



"A Daring Subject—
Masterfully Told"

THE TORMENTED

Theodore Pratt

A detailed illustration of a woman's face, tilted slightly to the right. She has dark, wavy hair and is wearing red lipstick. Her right hand is raised to her forehead, with fingers spread. She is wearing a ring on her ring finger and a bracelet on her wrist. The background consists of concentric, swirling bands of color, including red, orange, yellow, and green, creating a sense of motion or a vortex.

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150

THE TORMENTED

By
THEODORE PRATT



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Foreword

by Richard H. Hoffman, M.D.
Renowned New York Psychiatrist

This is an important book. It presents an authentic picture of nymphomania in a novel about a girl named Zona. It will be, no doubt, an enlightening, even educational experience for many to read this story of a girl who wanted to be a moral person and a good wife, but who found herself chained by insatiable, never-ending desire.

It is gratifying to me that the author has been able to present a true picture of nymphomania, and to do so with compassion and skill. Thus, while the story is clinically accurate, it is not burdened with scientific jargon, and is better for this simplicity. Certainly the wider the knowledge of man's ills, whether they be of the mind or body, the greater the progress toward cure.

Chapter One

IN THE FINAL EDITIONS of the New York morning newspapers of July 15, 1932, under sensational headlines, one news event was given prominent space on all front pages. One paper's account ran like this:

How a young woman remained for a week with the body of a murdered man was revealed late last night when police broke into the apartment of Frances Carver on East 37th Street. The body, which has not yet been identified, had been there for two weeks altogether, according to the medical examiner. Death was due to strychnine poisoning, with murder virtually certain. Up until a late hour last night the whereabouts of Miss Carver were unknown.

Police entered the apartment at the request of the janitor of the building, who last saw Miss Carver about a week ago, which means that she must have occupied the apartment during the previous week while the man lay dead.

In her bedroom, at a jaunty green dressing table, whose mirrors pertly reflected the sight three times, lay sprawled the body of a medium-sized and well-dressed man.

The lower part of the body rested on a flat, oblong seat. The top was flung across the dressing table. The feet did not touch the floor, the legs being contracted up toward the torso, which seemed still to writhe in agony. One of the arms was twisted up under the side in a curious way, while the other clawed out stiffly, grotesquely, among shattered bottles and jars on the dressing table. The odor of decomposition mingled with that of spilled perfume. It was plain that the man died a horrible death, and that he knew he was going to die.

The dead man's pockets were found to be empty,

with evidence that their contents had been removed after death. No scrap of paper with any writing on it was found in the three-room apartment. Every object and all furniture had been wiped clean of fingerprints.

Woman's clothing, from which the labels were missing, was found in a littered condition, showing signs of hasty departure. The garbage pail in the kitchen was choked with empty food tins, a whisky bottle, and cigarette stubs, most of them half-smoked, some with a ring of lipstick around them.

The only clue the police have in their hands is an oil portrait of Miss Carver, which hung above the mantelpiece. This, though unsigned, has been identified as having been painted by the late Henry Dight, dean of American artists until his death last winter. A check of Dight's intimates brought forth no information of any model or sitter of the painter's answering to the description of the picture.

The portrait is that of a beautiful young woman, hardly more than a girl, with dark red hair, a soft, sweet face, and a warmth to her belied only by the eyes, in which there is a certain hardness and bitterness.

The janitor of the apartment house said that Miss Carver had black hair, but that the portrait is undoubtedly of her. Little further is known about Miss Carver, who is now being sought. She had occupied the apartment a little over a year, taking it in June 1931. She always seemed to have plenty of money, in spite of the depression.

According to the janitor, Miss Carver spent frequent nights out, sometimes not returning until early morning or noon. She never had many visitors. Occasionally a man came to see her, often a messenger boy. The janitor didn't know if the murdered man was the one who visited Miss Carver, saying he never paid much attention to what he looked like.

Police express doubt that Frances Carver is the young woman's real name. Evidently she dyed her

hair to change her appearance. An endeavor is being made to trace her movements.

The events leading up to this account began nine years before at a young people's party.

A voice sounded from inside the clothes closet. It came out through a crack left by the door and flung itself at the silent, waiting group. The words rose high and hopefully, and then, ridiculously, they broke, because the boy's voice was changing.

"Zona Dodd! The postmaster has a letter for Zona Dodd."

Fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds began an abrupt, rude chatter. They looked and cackled at a girl who sat straight in her chair near the door. They called to her.

Zona flushed. She felt the blood moving all through her body. But she made herself smile, spreading her full, smooth young mouth, of which she was all at once acutely conscious. She felt weak. She rose and for an instant was strong. Then she was weak again, her head swimming in a hot stream. She stood irresolutely while the others called at her louder than ever. She tossed her soft shining red bob as if she didn't care. She cared a lot as she strode forward and entered the clothes closet.

Inside, after Zona closed the door, it was pitch-black. She could sense rather than see the boy there. She was hoping he'd call her. She was wanting him to. He was good-looking.

There were whispers in the darkness.

"'lo, Zone."

"Hello, Jimmie."

"I been waitin' for a chance to call you."

"It's awfully dark in here."

"Sure is."

"I guess it's better that way."

"Well, I got a letter for you."

"Well . . ."

He made a movement. She felt him nearer. She tensed for the peck on the cheek or on the nose or in the eye that you usually got when playing Post Office. She'd been

kissed that way before. Not by Jimmie, but by others. It wasn't much. You got more excited at the idea than anything else. No great thing happened.

He stopped. He wasn't doing anything. "Listen," he said, "you don't have to."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean not just because of the game. Some girls don't. They just pretend when they go out that they been kissed. See?"

"Oh."

"I let the girl decide. That's how I do it."

"You're nice, Jimmie."

"But gee, I'd like to kiss you, Zone."

This was something new. It was different. It quickened her. She stared at him. He wasn't visible in the darkness, yet she could see him clearly in her mind's eye. In this way she admired his curly black hair, his dark eyes, his big shoulders. She thought they had been there a long time now. The crowd outside would begin calling soon, kidding them. She could hardly say what she wanted to say.

"We—we might as well."

He touched her. Before he brushed her cheek with his lips he touched her. His arm was around her, finding her. Then, all at once, unexpectedly, surprisingly, his mouth was straight on hers, and for a long moment there was a sudden strange electrifying sweetness.

It was gone, but almost instantly returned. It was greater this time and lasted even longer. Something surged within her that had not surged before. It rose against her and carried her along. She pushed at it, though her knees sank beneath her. She stopped it. But she couldn't stop it. The sweetness descended upon her again. It was almost devastating. It made her frantic. It made her faint. Her heart raced on the first part of a terrible journey.

She trembled when free again. She could hear his breathing. She could hear herself gasping. "Oh," she said, "Oh!"

"What's the matter? I only kissed you. What's the matter, Zone?"

She didn't answer. She whirled and fumbled for the doorknob. She found it. She flung wide an opening of escape. She stepped forward to shouting, leering faces. They had been shouting for some time. She hadn't heard. She stared at them, wide-eyed. She listened to the cruel things they said.

She couldn't stand them. She hesitated, then raced past them, out of the house, up the street, away.

She ran, carrying the sweetness with her. In spite of herself she had it, could not rid herself of it as her long legs reached out for the earth. The earth was the only thing that could ease her, saving her life as she devoured it desperately.

Zona ran until it was hard to breathe. Still walking rapidly, she turned to look, like a young wild thing, for pursuit. She was relieved to see that no one from the party was following. She was afraid someone might. That would be awful. It would be the worst if Jimmie came after her. She couldn't stand that. She didn't want to think of him.

She wished only to be alone with what had happened to her. She knew what occurred when you were kissed like that and felt like that. Some girl who knew had told her. From what the girl said, Zona thought it took nearly a year. Anyway, a long time. Toward the last you got big and stuck out horribly at the stomach and you couldn't hide it. Not possibly. She had seen women like that, and she knew not even a corset could help. You were sick, too. That was at the very beginning. You couldn't hide that, either.

She felt a little sick already. The shame and fear of her predicament swept over her in a mighty wave. It staggered her, and she had to stop and gather her senses frantically together. She stared at the street she was on. It was calm in the soft warm evening. She saw it as something familiar that she had known before. All her girlhood she had trod this street. She knew it. It knew her. It was a part of Cranston, which she knew, too, because she was born here. Cranston was a town in New York

State, forty miles from the city of New York. It was good and comforting to know, even a little, where she was.

Zona walked on quickly, pulling the skirt of her short blue dress over her legs to hide as much of herself as possible. She wanted to go home, but she couldn't do that. She had left the party before the ice cream and cake were served. If she went home now, her mother would want to know why she returned so early.

The only thing to do was to walk around until the earliest time it was plausible to return from the party. Later than that, just to be sure. She must remember to avoid the street where the Republican Club was located. Her father was there and might be in front or coming out. He would call to her and show her to the other men, exaggerating her as his daughter, exhibiting her as if he had done something spectacular and special. She hated her father when he did that.

She walked, terrorized, her mind casting about wildly for what she would do. Maybe she would get married. She didn't think of anyone in particular when she thought this. Just that marriage would fix it up, would make it, magically, all right. It would take away the shame that had so suddenly and without warning been thrown over her. She wondered whether or not she was old enough to get married. In three more months she would be seventeen. That seemed old enough. Lots of girls married at seventeen. Lots. She tried to think of some she knew and couldn't. It wasn't old enough. It wouldn't be accepted.

She was caught in disgrace and she ought to throw herself in front of the car coming down the street and kill herself. The idea was dreadfully attractive. I ought to do it, she thought. I *will* do it. The car's coming now. It's coming fast. Just as it gets here I'll fall right in front of it, right under the wheels. It's coming, coming, coming! Our Father Who art in Heaven . . .

But it was past. She hadn't done it. She felt herself perspiring under the arms, and her throat was so dry that she could hardly swallow.

She saw a street clock that said it was nine-thirty; still too early to go home. She looked to see where she was, and

found she had come farther than she thought. She could go home after all, because it would take her half an hour to get there. Certainly twenty minutes. Anyway, fifteen.

She turned, retracing her steps for several blocks. She tried to walk slowly, but it seemed that she had never walked so fast in her life.

She arrived at her street. She entered it. Reluctantly she approached the brown wooden house. It was an ugly house, because her father worked in the City Hall and couldn't afford anything better. He often spoke of moving into a modern house, out on the edge of the city, in the new district. But it was only talk.

Through the windows she saw her mother sitting before the piano in the cramped living room. Her mother was playing, and once or twice her lips moved in song. For a moment Zona stood looking at her, at this woman with a pointed little face that could be her own. Only this one had some lines in it, and the eyes, the color of bright ash, were troubled a little, even when forcing themselves to be serene. Zona felt her own face was like that now.

She went in. Her mother stopped playing, turned her gray head, turned completely about on the bench before the piano. "Hello, dear. You're back early."

"It isn't so early." She stood in the doorway trying not to show anything.

"Did you have a good time?"

"It was all right." She wanted to throw herself at her mother's feet and tell her all about it. She was sure her mother could help, do something. But she clung tightly to her secret, unable to let it out.

"Who brought you home?"

"No one."

"Didn't one of the boys come with you?"

"No, Mother."

"But you shouldn't be out on the street alone at night, Zona."

"I didn't want anybody to come with me, Mother."

"Is anything the matter?"

"Of course not."

"You seem upset."

"Well, I'm not." She knew she shouldn't be so short with her mother, but she couldn't help it. "I'm tired. I'm going to bed. All those games . . ." She started to move away.

Her mother's voice called her back. "Zona, aren't you going to kiss me good night?"

Zona didn't want to have anything more to do with kisses. Not now. But she returned dutifully.

Her mother looked at her. "You've never gone to bed without that, darling. What is it? Did something happen at the party?"

"Nothing, Mother! I'm just tired, that's all." She was already hurrying to escape. "Good night."

