going to do it. What's the use of being married to a black Highlander if he can't bring in the bread and salt?"

"And the coal too, mustn't forget the coal . . . going to be a hard winter if I know the signs. And now that these damn bureaucrats are making a muddle of the mines we shall need every bit of warmth we can get."

"So you agree that Rowan should bring in the New Year?"

He hesitated: Hector had always been the dark man, and it might upset Georgina if she saw Rowan playing the same rôle. Silly to be superstitious . . . Georgina was far too sensible to be upset by a coincidence. "Of course Rowan should be the first to cross the threshhold," he said with unnecessary heartiness. "Lucky for a man to open the door of his own house. Clever of you to think of it. Good omen . . . probably get us a decent government before the end of the year."

"I will go and tell Rowan . . . of course he won't be able to change the plan if he's already asked Bruce."

She found Rowan talking with Mr. Henderson, the minister, in the dining-room. "Darling, can I have a private word in your ear?"

He smiled down at her and they withdrew to the far side of the room. "Alistair thinks, and so do I, that you ought to be the dark man."

For a moment he seemed reluctant. "I meant to brief Bruce. But if you'd rather have me. . . ."

"Always you. Darling, please remember that I'd always rather have you . . . for everything."

He smiled and tweaked her ear affectionately. "Then I shall stop being jealous of Duncan . . . the poor devil's been

gazing at you like a spaniel all the evening. Not that I blame him: who wouldn't be in love with you?"

"Please don't be jealous of Duncan . . . please darling."

The urgency of her voice reawakened suspicions he had dismissed. Surely she wasn't really interested? Not that he distrusted either of them, but it would be damned awkward to have to tell Duncan to keep away from the house. "I won't be jealous . . . so long as you don't give me cause."

She tried to smile, as though his remark had no significance. But why had he used those words . . . the same words that Hector had spoken to Emilie? Had Emilie been in love with Rhoderick? She saw Duncan coming to look for her and remembered that she had promised this dance to him. The beat of maraccas was suddenly menacing as drums that announce the imminence of magic. She couldn't pretend to Duncan that she was enjoying herself and if he knew she was frightened he would try to stop her going alone to Emilie's room. And if Rowan suspected that there was a secret between them he would be hurt . . . and tonight it was vital to avoid misunderstandings.

"Duncan, darling, I'm terribly sorry to cut your dance but I must go up and see what's happened to Maizie. She said she had a bit of a headache and I told her to find the aspirins in my bathroom cupboard."

He released her hand with obvious reluctance that was not lost on Rowan. "Oh leave Maizie. She's been knocking them back a bit and I think a couple of Alka Seltzers would be nearer the mark."

He followed her to the foot of the stairs and said urgently, "Darling, I know you're up to something. Emilie trouble? For God's sake hang on to yourself and don't tune in."

It was difficult to lie to him, but she hoped her laugh sounded convincing. "Can't a poor woman go up to fix her makeup without you having unworthy suspicions?"

"All right . . . pretend there's nothing up if you must. But remember I'm here if you want me, and don't try to tackle anything tricky alone."

For a moment she hesitated. Couldn't she ask Duncan to meet her in Emilie's room after midnight? Why shouldn't she have a little flirtation with him. . . . She felt suddenly gay and provocative, but as she saw the excitement in his eyes realized that again she had been thinking and acting as Emilie. She ran upstairs and left him staring after her, his face a revealing study of anxiety.

It seemed unnaturally cold in her bedroom although some

one had remembered to make up the fire and steam was hissing in the radiators. Her hands were shaking as she put on rouge so that Rowan should not worry because she was pale. Should she take more triple bromide? No, for soon she would need all the extra vitality she could command. She remembered the bottle of champagne in Rowan's dressing-room; there was still more than a third of it left and she poured out a glass and drank thirstily. Lucky I was careful not to drink anything since dinner for it's now that I need it. As she came into the hall, Sandy was carrying in the silver punch bowl that steamed with the mulled claret which would toast the New Year. People were crowding in from the drawing-room where they had gathered after the last dance.

"Five minutes to go," said Alistair, looking at his watch, "Rowan's gone out to wait for the clock to strike. You stand at the door to take the tokens from him . . . sprinkle the salt on the bread and then hand it to Georgina and she'll pass it around."

"Are you feeling all right, darling?" said Georgina anxiously, and at Marylda's smile, silently upbraided herself for being a fussy old woman who allowed herself to be upset by the coincidence of Rowan playing the part that she had watched Hector fill on a certain other midnight.

At the first stroke of the clock, Rowan knocked on the great door and waited for Marylda to open to him. Georgina instinctively grasped Alistair's arm and he patted her hand consolingly. No wonder she was upset; devilishly like his grandfather the boy looked . . . not that there was anything odd in that, perfectly natural family resemblance. And Marylda's likeness to Emilie was entirely superficial. Damn it, why shouldn't the girl look like her aunt? What was Georgina muttering to herself? "Don't let the pattern repeat itself." Better see she had a stiff drink . . . getting superstitious in her old age . . . not that all the Cairdries weren't too fey for their own good. He blew his nose with unnecessary violence and walked towards the punch bowl.

To the rest, the salted bread was only a symbol of prosperity, but Marylda found it of extraordinary potency. She had intended to wait until the dancing was in full swing before slipping away, but the sense of urgency became so strong that she knew that to delay would only produce the thing she most wished to avoid . . . a shift into Emilie so complete that she would be powerless to conceal it. Even as she walked through the drawing-room she knew the dual personality was not under full control. It was as though she

looked at two colored films projected on the same screen yet which could be seen simultaneously without confusion. Marylda's room; green walls, the lusters of chandeliers reflecting the frame of candles: and Emilie's water colors in gilt frames, peacock feather fans, a blare of harsh light from clustering gas globes.

And was it Marylda's heart that thudded with the fear of a sane and deliberate effort to free a ghost, or Emilie's that quickened in anticipation of an assignation? It was Marylda who had put matches and a candle in Alys' room to the top of the east tower stair, so that no one should be made inquisitive by a light switched on in the uninhabited corridor. But Emilie had had the same foresight; and it was Emilie who opened the door of the old nursery . . .

She went to the window and looked down on the terrace. The marble steps that had been brought from Italy only three months ago gleamed in the moonlight. How tiresome Hector had been about the new gates, every one else admired them. But Hector was nearly always tiresome now and she resented the attraction she still felt when he exerted himself to please her. Perhaps if she made him really jealous of Rhoderick he would beg her to let him share her room again. It was ridiculous of him to have sulked in his dressing-room since they quarreled when he shot the roe-deer. She heard footsteps coming along the corridor, and leaned her head against the window frame so that Rhoderick should have the opportunity of admiring her profile; it would be a mistake to let him know she was impatient. She heard the door open, and the candle she had put on the floor beside the rocking-horse flickered in the sudden draft.

"Pensive, my dear Emilie?" said her husband's voice.

Her swift movement of dismay betrayed her. "It was hot in the ballroom . . . I came up here to get cool." She spoke too fast, unable to think of an adequate excuse for being found in a room she had deliberately avoided ever since Hector had suggested it was time she produced an heir.

"What a remarkable coincidence that Rhoderick guessed your intention. I met him on the stairs, and suggested he would be better employed entertaining my guests than amusing my wife. He was not too drunk to take the hint."

"Jealous, dear?"

"Only of my rights. As, unfortunately, you happen to be my wife I must remind you that I expect a certain standard of—decency."

"Then I suggest you make it less obvious that you dote on

Georgina; the child is sufficiently ridiculous without you making her blush whenever you look at her."

I *am* jealous of Georgina, she thought with a spurt of anger. How dare Hector make a fool of me! How dare Rhoderick retreat like a guilty schoolboy! "So that flicked you on the raw?" she said. "You can tell your little cousin that I find her presence excessively boring, she can keep away from Cloud in future."

He made a gesture of distaste. "I suggest you learn your place. It is my business who is asked to this house, and yours to be a courteous hostess, if it is within your capacity to acquire courtesy. So far as I know it is not a purchasable commodity."

She dropped him a mocking curtsey. "How lucky for you —otherwise your family would not be able to afford it."

"I am not discussing my family, only my wife."

"And as I find the company of my husband, who is an ill-mannered boor, distasteful, I shall go to my room and leave him to make excuses to my guests—for they are my guests. Whose money paid for them?"

"Yours, God help me!"

She was too angry to be warned by the cold steel of his voice. "Hector, please move away from the door. I don't expect you to have the civility to open it for me."

He caught hold of her arm. "Emilie, what takes place in private is our own affair, but you will not disgrace me in public. You will come downstairs and behave properly."

She pulled herself free and faced him. "I shall not only go to my room: I shall let it be known that I will not again appear until Georgina has left the house."

"If you say a word to any one about your filthy suspicions I shall give you a thrashing you deserve."

She laughed. "A thrashing? Really, Hector, try not to be so melodramatic—beggars can hardly afford to beat the wives who hold the purse strings."

"A rich whore is still a whore!"

"Hector you forget yourself!"

"My God, if I could! If only I could forget, even when I'm drunk, that I'm married to you!"

The leash of her temper snapped, and she poured out a flood of words in which long months of boredom and resentment jostled for precedence.

He shouted at her, "Be quiet, you fool! Be quiet, or my God I'll thrash you like the bitch you are!"

She taunted him. "You poor, miserable coward, who boasts

of his illustrious family and hasn't even the courage to lay a finger on his wife. Hit me if you dare—and I'll show Rhoderick, show every one, my bruises."

"I believe you would. Is there no tradition of decency in the kennel that bred you?"

She slapped him hard across the mouth. One of her rings cut his lip. He took the fine linen handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped away a trickle of blood. Again she hit him, her fingers curved, and felt his cheek tear under her nails.

The veneer of civilization, fragile as the skin on a half-healed burn, flayed from the primitive male. She saw his fist driving towards her face . . .

There was a sharp sound like a stick snapping underfoot. The rocking-horse, against whose iron stand the back of Emilie's head had struck, began to move slowly backwards and forwards, as though ridden by the child which now would not be born to this Cloud woman.

VII LAMENT FOR A LADY

REMOTE AS the echo of a lament, Marylda heard a voice calling to her in anguish. She tried to answer, but her lips would not shape the words. Why was she so cold, so cold that she couldn't open her eyes? The dead are cold, and their eyelids are weighted with coins so that they shall not see the living.

"Marylda! Marylda, my darling, come back!"

Why did Hector call her Marylda? He was in love with Georgina . . . they had quarreled about Georgina. Didn't Hector know she was in the room? He would be angry if he knew she was watching him, but if she kept very quiet he would not see her.

Why is the woman in the white dress lying on the floor? She must have fainted, for her head lolls against his shoulder when he carries her across the room. She must be some one he asked to Cloud without telling me . . . that is why he is taking her down the narrow stairs into the room under the hearthstone. I wonder who she is . . . but I don't want to think about her. Why should I think about anything that might make me unhappy?

The room down there must be cold, for Hector has fetched the eiderdown from my bed to cover her . . . we bought the eiderdown in Paris on our honeymoon. Now he is taking

flowers to her . . . all the pink carnations from the dinner table. But it doesn't matter if he wants to give the other woman my flowers . . . they would be dead by tomorrow . . . I don't want to think of tomorrow . . .

"Marylda, listen to me! Oh God forgive me for letting her come up here alone!"

The despair in Duncan's voice brought Marylda back from the borderland where she had nearly lost her way. With an effort which seemed to drain the last dregs of energy from reserves depleted to danger point, she managed to lift her heavy eyelids. "Hector killed Emilie," she said, "but Emilie doesn't know that she is dead . . . I thought I was Emilie."

"Stop thinking about her, my darling. You are Marylda, you must forget everything else."

"But I mustn't forget," she said like a child trying to explain to obtuse grownups. "I came here to help Emilie remember, to make her be a real person again . . . it's very lonely being a ghost."

She leaned back against his shoulder and for a moment he thought she had fainted again. Then she put up her hand to touch his cheek. "You're warm," she said. "I was so cold when I was dead."

"You only fainted, my darling . . . you didn't die. You mustn't believe that you died."

She smiled. "Emilie died because she quarreled with Hector. He died because he thought she had come back to haunt him . . . but she didn't know. She couldn't forgive him when she didn't know, could she Duncan?"

Tears began to slide down her face. "You promise to help me make Hector understand that he needn't be unhappy?"

He gathered her closer against him, trying to share his vitality. "I'm going to carry you down to your room and then you'll soon be warm . . . you're beginning to be warmer already."

"I don't want to go into the little room . . . Emilie is in the little room. Hector was sorry that she was so cold . . . he was crying when he took the eiderdown to cover her."

"Marylda!" he made himself speak briskly, "Marylda you are not to think about Emilie, you are to think of yourself and Rowan, and all the people here who love you. Don't you understand that we all love you, that you must stay here with *us?*"

"Where's Rowan?" she said. "Rowan isn't angry with me?"

"How could he be angry. How could any one be angry with you?"

"Then why isn't Rowan here?"

He began to rub her hands and feet in an effort to warm them, talking to her as though he were comforting a child that was trying to wake from nightmare. "Rowan is downstairs with the others . . . if you listen very hard you can hear the music. It is happy music and people who love you are dancing and waiting for you to come back to them."

"Did I have a dance too?" Her voice was still childlike, but with relief he recognized a flicker of interest.

"You and Rowan are giving a dance, *now* in the year nineteen hundred and forty-eight. You must come downstairs, otherwise Rowan will be worried. I will tell him that you have gone to bed. . . ."

She sat up and brushed the tears from her face with the back of her hand. "I mustn't go to bed," she said. "Hector had to say goodbye to the guests alone . . . I mustn't hurt Rowan like that."

She tried to stand but had to lean against him for support. He felt her body suddenly draw itself erect. "I'm all right now . . . it was only that for a little while I got lost." She turned to kiss him. "You found me, Duncan . . . never forget how grateful I am that you found me in time."

"You are sure you wouldn't rather go to bed . . . I can easily explain to Rowan."

"Quite sure, my dear. Help me down to my bedroom and stay with me while I tidy my face. Think of an excuse for me. . . ."

He knew it was useless to argue, and perhaps it was wiser for her not to sleep so soon. "You can say that you were with Maizie: she passed out just after I missed you and Elsie put her to bed."

"How long have I been away?"

"Only about an hour."

She laughed shakily. "You see I have been thinking in years instead of minutes . . . it becomes a little complicated."

She took his arms as they went down to her room, and he marveled at the self-control of women as he watched her wipe the tear stains from her face, apply fresh makeup with a steady hand.

"I'd like a drink and a cigarette, then I'll be quite all right."

He turned towards the door, but she said quickly, "No,

don't leave me yet. There's a flask in Rowan's dressing-room and a glass on the bathroom shelf."

She was standing by the fire, a cigarette between her fingers, the whisky on the table beside her, when Rowan came into the room. He frowned and looked at Duncan who was sitting on the stool in front of the dressing-table.

"Bored with the party?" he said, "am I *de trop* or can any one join in?"

She looked at him and smiled with perfect assurance, "I've been putting Maizie to bed: she passed out, so Duncan very kindly gave me a hand. Holding her head while she was sick turned me up a bit so Duncan thought a snort was indicated."

"Very decent of Duncan," said Rowan, who was already ashamed of unjust suspicions. But his anxiety required a scapegoat, "Blast Maizie, why the hell can't she hold her liquor properly!"

Marylda laughed and put her hand on his arm. "The Blenkinsops aren't so tough as the Cairdries, darling. But she won't be staying in Cloud much longer."

VIII A FUNERAL IS ARRANGED

ROWAN, WHO HAD feared the New Year's party and its possible effect on Marylda more than he cared to admit, felt an illogical resentment towards her. Had he been more versed in psychology, he would have recognized this reaction as being similar to the impulse which causes a woman to slap the child who wanders home unscathed after she has tortured herself with horrific images of the cause of its belated appearance. As an outlet for repressed anxieties, he grumbled about the guests, criticized what he considered redundant expenditure. Surely the orchids were quite unnecessary, and gramophone records would have been just as good as, if not better than, the seven bogus Mexicans who had been more trouble even than the *soi-disant* Italians who had invaded the kitchen.

His gloom, thinly disguised when he had to act the host, convinced Marylda that she dared not take him into her confidence. He was behaving like a peevish child; and children were not sufficiently reliable to be asked to accept certain truths which had been almost more than their elders could tolerate.