Upstairs, in her narrow little room, Zona undressed in the dark. Without washing or brushing her teeth she got into bed. Her head pounded, and for the first time she realized she had a headache. Her body was taut between the sheets. She lay for a time on her side, with her face to the wall, trying to think but only feeling, until she was caught in a nightmare. She started to grow, her feet stretching out, making her miles long, while automobiles passed over her, cutting her into quivering sections. Then she buried her face in the pillow. "I'm going to have a baby," she sobbed. "I'm going to have a baby."

Chapter Two

IN THE MORNING Zona lay in bed for a long time, thinking about her predicament. Luckily today was Saturday and there wasn't any school. She wouldn't have to face the crowd for two days. She must keep secret what had happened to her. She would never let it out, never. She must find out more about it. She thought of her biology books. The teacher had given talks about flowers and frogs and illustrated them on the blackboard. But that was about flowers and frogs. She was a human being. It was confusing. Still, there was more in the book than they had yet studied. She might learn something from that.

She got up, dressed and washed hurriedly, and raced down to the hall table, where she had left her school-books. Her very first glance told her that the book she wanted wasn't there. But she undid the strap and went through them anyway, as if the action might miraculously produce the book. It didn't. The biology was in her desk at school. She would have to wait until Monday to see it.

Her father had already gone to his office, and her mother, with a white cloth tied over her hair, was busy with the housework. Zona prepared her own breakfast, and when her mother looked in upon her she forced herself to be bright and gay. While doing the dishes later, in her worry Zona decided there were other books. She hurried to finish her Saturday-morning duties, and then went to the bookcase in the living room to take out the volume of the old encyclopedia that contained subjects beginning with the letter B. Carrying this to her room, she began flipping its pages feverishly.

She was keenly disappointed to find no entry under "Baby." There was, however, an article about baby farming, which she read with morbid fascination. She learned terrible things about illegitimate children and how they were placed with farmers who made it a business to take them in but usually allowed them to die from neglect.

Sometimes they were poisoned. She wasn't certain what constituted an illegitimate child, except that it was something shameful. Hers would probably be that way, but she resolved never to allow it to go to a baby farmer. She would keep it and cherish it. Above all, it would never be kissed by a boy the way she had been.

Zona next turned to her dictionary for enlightenment. She looked up all the pertinent words she could think of, but obtained little or nothing from any of them. She didn't get what she wanted: exactly how it was brought about, what happened afterward. Guiltily she tried to find words she had heard boys shouting or had seen written on the back wall of the school, but they weren't in the dictionary.

She must know, she must.

In the afternoon Gracie Warren, at whose house the party had been held, called on the telephone. Zona expected Gracie's demand. She dreaded it.

"Say, Zone, what got into you last night?"

"Nothing got into me."

"Well, if you don't call running out on us that way anything!"

"I was—"

"We thought you'd come back. We waited for you with the ice cream. Where'd you go?"

"Oh, I came home."

"I guess you got kissed by Jimmie Wilson, all right."

"It wasn't that." Zona lowered her voice so her mother couldn't hear. "I wasn't feeling very well."

"I'll bet it was Jimmie."

"It wasn't, Gracie, I swear it wasn't. He was all right. Only the air in there was sort of stuffy. I felt funny before I came. It was something I ate, I guess."

"Well, that's too bad, Zona." Gracie sounded as if she wasn't altogether taken in. There was a pause. "Why'n't you come over this afternoon?"

"I still don't feel very good, Gracie. Maybe I'll see you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow the family's driving to New York to see some relations. I got to go along."

"That's too bad."

"Well, see you in school."

"O.K. G'by."

"G'by."

That night her father came home late and troubled. Usually he returned on Saturdays grumbling and loftily protesting because he had to work on those afternoons. Tonight he was silent. It wasn't like him. Something had happened, something disturbed him. Zona was petrified when he glanced at her and turned away, as if he disapproved of her.

Did he know? How could he know? Was he going to tell? Maybe he didn't know. Or could he read it in her face? She saw herself put out of the house, disgraced, to roam the streets, homeless, friendless in her great trouble. She clenched her teeth, sucked in her breath. She sprang, at her father's demand, to get him the newspaper.

Her father was a handsome man. At least, you got that impression when you first looked at him. To see his profile made you certain that here was a personality. His thick brown hair flowed strongly back from his high forehead. He had a protruding brow; his entire face was carved sharply. But when you looked a second time and heard him speak a little, you saw that he was a shell. There was something missing in the character of his mouth; something that should be in his eyes wasn't there. His stature, short, narrow at the shoulders, did not fit the promise of his head. These contradictions progressed down his body to his feet, which were ridiculously small, and gave him a dapper appearance, a pathetic air of lingering youth.

He had worked at the City Hall most of his life. For two years he had regarded it as his right someday to be city clerk. Somehow another man obtained the job after the recent elections. Since then he had been more troubled than ever. His political talk had become more extensive and more violent. He meant to do something about the outrage, something big.

Zona was relieved to learn, when they sat down to dinner, that it was this, and not her own grievous affair,

that possessed her father. He began to talk as soon as they sat down, as if stoking the flow of his resentment.

"It's a crying shame," he announced, "that such a man as Thomas Keefe is the city clerk of this city. I said that the minute he came into office, and I'll say it until the day he goes out. Incompetent, lazy, good-for-nothing—"

"Will," Zona's mother said gently.

"I'll say it, Em. And nobody can stop me from saying it!"

"But you let it bother you so much, Will. Why not let well enough alone?"

Will Dodd glared at his wife. "'Well enough?'" he demanded, shoving a forkful of mashed potatoes into his mouth and speaking indistinctly for a moment. "Do you call it well enough when a man like that— Do you know that he hasn't been near the office for three days? No. He plays golf while I do all the work. He came in tonight about five—about five, mind you—and wanted things. That's what made me late. That, and telling him what I thought of him."

"Will, did you do that?"

"I certainly did! And I'm going to let some of the voters of this city know—"

"But Mr. Keefe might—he might not like that, Will. He could make it difficult for you."

"He doesn't dare try anything. I'm in too well at the Club. I control too many votes. I guess I'm in politics enough here to stand on my own ground."

"But the Republicans didn't back you for the position, Will. You must remember that."

"I remember it, all right. And they're going to be sorry they didn't back me. Pretty soon, too. When a few truths come out."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I know a few things." He didn't say what they were. He was mysterious. He continued to attack the man he worked for. Endlessly he went on, lording it over his family, browbeating them in effect but not in fact.

Emma Dodd let him do it, permitted him to shout his righteousness, because she knew, from the past, that noth-

ing ever came of it. She feared the day something might, but took courage because her husband had been so long in the city's employ that it would be difficult to let him go.

Zona listened, adding nothing, keeping silent because she was glad that the secret things her father knew did not include her.

By Sunday afternoon her father's objections to Thomas Keefe had ceased to be voluble. It was a habit of his to entertain an enthusiasm for a bitterness or for a great achievement he had in mind, and then suddenly forget it. He became expansive and ready to serve. This took the form of an invitation. "Em," he asked his wife, "how would you and Zona like to go to the movies?"

Emma thought it would be nice, but Zona said she didn't want to go. She had to be alone, to crawl into herself and enjoy brooding and worrying about her trouble. Not even the movies were attractive enough to tear her away from this.

"Come, Zona," her father urged, "you always like the pictures."

Zona thanked him but shook her head. "You and Mother go."

"But you'll be all alone," her mother pointed out.

"I don't mind. I'll be all right."

They went, her father annoyed that his treat was not appreciated the way he thought it should be, her mother reluctant and a little hesitant.

Alone, Zona was miserable. She wished she had gone. She wandered restlessly about the house, feeling wrong, then justifying herself fiercely that she was right. About what, she didn't exactly know.

She faced Monday with defiance for the crowd and eagerness for her biology book. She managed to get at the book during the study hour. She hurried into its contents when she should have been preparing her algebra lesson. The farther along in the book she searched, the more technical it became about plants and flowers, or about the skeleton of man. There was something about frogs that excited her interest:

"The father frog enters the body of the mother frog and in this way fertilizes the eggs."

What did that mean? Did the father frog crawl into the mother frog somehow and then spit out something? Or what?

Aghast, she saw that she wouldn't learn what she must know from that source.

She didn't have to use defiance against her friends as much as she expected. Gracie seemed to have forgotten about the incident at the party. Some other girls twitted her, but hurriedly, between classes, and it didn't last long. Zona dreaded a meeting with Jimmie and took every means to avoid it. That day she succeeded. It was a relief.

The next day she ran smack into him as each rounded a corner at the same time. They stared at each other. Their contact in the clothes closet rose and crackled between them. It existed again. He looked a little concerned, a little amused. She didn't want to mind, or at least not show him that she minded. She wanted to pass it off. But something burned rebelliously within her when he spoke.

"Listen, Zona, I didn't—"

"You did!"

"But—"

"Don't ever speak to me again!"

"Well, if you feel that way about it, all *right!*"

They flung away from each other.

For the rest of the school week Zona bore her agony and guarded it. She caught her mother watching her with an anxious expression. Her father was oblivious. But she erected a tense wall to keep both of them out from her confidence, camouflaging the surface of the wall so that they might not even see that it existed.

In her more frantic moments she thought of going to see the family doctor. Dr. Bromley could tell her, could help her. Then everything would be all right. Or at least better. She would ask him to keep it a secret.

But she didn't go to see him. There was some doubt about what he would do. She couldn't trust anyone.

On Friday, after school, Zona came home and went to

her room. She threw herself on her white iron bed. It had been a week now since this began. The terror was beginning to tell on her. Her face was getting peaked and she was startled at little noises. Soon it would be worse, when she began to be sick. So far she hadn't been ill, though a couple of times she had thought she was going to be. She wouldn't be able to stand that.

She remembered how she almost threw herself in front of the speeding automobile, and many times during the week she had felt the same urge. She hadn't done it, but something like it would have to be done. It was the only way out. She had to kill herself. She resolved to kill herself. She lay on her bed with this sharp decision in her.

She jumped when the door opened and her mother came in quietly. She watched, not speaking, while her mother came over to her. She felt the bed move when her mother sat on it by her.

"Zona, I've come to talk to you."

"What about?" The tenderness in her mother's voice made Zona antagonistic.

"Something is troubling you, dear."

"There isn't anything."

"But I've seen it. And I met Gracie's mother on the street today. She told me what happened at the party last week. She said she didn't know exactly what it was, but you were playing Post Office and one of the boys kissed you and you ran home."

Zona made a sound of exasperation and jerked her head to one side.

Her mother spoke again. "You can tell Mother anything. Now, what is it?"

"Nothing."

"Is it something you don't know?"

"No. Of course not."

This time it sounded as if her mother spoke with difficulty. "I only want to help you. Please understand that, dear. From what Mrs. Warren said, there's only one thing I can think of. It's time—that is, there are certain things you ought to be told."

"I know all that."

"Zona! How can you know?"

"Oh, books. The girls."

"But are you sure you know?"

"Of course."

Her mother hesitated this time, seemed at a loss, then persisted: "Some girls have wrong ideas. It's important that you should know the truth. If you do already, then everything is all right. I know it's hard to talk about these things. But you must tell me what you know, dear. Or let me explain."

Zona muttered her rebellion. She wanted her mother to go away. At the same time she saw, cunningly, that here might be the chance to learn what she must know. She had no welcome for the process of knowledge, wished it over and done with, wished to have only the kernel she needed, not the bringing of it.

After a moment, still prone, and as if speaking to the wall, Zona forced herself to live up to her claim. Jerkily, and with solemn shame in her voice, with utter care not to connect herself with any of it, she related her ideas.

When she was finished her mother gave a sigh of sympathy that was at the same time a self-accusation of guilt. "You poor child," she said. "I should have told you before, long before. Somehow . . . Dear, it isn't like that."

"It isn't?" Zona asked the question of the wall, dully. But she was surprised, expectant, and afraid.

Her mother told her how it was. Slowly, her voice trembling a little, she told her. Sometimes her mother expressed herself well, sometimes crudely. For a long time Zona listened. She asked no question, and because she did not reply to her mother's inquiries about understanding, her mother went over some things again, making sure, with anxious distress, that everything was clear.

At the end, when the slow amazement welling up in Zona leaped to a high, singing relief, a great release, she twisted about and sat up. She flung her arms about her mother's neck. Tears were cold on her hot cheeks as she cried, "Oh, Mother, it's wonderfull! It's wonderfull!"

Chapter Three

ZONA WAS NO MORE concerned exclusively with herself. The way she thought of Jimmie Wilson was strange to her. Now that she knew it was possible to kiss like that without harm, she remembered the sweetness of it vividly. She regarded herself as a fool, regretting and feeling ashamed of her ridiculous misconception. Seeing herself through Jimmie's dark eyes, gauging herself the way he must see her, she wanted to rehabilitate herself with him.

There wasn't much time, for in three weeks Jimmie would be graduated, and everybody knew he would go away to camp this summer and next year to college. Zona would remain behind, for she was only a junior.

She wanted to tell Jimmie she didn't mean that about not speaking to her any more. She wanted him to know. She started writing him a note about it, to be passed to him in class. She didn't finish it. She wrote another, completed it, resolved to give it to him the next day. She failed. It was too much against the rules of what she understood could and couldn't be done. Waiting for him to speak, to open relations once again, was a ready, eager agony. She was alert to it throughout all her wakeful hours.

But he was taking her at her word. He was still angry. Once she smiled at him, inviting him, hungry for recognition. He didn't see, or pretended not to see. Thought she could treat him that way, and then expect to make up, did she? Well, she couldn't. The little fool. The fool, the fool!

Her work toward reconciliation, so carefully planned, so fervently desired, was not effective. The more futile it proved, the greater her wish for it grew. It fixed itself on the Senior Prom. To that she would go with him. To that he would invite her. They would dance together. He would take her home, and then, on the porch, perhaps there would be the sweetness again.

She waited. She made excuses to Ernest Marshall, who asked her to the dance. She wasn't sure she could go. She would let him know. The pain and disappointment when she learned that Jimmie had asked another girl, the popular valedictorian of the class, were a shock. With little enthusiasm she told Ernest she could go.

Zona sat in the school auditorium, with Ernest self-conscious in his tuxedo on one side of her and Gracie on the other side, watching the seniors receive their diplomas. Her hands were damp with waiting for him to get up from his place on the platform in the front row, and go to receive his roll of paper. She resented him. She felt proud of him. I won't clap for him, she thought. I won't. Then he was going forward, and she was beating her hands so furiously together that Gracie leaned over and hissed in her ear, "I guess he kissed you, all right!"

Gracie's taunting but willing understanding conspired with her later in the gymnasium. Zona had left places open on her card for a last-minute request by Jimmie. The last minutes passed, and he hadn't asked for a dance. "Listen," Gracie told her, "I'll give you mine with him."

"Oh, but he won't—"

"Don't be an airedale. I mean, who you got for the seventh?"

"Ernest."

"I'll take him and cut Jimmie. That's the kind of a friend I am."

"But how do I get Jimmie?"

"You just be convenient when he comes looking for me, see?"

"Gracie!"

Zona was not only convenient but conspicuous when Jimmie came looking. She sat, splashed with the green design of her dress, young arms bare, soft throat flushed, when he arrived. From the corner of her eye she watched him scowl at seeing Gracie dancing with someone else. His gaze turned to her, but he gave her no consideration. He went away, unaware of the racing of her heart, oblivious of the humiliation he caused. For her pains she was planted a wallflower, trying to hold her flaming head

high, through an interminable dance.

That summer she saw Ernest. She was his girl. He wasn't her fellow. Her fellow was away at camp.

Ernest was pleasant, not so bad, good enough to take her places, sometimes to be with. But he was short, there wasn't much positiveness to his sandy personality, and he was shy. He didn't talk much; he was content to listen to her. He tried too soon and awkwardly to kiss her, and she didn't let him. Then, in a burst of thrusting Jimmie out of her life, she wanted him to. It was a long time before he summoned the courage for another attempt. Timidly he made the thing a request instead of just going ahead.

His embraces were nice. They were proper and correct and worshiping. Zona thought she had caught the sweetness again. Then she knew she hadn't. The welling within her was there, but it wasn't the same as before, the way it had been with Jimmie. She tried to make it the same by returning Ernest's endeavors until they were both gasping and breathing hard. His touch remained polite, though his hands, holding her, caressing her, moved tentatively in new directions. She admired him for respecting her, she thought he was fine, and she told him, "You're sweet, Ernest."

"You're wonderful, Zona."

They were in each other's arms again, but he was as hesitant as before. She was surprised at her disappointment in him, her contempt when he simply did the same things over and over again. Not that she would let him do anything else. She wouldn't. She wasn't that kind of girl. But couldn't he even *try*?

Jimmie, whom she knew would dare, she saw once between camp and college. Suddenly he was riding by on the street in the rear seat of an open Ford with some other boys. Bronzed and straight and laughing, he waved to her for a glorious moment. He called out something. She was so startled and pleased that she stopped stock-still, her heart thumping.

But that was all. She didn't know what he had called. She didn't see him again. He was gone.

Vaguely Zona realized there was something the matter with her father. She felt it more than she knew it. She had always felt it, along with her mother, though they never mentioned it to each other. She didn't want to have anything wrong with her father. Her mother didn't admit or recognize it. For years her mother had tolerated him, made the best of him, buoyed him in his lack. Often she permitted him to assert himself when he had only absurdity to state. But he was the head of the family. It was his place to lead. Sometimes Zona thought he was allowed the privilege for her sake, so that she would respect him.

Zona was home from school with a cold, curled in an armchair in the living room reading a book. She heard a man's step, and then her father came in. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. He peered about furtively. Nervously he greeted her, asking, "Where's your mother?"

"She's at the store, Father."

"Oh. Then she isn't here." Relieved, he sat down and explained, "I'm taking a little vacation from the office, Zona. That's why I'm home so early. They're getting to appreciate me down there a little more. It's about time, too, that they realized they can't run things without giving me more time of my own."

Zona stared at him, wide-eyed, not saying anything. She could sense that this wasn't true, that something dreadful had happened. She was afraid.

Her father became bold. He told her more about his importance. He boasted that the city relied on him. He was the only one who knew all the ins and outs of its functions. He was showing them a few things. He'd show them more, too, before he was through. All those numbskulls. From the mayor down. Especially this Thomas Keefe.

In the midst of Thomas Keefe, Emma Dodd returned. The bundles in her arms slipped and nearly fell at the sight of her husband home before a working day was over. "Will," she said in quiet alarm. "Will."

"Hello, Em." He was elaborately casual. "I was just telling Zona how—"

"What is it?"

"Why, it's nothing, Em. Just that—"

"You've lost your job."

"Nothing like that, Em. Nothing like that at all."

"You have."

"Of course I haven't. Not the way you think."

"I can see it in your face." Her own stricken face turned to her daughter. "Zona, you'd better go upstairs."

Obediently, Zona unfolded her legs from the chair, rose, and went upstairs. She couldn't help hearing their voices as she sat in her room with her book before her, not reading.

Her mother took things into her own hands. "Now, then, what is it? What's happened?"

"They'll be begging to have me back in no time at all, Em. You wait and—"

"Tell me exactly what happened."

"Well, I had a little argument with Keefe, that's all. Don't think any more about it. Except that he can carry this high-and-mighty business too far, that's all."

"And you were told to leave? You were let go?"

"It won't last, Em. He'll forget it all tomorrow. They can't—"

"What were you arguing about?"

"Why, I was mentioning a few things about my record with the city, and I happened to say something about the time some of the voters spoke of me for city clerk. Then he—"

"Where is he now? Is he still at the office?"

"I suppose so. But what are you going to do, Em?"

Emma Dodd was at the telephone. She called a familiar number.

"Em, you can't do that."

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Keefe, please."

"I don't think you should do that, Em."

"Was there anything else? Anything you haven't told me?"

"Well, he called me a lot of names, and I wasn't going to let him do that, so— Em, you can't do anything about it. I don't think—"

Emma spoke over the phone, respectfully, almost humbly, with Keefe. She wanted to see him. Yes, she knew. She didn't blame him. She believed he had every right. But she would like to talk it over. She would come right away, if it was all right. What? Oh. Yes, of course. She understood. It was kind of him to think of that. She was grateful.

"What'd he say, Em? What's he going to do?"

"He said he'd come here rather than make me go down there."

"Come here? Well, I don't want him here! Not after what he's done! You shouldn't've fixed it that way. You shouldn't've done that at all."

"Do you realize we haven't got a hundred dollars in the bank?"

"What's that matter? That isn't what I'm talking about. I can handle my own affairs without—"

"All your life at the same job, and now you can't hold that. Because you've got to babble and boast about how great you are. About how you would do things! About how you, *you* should hold the job of the man who gives you yours!"

"I guess I know what I'm doing!"

"You'll do what I say! What I can do!"

Upstairs, in her room, Zona sat in the growing darkness. She had never heard her mother speak like that. She had never known her father to be so querulous. It seemed a terrible thing not to have a hundred dollars in the bank.

Later there was another voice down there, a gruff, reluctant voice that her mother worked on, pleaded with, cajoled, promised. Mr. Keefe said he didn't care what her father said about him, but that crabbing all the time must stop. Otherwise there wouldn't be a next time. Her mother arranged for the crabbing to stop. In this she had the abject support of her father, who all at once seemed a strange person, far away and shameful.

"The trouble with you is, you're too naïve."

Gracie, at eighteen, told Zona, nearly eighteen, about

men. Zona wasn't sure of what naïve meant, except that it appeared to be a lack she had.

"You think men are like knights," Gracie went on. "Sir Galahads fighting in your honor. Huh! They're fighting *for* your honor."

Zona was shocked. Gracie sounded so experienced. She was known among the crowd, with her blonde curls and pert face, as a hot necker. She was supposed to have done something more, but Zona didn't believe it. The girls talked too much.

"You can't sit back and let them come to you," Gracie continued. "You've got to go out after them."

"But that's chasing them," Zona objected. "You can't do that."

"Oh, I don't mean you run down the street after them. There's lots of things you can do. Without them ever knowing."

"Well, I don't see how."

"Listen, Zona, a girl can get any man she wants. If she knows how. The harder they are, the less they know how they fall."

"I guess it doesn't always work."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh . . ."

"You still thinking about *him*?"

"You won't tell anybody? Ever?"

"Of course not!"

"Well, then, I'm crazy about him."

"All right, we'll fix it." Gracie ruminated about the best way. "Let's see. He's in college. That means he thinks a lot of himself. He won't want anything from a kid, like a letter telling how you feel, I mean. He'll want something that's pretty sophisticated. I'll tell you: The best thing for you to do is send him an Easter card."

"An Easter card?"

"One with some pash on it. And just sign your name. Don't write anything else. That'll get him. You see."

Gracie's formula worked. Magically, it brought a letter from Jimmie. Under his exact college address, printed grandly on his personal stationery, he wrote he was glad

to get her card. He didn't say anything about the past, about their quarrel. He told her everything he did at college. He was scrubbing for baseball manager, whatever that meant, and he had made the freshman swimming team. She could see him, lean and lithe, leading a furious race, back and forth the length of a green pool, while the crowd cheered him on.

Her answer told him that college must be wonderful. She wished she could go, but she couldn't. When she got her diploma this June, she guessed she wouldn't go to school any more. She related the details of her own activities, and their correspondence became a careful, exhaustive history of the vast things happening to them. It was so acutely impersonal as to be extremely intimate.