Maizie, who was not without perception when she wished to use it, decided that her cousin was not finding life in the Highlands so gay as she tried to make out. The two women were spending a lazy afternoon by the fire, while Rowan tried to walk the other men off their feet and the less hardy had retired to their bedrooms for a nap.

"Darling, something's on your mind," said Maizie. "Come clean to a pal."

Marylda tried to dissemble. "I was only wondering whether I ordered enough curtain material for one of the spare bedrooms, it's such a bore if there isn't sufficient for pelmets."

"This country is certainly getting you down, darling, if you look so worried about such a minor detail."

"I'm not worried," said Marylda quickly. "I was only thinking that Grummie would be annoyed if I'd made an error of taste. Grummie thinks more of this place than you'd believe."

"It is certainly a most adequate dump," said Maizie judicially, "but unless I filled it with people to the roof it would give me the willies. Don't you ever find yourself looking over your shoulder when you go down one of the gloomy corridors? Goodness, I'd hate to be alone here!"

"It's not haunted!" said Marylda with revealing vehemence.

"Nonsense, darling! I asked Lord Dalwhin and he said it was teeming with spooks. Maybe he was teasing, but I believe he meant what he said."

"Alistair was joking. Really, Maizie, you mustn't be so gullible!"

"Well there's no cause to get angry. But honestly when I open a cupboard in this house I'd never be surprised if a skeleton fell out of it."

"Which cupboard?" Marylda laughed to try to conceal that anxiety had betrayed her. "Sorry, but we're a bit touchy about ghosts. Rather a taboo subject in these parts, supposed to frighten the servants."

"I don't know about the servants, they're probably hardened to it by now; but as a guest I can assure you that the thought of those sliding panels that Rowan spoke about last night at dinner scared the pants off me when I woke in the night and heard those damned owls playing banshees . . . if you hadn't warned me I would have bet my last dollar that it was a man and not a bird."

"Yes, they do make an odd noise . . . what time did you hear it?"

Maizie yawned and took another chocolate from the open box beside her. "It was soon after your maid tucked me into bed, about one-fifteen I should think."

Why didn't I hear Hector? thought Marylda. Or was it only an owl? She picked up a magazine, hoping that Maizie would take the hint and stop asking awkward questions; but Maizie had no intention of being sidetracked.

"Can't you get that handsome husband of yours to show us some of his secrets? I should adore to crawl along the passages in the walls, and if he tells me how the doors in the wainscoting work I could pop in on Henry Byrne and see if he's really such a stuffed shirt as he likes to make out. It's a pity to see all those polo ponies and that lovely place on Long Island going to waste, and I think it's about time this little woman found a new husband."

"You can't do that kind of thing here," said Marylda severely. "Georgina would be furious . . . and anyway there aren't any secret passages."

"Well then, why did Rowan tell me about them? Perhaps he's been holding out on you. Don't you tell me that in a castle as old as this there're no hiding places which are not spoken about too loud. Priests' holes and things. Why I've seen plenty when I was doing that cultural tour with Mama when we were over here before the war."

Marylda looked at Maizie who was placidly selecting a piece of candy from the lower layer, and wondered what the reaction would be if her cousin could read her mind. There was not only a secret room in Cloud, but in it was the body of their aunt who had been murdered by her grandfather-in-law. If only Maizie were more discreet they could look for the room this afternoon instead of waiting until the house party dispersed on Monday. She knew it was entered from the old nursery and that the steps led down from a square opening in the floor close to the fireplace. But further investigations were impossible until she could get Duncan to help her move Emilie's wardrobe . . . and it need not be done until she had decided how to dispose of the body.

But she must refuse to allow herself to think of Emilie until last night's experience faded a little: Duncan had not exaggerated when he said that her efforts on Emilie's behalf were dangerous. She felt resentful that Maizie was unsuitable for a confidante. Bother Maizie, why wouldn't she stop giving candy to the dogs! Angela had been sick in Rowan's dressing-room this morning and put him in a bad temper. Or was he jealous of Duncan? Had she been rather too fond

of Duncan until she realized it was no more than a hangover from Emilie's desire for Rhoderick's flattery?

"What's the joke?" inquired Maizie.

"I was just thinking about hangovers . . . some of them have rather odd results."

"You're telling me! This morning I had a mouth like the inside of a brakeman's glove, and my only New Year resolution was total abstinence. But sturdy forebears came to my rescue, so I crawled downstairs and took a reviver. Apparently it's against the local etiquette to be found swigging whisky out of a tea cup at ten in the morning, for that butler of yours gave me a look which would have uncurled a bandit's moustache." She giggled. "However I must have got something, even without makeup in a dressing-gown, for when I went up to my room after lunch I found a little decanter beside my bed."

Maizie yawned and settled herself deeper among the cushions. For a few minutes there was silence broken only by the hissing of logs in the Adam fireplace. Then, persistent as a mosquito, she returned to the subject which her hostess most wished to avoid.

"I think it's so dreary of you not to produce some exciting stories about Cloud. What's the use of staying in a stately home if you can't pick up news?"

Marylda embarked on the legend of Alys and offered to ask Rowan to show the skull after dinner, "But don't try to be funny about it," she added, "for it definitely comes under the heading of 'serious subjects.' "

"Have you seen Alys?"

"No, and I don't think any one else has: one can't count visitor's in Thunder's time who probably went to bed so tight that a bat would have scared them out of the rest of their wits."

"*Touchée,*" said Maizie. "But it was the hot punch that got me down." She sighed. "Doesn't even the previous occupant of the skull walk, even if he can't spare the time to turn up more than one night in the year?"

"No, why should he?"

"Well, he was *murdered,* at least I count chopping off a neighbor's head more than playful fun. The murdered never lie easy in their graves, and being kept with the rest of the family plate isn't my idea of a comforting burial!"

"You think that could make a difference?"

"Darling, of *course.* Murderers and suicides always walk unless their bodies are properly dealt with. Don't you re-

member how fussed the family were when Mama's brother bumped himself? They didn't draw a quiet breath until they'd rigged the verdict as 'suicide while of unsound mind' so that they could get a clergyman to plant him." She giggled, "Personally, I think it would have been rather funny if he'd continued to appear at board meetings and raise hell all around."

She was pleased to see that Marylda was at last displaying interest. "Suicides used to be buried at crossroads with a stake through them, just to be on the safe side, but in these days a churchyard seems to do just as well. If it didn't, Wall Street would have been bustling with spooks after the crash, when people were hopping out of windows faster than parachutists in an attack by airborne troops."

Until now, Marylda had not made up her mind what should be done with Emilie's body, except that it must be taken out of the house and decently buried in some suitable place where there would be no risk of it being found. But she was forced to agree that this would not be adequate. Emilie must be buried not only in consecrated ground but with an ordained minister to perform the service. How did one set about finding such a person, who would not only share such an unlikely ceremony but would be able to arrange for the interment?

On Sunday the house party were invited to tea at Dalloch, and while Mrs. Cairdrie was showing them over the house, Marylda was able to see Duncan alone.

"I've decided that Emilie's body must be given a Christian burial," she announced calmly. "I'm sure this is the first stage of de-spooking Cloud. After we've dealt with her we can find out what to do about Hector, but I've got enough on my plate at the moment without worrying about stage two!"

"First find the body," he suggested, trying to match her mood. "You didn't give us much evidence to work on."

"We know that the entrance to the 'little room' is close to the fireplace . . . I saw Hector carry her down."

"Cloud's a very solid structure, darling. It would take a pretty fair dollop of explosive to investigate stone walls, most of which are six feet thick. And are you sure that you saw the right room? It doesn't seem very likely that they'd have used it for the nursery."

"I'm quite sure. And don't you see that it being a nursery was an added safeguard? Even the most thorough searchers

would be put off by a nanny glaring at them, and whoever was hidden in there could be fed from trays taken up to the children. You know the family history. Haven't you any clues?"

"In one of the old documents there is a reference to the 'Hide,' where it is supposed that one of Prince Charlie's followers, if not the Prince himself, took refuge with the Cairdries after Culloden. Rowan and I used to think it must be a secret room, but Georgina says that it's only the cave on Ben Dhuie."

"But didn't you try to find it? If not, I consider it shows a lamentable lack of curiosity."

"We tried to get into the sealed room, when we were about twelve. Georgina caught us, and she used to wield a very effective cane."

She laughed, " 'And his great-aunt the ostrich spanked him with her hard, hard claw.' Poor elephant's child! However I've been doing some measuring, which wasn't too easy while the house was swarming with people, and I can make a fairly accurate guess as to where the Hide is located. If I am right, the walls of the turret stair are not nearly so thick as they seem, and if the chimney-breast is also largely fake, then there is a space unaccounted for about eight feet square, perhaps a bit more."

"On what level?"

"The same as my bedroom. I know there were quite a number of steps because I heard Hector go down them."

"I wonder if any one else knew how to open it, otherwise it may take us ages to find the secret."

A magazine with a picture of the Queen was open on the table. "Duncan, don't talk foi a minute, I'm trying to think. Glamis . . . the secret of Glamis. It's known only to the head of the family, and his eldest son, and to the factor. Who was the factor in Hector's time?"

"No one important or I should have heard Georgina speak of him. She ran the estate herself, to save money."

"But wasn't there some one equivalent? Think, Duncan, *think!*"

He laughed. "I *am* thinking, don't rush me! The Cairdries always had a piper: Robbie is the fourth generation of the direct line from father to son."

"Then Robbie knows! I believe that Robbie knows a lot more than he's ever admitted. He always tries to protect Emilie because he guessed, even if he wasn't certain, that she never left Cloud."

"But if he knows the entrance to the Hide he would have told Rowan and Hamish too if it comes to that."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't! Not if he knew that there was a chance that by doing so he would betray Hector! Now do you see?"

He found her eagerness very reassuring, as though they were discussing nothing more dangerous than possible buried treasure. "All right, we'll presume that Robbie knows how to open the Hide and that you can persuade him to tell us. What do we tackle next?"

"I'm not quite certain of the technique. Can a minister consecrate a piece of ground on his own authority or does he have to consult bishops and things?"

"We needn't bother about that. What's wrong with the old clan burial ground? It hasn't been used since Thunder built the hideous kirk and gave land for the cemetery, but it did very well for several generations of Cairdries, so Emilie should find herself in good company."

"Now we only need a minister who's not hidebound by conventions. Any hope of Mr. Henderson being cooperative?"

"His mother was a Cairdrie," said Duncan reflectively. "And if it comes to that his grandmother was supposed to be a witch . . . at least she could charm warts, and the less charitable said she wished them on any one who offended her."

"He doesn't *look* like the close relation of a witch," she said doubtfully.

"But you do, darling. The most beautiful and beguiling member of the white fraternity. If you try your magic on the old boy I think you might find an adventurous heart beating under that coat of sober black!"

She laughed. "Pardon me while I go to see if I have tethered my broomstick securely to the pillar of your porch."

Marylda found Robbie at the kennels, comforting a bitch in whelp. Two puppies had been born and the mother was panting though not unduly distressed.

"She has three, maybe four, more to come," said Robbie, "and is having an easy time. But with the first litter they are better for some one to talk to, so I shall not leave her until she's finished."

"She won't mind if I stay here for a few minutes?"

He chuckled, "If she did she'd have told you soon enough. But you have a way with animals, milady; knowing that

there's more ways than words in which God's creatures speak to each other."

"Robbie do you believe that people can know something but not be able to explain *how* they know?"

"I've never been one to bother my head how I can tell when the salmon begin to run: but I haven't been wrong more than two or three times in nearly sixty years."

"Robbie, if you knew something which you had promised not to tell, and then if you found out a little more . . . well, would you break that promise?"

"That is a very difficult question. I have always found it better to be silent than to say too much." He smiled. "By that I mean no impertinence, only that I belong to a race that has a great reputation for keeping its mouth shut."

Marylda was finding the conversation more difficult than she expected. Was Robbie deliberately trying to put her off? She must try to surprise him into giving a direct answer. "Is there a secret room in Cloud?"

"Such a place would not be unlikely in so old a castle," he said evasively, "but it wouldn't be secret if people knew about it."

"Was it called the Hide? Is the entrance close to the fireplace in the old nursery?"

He refused to betray the emotion that her question aroused. "What would you know of the old nursery? Or has the old lady taken her seal off the door?"

"Georgina knows I've been in there, though I didn't tell her until I'd got into the room by climbing over the roof. I found all the things that used to belong to Emilie . . . my *aunt* Emilie. Robbie, do you believe that she is still in Cloud?"

He turned to stroke the bitch before answering. "Do you mean is her ghost still here? Why ask me that, when you saw her yourself the day I pulled you out of the river?"

"Robbie, please, *please* trust me! I don't mean her ghost, though of course that's here too, I mean her body."

"It is said that her body is buried in France," said Robbie cautiously.

"But I don't believe it, and I don't believe you do either!"

"Perhaps it would be better if you tell me exactly what is troubling you, milady."

"The same thing that is troubling you . . . that is troubling Rowan and Georgina if they only understood. I *know* that Sir Hector killed his wife . . . though he didn't mean to do it. He put her body in the Hide. He will never rest and neither will she, until she is properly buried."

"So you wish me to open the Hide to see if you are right?"

"Yes, Robbie! I want you to help me take the fear away from the house. But we mustn't let Rowan or Georgina know. Why should they be made unhappy by something which happened so long ago?"

"It is a matter which should not be attempted without careful consideration. It might not be easy to bury a body, if there is a body, without causing undue disturbance."

The bitch stood up and began to strain among the straw. "Robbie, unless I can be sure that Cloud is no longer haunted . . . haunted by Hector and Emilie I mean, for Alys, if she really exists, isn't my business, I shall never have a son . . . I won't let a baby of mine be frightened as Rowan was frightened."

"So you are offering me a bargain," he said shrewdly, "an heir for Sir Rowan, against the risk of branding his grandfather's memory with murder."

"I'm not driving a bargain, Robbie. I'm asking you to trust me to protect the Cairdries."

There was a glint like blue flame in his eyes. "I think we understand each other. When you tell me you are ready, I will open the Hide. And if I should speak of what we might find there, may my tongue rot from my mouth and be eaten by carrion crows before midsummer day."

He smiled. "I am not being fanciful in my speech; only affirming what the kinsmen of Cairdrie have sworn on the Fealty Stone for more than five hundred years. You will understand it is used only when the Chief demands some special loyalty."

IX ASHES TO ASHES

ROWAN SAID goodbye to his guests with thinly disguised relief, for he blamed their presence as the cause of a feeling of estrangement from his wife. Not that there was anything definite, but she seemed aloof, almost as though she were too preoccupied to give him her full attention. He comforted himself with the thought that two or three days at Pitlairgh with the Coynachs would be a change for them both, and if she didn't feel inclined to come with him on the hare drive she could gossip with Bruce's wife.

Had he known it, Marylda had no intention of going to Pitlairgh. The opportunity of having him and Georgina safely

out of the way might not occur again for weeks, and the knowledge that only a wall separated her bedroom from Emilie's tomb was sufficiently unpleasant for her to be determined that it should not continue a moment longer than necessary. Should she tell Duncan now or wait until the thing was done? Then she remembered how he had implored her not to act alone and decided it would be kinder to let him share her plans.

With the excuse of taking three pineapples that had arrived too late for the dance to Mrs. Cairdrie, she drove over to Dalloch, thereby further annoying Rowan who would have liked to go with her.

Duncan came out to the car. "Any news?" he asked quickly.

"Robbie will open the Hide, and I shall tell him to dig the grave in the clan burial ground as you suggested. I've been up there to look for a site, and the ground is soft under the cedar so we can easily cover our traces even if it doesn't snow."

"Have you asked Mr. Henderson to dinner?"

"I can't invite him until tomorrow morning, otherwise Rowan might find out I never intended to go to Pitlairgh; I'll send a note saying I want to consult him on an urgent matter . . . I don't think he'll refuse."

"He won't refuse," said Duncan, "an invitation to the Castle is in the nature of a royal command." He broke off, "Look out, here's Mother."

Mrs. Cairdrie kissed Marylda, displayed enthusiasm for the pineapples, congratulated her on the success of the ball. "Don't forget to take down all the Christmas decorations tomorrow; so unlucky dear if there are any left after twelfth night. Not that I'm superstitious, but the year I found a tiny sprig of holly that had fallen behind one of the picture frames, or rather I *didn't* find it until the end of March, my poor dear husband had a stroke and Duncan caught measles off one of the garden boys." She laughed. "But of course it was only a coincidence . . . you modern children have no time for these silly old legends."