Zona knew when Jimmie came home for the summer vacation. She was hurt when he didn't come to see her, or even call on the telephone. Three whole days and he hadn't given her a thought. She kept prepared for him, primed even in the daytime, looking in the mirror of her little compact a hundred times to be sure that her nose wasn't shiny. She used a little more lipstick than her mother allowed, chewing it off hastily when there was danger of its being seen. She didn't make any dates with Ernest so that nothing would interfere.

The fourth evening he arrived, with a horrible sliding of locked wheels on asphalt, as he brought his father's car to an abrupt stop. Then he was jumping out, leaping at the leaping in her. She tried to keep her voice from being tremulous when she responded to his greeting. She found she couldn't say much; she had dried up. There was a pause while he looked at her critically.

"Say, you're prettier than ever. Why didn't you let me know?"

"How's college?" She wondered if she had shown her pleasure at the compliment too much by changing the subject so abruptly.

"It's smooth."

He was looking smooth. He was bigger, his clothes fitted him better, there was more fire to him.

"How about taking a ride?"

"That'll be fine."

Zona told her mother where she was going, and they were off.

They drove along the road leading out of town, chattering to each other of things they had done, were doing, wanted to do. They said nothing of anything between each other. After his first statement, which arranged their status, told them precisely where they stood, the subject was taboo. She told him what she liked. He told her what he liked. It was established, with no sense of discovery, that they each liked and disliked exactly the same things.

They came to a roadside eating stand. He had already applied the brakes before he asked, "How about a dog?"

"I love them."

On again, munching the hot dogs. She had no taste for hers. Something choked her so that she could hardly swallow. She managed to get it down, but it remained a lump just below her throat.

Their inconsequential chatter didn't end when he brought the car to a second stop on the dark road. Their talk went on just as if they were still riding, as if he wasn't shutting off the motor and turning out the lights. In the blackness, through which they could barely distinguish each other, the comments flew swiftly, nervous boasts, the flash of growing lightning. The words reached a pitch that could not go higher, and then, all at once, died an explosive, unnatural death.

A sharp hesitancy hung in the fresh fragrance of the spring evening. There was a moment. Then, at the same time, they moved toward each other as if they had been prevented until now.

This was it. This was it, again. The sweetness descended upon Zona like a blow. She wanted to feel it over and over again. She had waited so long. It was better than what she waited for.

There were long minutes of it. There were sudden springings apart as cars came along and passed them, throwing headlights into their faces. There were delicious comings together again after the cars had left them alone.

His lips were firm and enveloping and masterful. She liked the rough feel of his coat on her skin. In the very odor of his suit, which he had admitted was new, she found excitement.

In her glowing, Zona was ravenous. It never occurred to her to pull away. She didn't notice the surprise he showed. When his hand plunged into her hair her scalp tingled as if she were bathing him with the rich brightness there, flowing it over him in soft waves. They pressed against each other as though they would weld their two young bodies into one.

He touched her where she had never been touched before. The slow swell of her breast, under his caress, was nearly complete. To have it a part of her was devastating as she felt its tiny summit harden and rise to him. Her hand was over his, holding it there forever. She gasped. She felt there was something wrong, something unexpected, something too precipitate, but it couldn't be this. "Jimmie. Jimmie."

"Zone. Zone." His voice was a moan that swept everything on.

"Jimmie!"

They grasped at each other frantically and awkwardly. They fumbled, drew apart, then fumbled again, not minding. They worked at each other now almost savagely, uttering little cries that were hardly human.

She didn't know what was happening except that she never wanted it to stop.

Chapter Four

AS SHE HUDDLED in the corner of the car seat, Zona's shoulders shook, and under her hands great tears trickled, wetting her palms, slipping through her fingers. Jimmie sat stiff, shaken, staring at her.

"Oh, Jimmie, what must you think? What must you think?"

"I don't think anything. I think you're wonderful."

"I don't know what—I couldn't help . . ."

"Zone." At last he was holding her, comforting her.

"Don't cry. I—it's all right. Everything's all right."

She reasoned a little. "I just couldn't help myself. I love you so much."

She kissed him. He kissed her back. Somehow that made it better. Anyway, a little better.

"Zone, when I asked you to take a ride I didn't mean—"

"I didn't know what I was doing."

"I swear I didn't think—"

"I never thought I'd—"

"You're pretty passionate."

"Am I?"

"I never saw anything like it."

They clung together on that, silently clutching each other for comfort. Zona sensed that he was scared. She didn't mind, didn't think any less of him. Fear was no despicable thing in him. She was drawn to him all the more for it. It removed some of her own fear, made her feel stronger.

He didn't go up to the house with her when they drove back. They sat in the car whispering.

"You all right, Zone?"

"I guess so."

"I mean . . ."

"Oh."

"Well?"

"I—I don't know anything about that."

He gulped, tried to tell her something.

She reassured him. "Nothing will happen."

"Well, if anything does, I'd—of course . . ."

"We'd be happy, wouldn't we, Jimmie?"

"Sure we would."

They parted on a kiss that sealed their everlasting fidelity, and Zona entered the house with it. She was trembling with the realization that when she left here a few hours before she was one thing, and now she was another. She was exultant. She was fearful.

Jimmie was doing something the following evening that prevented him from seeing her. It wasn't until the second evening that he was coming for her. She waited only for that, wondering if it would happen again.

Jimmie drove for a long time before he parked. Then there was no slamming on of the brakes, but a gradual slowing down. He had been thinking. She could feel his thoughts in his arms when, after an instant, they went about her. She had resolved that nothing further should happen, but she wasn't so sure when his lips were on her mouth again.

The surge was there once more, rising in ecstasy, until he drew back. She didn't say anything, but sat, wondering. He remained silent and still, until it was terrifying. Impulsively she caught one of his hands and asked, "What's the matter, Jimmie?"

"Nothing."

"There is."

He still remained silent.

"Tell me," Zona urged.

Jimmie spoke jerkily. "Well, I don't want anything to happen. I—that is, do you know?"

In a low voice, but with an absence of shame that startled her, she said, "It's too soon to tell."

"How soon can you?"

"In about three days."

Her spell was broken in their wait for the days. Each time he came she saw the question in his eyes. Each time she couldn't give him the answer he wanted. She was terrified herself when five days passed, two of them so im-

portant. She couldn't believe it. Over and over she counted, arguing herself into the decision that it was only one day more than it should be, knowing it was two. She remembered what it had been like before, during that week after his simple kiss. Out of that, as if it followed, had grown reality to face, no foolish delusion from which to be released.

"Sometimes it's like that," she reassured him. But he stayed frightened. They were both frightened, children petrified by incipient calamity.

Jimmie hung back in expectation of the worst; Zona went on, more flexibly, to the next step, listening for him to speak, to tell her what he must. He made it known that he wouldn't let her down, but he didn't say it in so many words. With violence the realization came to Zona that he had never, of his own accord, told her that he loved her. How could she pass over such a thing? How, how could he neglect it?

"You love me, don't you, Jimmie?"

"Sure I do."

"But you never say it."

"Of course I say it."

"Only when I ask you."

"Well, you know I love you, Zone."

"I love you, Jimmie, more than anything else in the world."

The third day, in her anxiety, she had to speak with him, hear his voice, before he came to see her. She couldn't resist the desire to be assured of him, to hear him tangibly in his love and responsibility. She called his house on the telephone.

Instead of his answer there was that of a woman, his mother, with agitation in her voice. Jimmie wasn't there.

"Will you tell him that I called? This is Zona Dodd."

"Oh. Zona. You were out with Jimmie last night, weren't you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wilson." Already her heart raced.

"Well, Jimmie's gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"We don't know. He left a note saying he was going away. We're terribly worried and—"

"But he can't be gone!"

There was a pause at the other end of the wire; then, "Zona, do you know any reason he should—"

"No, Mrs. Wilson, I don't."

"Are you sure?"

"Why, yes."

"I see. Is your mother there?"

"No."

"Very well." His mother, her enemy all at once, sounded clipped, suspicious, accusing.

Zona hung up with dread tightening about her. Slowly, tensely, she made her way to the armchair in the living room and sank into it. Straight in front of her, as if at some ghastly sight, she stared. She could not contain this cruel humiliation following so closely upon the eager heels of love and belief. It brimmed over in her, a dry, racking pain, until little animal cries escaped her. Then she sobbed convulsively.

Her mother found her like that, going to her in alarm, calling through the enveloping pain to know what was the matter. In her hysteria, Zona blurted it out, shouting it without restraint. Power to hold anything back didn't exist. Not when the world had come to an end. Not when she wanted to die.

For a moment Emma Dodd was aghast. Then she asked sharp questions, and got answers that helped little. There was only one kind of information in this. With it in her possession she offered no recrimination; the time for that was not now.

She helped her daughter upstairs, to lie on her bed. There was no need for such despair, she said. It was terrible, terrible, but these things had happened before, and they could be put right. The Wilsons must see that the right thing was done. She calmed her daughter, stroked her hair, brushed the burning cheek with her lips, and then left her.

Zona knew where she was going. She wanted to call her back, but sobs strangled her.

Later, when her mother returned, she knew by her silence what had happened. The few things her mother said made her certain of it. The Wilsons blamed Zona. They had announced this in no uncertain terms. They had promised nothing when Jimmie was found and brought back. It was not his doing. Not their boy's.

Her mother whispered, "We won't let your father know. I'll just say you aren't feeling well. You can stay in your room and rest. Try not to think about it, dear. Pull yourself together. No matter what happens, I'll always be here."

In the morning, when, overwhelmingly, things were discovered to be well, there was the thought of Jimmie. At moments she had felt bitterness for him, even hate. Now there was only confusion. She couldn't hate him, not after what he had been. Out of the confusion came a bewildering wistfulness, a yearning that, even while she expressed it, she knew would not be fulfilled.

"Oh, Jimmie, come back to me! Jimmie, Jimmie, come back to me!"

Chapter Five

THIS TIME NOTHING could help Zona's father. Emma Dodd tried to save him, to preserve again the single job he had held all his business life, but she knew it was futile before she made her effort. Not even her husband's many years with the city meant anything against the trouble his discontent and boasts had stirred. The city was sorry for her, really sorry, but it couldn't put up with her husband any longer.

Emma accepted it wearily. She had known it to be inevitable. Through the years she sensed that something like this had to happen someday. For the past year she had even prepared for it as best she could. There was now nearly two hundred dollars in the bank. But two hundred dollars doesn't make a future, and plans had to be made.

"Well, Em, I haven't told you yet," Will said when she questioned him. "I wanted it to be a surprise. But I've got plans."

"What sort of plans?"

"I guess it's a good thing I'm out of the City Hall, anyway. I should have got out long ago. Get into something with a future to it. Something that'll bring in a lot of money instead of grubbing for it. That's what I'm cut out for."

"Yes, Will, I know, but—"

"So it's a good thing it happened after all. A lot of times it's like that, a man gets in a rut and when he gets pushed out of it, like I've been, he finds something better."

"Well, tell me what it is."

Will shifted his neat little feet, above which the narrow trousers fell as if recognizing that this part of him wasn't very impressive. Cunning came into his face, achievement into his flat voice.

"You know, there's lots of ways to make money. There's

slaving at a job and just getting enough. That's what most men do. And I'm not doing it any more."

"Will. Tell me. I want to know."

"Well, this thing's a big money-maker. There's been some millionaires come out of it. There'll be more, too, and maybe I'll be one of them. Of course, it isn't a thing you can let everybody know about, but—"

"Not let people know?"

"I mean, not right out."

"Is it against the law?"

"Why, no, Em, no; it isn't against the law. That is, not exactly. Not when you've got everybody on your side. Nobody thinks it's a crime these days."

"Will, are you trying to tell me that you're thinking of being a bootlegger?"

"Listen, Em, I know this fellow, and he'll work me into it all right. We'll have—"

"We'll have nothing of the sort. Oh, Will, where is your good sense? Won't you ever have any?"

"I guess it's good sense to make real money the same way lots of people do. There's nothing wrong with that."

"There's everything wrong with it. You're the last man to be a bootlegger. And if you can't see it, then I can."

"But there'll be protection. I've got my political pull and—"

"No, Will, No." Emma's voice was heavy with defeat. "Put that idea out of your head once and for all."

Grumbling, wronged, blaming his wife for not letting him take this genuine opportunity, claiming it was the kind of thing he could put his heart and soul into, Will Dodd searched for something on a lower scale. He scorned several small-salaried chances in favor of being a real-estate salesman on a commission basis. There was something worth while in dealing with vast estates. His profits, even before his first day on the job, were enormous, and in his thoughts he had already taken his appreciative family to live in grandeur on one of the estates.

Emma Dodd began to do her own washing and set about looking for some music pupils. She gave piano

lessons before her marriage, and now, twenty years later, she gave them again. She had not lost her knack, for she had taught her daughter. The house was filled several times a week, then several times a day, with hesitant tinkles and expressionless banging on the piano.

Zona, hearing it and listening to her mother's patient instruction, discarded the feeling of catastrophe that swept over her when her father lost his job. She generated a contempt for him, magnifying his faults with the exaggeration of her first awakening insight. When she showed this, with little restraint, her mother chided her gently, saying she must not feel that way; her father was doing his best.

A rush of emotion and love and sympathy for her mother came to Zona. She cried that she wanted to help. She would get a job, work for the family, give all her money to her mother each week.

Her mother petted her and thanked her and said that was nice. "But there's no need, dear. Not yet, at least. Maybe later. I don't want you to go to work until you have to. You're still so young."

Zona was eighteen now. She had shot up amazingly, above her father, above her mother. For a time she had seemed taller than she really was because of a slight gangliness. But by now she stopped going up and had filled out. There was a perfection to her, still slim but softly curved, that delighted her when she took inventory of herself. She watched with amazement the phenomenon of her completion. Her skin did not experience the usual blemishes and freckles of red-haired people, but glowed more every day with smooth delicate tints. Her face took its final shape, pointed and lovely. There was beauty in her gaze, in wide gray eyes, in small, straight nose, in lips that unfolded as if hesitant at their generosity. Contrary to the style of 1925, she let the clear candid erubescence of her fine hair have its way, until it fell to her throat on either side, conspiring with her.

For all the sureness of her bodily riches, Zona was bothered in spirit. She couldn't understand why one day the world was a marvelous, sunny place in which many

things awaited her, and the next was without attraction, filled with depressing things not worth the eager enthusiasm of the day before, making them seem silly. She didn't know why her head swam with a frantic exhilaration she could hardly control, that made her feel she was going to faint or shriek.

She was surprised and apprehensive when, without warning, her mother told her she was going to take her to see Dr. Bromley.

"But why, Mother?"

"It's only for an examination, Zona. You're so high-strung."

As the physician went over her with his instruments, she was convinced, with a terrorized certainty, that there was something the matter with her. She saw that her mother and the doctor had talked about her.

"What's the trouble, young lady?" Dr. Bromley asked as he worked. "What are you so scared about?"

"I'm not."

"Your heart's beating a mile a minute."

Direct and heartily brusque, with a frankness and a lack of reticence, he abashed her. She prayed and hoped he wouldn't find anything. She clenched her teeth and tried to be calm while he used his stethoscope again.

Finally he was through. While Zona fastened her clothing he said something, more to himself than to her, that she didn't understand. "This civilization thing puts restrictions on people, unfair from the purely physical standpoint, at your age. That's what we pay for our codes, our little religions, our superstitions. Have you ever thought of getting yourself a husband? That's all you need. That's your medicine."

Her mother didn't speak of it, Zona didn't ask; they simply united tacitly in the hunt for a husband. At times there was an embarrassment between them about this but for the most part they went straight toward the purpose, waiting and watching.

Zona knew she could have Ernest Marshall. He was still around, still readily, patiently adoring. Instinctively she didn't want him. She couldn't imagine him as her hus-

band. He didn't thrill her. He wasn't enough; he failed to be a mystery. There was no expectation to him, no excitement in the thought of him. Ernest, unknowing, was rejected before he asked.

What she couldn't have was what she wanted. Because he hurt her, Jimmie remained with her. The wound he inflicted made a deeper impression than the caresses of those more kind. She cherished it with greater regard, knowing it for a possession she would never part with, cling to through everything, no matter what. But he was out of her reach. She knew she could never return the hurt, subdue him to her love as she longed to do.

He hadn't got in touch with his parents till the end of last summer. He had gone to Buffalo and got a job there. Then he came back to Cranston for a hurried conference with his family before being returned to college. Zona received no inquiry, no word at all. But she did not match her mother's indignation. The memory of the Jimmie she wanted and found was too dear to her; the boy who ran out on her was another person, a stranger, and the bitterness she had for him was only a small part of her recollection.

It was the first Jimmie she pictured in her dream of what it must be like to be married, to have sanctioned the amazing, breath-taking thing that takes place between a man and a woman. To have a husband able to love her before the world, openly, known to all, and as often as they wished, was the thing she wanted above everything else. She imagined a perfect mate, always Jimmie or someone like Jimmie, and he intruded upon her thoughts continually, hardly permitting her to think long about other things. She spent hours daydreaming about him and the wonderful endless sweetness they could exchange forever. This became a goal constantly before her. She knew now that this was what you live and grow up for, that for this you drew every breath, and all else was secondary.

Chapter Six

"WELL, I DON'T KNOW." Mrs. Lowell, the owner of the tearoom, spoke doubtfully. Her bulk, pleasantly solid, was seated at one of her shiny tables in the place, deserted except for herself and an eager girl. Her eyes, magnified from behind strong spectacles, examined the girl. "How old are you?"

"Twenty," Zona told her.

"Hm. . . . More likely eighteen, aren't you?"

"Well, I'm nineteen, going on twenty."

This fine point of honesty brought a twinkle to the considering gaze of the older woman. Zona thought she had won until the twinkle died out and she heard, "But without any previous experience at all."

"Oh, Mrs. Lowell, I can do it. It's just the thing for me. I've tried so many other places and I haven't got stenography, but this— Please."

Mrs. Lowell took a more thorough inventory. The girl was young but quick and bright. She would be more than willing. Above these qualifications, she was decorative, with her face so full of ingenuous warmth and her freshly blossomed figure. Mrs. Lowell supposed that these attributes were as valuable as any others for a hostess in a tearoom. Perhaps more so than experience and ability. A pretty face brought the men in. "Well," she decided, "suppose we try it."

"Oh, thank you!"

When Zona returned home with her achievement, announcing that she had a job that started the next day, her mother at first demurred.

"But Zona, you didn't tell me."

"I've been looking for a long time, Mother. I wanted to surprise you. And I thought maybe you still wouldn't want me to work."

"I'm not sure I do."

"But it's all right, Mother! Mrs. Lowell is nice; you'll

meet her. I'm to get twelve dollars a week and my lunch and dinner."

Her mother was serious, concerned. "You don't have to do this, darling."

"I want to, Mother! I want to do something. I can't stand sitting around here all the time."

"But it will get you home so late, with no one to bring you."

"I'll take a trolley every night. And it won't be so late, not after nine, Mrs. Lowell said, and sometimes earlier, when business is slack. And just think, I don't have to get there until eleven every morning."

Reluctantly, her mother agreed.

Zona's first days at the tearoom were full of fear and overzealousness. She tried not to show her hesitancy, and didn't succeed for nearly a week. When people chose to sit at other tables than those to which she escorted them, she was dismayed. The women were the worst, which meant that the hour of tea was the most trying. Men, who came almost solely for meals, usually followed her docilely and took what she gave them. She was rather amazed at the way they could be led, in public, by the nose. But many women seemed to take pleasure in doing the opposite of what she suggested. In the end Zona adopted a practice of recognizing these symptoms in their infancy and permitting the customers who displayed them to do a part of her work for her.

Zona settled down to the routine of her job, but she found it difficult to make a routine matter of the interest the men customers took in her. They boldly undressed her with their eyes; they constantly asked for special attention, not because anything was needed, but because they wanted her to look at them. She was annoyed when they tried, with no reticence, to date her, and amused at those who were obviously restrained by timidity from making any approach.

Though she came into almost daily contact with a number of men she would like to know, she knew she had to keep them at arm's length if she wanted to keep her job. The only man she knew was Ernest Marshall. He was

her faithful, adoring follower who sometimes called for her after work and took her for a drive or to the movies and then home. Ernest was selling insurance, and Zona knew only too well the certain picture he fashioned for the day he established himself. It was like him to wait until the day had actually arrived. But he remained not enough.

The sun was melting the winter around her one day when Zona waited on a corner for the bus to Linton, a town five miles from Cranston. She had found there was just time, in her hours off between lunch and tea, to get to the large and splendid new motion-picture theater there and then back again. She stood watching for the bus when a black roadster stopped and a voice called out to her, "Going to Linton, Miss Dodd?"

Zona saw in the car a man who came often to the tea-room. She didn't know his name. He seemed old to her, probably thirty-five, but not too old, and he was tall, with a small dark mustache in a clean mobile face.

She told him she was waiting for the Linton bus.

"I'm going to Linton," he said. "That's where I live. Let me take you."

She shook her head slowly. She had promised her mother not to have anything to do with men she met at her work. "Thank you, but I guess I'll take the bus."

He chuckled. "You're getting your feet wet standing there."

Zona looked down at the slush on the pavement. "Well, I—"

"Come on." He laughed at her and opened the door of his car.

She found herself climbing in.

They drove at a smooth pace along the road to Linton. Zona sat tensely, staring straight ahead, thinking that she shouldn't be doing this, glad she was.

"Going to the movies?"

She glanced at him, startled. "How did you guess?"

"Well, I know they're showing a John Gilbert picture this week. And I thought you might—well, sort of like him?"

She did, and explained the reasons why. He listened attentively, as though she told him extraordinary things. She listened during the rest of the way for the things she expected him to say, but he didn't say them. He was extremely respectful. His attitude had nothing in it of picking up a girl. He called her Miss Dodd.

Only when he let her out in front of the theater and she thanked him did he say anything personal, and then it wasn't the way she had imagined it. "Look here, I'd like to see your John Gilbert, too. I have some business to attend to, but if you sit about halfway down on the right, I'll come in later. That is, if you'd like to have me?" He looked at her half in question, half certain of her answer.

"Of course, but—"

"See you in a few minutes!" He drove off.

In the theater, which wasn't crowded, Zona carefully chose her seat halfway down on the right and was promptly surprised by her lack of power to concentrate on the picture. She sat watching John Gilbert but waiting for another who she fancied looked like him, wondering if he would really come, if he could find her in the darkness.

It seemed a long time before he sat beside her, folding his coat and whispering a greeting.

"How did you ever find me?" she whispered back.

"Had my spies working."

They laughed together guardedly while shadows flickered over their faces.

Zona, though she stared intently at the screen, didn't see much of the rest of the picture. She was too aware of the man beside her, and of how her afternoon had been changed. The place where she came in appeared on the screen, but she didn't do anything about it. She would miss the four-o'clock bus back unless she left soon. She stayed until there was danger of missing the four-fifteen bus.

Hastily she rose, saying she must go.

He accompanied her up the aisle.

"Aren't you going to see the rest of the picture?" she asked.

"I'm going to take you back to Cranston."

"Oh, but I can't let you do that."

"Why not? I've got to get back there myself."

On the way he told her he was in the hotel and restaurant supply business, with offices in Linton. He came to Cranston half a dozen times a week. Sometimes he sold supplies to Mrs. Lowell. When he let Zona out a short distance down the street from the tearoom he told her his name, Grant Matthews. "I know you're Miss Dodd, but—"

"Zona."

"Hello, Zona!"