"I shall be very careful," said Marylda gravely, "to have all the relics taken out of the house. As you say, there is no point in courting coincidence."

"Such a nice girl," said Mrs. Cairdrie as they watched the Rolls sweep down the drive. "But no poaching, Duncan! Though of course she much prefers you to that rather dull husband of hers."

"Sometimes, mother, you are quite idiotic," he said angrily, and strode off without giving her time to protest.

Oh, dear, now I've made him cross! she thought resentfully. Why *won't* boys confide in their mothers!

Oh dear, when will I earn the luxury of confiding in Rowan, thought Marylda the following morning, as her husband slammed the door of the car and drove out of the courtyard without kissing her goodbye. Even if he was disappointed, surely he might have pretended to sympathize with the imaginary chill which she had produced as an excuse to stay at home.

She might have been more tolerant of his attitude if she had known that when he telephoned to Pitlairgh to say that only he and Georgina would be coming over, Lady Coynach had mentioned that Duncan had also cried off at the last moment. This would have been enough without the added evidence that Marylda was not really ill; women who aren't well enough to accompany their husbands seldom tell the cook that there will be one extra to dinner!

Well why shouldn't she ask Duncan to dinner? he argued to himself, but why the hell lie about it?

Georgina had the tact not to ask what made him drive too fast, but decided to give Marylda a hint that Highlanders are very possessive of their women. Had she known that Duncan was waiting on the high ground, watching the road until the Rolls passed out of sight, and then set off at a brisk pace towards Cloud, she might have found her loyalty towards Marylda a little strained.

Duncan found Marylda in the courtyard, directing Anderson, who in turn directed his underlings, in the erection of a heap of faded greenery that grew larger with every load that was carried out of the house. For the benefit of Anderson she pretended to be surprised to see him. "Hello, Duncan, how nice of you to come over to give us a hand. Anderson is being most tolerant of American custom . . . burning all the Christmas decorations to bring good luck during the year."

"A very sensible custom," said Anderson pontifically, "and burning it here saves a lot of labor and the wood ash will be easy to collect off the cobbles."

"They're stripping the banqueting hall now," she said, "I should think there are a couple of tons of holly in there . . . come and see."

Mystified he followed her into the hall, only to be led into the library. "What's the idea, darling?" he asked.

She poured out two glasses of sherry before answering. "I had a hunch, maybe I dreamed it and forgot the details, but anyway when I woke this morning I knew we had nearly slipped up on an important detail."

"Which is?"

"It's no use disposing of Emilie's corpse unless we make a clean sweep of everything with which she is magically linked."

"But why burn the evergreens?"

"Darling, don't be dumb! I had to think of a reason for having a bonfire."

"You're in charge of this operation. What are my orders?"

She handed him the decanter. "Have another drink and see if you think I'm talking sense. I know I am, but it may be a bit difficult to explain."

He filled his glass and lifted it towards her in a silent toast. She smiled. "Thank you, darling. Forgive me if I sound a bit prosy, but I'm trying to crystalize my own feelings as much as anything else. When I first came here, Emilie was no more than a vague and rather annoying ghost. Then I deliberately tried to get closer to her because I realized she was some one who was badly in need of help. You gave me the essential clue, though I don't think either of us realized it at the time, when you said, in the ruined croft near Ben Dhuie, that a ghost could either be a facet of some one who had no physical body or of some one who was still alive."

"I only meant that part of the personality can be split off from the rest, as in the text book cases of schizophrenia. I was afraid that if you brooded too much about Emilie you might get caught up in her behavior pattern and lose your own identity."

"Well, darling, you were a lot nearer the mark than you realized! And if it comes to that, I can give myself a pat on the back for being a good deal closer to the truth than the authors of the books I've been reading privately for the last three months. Orthodox religion recognizes the nature of man as being composed of body, soul and spirit: but so far as I've been able to discover, the pundits are fogged as to the difference between spirit and soul. I believe that spirit is the permanent self which is free of guilt and desire, and that soul is the residue which is not 'of God.' What I hadn't realized until last night is that a spirit can send down another bit of itself into incarnation without waiting for the bits and pieces to catch up with the main stream. I know it sounds rather involved, but what I want you to get firmly established in your mind is that Emilie and Marylda are two branches of

the same tree . . . and the tree has probably a lot of other branches."

"You mean that the tree is God?"

"No, of course I don't. I mean that the tree is my spirit, and that its branches include Marylda and Emilie . . . and probably lots of other men and women I used to be, and perhaps animals too."

"Why stop at animals?"

"Why? Go back to the atom if you like, but this isn't a philosophical discussion, it's a plan of action."

He looked at her sharply. Did she really think she had been Emilie? Surely not, but it would be dangerous to underrate the strain of the last few days. Better not ask her to be more explicit: time enough to argue with her when the present crisis was passed. "Then what's the drill?" he asked, trying to conceal his mounting anxiety.

"Emilie, poor dear, must be getting very bored with being limited by the dregs of an outworn personality. Nearly half a century is far too long to sulk about being murdered, and I think the best way to help her snap out of it is to dispose of her clothes as well as her body . . . she found them both far too engrossing."

"So you want me to arrange for everything to be taken out of her room before tonight?"

"Yes, darling, unless you'd prefer me to give the orders in case Rowan is sour."

"I'll fix Rowan," he said with a confidence he did not feel. "I'll go to see Robbie now, he'll be the best judge of how to tell the others."

He whistled as he crossed the hall, hoping that Marylda would take this as a sign that he was not in the least dismayed. How could he pacify Rowan? The situation was tricky enough already without giving him further cause for jealousy. Damn it, what would he feel like if his wife preferred to take another man into her confidence? But it was no use worrying about it: sufficient that the lady had spoken and the knight must obey.

After further deliberations, he summoned Robbie, Sandy, and Anderson to a conference in the gun-room. He passed around his cigarette case and waited until they had half emptied their mugs of beer. "We have decided, that is her ladyship has decided and I entirely agree with her, that it is quite time the things which were left behind by the first Lady Hector should be removed from Cloud. You may think it odd that this should be done in Sir Rowan's absence, but

I feel confident he will approve, for his grandmother would otherwise be reminded of unhappy memories."

"Quite right," said Robbie, whose practical mind had already considered that the wardrobe would be heavy to shift. "There is no good purpose served by keeping things which are of no manner of use, and it would not be suitable to offer them for sale."

"They should be burned," said Duncan, as though the idea had only just occurred to him. "The bonfire in the courtyard will serve as an excellent excuse, for I am sure you all agree that this should be done privately, so as to provide no opportunity of reviving certain malicious stories. It would not be pleasant if her ladyship should hear anything said against her aunt."

"I agree too, sir," said Sandy hastily, dismissing as unworthy the thought of how these happenings would have entertained the girl he was courting. The prospect of seeing the sealed room, which had already become almost legendary, fired his imagination and brought a twinge of excitement even to the more stolid Anderson. Some maintained that the room contained only the furniture of the wicked Lady Hector, but there were others who whispered that it had been closed because of a haunting. This view had always been stoutly denied by Mrs. MacTaggart, who could dimly remember when it had been the nursery, and maintained that no one would put children to play with ghosts. Sandy, following this train of thought, broke into a broad smile, "No doubt the room will be needed before long," he said, "and then there will be the lighting of bonfires that can be seen for forty miles."

"That's none of your business," said Anderson severely, making up his mind to ask Agnes whether Dr. Garvie had been recently to the castle.

Sandy blushed and relapsed into silence.

"There is no need for curiosity to be aroused," said Anderson. "I suggest, sir, that we wait until the afternoon. The men will have finished clearing out the decorations and I will then find work to occupy them well away from the house. Mrs. MacTaggart can give the young maids the evening off: there is a dance, so Elsie was telling me, in Inverness. If Sandy could take them in the shooting brake they could go early and be out of the way by five o'clock."

"Excellent," said Duncan before Sandy could protest at being excluded from the later stage of the proceedings.

"But you will need me to help carry down the furniture," he said hopefully.

"You can help us," said Robbie who realized how great a deprivation it would be for his grandson to feel less in the family confidence than Anderson. "But see you get the girls out of the way by sunset; they will be glad of a chance to have you show them the shops before they close."

Sandy was mollified at this concession and produced further evidence of intelligent cooperation. "Should I telephone to the post office and tell Jean that we are having a bit of a bonfire this evening, so that she will be able to stop any inquisitive body, who sees the glare in the sky, calling the fire brigade?"

"Good idea," said Duncan, "and we'd better have a couple of tins of petrol in case the fire is slow in starting."

Again Sandy was able to assert himself, "Diesel oil would be better, sir. Easier to handle and the electric light engine can spare it easier than the Rolls."

Marylda went alone with Duncan to the old nursery soon after lunch. Though determined not to admit apprehension, she was uncertain whether this final contact with things so intimate to Emilie might not produce a disturbing reaction. She decided that if she found herself becoming emotional she would leave Duncan to supervise the burning, for it was essential that she reserved her energies for the more difficult hours ahead.

"You're quite sure you don't want me to come to dinner?" said Duncan, who was reluctant to let her out of his sight and was already torturing himself with an image of her lying insensible at Mr. Henderson's feet.

"Quite sure, darling. It will be tricky enough getting him into the right mood, but if I'm to practice my white arts on him it'll be easier without an audience. Easier for me I mean, for he won't be so much on the defensive."

"Well, I shall stay with Robbie, so if you want me you've only to shout . . . I'll leave the gun-room door open."

She laughed. "You sound as though I was in danger of having to fight for my honor."

He flushed and hastily changed the subject to safer ground. "We had better take the clothes out of the wardrobe. They'll have to take it to pieces or it won't go through the doorway."

"Take the sheets off the bed and we can tie the clothes in bundles; easier to carry them."

She pulled an armful of dresses from the padded hangers

which still smelled faintly of lily-of-the-valley. "Poor Emilie," she said, as she dumped them on the coverlet that Duncan had spread on the floor. "She used to be so fussy when she traveled; everything packed in layers of new tissue paper. She never realized what a trial she was to her maid."

She held up a confection of *mousseline-de-soie* lavishly trimmed with rose-point lace. "Believe it or not, I used to wear this for dinner when we dined *en famille*. I kept it out of sentiment, for it had certain tender memories of Hector in the honeymoon stage, before we got bored."

"Are you pretending, or do you really remember?"

"I was joking . . . at least I thought I was but now I'm not so sure. Since New Year's Eve, I find certain incidents, most of them quite trivial, coming into my mind. They seem quite ordinary, as though they were recollections of my childhood . . ."

"Can you remember associations of any of the other clothes?"

She was holding a black chiffon dress whose train was embroidered with jet acorns and silver thread. "I wore this at the Opera . . . it must have been Covent Garden. It looked very well with the diamond necklace Papa gave me—I suppose Hector sent it back to the Blenkinsops—and I had a diamond butterfly in my hair."

She laughed shakily. "I can't help wondering if her more personal covering will be so safe from 'the moth and rust for which doth corrupt.' "

For a moment he thought she meant Emilie's lingerie, and then realized the implication of the remark. "I'm not sure," he said frankly, "it depends on the ventilation . . . there may be only a few bones."

She shivered. "Emilie disliked rats. However I agree we must be prepared for eventualities. How odd it sounds to discuss the disposal of one's discarded corpse . . . but I hope we shan't have to carry it away in sponge bags."

"Practically no chance of that," said Duncan with mistimed heartiness. "When we fought over one of the Kaiser's war cemeteries, late in '44, most of the chaps were skeletons."

"And the others?"

"A few had maggots," he admitted reluctantly; "probably due to something in the soil."

"A cozy thought: I gather you have no experience of stone vaults?"

He blushed, ashamed of having been so tactless. "Don't

worry, darling. Robbie and I will cope with that side of the job. All you've got to do is to get Mr. Henderson in the right frame of mind. It might help if you see he has a few drinks, the old boy's a connoisseur of port."

"Emilie had very good taste in furs," she said with a shade of regret. "This chinchilla scarf would be perfect with my new Christian Dior, and it must still be worth several hundreds—pounds not dollars."

"Why not keep it?" Duncan still found her disregard for economy alarming.

"Mustn't niggle," she said firmly, "this is definitely an occasion for a clean sweep."

They heard heavy footsteps approaching down the corridor. Duncan took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. "Now for the removal men," he said briskly. "Good, Sandy has remembered to bring a screwdriver. We'll start on the wardrobe first."

Sandy and Anderson tried to display no more interest than on the previous occasions when they had been part of the team who, under Marylda's direction, carried furniture from one part of the house to another. Robbie kept them steadily at work so that they should have no time to make detailed observations. Duncan maintained a flow of jocular remarks, which he hoped would convince the men that they shared in nothing of great importance.

Marylda stayed behind when they took down the last load, the bureau where Emilie had kept her letters. When he came back he found her standing beside the rocking-horse.

"That had better go on top of the pyre, like a fairy doll on the top of a Christmas tree." He tried to sound as though it had no special significance.

"The rocking-horse stays here," she said. "Emilie hated it because it reminded her that she was only a link in the continuity of Cloud. But one day my son will ride it."

"Darling, aren't you being a little macabre? After all, it broke your neck!"

She smiled. "So what? I've another neck, much better than Emilie's would have been by now—though any one can be forgiven for getting a big scraggy when they're over eighty!" She pulled gently at the scarlet reins and the rocking-horse broke into a smooth canter. "How many miles to Babylon? How many years to the Land of the Morning?"

She turned to face him, leaning back against the worn saddle. "Don't you see, dear Duncan, that this is the perilous

steed of dreams? He knew this room long before Emilie came to Cloud; he knew Hector as a little boy, and Thunder before he grew into that crusty old tyrant that Georgina tells us about. He isn't deceived by age, for he is free of time that is measured by clocks. He knows the good and the evil of them all, and that's the only real way to love."

"You are a very great woman, my dear," he said gently.

"I'm only trying not to repeat the pattern that made people unhappy. It hasn't always been easy not to make the same mistakes: but I think I have always known how dangerous it would be to reflect Emilie. We had the same name and the same money, and part of me wanted to use them the same way. So I tried to run away . . . but you can never run away except towards unhappiness."

"You mustn't feel responsible for her," he said.

"Why not; aren't you responsible for the man you were ten years ago?"

"But that's different . . . I can remember him."

"And amnesia would let you off? No, darling, don't be deceived by any doctrine which tries to dodge personal responsibility. When Emilie knew she and Hector were drifting apart, she was too lazy to do anything about it; and too fond of her social position to make a clean break. She tried to have an affair with Rhoderick to console her hurt pride and to make Hector jealous . . . she wasn't in love with him."

"I understand that very well. Bless you, my dear, for not letting me make a fool of myself." He stared out of the window, trying to conceal how much it had cost him to let her know that he loved her.

"Loving some one very much doesn't mean being 'in love' with them," she said gently. "Emilie didn't love any one except herself. That's why she tried to fill her life with *things* . . . which are the treasures that cannot be stored in heaven, the pitiful currency of ghosts. She wouldn't even have really loved the baby . . ."

"Are you having a baby?"

"I shall, when Rowan and I have sufficient security in each other to have enough for a third person to share. At least I have learned that our children will be people in their own right even before they are born, not just extensions of me or heirs for Cloud. That's one of the reasons I am keeping the rocking-horse, to teach them that it isn't enough to be part of a family; that they must ride against the Four Horsemen, in the van of a real aristocracy. They must be strong enough

to make peace with themselves, so that Cloud can become one of the castles of chivalry."

She smiled. "It must sound funny to hear a person like me talking of chivalry . . ."

He went down on one knee to kiss her hand, "I said I was your knight: perhaps I should have said your page . . . remember I mean it always."

He stood up, embarrassed that she might consider his gesture a trifle florid. "We'd better go down and light the bonfire. If we leave it too late you won't be ready for Mr. Henderson."

He followed her into the corridor, and she paused by a window whose leaded panes were jeweled with firelight. "So Robbie lit it," she said. "I didn't want to funk doing it myself, but—well, I'm grateful to Robbie."

She opened the window and looked down into the courtyard. The wardrobe gaped like an empty coffin; a chest-of-drawers burst open in the fierce heat with the sound of a cannon shot. Shreds of charred silk swirled in the heavy smoke like dark birds circling above a pyre. The ostrich feathers of a summer hat fluttered for a moment, brave as the panache of a helm.

X DUST TO DUST

MARYLDA'S INVITATION caused Mr. Henderson certain heart-searchings with which he was only too familiar. His sister Enid had not been asked to dine at the Castle, and to reduce her indignation he had said that Sir Rowan wished to consult him on business connected with the endowment fund. But later he had been told by Maggie, the maid at the Manse whose position on the village grape-vine was rivaled only by Jean's at the post office, that both Sir Rowan and his grandmother were away from home.

He had never been able to decide how far God permitted such trivial evasions of the truth as are made in the cause of domestic harmony. Surely God, the Allseeing, knew how difficult it was for him to live at peace with Enid; or was He impatient of any attempt to lighten the cross which He, in His bountiful goodness, had constructed for the purpose of testing His insignificant servant?

Mr. Henderson would have been horrified had he been told that with a less arid upbringing he might have de-

veloped into something of a mystic instead of a minister, yet there were times when he secretly longed for more nourishing food than the stony bread of his creed. It was then that he fought, alone in his study, to maintain the sturdy materialism of his Henderson forebears against the beliefs shared in childhood with his Cairdrie grandmother.

Enid had laid out his evening clothes in his bedroom, which was chill with a suffocating tidiness. He went up to change precisely at seven-fifteen so that within half an hour he would be ready to leave in time to reach the Castle as the clock struck eight. He rebuked himself for a sense of pleasurable anticipation; it was uncharitable to rejoice that for once he would not only be free of Enid's company but dine alone with the beautiful Lady Cairdrie. He slipped three Bisodol tablets into the pocket of his waistcoat, wondering whether he was being unduly optimistic to expect port wine in the absence of his host. However, he had noticed during the revels at New Year that the ladies of the house party had indulged both in wine and stronger liquors, a custom which had not met with Enid's approval. He had tried to confound her, without success, by saying that the miracle of Cannaan was an indication that on certain occasions wine was preferable to water in the sight of the Lord.

Enid was waiting in the hall, to make sure that he put on his galoshes and wore his gray woolen muffler under his winter overcoat. To mollify her, he took his umbrella from the china stand which it shared with three golf clubs, long past their age of usefulness but cherished as a relic of a strenuous youth.

The bonfire had burned low when he entered the courtyard, and except for a casual thought that it was odd to have kindled it so close to the house he observed it without interest. He greeted Agnes with geniality, for she had a record of thirty years of unbroken attendance at the kirk, and followed her to the library.

Marylda had intended to wear a day dress, but at the last moment she had changed into black velvet and the Cairdrie pearls. He found the warmth of her welcome very flattering and approved her choice of sherry; it was fortunate that Duncan had warned her he would prefer Bristol Cream.

He complimented her on the improvements she had made on the estate, and his admiration increased when she asked his advice as to what else should be done and wrote down a list of names to remind her which of his flock were most in need of American food parcels. Evidently the new Lady

Cairdrie was not only generous but efficient; if Enid made any more remarks against her she would receive a sharp reminder that envy was one of the devil's advocates.

Agnes announced dinner, to the relief of Marylda who was finding it difficult to maintain a smooth flow of conversation. Mr. Henderson decided that Lady Cairdrie had connoisseurship to add to her other virtues. Sancerre with the sole, Lafite '28 with the snipe, had not before been offered to him; for Georgina had considered a bottle of inferior claret and a single glass of port more than adequate when he and his sister were by courtesy invited twice a year.

He beamed as he took a second helping of cheese soufflé, "Mrs. MacTaggart must also bless the day you came to Cloud," he said. "I hope Agnes will tell her that I was appreciative."

"Don't bother to clear, Agnes," said Marylda. "Just leave the decanter on the table. I am sure Mr. Henderson won't mind us being informal."

He accepted grapes, the last of the muscats that were Anderson's special pride, and sniffed his port with reverence before putting the glass to his lips. He saw the candle flames reflected in her eyes as she leaned towards him.

"Mr. Henderson, will you forgive me if I ask your help on a matter which is terribly confidential?"

"Dear lady, you have only to ask." He felt gallant as a boy.

"You must have heard many odd confessions . . ." she began.

He raised a hand in protest, "We do not have confession: a Romish practice, shared, I regret to say, by some of the Angelicans." But he said this benignly, almost in jest.

"I used the wrong word. What I mean is that you are used to hearing things which must remain secret: you won't think it impertinent of me to be disturbingly frank, to ask questions which you may consider none of my business?"

"It is the duty of a minister to answer questions," he said with a confidence he did not feel. Surely she had not invited him to dinner in order to confound him with one of the problems, such as the nature of God, which had caused his own feeling of inadequacy?

"Mr. Henderson, do you believe in ghosts?"

He hesitated, torn between honesty and expediency; honesty won. "If you ask me as a minister I must say 'No'; if you prefer my personal opinion, I say that there are more things in heaven and earth than man has dreamed of."

He expected her to ask him whether he had any personal

experience of the supernatural, and was wondering whether he could be sufficiently discreet as to describe a certain summer morning when he had fled in terror down a path of the Cairngorms, fled from a "thing" felt but not seen, which had reduced him to panic. It was a good story, and evidential, for had not two men been found dead at that place the next year, and had not Dr. Garvie, who performed the post-mortems, told him in private that they seemed to have died of fright?

"Do you think a ghost might be some one who had not received Christian burial?" said Marylda. "And if you knew of such a ghost would you be prepared to offer it the consolation of your church?"

"I consider it of vital importance that the ritual of the church, by which I mean the Established Church of Scotland, should not be withheld from any one in need." Then a thought of alarming implications occurred to him. "You would not by any chance be asking me to inter the Cairdrie skull? Dear lady, I know that such a relic must strike you as barbarous, but I could not do such a thing without the expressed wishes of your husband . . . and I doubt if even that would be enough without the approval of the clan."

"It's not the skull. I don't think its late owner minds it being here in the strong-room, though personally I should have been annoyed when Thunder gave it those silver acorns and used it as a fruit dish! No, it a *much* more recent corpse."

Mr. Henderson blamed his third glass of port for what had clearly been a misapprehension. Lady Cairdrie was asking his advice as to whether she might interfere in the affairs of some local family who were in doubt as to where their deceased should be interred. Was he to rescue at the eleventh hour a strayed lamb who had died in heresy? "It would be necessary to obtain the permission of the next of kin," he said.

"There's only a niece, and she will be only too willing. But there are some rather odd aspects. You see, the funeral should have taken place much sooner."

No wonder she had appeared somewhat agitated; he must hasten to put her mind at rest. "These matters can be very distressing, but as we have had a long spell of cold weather there need be no undue anxiety." He coughed discreetly. "William Campbell is a most competent undertaker. I think he will recommend a lead lining to the casket: the expense is considerable, but it will remove all danger of *drip*."

He saw his hostess turn pale and rebuked himself for

having mentioned such an unsavory detail to a woman of sensibility. "I don't think there will be any drip," she said, trying to hide the emotion his suggestion had aroused. "I'm almost sure she will be only a skeleton."

He was now convinced that he had taken a glass too many. "A *skeleton,* Lady Cairdrie?"

"My aunt's skeleton," she said desperately. "It's under the floor of the old nursery. Sir Hector killed her by accident and thought it wiser not to mention it."

Mr. Henderson furtively swallowed his Bisodol tablets: either he was drunk or else the poor lady was undoubtedly insane. He took counsel with himself and tended to rely on the second alternative. She must be humored; if necessary he would investigate so as to prove to her that this was no more than a temporary delusion.

"You say that Sir Hector's first wife is under the floor somewhere in the Castle; may I ask if you have seen the body?"

"Not yet. It's in a secret room, they call it the Hide, and Robbie is going to open it for us."

This was getting more serious. If Robbie was included in the delusional pattern he would have to go warily. What a terrible tragedy that Sir Rowan's young and beautiful wife should be mad . . . but there was hope that the condition was curable. How right she had been to turn to him instead of Dr. Garvie, who was not qualified to minister to the soul! He took her hand, his eyes warm with compassion. "Thank you so very much for your understanding," she said. "How right Duncan was to say we could trust you! He knew you wouldn't forget that your grandmother was a Cairdrie."

"Duncan Cairdrie of Dalloch?" he said incredulously. Surely that reliable young man could not be a party to this fantastic story! Or was it fantastic? Those steady eyes did not belong to a woman who was bereft of her reason.

His heart rebuked his mind that still pleaded for neutrality. "Can I be alone for a few minutes," he said quietly, "I would like to ask God to guide us in what we may have to do."

It was nearly ten before Duncan heard them leave the dining-room, and he was halfway along the passage when he heard the door of the library close. Oh, damn, he thought, now there will be more of this interminable waiting! What were they to do if Henderson wouldn't play? Call the whole thing off, or get rid of the body and try to find another par-

son later? But how would they be able to smuggle a parson to Cloud when Rowan was at home? At least he could try to find out from the tone of their voices how things were going. . . .

He tiptoed acrsos the hall, so intent on not making a noise that he had almost reached the library door before a low whistle caused him to swing around. He saw Marylda standing by the fire, and felt guilty as a boy caught eavesdropping.

"Everything couldn't be better," she said. "At first it was a bit sticky, I think he felt certain I was nuts. But after he realized that you and Robbie were in it too he was with us a hundred per cent."

"It must have been a shock for the old boy."

"I'm afraid it was. We'll give him half an hour or so to collect himself. How are we off for time?"

"Well in hand. Sandy won't be back before three; the dance doesn't finish till two, I rang up this afternoon to make sure. By the way, would it be a tactful move to ring up Rowan? I gather he was a bit peevish this morning, and we want him in a good mood when he gets back tomorrow."

She picked up the telephone, one of the house extensions which now replaced the solitary instrument that had been inconveniently placed in a draughty passage, but the line was dead.

"Perhaps it's not switched through," he suggested.

"No, it's out of order again, or I would hear it buzzing on the board. However it's probably just as well . . . Rowan might guess there was something up. I'm not in the mood for making effectively trivial conversation!"

"Like a drop of brandy?" he said sympathetically.

"No thank you, darling. Waiting is always the worst part. Have you got 'jitter tummy' too? Dentist's waiting-room feeling, only more so."

"One of the finest cases in captivity." He hoped she took this for a deliberate overstatement, it would be dreadful if she guessed how close he was to being sick.

"Robbie all right?"

"Almost infuriatingly so! I don't believe he'd turn a hair if he caught the Loch Ness monster on a salmon rod. He's gone to make sure that Mrs. MacTaggart and Agnes are safely out of the way. Trust Robbie to attend to detail! He persuaded them both they were getting colds in the head, and mixed them a brace of toddies that would have made the strongest wilt!"

"He's dug the grave?"

"Single handed: he wouldn't let me help him. He's got Hector's plaid to wrap her in, Georgina gave it to him. His pipes are under the cedar . . . he said Miss Emilie would expect the music to play her home."

"Dear Robbie," she said, blinking to hold back sudden tears. "I'll just run up and tidy my face, meet you here in a few minutes."

Oh damn, I *am* going to be sick! he thought despondently. Why is every one so much more self-controlled than I am?

In the sanctuary of the lavatory next to the gun-room he retched until sweat ran down his face. Why was he more nervous than before battle? No use trying to dodge the issue. He had always been terrified of the effect on Marylda if Emilie became dominant, and that was before he believed —and he wasn't sure if he believed it now, that they were linked by more than the physical relationship.

Thoughts which he had managed to hold in siege came crowding into the citadel of his mind. What would be the effect of seeing one's own body buried? What would happen if Marylda associated herself with the corpse? Would she get a wasting disease. T.B. or something, or might the shock be enough to kill her?

"Shut up you bloody fool!" The sound of his own voice startled him: the voice of the officer cursing the troops who threatened to panic. He sluiced his face in cold water and went to the dining-room for a stiff whisky.

Marylda was waiting for him in the hall beside the refectory table on which were her mink coat and an armful of white azaleas. "I went to the greenhouse before dinner," she said, "I meant to get carnations, and then I remembered she loved white flowers; it always annoyed her when people said they were funereal."

"Robbie thought of flowers too, he lined the grave with hyacinths and narcissus. I seem the only one who is being thoroughly inadequate."

She kissed him on the cheek, "My dear, how could I possibly have managed without you?"

He was comforted, though reason told him she was only being kind. He watched her go to the library and heard Mr. Henderson say he was ready. He fetched Robbie, and the three men followed her up the wide staircase and along the gallery where other Cloud women seemed to smile down in pride of this youngest defender of their loyalty.

At the door of the old nursery she paused to light three

candles which had been set ready in a silver sconce. "There isn't any electric light in there," she said to Mr. Henderson, anxious in case he might consider the candles a popish practice. He smiled and she was reassured. Obeying a sudden impulse, she held the flame of the central candle to the purple seal which still obscured the keyhole. The eagles of Cloud blurred in the heat, released their hold. She set her thumb print in the cooling wax. The men watched her, unconcerned with need of intellectual reasons for what she did.

She gave the candlestick to Robbie, who was glad he had trusted intuition to tell her that only the Piper of Cloud must know how the Hide was opened. As the door closed behind him, she turned to the passage window and looked down to the pyre that had smouldered to ashes the color of faded roses.

"Dust to dust: ashes to ashes," murmured Mr. Henderson. She took his hand. "Never forget how grateful we are to you," she said softly. "Never forget, even when we have to pretend that this is a dream forgotten on waking."

"She won't be much more than dust, at least not much more," said Duncan.

She felt momentary anger. Why did he have to remind her that it would not be easy to see how Emilie's body had suffered with the years? She looked down at her hands, pale shapes against the black velvet of her dress. Of course it didn't really matter that Emilie's hands were only bones, that these hands would in their turn be dust. But why think of it now? She had read somewhere that nails were very resistent to decay. Would Emilie's nails look like bright petals in the dust? She shivered. Nonsense . . . Emilie didn't use nail varnish.

They heard the heavy sound of slow moving stone. Like drop-stones closing a tomb of Egypt, she thought.

The door opened. Robbie gave her the sconce and stood aside for her to lead them. Was it only imagination, or was the rocking-horse moving as though obedient to an invisible rider?

Where the hearthstone had been, steps led down into darkness.

"You wait here, Marylda," said Duncan urgently.

She had intended to let him and Robbie fetch up the body, so that her only memory of it would be a shape covered with the plaid. His face glistened with sweat; she knew it was cold, cold as her hands.

"No, Duncan. I want to go down to her alone. She was

proud of being beautiful: she would not wish any one except me to see her."

"Would it not be better to leave it to us," said Mr. Henderson. "A minister is familiar with death; a dead body can be distressing."

"It is very kind of you," she said gently, "but you see, Emilie and I are not afraid of each other."

Duncan would have protested, but Robbie put the folded plaid over her arm and silenced him with a gesture.

The three men instinctively drew closer together as they watched her walk slowly across the room. She went so quietly down the steps that it seemed to them as though the light she carried was being drawn slowly down into dark water.

Marylda shielded the candles with her hand as they flickered in a draught from a narrow opening in the groined roof of the Hide. There must be a ventilation shaft, she thought. Perhaps it goes into the chimney. She tried to cling to this trivial consideration as a frail thread which could serve to hold in check her steadily increasing fear. I was right in the measurements I made . . . the Hide is almost exactly eight feet by ten. The men who built it might have known that one day it would be used as a family vault; for there is a stone shelf against each of the longer walls. Don't look at Emilie until your heart quietens; it is beating so loudly that the others will hear it if you don't control yourself . . . You mustn't let them know you are afraid. Emilie never knew that her body was hidden in here . . . she watched Hector carry it down the steps and felt no more than a mild curiosity. Will Emilie's skull be pale as ivory, like the other skull that is kept in Cloud?

A gout of hot wax fell on the back of her hand as she set the sconce down on the stone shelf that was not occupied. The trivial pain was curiously consoling, a proof that in her own body there were nerves obedient to bright blood. She turned and saw her shadow commanding on the wall in front of her. She forced herself to look down at what she feared to see.

The blue silk of the eiderdown had split, and feathers had drifted among the brittle stalks of what had once been pink carnations. There was nothing else to see; only a shape under frail, faded silk. All she need do was to cover it with the plaid. . . . But would she believe in her own courage enough to be able to hand it on to her children, if she dared not fulfill the boast that she and Emilie had nothing to fear from each other?