She remembered his quick smile when he spoke her name so enthusiastically. She thought of him, of his maturity, and not understanding it, was impressed by it. On the following days she watched for him among the stream of people she greeted.

He came again on an evening when the rain poured down outside. She was grateful that he didn't presume, publicly, on their acquaintance. Beyond a flash from his dark eyes and greeting her by her first name, he offered nothing. But he lingered till most of the other diners had gone, and when he finally had put on his coat he came over to where Zona was standing against the wall. "It's raining," he said.

"I'd noticed."

"I'll take you home." He offered this as a piece of information. She started to say something but he spoke instead. "I'll be waiting outside in my car."

Zona went to the car as if obeying an order, even hurried to it through the rain.

"Where to?"

She told him where she lived.

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. Please."

He didn't try to dissuade her, but followed instructions when she indicated what streets to take. This wasn't what strange men were supposed to do; they were supposed to drive around, stalling, searching for an excuse to stop the car on a lonely road instead of in front of her house.

They sat with the rain sounding over their heads until Zona asked him if he would like to come in.

He accepted, and she introduced him, rather breathlessly, to her father and mother. He spent an hour talking with them, at his ease more than they, not on exhibition as much as they.

After he had gone, Zona explained how she met him. Her mother didn't like it. The man seemed all right, but she was doubtful. Her father saw no objection. "You've got to get to know people some way," he said. "And there's a lot to him. That hotel supply business, now . . ."

One noon at the tearoom Grant Matthews told her, "I've been a big success in business this month. You'd better celebrate with me tonight."

Even before she replied, while they looked at each other, it was decided what she would do. But they went through with the words.

"Well, I shouldn't."

"But you will?"

"It depends on what kind of celebration it is."

"We'll have a drink and then do anything you like."

When they started out that evening Zona saw they were headed for Linton. She was more excited than disturbed when they stopped in front of an apartment building.

"Here's where we get the drink."

"In your apartment?"

"Oh, but we leave right after it."

"Really leave?"

"We'll still be swallowing the drink when we come out."

Zona laughed and got out of the car.

When the door to Grant's attractively furnished apartment was closed behind them he took her coat and then seated her on a small divan before the fireplace. He touched a match to the prepared logs before he went to get the drinks. While she was alone Zona looked about, admiring the apartment, thinking how much nicer it was than her own home. Then he was with her again, in back of her, making liquids gurgle.

He came around, handed her a tall ice-cold glass, and seated himself beside her.

They drank.

The fire crackled in lively fashion before them, then settled into a low friendly blaze. He talked, telling her of how he had been working night and day lately, of how delightful it was to have a respite, especially with her. It was comfortable and peaceful sitting here with him. She felt flattered and suddenly grown-up.

They finished their drinks and he sat forward, hands on his knees, to look at her and say, "I suppose I've got to live up to my promise. What's it going to be? Dance? I know a place. Movies, if it isn't too late?"

Zona knew she should make a choice, give a decision between one of these. But she was still enjoying a moment she didn't want to desert. In a low voice she said, "Let's stay here a little longer. Then we'll go to the dance place."

"Fine!" He jumped up. "In that case I'll have another drink. You—? I mean, we'll both have another drink."

The whisky, as she sipped it, made Zona feel that they had drawn closer together. The disparity in their ages diminished. He was not in his thirties and she was not at the beginning of her twenties; they were meeting, magically, at some place in between.

They sat silently, staring at the fire. Their plan to leave after the drink, really leave, was forgotten. She sensed this sharply when his gaze turned to her. He put down his glass and waited until she finished hers. Then he leaned toward her and took one of her hands.

He held it an electric moment before he spoke. Then he told her some astonishing things. He said she was the most lovely creature he had ever laid eyes on. He thought that the first time he saw her. He had thought of her ever since. Once in a lifetime a man sees a girl and knows immediately that she is the one for him. He had known that the moment she stepped up to him in the tearoom. He knew it now more than ever, having her here beside him. He lifted her hand and brushed it with his lips.

Zona stared at him. She had never been made love to

like this before. This was something she had dreamed about, just as she fancied that the man making it real was like John Gilbert. It came to her that she was living over something she had known before, a wanted thing recaptured.

Yet she drew from it. The memory of Jimmie, her mother's strong warning, her own resolve sprang before her vividly.

She didn't know that his lips were on hers and his arms about her until they had been there for an instant. Then her recollection of her first lover, of her mother, of her own intent were suggestions rather than deterrents. The sweetness and the surge flowed through her again, tapped like latent forces. It shot through her, overpoweringly, that this thing could not be turned on partially and then shut off. Perhaps other people could start and then turn back, but she knew that she could not.

The pain of remaining unresponsive was bittersweet before she could no longer resist the sweeping tide within her to give, to pour herself forth, to obtain.

Chapter Seven

THERE WAS NO SENSE of anything shattered. Zona had supposed that if it occurred again it would be the same as the first time. It wasn't. The first had been a conclusion of her old, young self. This was the beginning of her new, future being. It seemed to her that at last she had found what was singularly her own.

From Grant she learned things she had but faintly known before. The only physical fear she had was removed. She was stirred with the delight of being a woman loved. She was pleased, with an awareness she couldn't escape if she wanted to, at her ability to meet him magnificently, even to astonish him. Her days were spent in a continual consciousness of him, a never-stopping adoration. She lived only for him, for he had suddenly become what she had always wanted.

Grant came nearly every day to the tearoom, so that they could see each other as much as possible. They overdid not paying any special attention to each other, though there were moments of quick glances full of tender meaning, of hasty endearments passed when he entered and she greeted him, or when she bent over him ostensibly to consult the menu. This teasing of their emotions was sweet to them, and when they met later they often continued it, not touching each other until they were in the apartment. Then came an overwhelming meeting when, as if closing the door was a signal, they threw their arms about each other.

The sense that their love was stolen gave them an added intimacy, a precious, exultant secret from everybody else in existence. Others could have their own love, but no one else could have exactly what they had; they were the only ones in possession.

They felt no need to make it more ethical than that. Zona was too caught up in it to think of anything else. It was enough, this welcome bliss that blotted out all

qualification, that was an impetus to unfurl herself completely to him, without question.

To support in the eyes of her parents the plausibility of her going out with him, Zona took Grant home as often as they could bring themselves to spare the time. Sundays, when she didn't have to be at the tearoom, he had dinner with them. Then a feeling of sharp guilt stole over her and she was aghast at the chances of discovery. He showed no sign; his lack of disturbance at being with her father and mother amazed her. Sometimes she thought it callous. But she was glad to be buoyed by his poise and strove to equal it. The qualms she had were further calmed by her fierce sense of right in doing what she wanted. Her life was her own. It was hers to choose what it should be.

Her parents liked Grant. Her mother was won over on all except one point. "He's very nice, dear," she told Zona. "But isn't he a little old for you?"

"He isn't old. Thirty-two isn't old." Grant was thirty-four. He had told her.

"That's twelve years' difference between you," her mother objected. "It's a good deal."

"Oh, Mother—"

"But I suppose it's all right, if he means well."

"Mother! *Means* well!"

"Are you certain he does, Zona?" her mother persisted. "Has he said anything to you?"

"He hasn't had time."

"Be sure you want him, dear," her mother said; then anxiously, "I know you won't do anything you'll regret."

Any moment of regret that Zona had was soon over. She was ready again, in an instant, to abandon all upbringing, all experience, all shame and conscience in favor of the recurring gladness she became certain was devised especially for her.

Even the caressing spring seemed made for her, and they stole all they could of fragrant days and nights, happy to be with each other in them, happy simply to be together.

One soft evening Grant drove about aimlessly instead

of going to Linton. Zona saw no significance in this until he told her that they couldn't go to the apartment any more. The reason wasn't nice. He was hesitant about telling her.

She asked, "People have noticed something?"

"The superintendent spoke to me about it today."

"Oh. Do you think—?"

"No. No one knows you. Don't worry about that."

They drove on in silence. Zona had not known that such objections applied to private apartments. It was disturbing, the first negative thing in their love. It placed an unattractive brand on it, a stamp she didn't want to be there. She resolved not to let it matter.

Grant announced with some heat that he would give up the place. He wouldn't stand for it. He'd move to a hotel. In Cranston. He'd be nearer her. "You won't mind that, will you, Zona?"

She thought of the hotel. She thought of him. "I won't mind. If it's safe."

"We'll make it safe."

The first time Zona went with him to his room in one of the smaller hotels in the city she discovered that she did mind. She shrank from the stares of the people about, from bellboys, from the elevator operator. There was the walk down the hall, which seemed miles long, and then the room itself, so patently a bedroom it shouted the fact at her. She was shocked, and it came to her all at once, as if for the first time, what she was doing. She was filled with a dread that lived on after he took her in his arms and kissed her.

Each time after that the dread persisted. Zona tried to hide it. She didn't want to admit it. If Grant noticed it, he didn't say anything. Her love for him did not slacken; it was with her, ready and eager as ever, but now crept in a resentment for its status. The conviction arrived, slowly, that it had gone on long enough this way; she was no longer satisfied to make the loan of love without security.

There ensued a battle between her need of him and the desire for him to speak of marriage. Half a dozen times

she met him with the strict resolve of insisting upon it or withholding herself from him. But the persuasion of his touch, of being with him, weaned her away from facing the problem. She went on, a little stronger with decision each time, but not strong enough.

Her twentieth birthday provided a hiatus in the struggle. Her mother arranged for a little family party to be held after she got home from the tearoom, and suggested that she bring Grant. Zona told herself she would wait until after her birthday and then inform Grant that they must make some new arrangement.

It was a disappointment when he told her that he might not be able to meet her, that he might have to work. Lately he had been missing days with her. But he said he would do his best and let her know by telephone on the afternoon of the day.

When he called during the slack time between tea and dinner, Zona was chilled by the conviction that he wouldn't be able to come. Then she was filled with expectation when he said that he could. "I've got a surprise for you," he announced.

"That sounds nice."

"I think you'll like it."

"Oh, Grant!"

She hung up and was sure that he had anticipated her. He had a ring, her engagement ring. It was the only thing it could be. It was the more wonderful that she didn't have to ask him. It would be glorious to have the feel of the ring on her finger, to move her finger and watch the beautiful twinkling stone shining there.

Sitting at one of the tables, lost in her dream, Zona came to herself, back to the mere moment, to see Mrs. Lowell opposite her and realize that she had been addressed.

"Yes, Mrs. Lowell?"

"I was saying that I don't mean to pry into your affairs, Zona, but in your own interest I wanted to ask if you know Mr. Matthews very well."

Zona stared at her employer. She had supposed that Mrs. Lowell did not know about Grant. She had thought

that they had kept their meetings a secret from the tea-room. "Why," she said, "outside of here I don't know him. I mean," she floundered, "I've been out with him a few times, but—"

"That doesn't matter," Mrs. Lowell told her. "There's no harm in your getting to know some of the men who come here. That is, if they're the right men."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Lowell?"

"Do you know that Mr. Matthews is married?"

"Married?"

"He has a child, a boy of three or four."

Deep down in the pit into which she suddenly descended, something white-hot seared her. "But he can't be! He—"

"His wife left him last year and took the child with her," Mrs. Lowell went on. "She's come back now."

"It isn't true!"

"I'm afraid it is, dear. Is anything the matter?"

Zona knew how much she showed it. She tried to twist her face into composure, into a smile. "No," she said, "no, nothing's the matter." There was a minute of strained, awful realization. Through the shock that dulled all of her except one agonized thought, she managed to ask, "When—when did she come back?"

"About two weeks ago."

Zona made a sound that she fought to keep casual but that came out as a cry. It was a little over two weeks ago that Grant told her about the apartment and took the hotel room.

Mrs. Lowell looked at her with enlarged eyes that seemed to search her soul and see what was there. The older woman opened her mouth to say something more, then didn't. She got up and went away.