She touched the eiderdown and felt it crumble: the shred of silk between her fingers was soft as the wings of dead moths. She shuddered, and wiped her hand on her dress, leaving a gray smear on the dark velvet. She forced herself to take a firmer hold. The covering resisted her for a moment and then slid to the floor with the faint rustle of falling leaves. She shut her eyes involuntarily . . . Oh, God, please don't let there be maggots in her flesh. Her mind fought off images of decay that seemed to circle round her like bats disturbed in a forgotten cave.

To open her eyes required a deliberate physical effort, as though the lids no longer owed her their obedience.

Hector had tied a lace scarf over Emilie's head so that the jaw should not fall, and gold sovereigns to close her eyes. Was it the weight of gold that made it so difficult to look on the body that once she had loved?

Skin, dry and odorless as the bark of a tree, lay taut over temple and cheekbones . . . those high cheekbones which gave to their faces the distinction they shared. Only Emilie's hair could have belonged to a living woman, dark hair that spread, tenuous as cobwebs, over the folded skeleton hands which seemed to try to conceal the ivory cage of ribs where emeralds gleamed like a jeweled bird.

"I must give the emeralds back to Cloud . . . Robbie never believed that you stole them. Robbie always loved you," she said aloud.

There was another glint of green . . . the ring that Hector had given to Emilie on the day she promised to marry him. As Marylda tried to draw it from the finger which had found it too heavy, a withered tendon snapped and knuckles fell like beads from a rotted cord. She held the ring cupped in her hands, and then as a gesture of faith put it on her own finger.

She had to move Emilie's arms before she could take the necklace . . . it was like moving a doll, the Dutch doll that her Mother had brought home from Europe when she was five years old . . . no one can be afraid of a doll. . . .

There were brown streaks on the white satin dress, brown as lines of faded ink on a brittle parchment. "It is only rust," whispered Marylda, "rust from the steel bones of her corset . . ."

She stooped to kiss this echo of her younger self. The skin of the forehead was dry and smooth with forgetting. "Lord, let now Thy servant depart in peace."

For a moment she saw Emilie as though asleep: her hand

curved to a cheek that was warm and alive, her lips smiling in a happy dream. Strong with this vision of a wider reality she prepared Emilie for her last journey.

She knelt in the dust, searching with outspread fingers to make sure that no shred of tendon, no shard of bone remained forsaken. Then she folded the plaid around the skeleton of the woman who was no longer lonely.

Emilie was light, light as a sleeping child wrapped in a shawl. "Let there be Light in all the ways of our going, Light in our hearts, Light in our understanding."

Robbie waited at the top of the steps to take from her the burden she need no longer carry.

Duncan watched Robbie walk slowly and proudly from the room; saw Marylda follow with Mr. Henderson. He looked back at the shaft of light which shone up from the space below the hearth. Should he put out the candles, or let them burn against the darkness?

He heard a sound like an ancient tree complaining of the storm . . . or was it the sound of a rope, a rope creaking against an iron ring bolt, a rope that protested against the weight of a man?

It seemed that the rocking-horse grew beyond its disguise of wood and paint to become a fifth to the Four Horsemen. Was he going mad, or could he hear the grief of a man abandoned to despair? Panic flailed him down the corridor.

When he reached the hall, the red brocade of sofas, the glossy security of illustrated papers on a table by the fire, rebuked him for hysteria. In an agony of humility he hurried past the heap of smouldering ashes in the courtyard; no longer praying for the peace of a ghost but only that Marylda should not know that her knight had faltered in the press of battle.

But was there a battle? They walked so quietly under the moon; up through the beech wood, silver pillars of a chancel; to the open moorland, vestment of the mountain; to the burial ground where sere grass rippled in the rising wind that brought incense of wide sky and running water.

Robbie knelt to lay Emilie to rest among flowers. Like snow, white azaleas fell from Marylda's hands to cover the brave colors of Cloud.

The burial service was spoken by Mr. Henderson with an authority he had never before experienced; in magnificent knowledge of the grandeur and triviality of death.

Robbie and Duncan filled in the grave; the clink of spade on stone was lost in the living voice of the wind. Then Robbie

took his pipes and paced three times around the tree and the body it sheltered. The lament told of the grief of those who must relinquish the warm contact of hand to hand, the solace of flesh. Then the music changed to the song of rejoicing; the laughter and the dancing, the birth and the marriage, the loving of the company who live beyond the hill.

XI EMERALD GREEN

As THE SOUND of the pipes faded into silence, Mr. Henderson found himself incapable of acting in the manner he used to consider appropriate after a funeral. He had an overwhelming desire for privacy in which to sustain his intimations of immortality, and he offered a silent prayer to the close and friendly deity of whom he was for the first time aware, that Enid might be asleep before he reached the Manse. He was too preoccupied to do more than murmur good night, and hurried away with his coat flapping like the wings of a bird learning to fly.

Marylda suddenly wanted Rowan with such intensity that she almost called his name aloud. If only Rowan was with her instead of Duncan she could cry on his shoulder until the tension relaxed. Rowan would comfort her, as he had done after she fell in the river, as he had done when they found each other in France. Oh, why had he gone to Pitlairgh and left her alone!

Duncan sensed that she found no comfort in him, and his feeling of inadequacy increased. What could he do to help her? Would she feel happier if he made her eat something? Ought he to insist on her having a hot bath as soon as they reached the castle? She must be frozen, her thin sandals were soaked . . . he might at least have had the wit to see she put on proper shoes. Should he insist on staying the night in case she needed him?

Marylda was aware of his agitation and found it annoying. Why couldn't he be cheerful, and help her to put a barrier of triviality between experience too recent to be remembered in tranquility and the ordeal of sleeping alone in a room divided only by a wall from another which it had not been easy to enter? She was far too tired to cope with him. If he didn't come out of his gloom she'd send him home. If he became sentimental she would probably be angry, and then he'd expect sympathy. And if he offered sympathy to her she

was almost certain to cry, and he was afraid of tears. She had had quite enough fear to fight against for one evening.

When they reached the front door he asked whether she'd like him to doss down in one of the spare bedrooms, and she said that it would be silly to annoy Rowan. He cursed himself for a tactless fool who had not even the decency to know when he wasn't wanted, and before she had time to explain that she wasn't ready to be alone, he got into his car and drove out of the courtyard.

She stood forlorn in the great hall with Angela beside her, listening to the sound of the car as it turned through the gates which Emilie had brought from Italy. The castle had never seemed so vast, so echoing with dark corridors from which opened room after room . . . all of them empty except for those far away in the servants' wing where two old women slept, and would not waken even if she screamed.

"Angela, does a man always leave a woman when she wants him most?" she said wistfully. "Robbie or I wouldn't let you have puppies alone, but most men expect sympathy for prowling up and down the corridors of nursing homes while their wives have babies. What would you feel like if I sent you to the vet and pretended that I couldn't bring myself to see you in pain?"

Angela whimpered and looked anxiously towards the staircase; she was not used to being up so late and wished to return to her basket.

Marylda lit another cigarette. "We're not going to bed just yet, so don't be impatient. I may even make myself an omelette, and if you are good I'll give you something interesting from the larder." She tried to be angry with Duncan; any emotion was preferable to the self-pity which was creeping over her like a fog. She poured herself a stiff brandy and soda, but the nonchalance of the gesture became ineffective when the decanter clattered against the glass.

"It's only a perfectly normal reaction," she explained to Angela. "If I belonged to the age when ladies could indulge in the vapors, I should have had a nice cry by now, and be reveling in the sense of virtue rewarded, with a whiff of smelling salts, and lavender-water on the temples, to bolster my feminine ego. But as we belong to a time when men expect their females to be tough, and then grumble because their vanity isn't cossetted, we shall have to look after ourselves . . . and try to like it."

Angela licked her hand, squirming in an ecstacy of devotion. "We can't stay down here much longer, my sweet.

Sandy has probably forgotten to tell some one to make up the boiler, but we can at least try for a bath." She took some more brandy to stave off the moment when she must go upstairs. "Angela, never trust to male intuition, either they haven't got any or they're too lazy to use it. I know it sounds cynical, but could I be honest and say less? Surely Duncan ought to have guessed that it wasn't very cozy to be left alone! Even after the most orthodox funerals there is a party to cheer up the mourners, and without being fussy I think I deserve a little consideration when I've acted as pall bearer, chief mourner, and corpse, at the same time!"

Angela thumped her tail on the sofa cushions to indicate approval.

"You agree? Well, remember what I've told you when Jock tries to make you feel inefficient because you've got too much sense to carry a bundle of wet feathers in your mouth! Men are much more silly than women, which is why women have to exhaust themselves by waving pink celluloid rattles to keep them in a reasonably good temper."

In the confidence of the perennial battle of women against men, Marylda began to feel more bold. Why was she shivering by a dying fire because Duncan had deliberately abandoned her? Why was she in the shaming position of needing Duncan? Because her husband preferred to exchange dreary stories with Bruce Coynach instead of helping her deal with his family spooks!

She left all the lights on, trying to believe she did so only as a gesture against Rowan's ingrained habit of turning them off for the sake of economy. Any one who had watched her sweep up the stairs, her head high, her dog beside her, would not have guessed that she walked imperiously because it would otherwise have been too difficult to leave the seeming security of the hall.

She suddenly noticed that her sandals were clogged with the soft mould of the burial ground. She pulled them off and threw them into the wastepaper basket. She was no longer afraid of Emilie, except in so far as every one is afraid of certain traits of character; so why was she nervous? But Marylda was too familiar with the need for lies to seek comfort in lying to herself. She was frightened because she knew that she could hope for no more than a breathing space before she must further extend herself to free Hector. But not yet; please not until I can ask Rowan to help me.

An owl screeched, and though she knew it was only an owl she ran into the bathroom and slammed the door. She

turned on the bath, and soft, amber colored water gushed from the tap with a heartening steam. At least Sandy had remembered to stoke the boiler; men were not entirely useless!

Angela took up her usual position, chin resting on the marble rim, watching for an opportunity to lick the wet shoulder of her mistress. Ignored, she put her head on one side, a gesture that seldom failed to draw attention.

But Marylda was washing too vigorously to notice her. Will I ever feel clean again? she thought, scrubbing her nails with a fervor that a doctor would have not thought inadequate after doing a post-mortem without gloves. She glanced over her shoulder at the ring and necklace which she put put on the glass shelf beside the basin. "You'll need a thorough wash too," she said defensively. "You'll have to make do with eau-de-Cologne. Georgina uses methylated for her diamonds, but if you think I'm going to the butler's pantry to fetch it, you couldn't be more wrong!"

She got out of the bath and wrapped herself in a towel. Then she picked up the emeralds between finger and thumb, dropped them into the basin and turned on the cold tap. A gray scum rose to the surface. Dust, only dust . . . of course it wasn't particles of skin.

She left wet footprints in the thick carpet as she fetched Cologne from her dressing-table, a new tooth brush from one of the mirror fronted cupboards. The elaborate setting of the necklace seemed to move with a life of its own, as though the stones were segments of a green snake, coiling to strike. She scrubbed it with spirit, with soap, and finally poured a bottle of Listerine over it. The emerald of the ring seemed penetrating as the single eye of Cyclops . . . the eye in the forehead, the eye which sees those things which the materialist denies.

The impulse to hide the Cairdrie emeralds in a locked drawer, or throw them out of the window, was sufficiently insistent to demand that she prove her courage by wearing them to bed.

Rowan, who had tried to telephone to his wife soon after dinner and been told by Jean that the line was out of order, felt increasingly uneasy. Bruce showed no inclination to go to bed, and Rowan found it difficult to feign interest in reminiscences that his host apparently found absorbing. At intervals he made remarks, or noises, which indicated enthusiasm or sympathy, but so little attention was required

to maintain this surface courtesy that his mind was free to carry its own burden of speculation.

Had Marylda only pretended to feel under the weather because she wanted to avoid coming to Pitlairgh; and if so was it because she was cross with him, or because she had the sense not to accept boredom from Bruce? If she was really ill would she get Dr. Garvie . . . not that the old boy was much use, but he would at least have the wit to send for her husband. But how could they send for him when the telephone wasn't functioning? Sandy would come over in the shooting brake . . . but suppose that had broken down too?

Were he and Georgina over optimistic in thinking that the New Year's Eve do had had no effect on her? Sometimes there was a delayed reaction, as in concussion. What would happen if Marylda suddenly saw Emilie; or worse, behaved as Emilie, when he wasn't there to look after her? Why had he been such a bloody fool as to leave her alone! He had a hunch that Marylda wanted him, so what was he doing, sitting listening to Bruce droning interminable stories!

He stood up and said dramatically, "Good God, Bruce, I'm the most appalling ass! I've asked a chap to come up from London, he's due on the night train and I've clean forgotten to tell my wife."

"I'll send a car to meet him and bring him here for breakfast," offered Bruce hospitably. "Probably be able to fit him out with a gun and give him a chance to get the fog out of his lungs."

"Quite impossible, I'm afraid," said Rowan. "Fellow's a lawyer, doesn't shoot and can only spare a day. I shall have to go back to Cloud tonight . . . papers I've got to read before he arrives."

Bruce made mild protests and then went to fetch the Rolls from the garage while Rowan ran upstairs to pack his suitcase. He wondered if he should scribble a note to Georgina, and then decided it would only alarm her.

There was mist on the low ground, but beyond Inverness he was able to allow the speed of the car to match his impatience. He was angry because he knew he was driving badly; several times he had to brake sharply because he had taken a corner too fast, and once he nearly hit a startled sheep that had strayed on to the road. If there was nothing wrong at Cloud how would he explain his unexpected return? He glanced at the dashboard clock and saw that it was three fifteen . . . he hadn't realized that time as well as boredom had made the evening so long. Could he say to Marylda

that he had come home because he wanted to apologize for being short tempered this morning? She would probably think him ridiculous . . . or would she? Wouldn't he be grateful if she had taken so much trouble to end a quarrel? He'd feel a fool if she hadn't known he was angry, and he was damned if he'd admit that he'd been jealous!

Birch trees flicked past in the glare of the headlights; the road curved towards the river. He changed down and accelerated up the drive, for once too preoccupied to consider the welfare of his tires. He left the car in the garage and found he was running when he reached the postern door which was used after the house had been locked for the night. Some one had put the key further along the ledge where it was usually hidden and he had to strike several matches before he found it. Without pausing to secure the bolts, he felt his way across the library and opened the door which led into the hall. Where was Marylda? Why were all the lights still on? He went to the dining-room and saw that the table had not been cleared. So Duncan had been there to dinner: they must have found something very interesting to talk about if they sat until the servants had gone to bed. Perhaps Duncan was still here. If so he'd be in the ridiculous position of the husband who comes home at the wrong moment.

He whistled as he ran upstairs, to show that he had no intention of spying on them. But Marylda, who had taken two capsules of barbitone, only turned over in bed.

Any husband who has tortured himself with visions of his wife in dire need of rescue can be forgiven for indulging in either anger or self-pity when he sees her quietly asleep. Angela, who had been dreaming of remarkably unintelligent rabbits, immediately recognized that he was not in a mood when liberties might be taken. She slid from under the eiderdown and retreated to her basket.

Marylda opened her eyes for a moment and murmured drowsily, "Darling, I'm sure it isn't time to get up yet," then relapsed into sleep.

Rowan retaliated by switching on all the lights. Surely it was not too much to demand some consideration after driving fifty-seven miles in sixty-five minutes! At least she could have had the courtesy to pretend to be pleased to see him when they hadn't met for nearly twenty hours. He could scarcely have felt more indignant had it been twenty years.

Marylda reluctantly returned from the pleasant borderland into which she had been taken by the barbitone. As her

mind registered Rowan's unexpected presence she sat up and stared at him in bewilderment. She saw him looking at the emeralds which were defiantly green against her white skin; she tried to cover them with her hand on which another emerald shone.

Rowan's complex emotions fused into cold jealousy. So Duncan had given her this ridiculously valuable present, which she dared to wear only when her husband was safely out of the way! Duncan would soon discover that trying to cuckold the Laird had never been a healthy occupation!

"Give those bloody emeralds to me," he said quietly. "I shall enjoy returning them."

She hesitated. Surely he couldn't think she meant to keep them? He was more than welcome to his dreary heirlooms! She took the ring off her finger, noticing as she did so that she wore it, as Emilie had done, over her weddingring. Then she unclasped the necklace and dropped them both into Rowan's outstretched hand.

"It was surely an unnecessary refinement of bitchiness to wear his ring on your marriage finger," he said bitterly. "Why didn't you make a clean sweep and remove my humble offering? It is only 18-carat gold, but Mâcon could not produce a better one . . . or you may have forgotten the incident."