Zona sat on, her thighs jelly beneath her. Grant wouldn't do that. He simply wouldn't. But he had. She saw, without doubt, that he had. This, then, was his surprise, her birthday present from him.

She was to meet him, after work, at the usual place he parked his car, down the street. She wanted to face him with it, to chastise him, to tell him how much she hated

him. At the same time she never wanted to see him again. With this conflict she lived through the ordeal of her job, white and trembling, until closing time. Then she put on her hat, took up her other things, and stepped out on the sidewalk.

She hesitated, drawn between two unenviable courses, both devastating to her. Through swimming eyes she could see his car down the street, dimly make him out sitting in it. She turned and walked in the opposite direction.

Blindly she found the trolley stop and stood waiting. Happy birthday, Zona. Many happy returns of the day. The words, heard so many times since morning, resounded in her ears, scorning her.

A noise came from behind her on the deserted corner. The shape of a familiar car appeared and then she heard Grant's voice.

"Zona!"

She didn't answer, but stood, tight-lipped, hostile.

"What's the matter?"

She was silent for a moment longer. Then she couldn't stand it. Abruptly, she started walking down the street.

He called after her. He followed in the street with his car. She walked faster. There was a noise from his engine and he spurted ahead. Then he was out of the car and blocking her way.

"Zona, what's happened? I saw you going away and—"

"You're married!"

She had it out, flinging it at him. It made him murmur, made his body move as though struck. She started to walk around him and go on, but he stopped her.

"Wait."

"No."

"Zona, let me tell you—"

"I don't want to know."

"But I can't let you go like this. At least let me take you home. Let me do that much."

"I never want to see you again!"

"Zona! Don't say that. Please. Let me drive you home. That's all I ask."

She considered. Her only solace was punishment for him, and she couldn't punish him unless she was with him. She got into the car.

Neither of them said a word on the way. She remained huddled, withdrawn in her hurt and hate. He looked straight ahead, awkwardly without speech.

In front of her house he stopped the car. She made a movement to get out, without saying anything, when he spoke. Jerkily, he told his story.

"I thought my wife was divorcing me. She went away saying she was. She started the proceedings. That was just before I saw you. I don't need to tell you what I felt when I met you. You know that. Then my wife wrote that she was coming back. I couldn't stop her, not when she put it on the basis of the boy, for his sake. That's where it stands now. I'm afraid it will have to go like that. I know I should have told you in the first place. I'll always blame myself that I didn't. But I thought you wouldn't like it. Then after we— I wanted you so much I couldn't help myself."

Zona turned to him wrathfully. "*You* couldn't help it?"

"Don't take it that way. Maybe it isn't as bad as it seems. If you could wait a few days, think it over—"

She snapped him off with a sound of contempt.

There was remorse in his voice when after a moment he spoke again. "I had this for you. I don't suppose you'll want it now."

He took out a slim gleaming wrist watch. It glittered in his hand, bringing sharply into focus the recollection of what she had thought his surprise was going to be. The thought stabbed into her that he didn't care as much about how she was hurt as he did about wanting to keep her if he could. "You kept on with me!" she accused. "After she came back! Oh, how could you?"

His fingers closed over the watch. His face was stiff, without the right to be turned to her; he was silent and defenseless.

With a cry of anguish Zona jerked open the door of the car, sprang out, and ran into the house.

Chapter Eight

WHEN SHE ENTERED the house she saw the cake decorated with candles waiting to be lit, the presents ready to be opened.

"Isn't Grant coming?" her mother asked.

"No, he isn't."

"But wasn't that his car out there? Didn't he bring you home?"

"Well, he couldn't stay."

They looked at her curiously, and shared what they thought was her disappointment. Her father guessed they could have a good time all by themselves, and set out with determination to have it. With forced gaiety he put a match to the candles of the cake. The ice cream was brought in, and Zona managed to exhibit the expected surprise and pleasure. It was harder when she opened the presents, a pair of stockings from her mother and a neat little red leather purse from her father, both, she knew, paid for by her mother's music lessons.

When she blew out the candles something seemed to press on her lungs, so that she couldn't get enough air in them to get all the little flames out, and three of them burned on. That meant she was to have three children. It was a joke she had to laugh at. She cut the cake and they began to eat. After the first few bites Zona felt that if she tried to swallow again she would strangle. She sat, rigidly fighting to hold herself in, until finally she was beaten.

"He's married," she announced.

Her mother looked up at her. "What did you say, dear?"

"Grant's married. He has a wife."

"Do you mean—?"

"I found out this afternoon."

Zona believed she kept the real part of it from her mother. She didn't want her to know about that, about

what she had done a second time. But she wondered if her mother didn't suspect. At the thought that she did but refrained from saying anything, Zona was more grateful to her than she had ever been in her life.

Her father issued a lengthy proclamation. He declared he meant to do something about it. A man couldn't do that to Zona, not to his daughter, deceive her, deceive them all, and not expect to pay for it. He would see about this. If the least he could do was to horsewhip Matthews within an inch of his life, he would do that.

Will Dodd did nothing. He could do nothing. There intruded, upon his dapper ranting, the recollection of the small loan he had had from Grant, the sums received in furtive moments that were to be paid back next Thursday or next week. Matthews was understanding about them. He never referred to them, knowing them for what they were. But if it wasn't for that . . .

The world had not come to an end as Zona first thought. It was simply minus one thing. Life was still here; she was still a part of it, even a greater part, for in place of the missing thing there had been etched on her a little more what the world is like.

Ernest Marshall came back. That is, she let him come back, for he had always been on tap, ready for her when there was no one else. The first time he called on the telephone to inquire, hopefully, if she would go out with him, she made an excuse. She didn't want to see him. She didn't want to see any man. The second time she let him come, apathetic about it. He knew that Grant Matthews had cut him out. And now, when he learned that that was all over, his endeavor began again.

Ernest had grown up. He was more like what she wanted him to be before. She learned, when she went out with him summer evenings, that he could be positive, persuading. He was still, because of love, a little afraid of her, but because of the same love, pressing. "I thought I'd lost you, Zona," he said. "It's great to be going places with you again. And now I've got you, I won't let you go. Not this time."

He told her of his strides in the insurance field, laying

them at her feet with self-effacing pride. He intimated that he was far enough along now to settle down.

Zona felt that he would never betray her, never trick her. She was happy when with him. Anyway, happier than when alone. She wanted to overlook the fact that though she was pleased with him now he still didn't churn in her what she ought to feel. She noticed his pale eyelashes, his lack of coloring. She had always liked dark men. She told herself that this was ridiculous, that it was nothing against Ernest just because he didn't have black, curling eyelashes. He was just as good as, better than the dark men she had known.

Ernest showered her with attention, with little gifts, with good times. She watched his innocent campaign without his knowing it. He didn't try to rush her. He went at it the way he worked up a prospect for a sale. This touched rather than displeased her. She felt a little sorry for him, a little fond of him, a little, and then more, as if she wanted him.

He asked her late one cool evening while they sat on the dilapidated swing on the porch of her house. His arm was possessive about her, his hand held one of hers. "Zona, you know how I've always felt about you. How I always will feel."

"How, Ernest?" If she couldn't put it off, she wanted him to say it.

"Don't make it tough for me, Zona," he whispered earnestly. "I want to marry you."

Faced with it, Zona had a curious mixture of emotions. Even though she had seen it coming, tortuously, for so long a time, she was flattered that he asked. She was conscious of what the other men had had without asking. It made her feel a lack not permitting her to say what Ernest wished.

Putting her other hand over his, she pressed it. Looking down, she said, "I'll always appreciate your asking, Ernest."

"You mean you won't?"

She shook her head slightly.

"You don't love me?"

"I like you, Ernest. Please believe that I like you a great deal."

"But that's all?"

Her silence told him it was.

He argued with her. He painted a picture of what it would be like for them. They would be happy. They enjoyed doing the same things. She must, she had to say yes.

When she couldn't he became drenched with the blackness of his future without her. She pleaded with him not to take it like that. She petted and fondled him and told him he was fine. In that moment she felt closer to him than ever before, almost as if she should accept him.

He moaned with self-pity at the collapse of the structure he had built so carefully. "You don't love me at all."

"Well, I love you a little."

He sprang tense and sat up. "Do you mean that?"

"Of course."

"Then say it. Say, 'I love you a little,' Zona. That's all I want. Say it."

"Well . . . I love you a little."

He uttered a whoop. He grabbed her and planted a quick kiss on her mouth, then released her to throw his arms and legs out. He gave another whoop, crying, "I've got her! I've got her!"

"Silly!"

With that edge, as he believed, he couldn't give up. He tried harder than ever. Sometimes he was light-hearted, even gay about it, trying to banter her into marrying him. Sometimes he was morose and tragic. Always he meant it with deadly seriousness.

The problem before Zona extended into the field of her family, becoming a question to which they were expected to give an answer. Her father vacillated between being uninterested in Ernest as a son-in-law and enthusiastic for her to marry him, so that Zona wondered if he cared at all whom she married, just so she was off his hands. As if she had been on his hands at all since she began earning, while he earned nothing.

Her mother, in spite of her repeated insistence that

Zona alone must decide, anxiously backed Ernest. She felt that her daughter should get married. She had never been sure just what happened between Zona and Grant Matthews, but whatever it was, Grant, Jimmie Wilson before him, and the advice of Dr. Bromley established that Zona needed security before any more harm came to her. Ernest, she thought, would be a good husband. She found no lack in him, and wondered what kept her daughter from accepting him. Emma wanted Zona to make her own choice, but when no choice was made, she intimated, then said openly, that there would be no mistake in taking Ernest.

Zona's reluctance continued. She couldn't, somehow, picture herself as Ernest's wife. There wasn't anything seriously the matter with the idea, but it certainly had a remarkable lack of interest. It didn't lift her, carry her along to any height, but remained on a level, down on the ground, with little on the horizon.

Ernest's persistence and unquestioned steadfastness made it difficult for her. She was touched more than ever one night when he told her, "I know you don't care for me as much as I care for you, Zona. But I want the chance to make you. I want you so much I'll take the risk. I'll be good to you. I'll be anything to you. Only say that we'll get married."

For a moment Zona couldn't say anything to that. Then, impulsively, wanting some kind of defense against him, she announced, "Ernest, I want to tell you something."

She blurted out the story of Jimmie. She recalled to Ernest the senior prom when they were in school together, and how it was Jimmie she wanted to go with, how she accepted Ernest's invitation only at the last minute when Jimmie didn't ask her. She related what happened after that, the next year, making it plain that if ever she came to him she wouldn't be coming as he thought.

Ernest didn't say anything, remaining silent, not commenting, not showing what he thought.

"That isn't all," she went on. She outlined everything she and Grant were to each other. She didn't excuse her-

self. She simply placed it before him, all of it, about Grant's being married and having a child, about the room in the hotel where she had gone.

Ernest's arm had been about her. Now it slowly slipped away, withdrawn. She waited for him to speak.

He sat forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands at the side of his head. In a low voice he asked, "Why have you told me this?"

"I don't know. I thought I ought to."

Zona knew she had told him so that it might drive him from her, so she would not have the chance of taking him and perhaps succumb to it.

He felt as though she had slapped him suddenly, shockingly, without warning. He made some sounds that tried to be words but weren't. He waited. Then, in a muffled voice, he managed to get out, "I'm glad you told me. Some girls wouldn't have."

"Oh, don't you see, Ernest? I'm not good enough for you. Not nearly."

"Let's not say any more. Not right now. I . . ."

When he left a few minutes later, minutes in which they sat glumly, without speaking, she felt that he would never be back again.

A day passed and Ernest didn't come near her. Two days went by and then three, to make her sure she had driven him away for good. She didn't blame him. She hardly knew whether, for herself, to feel glad or sorry.