She had been prepared for him to be angry that she had lied to him about Emilie, but what was this nonsense about another man? There was no link between him and Hector, so he couldn't be jealous of his grandfather. The idea of a husband being jealous of his grandfather made her smile, which provided the detonator to his anger.

"I ought to thrash you, thrash you until you whimper like that bloody dog of yours! And then go over to Dalloch to teach Duncan not to meddle with other men's wives."

He took her bewilderment for disdain. Oh, God, he thought despairingly, now I shall really have to beat her or she'll never respect me again. I thought I could bluff her into admitting what she'd done, and then I could have given her another chance. But how can I make her faithful to me if she thinks it's *funny* to be caught out?

He forced himself to modulate his voice, to speak slowly as though he felt confident and aloof. "You may find it odd that I am annoyed to discover you prefer another man and accept his favors. I can only suggest that you revise your opinions."

Marylda leaned back against the elaborately monogrammed pillows and regarded her husband with distaste. So this was

the man for whom she had fought terror! This was Sir Rowan Cairdrie who talked about the allegiance of the clan, the obligations of ancestry, and yet who had not the elementary decency to trust either his wife or his best friend! Certainly this primitive ape need no longer be protected from knowledge!

She took a cigarette from the box on the bedside table; lit it with a gold lighter; blew a smoke ring to show that she was not to be intimidated by the behavior of barbarians.

"The emeralds, my dear Rowan, are not, as it apparently flatters you to presume, a payment on account from your friend who bears the whimsical title of the Master of Cairdrie. Had I desired emeralds, I, fortunately, have the means to buy them."

"Don't lie to me!"

"I assure you that I shall not again trouble to do so! As you are so interested, it may amuse you to know that you are holding the Cairdrie emeralds, which my aunt was accused of stealing. After all, when a Cairdrie is prepared to murder his wife he might just as well go the whole hog, and malign the dead by saying she was a thief and also sufficiently ill-mannered to elope with the chauffeur!"

XII SKEAN-DHU

BREAKFAST in the servants' hall was more silent than usual, for every one was privately speculating as to the reason for Sir Rowan's unexpected return. In spite of the presence of Mrs. MacTaggart, Elsie was sufficiently indiscreet to remark that something odd must have happened to cause Mr. Henderson to leave without his umbrella and galoshes.

"I suppose the minister has to ask your permission before deciding what to do," said Agnes icily.

Sandy removed the bones from his kipper with care, to conceal that he was worried in case Sir Rowan bringing the Rolls back at four in the morning had any connection with the bonfire which he had helped to construct. Sir Rowan had a temper that could flare up quick as petrol; he hoped that he wouldn't use it against her ladyship. It would be dreadful if they had a real quarrel just as everything was going so smoothly, and she might take the car with her. He rebuked himself for such an uncharitable thought and choked on a bone that he had failed to detect.

When Elsie took up the breakfast tray, she listened at the door before knocking . . . it would make matters worse if she interrupted a quarrel. She heard a low murmur of voices and then Marylda's laugh. "So much for that sour old Agnes," she thought.

She knocked twice before she entered, and while drawing the curtains noticed out of the tail of her eyes that her ladyship was blushing and Sir Rowan pretending to be asleep.

When Elsie had left the room, Rowan sat up and exclaimed, "Darling, what a narrow escape!"

He regarded the poached eggs with aversion. "Do you think Angela would eat them to save us offending Mrs. MacTaggart?"

"She likes them mashed into the toast, but don't let her dribble on the eiderdown. Would you like coffee or orange juice, my sweet?"

He gazed at her with awe, marveling at the resilence of women, and ran a hand over his bristly chin. "I feel as though I'd been thrown down an elevator-shaft," he said ruefully. "While you remain as fresh as the lovelies who advertise some one or other's super-sleep mattress. How do you manage it?"

"Assiduous practice in 'How to please down the centuries!' I'm glad you appreciate my efforts."

He grinned. "It's a bit of a shock to realize that one's wife has been popping about in space and time. Fancy being made love to by my grandfather!"

"In that case why shouldn't I be jealous for a change? Why stop at the last generation? Further back you probably had delicious romps while I was occupied with drab good works."

"Darling," he said with mock severity, "if you insist on raking up unsavory incidents from my remote past I shall deny them flatly. You must promise always to marry me in future."

"That would be awkward if we happened to be brother and sister, or you were my dear little son."

"Incest or Oedipus . . . what a dreary choice! Still, I suppose it *might* be possible to love you as much as I do now."

"I too should regret any change in our present status," she said demurely. "Wouldn't it be interesting if we had had a dictaphone under the bed and could play back the record of the last four hours! As I once read on the blurb of a novel, 'The hero and heroine ran the gamut of the emotions.' " She ticked them off on her fingers. "Surprise, Bewilderment,

Indignation, Cold Anger, Hot Anger, Bitter Sarcasm . . . darling, we thought up some magnificently dirty cracks during that stage! Then I slapped you, and when instead of slapping me back you sat down on the side of the bed with your head in your hands, I burst into tears and cried until my eyes felt like gooseberries."

"While I was feeling such abject remorse that I daren't touch you until you said you'd lost your handkerchief."

"And I was thinking that you were disgusted because I was making a scene and looked so hideous!"

"You are the only woman in the world who looks equally lovely when she's crying . . . rain drops on roses."

She giggled, "A red rose, I'm afraid."

"My love is like a red red nose," he said.

" 'That softly blows in June' . . . but I blew hard because I was so snuffy, and it's January! It was almost worth the quarrel for the fun of making it up," she added with a candor he found enchanting. "And when I told you about me being Emilie you didn't find it at all incredible, and after we'd talked and talked we were suddenly hungry, and you fetched cold chicken and oranges. You peeled the oranges and fed me the 'pigs' all neatly de-pipped."

"Then you told me about the little pink pigs nightmare you used to have, and I admitted how terrified Georgina and I were about you and Emilie."

"Weren't we incredibly silly to make each other miserable by lying from the best motives?"

"No more lies," he said firmly.

She pointed to the emeralds which he had left on the dressing-table. "You'll soon find out that it isn't always possible to be truthful . . . except to each other. What do we do with the relics? We can't remark gaily that we found them in the Hide, for only Hector and Robbie knew how to open it . . . and Hector pretended that she'd pinched them."

"I expect what he really said was, 'The emeralds are with Emilie,' and was pleased with himself for keeping scrupulously to the facts. What about saying that you found them when you went through Emilie's things before burning them? It would be quite consistent with Georgina's view that she was feckless and untidy for her to have thrown them into a drawer; they could have slipped down behind it."

"How I shall enjoy telling Janet, unless my better nature stays in the ascendant! To be candid, I was just as jealous of her as you were of Duncan."

"I'm damned grateful to Duncan for all he's done, but I wish he'd had the sense to tell me what was up."

She tweaked his ear affectionately. "A little while ago you didn't sound in the least grateful. The poor man was due for some awkward disabilities, and would have required at least a year in a plaster cast!"

"I've got a bloody temper," he said despondently. "If I'd found him here you would probably be standing by the window watching me being taken away in a prison van." The picture was too vivid to be funny and Marylda realized that he was sufficiently overtired to be easy prey for gloom.

"Darling, you mustn't underrate my wifely devotion. I should have insisted on popping him in the Hide, and if his spook turned up we would have apologized prettily and explained that the whole episode was an unfortunate misunderstanding. He couldn't have taken umbrage, for after all he's a Cairdrie too."

"How much do we tell Georgina?"

"Only that I decided to dispose of Emilie's things; no more, because she'd be bound to be upset that Hector didn't trust her enough to ask her to help. . . . Oh, darling, I didn't mean to be tactless, it wasn't lack of trust that kept me quiet, only conceit that made me want to protect you by tackling it on my own."

"You told Duncan," he said gloomily.

"Only because I didn't mind him being worried. And anyway I probably shouldn't have told him nearly so much if he hadn't found me when I fainted on New Year's Eve."

"You promise, categorically and with no reservations, that you won't do anything more about Hector without letting me share it? Otherwise I shan't let you out of my sight for a second."

"My darling, what a temptation! I should like nothing more than never being out of your sight." She saw he was serious. "But I promise, darling." She held up her right hand, "If I break my word, may my tongue rot from my mouth and be eaten by carrion crows before midsummer day."

"That's a drastic oath! Where did you get hold of it?"

"From Robbie. It's part of the oath that Cairdries swore to the Chief on the Fealty Stone, didn't you know?"

"I knew it existed, there are several references to it in the History of Cloud, but I didn't know any one remembered the form of the words."

She yawned, "I've suddenly gone sleepy. Let's not get up

for lunch. I'll ring and tell Elsie that we don't want to be disturbed until five. I'll order a specially nice dinner. There's a tin of caviar which Grummie sent, and we'll be beautifully greedy and eat it all, and then we'll have woodcock, and I think, only fruit after that, unless you would prefer a savory?"

She was too engrossed in planning the menu to realize that Rowan, who had been taught to regard a day in bed as justified only by serious illness, was having a silent battle with himself. He wanted to prove his loyalty by some extravagant gesture, but couldn't he do something that would not earn Mrs. MacTaggart's amazement, Agnes' silent disapproval, Sandy's dismay that he had followed so soft a man to war?

"Isn't it a clever idea," she said happily. "I never sleep properly unless you're with me, and if we got up for lunch we should either yawn all the afternoon or else go out for a hearty walk and be exhausted by dinner time."

He squared his shoulders. "You tell Elsie while I have a bath and shave." He whistled defiantly while the water was running. Damn it, if the servants objected to his behavior he would take pleasure in teaching them that he was master in his own house!

His fears were groundless; even Anderson hastened to send up his cherished gardenias for the dinner table. "They look like a honeymoon couple," said Sandy confidentially to his sister after he had taken coffee to the library. "Let this be a lesson to you not to get silly ideas into your head. Quarreling indeed, I never heard such nonsense!"

Elsie was already regretting her tactless remark at breakfast, "It was Agnes' fault, she shouldn't have said he would be black angry when he found she'd got rid of all the things that belonged to the first Lady Hector."

"I don't believe Agnes said anything of the sort."

"She did! I heard her telling it to Auntie!"

"*Over*heard you mean. You keep your ears to yourself and your nose out of other people's business . . . and if you don't do as you're told I shall see to it that my footman doesn't get the same evening off as you."

"Oh, Sandy, you couldn't be so unfair," she said, on the verge of tears. "He's promised to take me to the pictures."

"Well, you remember that, brother or no brother, I'm the butler and what I say goes. So don't let me hear any more talk as to what was or was not burned in the courtyard. Understand?"

"Yes, Sandy," she said meekly.

Marylda, curled up on the library sofa beside Rowan, looked at him and smiled. "Happy?"

"Of course, aren't I with you?"

"We're with each other, and in a way it's for the first time. There were always things we daren't say, things we still had to face alone. Rowan, what shall we do about Hector?"

"You're sure something needs doing?"

"We've got to make certain that he and Georgina are free to be together. I know she has always been in love with him, and love works both ways; it's only desire that can be unrequited. I thought about Hector a lot, when I got to bed. It was really because I couldn't stop thinking that I took the sleeping pills. Emilie was a ghost because she had such a quick death that she was able to ignore it and retreat into her immediate past. We know that Hector hanged himself, at least Georgina's evidence is pretty conclusive. If a pleasant death let Emilie go back into the pleasant part of her life, why shouldn't his suicide drive him to relive the things that he couldn't face? Emilie always tended to take the easy way and he was equally tiresome by being far too combative. She goes into a self-created heaven, he into an equally real and unnecessary hell. If this is true, then nothing will free him except being helped to recognize that his fears are no longer relevant."

"But we don't know exactly what they are. Is he only afraid of having killed his wife?"

"I don't think so," she said hesitantly. "At the moment I've nothing better than a vague hunch, but I believe it wasn't the guilt he minded so much as the shame of having tried to avoid the consequences—all the deceits he had to practice in cold blood to substantiate his story. You're *sure* he hanged himself?"

"I only know what Georgina told me."

She shivered. "There's something at the back of my mind that I can't get into focus—however it isn't important yet. If you could feel me calling you last night, sufficiently strongly for it to get through the fog of being bored by Bruce, I don't see why I can't get in touch with Hector, using the affection that Emilie had for him as a call-sign and myself as the transmitter. I know it sounds rather odd, but I feel it's really quite reasonable."

"I gather that what used to be called 'thought transference' has become a respectable science," said Rowan,

pleased to be able to contribute. "It may be brain radiations or something, in which case Hector would be short of equipment at the receiving end."

"Emilie hadn't a brain so that can't make any difference. It might help me to tune-in to him if I held something that he used to wear; he didn't leave a signet ring?"

"It was buried with him—that's why mine only belonged to my father." He paused to light her cigarette. "But I've got his skean-dhu. Wouldn't that do?"

"It might; but we shouldn't get the Paris sequence, when he went there to fake her burial."

"I'm not sure. I've read a bit about psychometry, and apparently the memory of a strongly emotional scene can be just as vivid as the actual event."

"Shall I try now?" she offered.

He attempted to conceal his eagerness. "Aren't you too tired, darling?"

"I'm far too wide awake to go to bed. I slept more soundly today than I've done for weeks."

"Well *if* anything happens, I shall stop you the moment you get in the least upset."

She hoped that nothing would destroy his confidence that this was no more than an interesting scientific experiment. But how much easier than having to fight against disbelief! "Go and get the skean-dhu," she said decisively, "and you'd better fetch a pencil and paper at the same time, in case I say anything that's worth writing down."

When he returned from the strong-room, she was lying full length on the sofa by the fire with a rug over her. "Sure you're feeling all right?" he inquired anxiously. "Wouldn't it be wiser to leave it for a few days?"

"I'm just as excited as you are," she said, determined not to let him know she would greatly have preferred to postpone the experiment. "The rug is only because I seem to get cold when I've been up to something, even when it was only seeing Emilie quite casually. I didn't notice it at first."

"Then you'd better have a drop of brandy before you start."

She held the *ballon* in both hands so that he should not notice they were shaking. He sharpened the three pencils he had brought from his study and put them on the arm of the chair beside an open notebook. "All set," he said cheerfully. "What about you?"

She smiled and lay back against the cushions, the skean-

dhu in her hand. He watched her breathing become gradually slower and deeper. Then she turned on her left side and held the hilt against her forehead.

XIII GHOST'S STORY

"It's going to work," said Marylda, "but don't write anything down yet. This is only the preliminary stage. I'll try to tell you my reactions."

Rowan leaned forward, alert for any change in the tone of her voice which would warn him if she became distressed.

"There are so many pictures that it's difficult to get them into focus. It's like looking at something very intently and then shutting your eyes; I seem to be looking through my forehead, though that doesn't explain it properly either."

"Don't worry about the technique, darling. Concentrate on Hector, but don't think of the time when he went down into the Hide. Skip that sequence and find out what he did after the others had gone to bed."

"He's unlocking the drawer of a desk. I think it's the same one that is now in Georgina's sitting-room: the bottom drawer on the righthand side. He is taking money, gold money, out of the drawer and counting it . . . sovereigns, two hundred sovereigns. He needs it to bribe Gaston. He goes out of the postern door towards the stables. Gaston slept over the saddle-room. He shakes Gaston by the shoulder to wake him. Gaston is a small, dark man with a waxed moustache. He is frightened, because Hector is accusing him of having stolen a diamond brooch from Emilie. Hector wanted to accuse him when the brooch was missed but Emilie wouldn't let him. He says the police have found out and are coming in the morning to take him to prison. Gaston admits it and is imploring Hector to protect him. Hector is pretending that the crime is too serious. Gaston is sobbing: he looks ludicrous, groveling on the floor with his hairy legs showing under his nightshirt.

"Then he seizes Hector's hand and kisses it. He has been told that he shall be given money and the car to make his getaway. Hector says that he won't be able to delay the police more than a few days, so Gaston had better drive to Glasgow and get on a boat to Canada. He says Gaston must get rid of the car, for the police would never believe he had been allowed to take it. Hector adds that if the car is traced

he will have to say that it was stolen, otherwise it would be proof that he had aided and abetted a crime."

She dropped the skean-dhu on the floor and when Rowan bent to pick it up she waved him away. "I don't need that any longer. . . . Hector is throwing clothes, Emilie's clothes, into a suitcase. Now he is putting her toilet things into her dressing-bag. It is made of crocodile and the fittings are gold. He is beginning to find it difficult to think clearly . . . he must be sure to get the details right. What would she take with her if she was really eloping? He runs upstairs and gets another suitcase . . . no, it's a Gladstone bag. He bundles her *peignoir* into it, and four nightgowns. He is afraid that they will be suspicious if he leaves out something she would be sure not to have forgotten. Her sable coat, she would never have left that behind. He takes it out of the wardrobe. It is in a muslin bag, which frightens him because it looks like a body hanging in a shroud. He looks down at his wrist and sees a fleck of blood on the lace ruffle . . . a little blood ran out of the corner of Emilie's mouth when he was carrying her down to the Hide. He wrenches the lace from his shirtsleeve and tried to wash it in the ewer in his dressing-room. But there is still a brownish stain. He starts quoting Lady Macbeth, 'Out damned spot.' He stares around the bedroom, wondering what he has left undone that can betray him. It is now he decides that everything belonging to Emilie shall be put away in the old nursery. He didn't do it only to protect the Hide, it was so that Georgina shouldn't be able to check on what Emilie was supposed to have taken with her. . . ."

There was a long pause. "What did he do with the luggage?" prompted Rowan.

"He hid it under the hay in the Great Barn. The following night he took it to the lily loch. He weighted it with stones so that it would sink deep into the mud. Slow bubbles rose to the surface as though some one was drowning . . . ripples spread across the moonlit water and reminded him of how he had swum there with Emilie . . . he imagined that he could see her among the lily leaves."

"How soon did he really see her?"

She sounded like a child answering a question in school. "Standing beside the gates. She was admiring them, feeling proud that she had insisted on bringing them from Italy. But he thought she was mocking him . . . he had forgotten that he had seen her like that on the day the gates were hung. . . .

"Robbie was one of the men who carried them to the loft in the Great Barn. Hector said it was done because the hinges were too frail to support their weight, but he thought every one knew that the rust stains in the stone pillars reminded him of blood.

"Emilie had always been afraid of blood, and he had laughed at her for being squeamish. . . . He noticed a brown mark on the white owl that Emilie had had stuffed; he knew with his mind that it was only mould, but every time he saw it he remembered the stain of blood on lace . . . the lace ruffle he had burned because he couldn't wash away the blood . . .

"He is getting so terribly afraid; afraid when he goes through the beech wood because the dead leaves are the color of old blood, afraid of the river in spate because it is the same color, afraid of the heather when it begins to rust in autumn . . ."

"You are going too fast," Rowan interrupted, trying to bring her back from this concentration on fear. "He married Georgina in June: why did he marry her?"

"Because he was afraid to be alone . . . no, that wasn't the only reason. . . . He saw Emilie admiring herself in the long mirror of her wardrobe. She was thinking that no one could guess that she was pregnant . . . she was running her hands over her belly, pleased that she lived at a time when women wore corsets. But Hector thought she had come back to tell him that he had not only killed her but also his child. He thought she was laughing because she was strong enough to break three hundred years of the succession of Cloud from father to son. . . . He thought that she was sure that no woman would marry a murderer, and that he would die without issue. . . .

"He got very drunk that night and stood with a glass of whisky in his hand before the Cairdrie family tree—it used to hang in the library—and swore that he would live until his son was born. Emilie wasn't at all interested in the family tree so she wasn't there, but he thought she was mocking him because he had not been able to forget her even though her name was now scored out with heavy black lines. Most of the other Cairdrie women had their coats of arms in the glass windows of the banqueting hall. Emilie put a pig surrounded by sprigs of parsley in one of the panes for the Blenkinsop Arms. But it isn't there any more. Hector broke it and threw the splinters of colored glass in the river."

"How did he fake the evidence of Emilie's death?" said

Rowan, who was finding it difficult to write fast enough to keep up with what she was saying, and so did not notice that she was finding it increasingly hard to maintain a measure of detachment.

"I'm not quite sure . . . there's something about a letter. Yes, I've got it now. A friend of Hector's, some one he had known in his bachelor days, wanted an alibi . . . so he sent a letter written by himself to be posted in the village here, so that his father would think he was at Cloud instead of at Monte Carlo. That gave Hector the idea of sending this man several letters to post in Paris . . . he made the excuse that he wanted certain people to think that he had gone abroad for a few weeks. He addressed one of the envelopes to himself, saying that he didn't trust him to remember to post the letters unless he had proof they had not been forgotten.

"He deliberately disguised his handwriting . . . the friend had never had a letter from him before, they didn't know each other very well. The other letters were addressed to people Hector had never met, and there was only a sheet of blank paper inside so they couldn't be traced back to him."

"Why did he address one to himself?" said Rowan who had forgotten this detail of Georgina's story.

"He took a long time to write it. . . . I can see him in the library, late at night. The floor is covered with sheets of writing paper . . . thin paper on which he is writing with purple ink. It is in French and he has to look up many of the words in the dictionary. It is supposed to be from the proprietor of a little hotel in Montmartre . . . the kind of place to which Emilie might have drifted after Gaston deserted her, taking the emeralds with him and any money she had left. It said that an English lady, who appeared to be very distressed, had spent three nights in the hotel and then disappeared, and had not returned either to pay the bill or collect her luggage. The proprietor had waited for a week in case she came back. Then he searched her room to find the address of some one with whom he should get in touch. He had found a torn envelope on the floor which was addressed to Sir Hector Cairdrie. Could Sir Hector give any clue as to the lady's identity, and if so advise as to what steps should be taken. . . . I'm giving a free translation. It's difficult to get the exact wording, because Hector was agitated when he wrote it, and even more so when Georgina read it over his shoulder . . . he made sure that Georgina would be at Cloud when the letter arrived.

"Georgina thought he was so upset because he had always

hoped Emilie would come back to him; but it was really that he thought she would recognize the characteristic way he wrote his capital 'M's' and would guess the letter was a fake . . . Georgina looked flurried because she was feeling guilty for hoping that Emilie had committed suicide.

"Georgina helped him pack his bag and drove him to the station in a dog-cart . . . Hector didn't buy another car, for cars always reminded him of Emilie. In Paris he went to the Ritz, because he couldn't think of the name of any other hotel when the driver of the *fiacre* asked him where he wanted to go. He was given the same rooms he had shared with Emilie on their honeymoon . . . she happened to be there too, because Paris was one of the favorite places in her narrow heaven. She was lying on the chaise-lounge by the fire, wearing the negligée she had kept as a memento. He ran out of the room and went to a brothel to try to forget. But the girl who took him up to her room was also called Emilie. She stared at him in amazement when he threw a fiver on the dressing-table and fled down the stairs. She laughed as she watched him go, then shrugged her shoulders and hid the money in the top of her stocking.

"It was raining, but he wandered through deserted side-streets because he dared not go back to the Ritz. At dawn he wrote a note in a *bistro,* enclosing money to pay his bill and saying that his luggage must be given to the bearer . . . I think it was a porter from one of the markets.

"He found a seedy little hotel, on the Left Bank beyond Notre Dame—he wanted to be able to go to the Morgue without having to take a cab . . . he thought every one might be a potential spy. He threw himself down on the bed and slept for two or three hours. . . . I'm not sure if he was too exhausted to undress or if it was because the sheets were gray with dirt. He knew that he ought to eat something to stop him feeling faint, but he revolted against food and took black coffee and cognac instead. He wondered if he dared risk there being a body which he could reasonably identify as Emilie without going to the Morgue among the sight-seers, but decided it would be too dangerous.

"There were even children among the people who stared avidly through the plate-glass windows at the corpses that were displayed on marble slabs . . . some of the bodies look as though they had been dead for a long time. He hurried past a Negro who had cut his throat, an old woman whose lips were hideously burned by the acid she had drunk, a man who had been pulped by a fall from a high building.

There was a woman's body . . . she had dark hair but her features were too bloated to be recognizable. He thrust his way through the press of people, who stared at him and muttered resentfully . . .

"Now I can see him entering a large building . . . I think it is a police station. Yes, he is talking to a gendarme who listens sympathetically: he keeps on thinking how differently the man would behave if he knew he were talking to a murderer. Now he is sitting opposite an older man in blue uniform . . . it is the Chief of the Arrondissement. Hector says he received a letter saying that his wife was missing, but that there was no address, only the postmark. The official insists on giving him a glass of brandy and then scribbles a few lines on a sheet of paper. It is an authorization for Hector to go to the Morgue, even though it is now too late for it to be open to the public . . . Hector does not tell him he has already been there.

"At the Morgue there is an official who attends to the people who come to identify the bodies. He is a fat man with a red face and ginger whiskers . . . he looks like a prosperous butcher. He takes Hector into a dusty office, and runs his finger slowly down a list of dates and descriptions in a ledger. He asks whether the missing lady had false teeth. 'No? Then perhaps she was a blonde, or had a toe broken on the left foot?'

"He asks Hector to understand that it is difficult to give a more accurate description when bodies have been in the water for some time. 'Is Monsieur perhaps looking for a young woman, about twenty-five years of age, with dark hair? It is almost certain that her hair was dark. Well nourished, though Monsieur will understand that it is impossible to be more precise, for the fish in the Seine are as hungry as those of the sea. She has been here over three weeks. Would that agree with the period which Monsieur investigates?'

"Hector almost refuses to view the body. The guardian of the Morgue takes his arm as they walk down a dank passage: it is obvious that he is so familiar with the ritual that it means even less than it would to an undertaker. He points out a mole on the right shoulder of the bloated corpse; Hector turns away and retches. 'So Monsieur has recognized his poor wife!' says the guardian with practiced sympathy. Hector realizes that the man is mildly amused that the cold English can display so much emotion.

"Hector knows some one in the British Embassy. He sends

a note outlining the circumstances, asking them to arrange for the burial. Now he is standing by the grave while a chaplain hurries through the burial service. He wonders whether the girl he is burying in a Catholic. If so will she also return to haunt him because he has buried her in a Protestant cemetery? He has bought an enormous wreath of white roses and lilac. The man from the Embassy thinks this is because he loved his wife: Hector knows it is really a pathetic bribe to the unknown who is helping him to maintain the deception by which the continuity of Cloud shall be protected."

She broke off and opened her eyes. "There's a lot more, but I'm running out of energy. Give me some brandy." Her voice was too authoritative for Rowan to protest that she had already done enough for one evening. He flexed his fingers, which ached with the strain of writing so fast; watched her empty the glass and relax again with the rug drawn more closely around her.

"Ask me a question," she said commandingly. "I've lost the thread . . ."

"Was he really in love with Georgina?"

"Yes: so he felt even more guilty because he never dared to tell her so. He thought that if he loved Georgina enough and they were married that Emilie might lose her power over them. He never realized that Emilie wasn't trying to haunt them. He often saw her, because he was thinking of her so much and had the sight. She was nearly always laughing when he saw her, because she didn't want to remember anything except the times when she was happy . . . so he thought she was mocking him. That's why he sent all her money back to the Blenkinsops, because he thought that she was scornful because he still needed it. The reason he often saw her in the new wing was because she enjoyed planning how it should be finished . . . but he thought she was angry because the workmen were dismissed the day after she was supposed to have run away.

"He saw her playing croquet several times. He had the lawn plowed up, and then at midnight of the full moon he crept out of the house and sowed it all with salt . . . he thought it was a ritual against ghosts."

"When did he brick up the turret stair?"

"After he married Georgina. Two or three days before Emilie died she had been up to the old nursery to decide how it should be redecorated. She couldn't make up her mind whether to choose Kate Greenaway figures or a Noah's Ark frieze, so she quite often ran up the stairs to look at the

room. Hector thought she couldn't get past the new wall; but the only reason she didn't use the stairs again was that she was bored with the idea of having the room painted. Emilie was very easily bored.

"She was often in her bedroom because it was the place she found most attractive. She would have been amused to see Georgina in a flannel nightgown, but she had no knowledge that her husband had married again. That is one of the reasons why Hector couldn't make love properly to Georgina . . . he knew that Emilie might be sitting in front of the dressing-table, brushing her hair or putting perfume behind her ears."

"When did he decide to commit suicide?" said Rowan, scribbling so fast that his right hand felt as though it was going to fall off at the wrist.

"When his hatred of Emilie became more real than his love for Georgina . . . I think it was about two months before his child was due to be born. He thought Emilie would haunt them too, until she drove them all mad. He wasn't mad, but he thought his brain was slowly rotting with fear. That's why he drank so much whisky, to make him bold enough to fight against fear . . . but of course it only made it easier for him to see her. But he knew it was cowardly to commit suicide. If he proved himself a coward how would he be able to fight for his wife and his son? If Georgina had had a daughter he would have fought on alone until there was a new Chief of Cloud to succeed him. That's why he found it so difficult to smile when Georgina insisted on blue ribbons for the layette . . . pink for a daughter would have given him another lease of life.

"He couldn't face Emilie until he had paid his debts . . . he believed she would demand more than the repayment of money with which at first he had hoped to placate her. He used to read the Bible, only one line, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' And then he would stand in front of the family tree and swing around suddenly as though Emilie was waiting behind him and cry out, 'God damn you! The sins of the fathers shall *not* be visited on the children!' But Emilie wasn't there. She had never liked the library; she objected to the smell of cigar smoke."

Her voice took on a note of more urgent emotion. "Hector dared not challenge Emilie until he had paid all his debts . . . she would never be able to taunt him for having tried to escape punishment according to the law."

"But he didn't confess," said Rowan, too intent on his

notebook to look up from the page of almost illegible writing.

"The law . . . I mustn't escape the law . . . I will pay all my debts . . . Rhoderick, I wish you to come with me to the Fealty Stone. Rhoderick! You are the Master of Cairdrie until my son is born . . . Rhoderick, put your right hand on our stone, and give the oath . . . remember that if you break your oath, or speak of what you must do in its fulfillment, then each day which brings you nearer to midsummer will dawn in fear . . ."

He waited for the next phrase, and in the silence heard her sobbing. "Don't ask me to do any more . . . not yet. Please Rowan, don't let me see any more. I'm sorry to be, a coward . . . but the fear is so strong . . . the fear . . .

XIV SPRING CLEANING

In spite of Marylda's protests that her sudden tears were nothing to worry about, Rowan insisted on carrying her upstairs and putting her to bed.

I was a bloody fool to let her go on so long, he thought anxiously. I was so excited to find out what happened next that I hadn't the decency to remember that it's a frightful strain on her. It's damned unfair that she takes all the hard knocks, while I find that my curiosity is rapidly getting stronger than my fear of spooks.

He noticed the blue stains of fatigue under her eyes and felt increasing remorse. To console him, she drank a glass of water in which two triple bromides were still fizzing and pretended to fall asleep.

Rowan had insisted that she make no further experiments for a long time; but did he really believe that she would leave Hector and Rhoderick in their lonely hells a moment longer than she could help? Or was he being sensible; would it be wiser to wait until they had been to London for a holiday? When Georgina came home, the day after tomorrow, there would be no opportunity to do anything more. So it would have to be tomorrow: but did she know enough to tackle it yet?

She would like to have discussed the implications of the final sequence with Rowan—the one she had seen just before she cracked. Why had Rhoderick seemed just as important as Hector? Why had the oath of the fealty the insistance of a bruised nerve? Were there two ghosts in the old nursery?

The moon shone through the open window, giving fugitive color to the embroidered curtains of the wide bed. . . . The image of the two men blurred as a more vivid picture of Georgina came into focus. . . . A young Georgina lying in this same bed hearing the rocking-horse overturn, listening to the lament as her husband's body was carried to the churchyard.

Is Georgina the more important ghost? But that is silly; Georgina is an extremely healthy old woman. But Emilie was a ghost because she preferred to live backwards instead of forwards in time. Hector is a ghost because he is caught in the present of his dying. Was part of Georgina's personality left behind in the misery of knowing that even a son for Hector was not enough to free him from Emilie? This explains why Georgina is so masculine. The bride and the mother are in pawn to fear: only the woman who was brought up as a boy has continued to grow in the arid soil of duty. This is why she refused to marry Alistair: it wasn't because she lacked the courage to risk another tragedy.

Emilie, with her self love, her desire for things which could armor her against being hurt by people, kept Georgina and Hector in exile from each other. Marylda was getting drowsy. . . . How shall I give them back their marriage in heaven? They are waiting for their heaven. . . .

Rowan slept until eight, and woke to see his wife sitting on the edge of the bed smoking a cigarette.

"Good God what are you doing up so early?" he said, disconcerted that he had not had a chance to make sure she had a lazy morning.

"I've got the extra clues we needed," she said cheerfully. "I've already telephoned Duncan and told him to come over before lunch. He's staying the night."

"But we're going to Inverness. We could do a cinema and then drop in at Dalloch for dinner."

She smiled. "No, darling. That was the plan you made last night, when you hoped to keep me out of mischief until Georgina came home."

"Why do you want Duncan?"

"It's only fair to let him be in on the last act, and I think it may help Rhoderick to have him with us."

"Aunt Emilie and Uncle Rhoderick? Am I the only member of the cast who wasn't billed in the 1900's?"

"Neither of you appeared, darling, only me; that's why I'm insisting on playing the lead. Rhoderick was also the

Master of Cairdrie, so Duncan understudies for him, and you're the Laird to my Lady."

"When and where does the curtain go up?"

"In the old nursery, after the servants have gone to bed."

"But need we do it yet? Wouldn't it be more sensible to give yourself a break?"

"And wake in the night to hear some one sobbing in the room above, and know we hadn't tried to do anything about it?"

"I used to pretend it was owls," said Rowan.

"So did I."

"I don't want to seem obtuse, but why do you think Rhoderick is here? If he's got to haunt, why not in South Africa where he died?"

"Unless I've got the set-up wrong, I'm almost sure he killed himself . . . and came back to what he imagines is the scene of his crime."

"He died of enteric. There's a memorial window to him in Dalloch church, and suicides don't rate stained glass."

"I'm talking about facts, not evidence," she said firmly. "Anyway Duncan may be able to tell us more about it. He's going to spend the morning searching through his father's diaries, particularly the months in which there might be details of Rhoderick's death."

"How do you know about Alexander's diaries?" he asked with a twinge of jealousy.

"Duncan and I looked through them, not very carefully, before the New Year's party. I wanted to find out if there was any reference to Hector being jealous, but there wasn't so it was a waste of time."

"Jealousy is always a waste of time," said Rowan, and was surprised to find he really meant it.

Though Robbie was profoundly relieved when Rowan asked him to open the Hide and help to clean it, he displayed no emotion. "I am very glad that I can show you the way to move the stones," he said. "I shall be seventy-eight next month, and the knowledge that the secret might die with me has been a grave responsibility. I will instruct Agnes to provide us with brooms and suchlike: we shall also require several buckets of hot water, for there is a prodigious quantity of dust." He chuckled. "We had better do the nursery, too, for if I am not mistaken the room will soon be put to its proper use."

Surely there isn't another, even more vital, secret which Marylda is keeping from me, thought Rowan. Robbie, seeing

his embarrassment, patted him on the shoulder. "Don't I always know *before* the salmon begin to run?" he said blandly. "Her ladyship has only been waiting until the rocking-horse is free for a child to ride, and unless I am losing the sight in my old age there will be bonfires lit before the end of the year."

On his way back to the castle, Rowan met Marylda, who was carrying a basket and a pair of sécateurs. "I'm going to get some flowers," she said. "I want to have lots of them in the Hide."

He parted from her at the gate of the kitchen-garden and watched her walk purposefully along the wide path among ice-spangled fruit trees. How does she manage to make ghosts seem natural? he wondered. Why is everything so different since she came to Cloud? Why is every one so much happier, so much closer to each other? His questions remained unanswered for he was far too modest to recognize that it was because she loved him more than she loved herself.

In the steamy, scented warmth of the hothouses Marylda found it more difficult to sustain her pose of brisk efficiency. Whatever happens I mustn't let Rowan know I am afraid: panic is horribly infectious, and there is far too much fear in the nursery already.

She made herself concentrate on the flowers. What a nuisance that Emilie was so inordinately fond of carnations; they were so difficult to arrange. But if she used birch branches to support them they wouldn't look so formal, and she would take plenty of buds and their own foliage. She filled her basket with color, palest pink to crimson, citron to dusky purple.

She fetched another basket from the potting-shed and went into the house where Anderson grew his early bulbs. No, she didn't want either hyacinths or tulips. What should she put in the Laird's Room? They must be bridal flowers. Where would Georgina have wished to spend her honeymoon? Somewhere carefree and vivid enough to blot out the drab actuality of a week in Edinburgh. The Riviera, which to her would be a country of eternal sunshine and blue sea for she had seen it only through picture postcards sent by Hector.

While Marylda cut sprays of mimosa, pink and yellow freesia, white cyclamen, her thoughts ran on. . . . Could she rely on Hector's vision of his bride being stronger than Georgina's bitter memories of flannel nightgowns and pig-

tails? Yes; she would at last see herself in a lover's eyes; her hair, bright as new copper, loose on the pillow; her skin very white through the fragile lace.

Marylda found she had been humming Nannie Lovell's tune, "Sing me home said the long lost lady." They must have music as well as flowers. I will tell Robbie to watch for a light in the window.

She was in her bedroom, arranging the last of the mimosa, when Duncan's car came up the drive. She waited until she heard Rowan calling for her and ran downstairs. He was standing with his hands on Duncan's shoulder and they were laughing together. "Isn't she lovely?" he said proudly. "Note that delicate smudge of green on the side of her nose, it brings out the fleck of green in her eyes."

She took a compact from the pocket of her slacks and studied her face in the mirror. "It's only a bit of leaf," she protested, "I think it looks rather charming, an alfresco variation of the eighteenth century patch."

She smiled at Duncan, relieved that he was so obviously glad to have no secrets from Rowan. Emilie would not have been pleased to recognize that her glamor was so easily translated into secure affection, so this was another proof of progress as Marylda.

"Any fresh data about Rhoderick?" she asked. "I told Rowan you were trying to find more in the diaries."

"I found two pages stuck together; it had been done so neatly that unless I had been searching carefully through the right month I should never have noticed it." He handed her a typewritten page, "I copied it out for you: it's an extract from a letter written by the C.O. of his battalion."

Rowan read over her shoulder. " 'Captain Rhoderick Cairdrie was a most gallant officer, and would never have deliberately deprived Her Majesty of his services in the field had not the balance of his mind been disturbed by the debilitating effects of a sharp bout of fever, combined with ulceration of the tongue, which in spite of the assurances of the M.O. he believed to be cancer. He took his own life by shooting himself through the mouth. As you have already been informed, his death took place on the 19th June. I suggest you regard this information as strictly confidential, as in consideration of the relatives of a man who has shown himself tireless in duty and an example to all who served with him, I have taken it on my own responsibility to enter his

name in the casualty list as "Died of fever while on active service." ' "

"Oh, poor Rhoderick!" Marylda exclaimed. "But how did he break his oath? He didn't tell any one . . . I'm sure he didn't tell any one."

The men looked at her in consternation. "Tell any one what?" said Rowan.

"I don't want to talk about it yet; we'll know all the details tonight." She forced a smile. "We're going to be too busy this afternoon to have time for jitter-tummy. I want the wall taken down, the wall that was built to close the turret stair."

"Add crow bars, etc., to the list of equipment required," said Rowan to Duncan. "We can chuck the rubble from the battlement walk into the garden. Any more orders, milady?"

"I want you both to promise not to worry about me, and to be very tolerant if I have illogical ideas. I want you both to wear full dress tonight, though perhaps we had better not change until the servants have gone to bed."

"I'll pop over to Dalloch and fetch mine directly after lunch," said Duncan.

"We may be a bit slow," said Rowan gently, "but at least you can trust us to give you everything we've got . . . we both love you a great deal, my darling."

XV FEALTY

AT HALF PAST TEN Rowan returned from a reconnaissance and reported that the maids had gone to bed. Marylda stubbed out her cigarette and rose from the cushion on which she had been sitting, staring into the fire.

"All set," she said. "I'll go and change. If you don't mind I'd rather be alone until we start."

"Duncan and I will wait in my dressing-room till you want us," said Rowan. "He's left his things in there."

Marylda was surprised that she felt so calm, though already she could feel her pulse beating more rapidly. For the second time she put on the white satin dress which she had chosen to increase her resemblance to Emilie. She found it much easier to do her hair than it had been on New Year's Eve, almost as though her fingers were familiar with the way the pins must be placed to keep it high on her head. She fastened the emeralds around her neck, slid the heavy ring on her marriage finger.

Then she drew the curtains back from the window and stood looking up at the moon. "Please God let it be all right. Please God . . ."

She opened the door of the dressing-room and the two men followed her in silence down the gallery. Rowan wondered why she had made them open the turret stair as she appeared not to be going to use it.

Outside the nursery she handed him an electric torch and asked him to go down to the Hide and light the candles. "Come back when you have lit them," she added. "I want to see their light shining up when I go into the room."

She asked Duncan for a cigarette and took several puffs before she threw it out of the window. "All right?" he asked anxiously.

Her eyes were beginning to take on the remote expression he had seen in them after he found her lying on the floor of the room they were about to enter. "Are you all right?" he said more urgently.

"What did you say?" she spoke as though she had forgotten he was there. "Oh yes, I'm quite all right . . . only rather dissociated."

She smiled at Rowan, as he opened the door, and spoke in her normal voice. "Last minute instructions. The first bit may be rather unpleasant, but whatever happens you mustn't interrupt. I shall try to do what I did last night, give a kind of running commentary on what actually took place. It's possible that I may start talking in the first person, either as Hector or Rhoderick. If I seem to be running out of energy, concentrate very hard on giving me as much of yours as you can spare. Remember that the first stage will be me recording what happened; the second stage is more difficult. I've got to change the pattern of their thought and make them see and hear me—or rather Emilie—so vividly that it breaks the chain of repetition which is binding them here."

She kissed them both and walked ahead of them into the room. "Sit on the window seat," she said, "and smoke if you like but whatever happens don't interrupt."

She glanced up at the beam, and dragged the rocking-horse a few inches forward so that its saddle was exactly below the ring-bolt.

There was a long silence. Duncan fought against a desire to cough. Rowan felt cramp threatening the calf of his leg but managed to take off his shoe and bend his toes back without making a noise. The clock boomed a slow midnight.

"Hector and Rhoderick are in the room," said Marylda.

"They are standing close to the door. Both are in full dress. There is a rope hanging from the ceiling; there is a noose at the end of the rope. Hector is calm, but Rhoderick is close to hysteria. Hector is angry with him for behaving in such an unseemly manner. Hector considers that as the decision has been reached any delay is discreditable to them both . . .

"Rhoderick, please pull yourself together! I thought we had finished with arguments." Her voice now had the authority of a man who is used to being obeyed. "Yes, no doubt you think I am mad; however I am not interested in your opinion. I happen to believe that this is the only way in which I can defend my wife and my son, the Chief to whom in a few moments you will owe allegiance, from suffering as I have done in the last two years . . .

"Rhoderick, even if you were able to carry out your threat—knock me out and put me under what you call 'proper care'—what would be the result? I assure you that I am not insane; no doctor would certify me. I should, however, be driven to take the only other course open to me. I would make a full confession. You see, Rhoderick, there is no way in which you can deprive me of retribution. I will die by hanging; if you will not act as my executioner, then you condemn me to the extra unpleasantness of a trial and the services of the public hangman. Are you such a weak friend, Rhoderick? If so, how fortunate that you no longer disgrace the title of Master of Cairdrie, which you ceased to bear some seven and a half hours ago . . .

"You ask me to consider my son's feelings when he learns that his father was a suicide? Have you so soon forgotten the details of the service I demanded after you had given me your oath of fealty? Let me remind you, for soon I shall not find it so easy to make you listen—unless you also have the disability of the sight. You will pretend to have found my body, after life is extinct. You will go to Robbie and show him the note I have given you, demanding the last service you are able to render me: to carry my body to such place as you may consider convenient, and discharge a shot-gun at my face. This should be sufficient to convince the police that I died from a shooting accident, and will remove the awkward evidence of strangulation. Robbie will say he heard the shot at dawn. If the police find it difficult to believe that I wished to shoot at such an early hour, they will no doubt attribute it to sleeplessness attendant on my excitement at fatherhood. The less charitable will say that I was too drunk to know what I was doing . . . there are advantages in having a

reputation for a certain lack of sobriety. You will keep this note carefully; should you bungle the plans I have so carefully made you may require it to save your own neck from a rope.

"My plans have been very exact, Rhoderick. I have studied the subject of hanging with some care. It would have been better had the room been a couple of feet higher, but I think the plank I have set on the two trestles will provide sufficient drop. I gather that if the rope were unduly long it might pull my head from my body; a trifle which would not concern me, but would render your further operations more distressing—and possibly make them ineffective.

"Rhoderick, for God's sake control yourself! On you depends the future of my family. No one must be able to say I died as either a suicide or a murderer. Will you condemn me to quicklime in a prison yard? Will you deprive Georgina of even the little comfort she may find in putting flowers on my grave?

"Oh God, what can I say to give you courage! If you have no pity for me, have pity for Georgina and my son. If pity is not enough, will not your own fear drive you to obedience? Rhoderick, you have sworn to obey me: if you break your oath the weight of five hundred years of allegiance will haunt you. Rhoderick, no forgiveness of mine can save you from the carrion crows which will wait to watch your tongue rot from your mouth. Rhoderick, for the love of God, obey me!

"Poor devil! Oh God forgive him, and forgive me . . ."

Marylda was standing upright her eyes wide open. "Rhoderick is lying on the floor . . . the terrible sound is him sobbing . . . his head is hidden by his arms . . . his hands are pressed against his ears. Hector looks at him with compassion and then turns away as though he were very tired. He moves the trestles aside, and pulls the rocking-horse forward in their place. He tied its forelegs to the iron stand so that it is steady for him to mount.

"Now he is standing on the saddle with the noose around his neck. He draws his dirk, kisses the blade and slides it back into the sheath. Then he kicks the rocking-horse over. . . . His body is jerking . . . it is so terrible to watch it jerking. Hector instinctively tries to pull the rope away from his neck, then forces his hand down to rest on the hilt of his dirk. . . . His face is turning black, there is froth on his lips and his tongue bulges from his mouth . . ."

Duncan would have gone to her, but Rowan held him

back. "Don't move," he whispered, "we promised not to interrupt."

They saw that Marylda's eyes which had been staring at a point below the ring-bolt, were now looking towards the door.

"The pattern is repeating," she said. "The same pattern, over and over again; from the moment they come into the room until the rope stops creaking and there is no sound except Rhoderick sobbing. This is where you must both help me with everything you've got . . ."

Rowan and Duncan leaned forward, concentrating so hard on giving strength to her that sweat was cold on their foreheads.

She walked slowly across the room. "Listen to me Hector! Please listen! Hector . . . Hector!"

There was a long pause: then her expression changed from intense effort to gradually increasing serenity.

"Yes, my dear, I know you thought I was dead," she said gently, "but I am not a ghost. We are both alive, but I am not married to you. Georgina is your wife, and she is waiting for you to tell her how much you love her.

"But first you must tell Rhoderick that he has nothing to fear. . . . He won't listen to any one except you. . . . He only acted like a coward because he loved you too much to be able to do what you asked. What did you ask him to do? That doesn't matter: the details are too trivial to be worth remembering. . . . Tell Rhoderick that you are grateful for his loyalty, and ask him to forgive you. . . . Why should he forgive you? Because you tried to make him an instrument of the blind justice which you thought could conquer Emilie. You were very silly, for it would have been so much better to let yourself love Georgina . . .

"Thank you, dear Hector: now you can be happy because Rhoderick is free to go on his way in peace." She was speaking in the voice a mother uses to give confidence to a child. "My dear, if you don't believe me come down to the Hide and see for yourself . . . it is always better to see for yourself."

They watched her go down the steep steps, the light of candles shining as a nimbus around her dark hair. They went quietly forward and looked down into the little room. She was standing beside the stone shelf on which a body she once loved had mouldered for nearly fifty years.

"How could my body be here, Hector? I am alive, you can feel me holding your hand. . . . But I never hated you:

the hatred is only part of the nightmare from which you have awakened. Here there are only carnations and candles: I put them here because, long ago, some one was unhappy in this place. Now there is no more sorrow; only the kind flames and the living flowers."

They saw her lead some one they could not see back to the nursery where the rocking-horse rested in the moonlight. She stood aside to let Hector, impatient to return to his love, run down the turret stair.

She opened the window and set the silver sconce on the wide sill. "A signal to Robbie," she said. "He is waiting to pipe them home."

Hand in hand, the three whose love for each other was the key that had unlocked the prisons of the lonely, looked out across the quiet fields of Cloud. Together they listened to the proud music, as Robbie played his Laird and his Lady across the river.

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