Then, on the fourth day, he appeared, coming out of the night while she sat alone on the porch. He greeted her solemnly and sat beside her, to resume the silence where they had left it off. She was astonished when he leaned toward her and kissed her tenderly. "Listen, Zona," he announced, "I've been thinking over what you told me. It was pretty fierce at first. But—but it doesn't have to make any difference. It didn't make me stop loving you."

"Ernest!"

"I still want to marry you."

She murmured, "That's the loveliest thing that's ever

happened to me. I'll remember it all my life. Nothing will ever make me forget it."

"You will?"

"But I didn't expect you to come back. I never thought you would."

"I've got to know, Zona. I can't go on like this. I can't stand it. It's got to be yes or no. Now."

"Not now. I can't. Not yet. Give me a little while. A week. Will you give me a week?"

"All right. Today's Friday. You'll let me know by next Friday. Before, if you—?"

"Yes. Yes, Ernest. And I'll try. I'll try so hard."

Zona tried. She was impressed with the cruel test his love for her had survived. It made her think more of him than she had believed possible. She couldn't doubt him; she could doubt only herself, and she struggled to reason that away. From Grant she had wanted marriage and he didn't even love her. She needed marriage and Ernest loved her. Well, why not? Why shouldn't she? Ernest wouldn't sneak her off to hotels while he had a wife and child at home. Ernest wouldn't lie to her. Ernest would see that a real ring encircled her finger. Ernest was good.

She would. She would even tell him before the week was out.

But she didn't. She waited, indecision gnawing at her.

While she waited, Mrs. Lowell brought to her in the tearoom a young man she had never seen before. "This is Roger Fane, Miss Dodd. Mr. Fane is a stranger in the city," Mrs. Lowell went on, "so we must make him at home."

Roger Fane was a sturdy young man of perhaps twenty-five. His brown eyes, under full but straight brows, were on a level with Zona's. In his chestnut hair the faintest of waves seemed hesitant at asserting themselves. Their owner appeared to be a little shy himself as he greeted Zona. But when they touched hands there was nothing lacking in what instantly passed between them. For a second longer than was natural they clung to the contact, as though they had waited a long time for this and meant

to make the most of it. Zona released her hand and murmured that she would show him to a table.

That was on Wednesday. On Friday, at noon, Roger Fane came again to the tearoom. He didn't try to speak to Zona until he was leaving. Then, in the slow, serious way she noticed before, pronouncing his words with no slurring of the syllables, he asked, "Might I call for you this evening when you're through here?"

Zona told him, while their eyes were fastened on each other, that she had another engagement.

"Then tomorrow evening?"

"Yes. Yes, tomorrow."

That night she gave Ernest his answer. "It wouldn't be fair to either of us for me to marry you without loving you enough."

Ernest took the blow calmly. "I thought it would be like that," he admitted. "Otherwise you would have known before."

"I'm sorry, Ernest, terribly sorry."

"Is there anyone else?"

"No." She couldn't hurt him with that, let him know how near he had been, how brief a thing had taken her away. "There's no one else."

"I'll always love you, Zona. I'll never stop."

Chapter Nine

ROGER CAME FROM Minnesota. That accounted for his way of speaking, the way Zona liked of pronouncing words clearly, without running them together. He was twenty-five; she had guessed exactly right. His parents in Minneapolis were rather old. They hadn't liked his coming east, but they didn't stop him. His father had even helped him, by arranging for a man he knew, a prominent lawyer, to get him taken into a Wall Street broker's office. Roger had spent a year in New York learning the groundwork of the business. Lately he had been transferred to the Cranston office, where the company had a stock quotation board and where he was assistant to the manager. When there was a regular opening for him at the head office in New York, he hoped to be a customers' man.

Roger might be slow and careful in manner about most things, but when he spoke of stocks, of bonds, of figures, he had the head for what he talked about. He was certain then, and enthusiastic. Nothing like this 1927 market had ever been seen before. It was going up and on, to even greater heights, and he wanted to rise with it.

Zona listened, infected by his zeal, caught up by him even when he should be making love to her and wasn't. At first she thought he was too timid. Then she saw it was based upon more than that. He was methodical and thorough, going at things as if he meant to get somewhere but making sure of his objective before taking the steps to reach it. Once having made a decision, he went ahead directly, without question.

It was like that the afternoon he led Zona to a jeweler's and asked for diamond rings. He had offered no formal proposal; there was no agreement worked out in words, but simply the mutual assumption, beyond debate, that they were made for each other.

Zona, after her first startled look at him, to see him

grinning at her, was delighted. She was infinitely pleased that he was letting her pick out her own ring instead of getting what he thought she would like. Darting with her hand among the diamonds in the tray, she hardly knew which to choose. They were all so beautiful. She knew she must not decide upon anything costly, even though Roger had told her he had saved regularly from his fifty dollars a week. The one she wanted, a small square of clear white and blue set in neat platinum, seemed expensive. She tried it on only to put it back again and look at others. But always she came back to that one. Unconsciously she left it on her finger when finally she picked a smaller stone.

"What about that one?" Roger asked, pointing to her finger.

Zona gave an exclamation, stripped it off hurriedly, and replaced it with the more modest ring.

Roger examined them both, looked at her, and then reversed the process, slipping the other ring back on.

"But it's three hundred dollars!"

"Do you like it?"

"I love it."

"I hope it fits."

It fitted exactly. Zona flung her arms about Roger and kissed him right there in the store, unmindful of staring people. Roger blushed with embarrassment.

It happened so quickly between them that she wondered if things could really come about like that. It was hardly a month after her desperate decision to take Ernest that she wore Roger's little square diamond. It wasn't six months ago that she spent her days in adoration of Grant Matthews. Can you fall in and out of love as easily as that? Can it be genuine if you do? Recollecting her readiness, Zona was frightened. She questioned her love for Roger, wondering if she was attracted to him because he reminded her of Jimmie. She told herself Roger was different, that he was more solid, better than all the others put together. She decided her fears were groundless, that Roger was the man for her, the only man.

Carefully she guarded against anything endangering

their love, knowing that to step with Roger beyond the limit she had crossed with others would be fatal. Sometimes she found this difficult and then she was disturbed, but mostly she was filled with a sense of virtue at the respect they showed each other. Roger's unquestioned acceptance of what was consecrated as right made their caresses proper and correct. And though usually placid, he could be fervent. Once they lost themselves in hot, stirring response to what they felt for each other until Zona cried, "Roger, darling! Oh, Roger, darling!"

It was he who drew back from this wanting each other. Zona was startled when he apologized for what they nearly did. She knew she was to blame as much as he; more, if only he knew. The disturbing suspicion had reached her that she must be different from other women. Women usually had to be aroused by something outside of themselves. Alone, they needed nothing else, had nothing else until it was brought to them. This was at once their nature and their protection. Zona questioned if she possessed this armor. Some lack, she felt, laid her bare to the world, made her helpless before her urges, almost continually under their power. They controlled her, swept her along sometimes with the ruthless need of a tornado to find space in which to spend itself.

She had heard of women like that. Gracie Warren, still her best friend through fits and starts of seeing each other, several times referred to women who could not get along without men, many men, any men. Gracie had read about them in a book. She called them by a name. The name, nymphomaniac, had an unenviable, dreadful connotation. Zona was appalled when the thought crossed her mind that perhaps the name applied to her.

It was indicated by more than imagination alone, present in her most constant thought, proved by past events. She wondered if it accounted for Jimmie, for Grant, now for Roger. She couldn't believe it of herself. She didn't altogether understand it and shrank from the threat, apprehensive even after the self-assurance that such things happened only to other people, not to her.

Emma Dodd was considerably bewildered at the sud-

den shift to Roger. "But I thought," she told Zona, "that you and Ernest—"

"This is something different, Mother." Zona explained how it was different and about how she and Roger would get married as soon as he was transferred back to New York. They would live in New York.

Mother and daughter talked over the problem of whether or not Zona should tell Roger he would not be the first to possess her. This bothered her, for she wanted to be honest with him from the very beginning. But the dangers of honesty held her back. She remembered how Ernest took it, but she hardly dared hope that Roger would feel the same way. It would be a relief to her conscience to tell him, a welcome removal of a burden she would otherwise have to carry all her life. But it would be a risk, a terrible risk.

"If you think you should tell him," her mother advised, "you must. But if you feel that it won't hurt him in any way, there is no reason to. Dear, sometimes things like this do more harm than good."

Zona decided not to tell him, to make it up to him in a thousand other ways. She wondered if he would find out on their wedding night, fearful of discovery even with the certainty that he wouldn't, and aware of the plausible explanations there were even if he did.

At the first of the year, sooner than he expected, Roger was given the job he wanted in the New York office of his company. His increase in salary, to sixty-five dollars a week, wasn't as much as he had counted on, but to get permanently in the head office was the important thing.

Zona thought it wonderful, though she didn't like being parted from him. He came back to Cranston on Sundays to see her, glowing about his work and his prospects. Zona was carried along with him, pushed even beyond him. "Oh, Roger," she pleaded, "let's get married right away."

Holding her closely, possessively, he made it plain that he would like to. "But we ought to wait until I've got a little more saved," he told her. "Then we can get out to Minneapolis and see my folks."

Zona had written to his people and they to her, nice affectionate letters assuring each other that they were happy about the coming relationship. Roger's parents explained that they were too far along in years to come east; she would have to come to them. She wanted to meet them, sometime, but not on a wedding trip. "We don't need a honeymoon," she assured Roger. "We can have one all by ourselves; I mean, anywhere. Later on we can go out there, when you're a big man in Wall Street and we've got a lot of money."

"Maybe I'd better see if I can keep what I've got."

"Oh, you will, you will, Roger! I know it. I'll help you. We'll help each other. Only let's not wait. Not any longer. I—it's because I love you so much!"

Flattered and touched by this frank want of him, Roger agreed to get married on the first of February.

Gracie agreed to be Zona's only attendant, and she held a lingerie shower for her, asking girls they both knew, and offered lots of advice. Zona, listening to it and to that of her mother, had a curious feeling of guilt, feeling she knew so much more than both of them.

Ernest came to offer his best wishes, but he couldn't keep from his eyes his disappointment. It brimmed in him, quietly but steadily.

"Ernest," she told him, "you'll forget me."

"I hope so. But I don't think so."

"You'll find someone else, someone better."

"There isn't anyone better."

Impulsively she kissed him and then stood back, gazing at him in sympathy, wondering if she should have done that. In him she felt, with a sense of warm pride, that she had a friend she could count on forever. She wondered whether Ernest would ever marry, and if he did whether or not he would continue to love her. She hoped he would, she hoped he wouldn't.

On the morning of her wedding day Zona awakened with a feeling of panic. All that was ahead of her, all life, about to be newly born, seemed almost too much to face. She wanted everything it promised, but the moment before the plunge, the responsibility of taking it, the

finality of it after it was taken, frightened her. She wished the day were not ahead of her, that Roger would simply come and they could go away together without any fuss or ceremony. For an instant she regretted having hurried it, yearned not to get married at all, wished that when she got out of bed it would be simply to get ready to go to the tearoom as usual. But Gracie had given her a shower, there had been a piece in the newspaper, some presents had already arrived; all the preparations were made.

Once she was up it was better, with all the important things to do. She hadn't packed yet, and they were leaving by car for New York right after the ceremony in the afternoon. There they would stay at one of the big hotels during the week off that Roger had obtained, while they looked for an apartment and located furniture.

Her mother, though excited, was the only one of the family not frantic during the preparations. Emma moved about getting things done, getting her husband out of the way, getting him dressed, properly and long before time, to give their daughter away. More wedding presents arrived, from relatives, from friends of the family. One long box contained a wrought-iron smoking stand in the shape of a red dragon from Ernest. Roger telephoned that he was in Cranston and confirmed the plan, as if arranging it for the first time, that he would be at the church at three o'clock.

Zona gulped down a lunch she didn't want because her mother said she must eat. Then there was a second bath—she had worked so hard watching her mother fix everything that she felt she ought to take another—and after that came the delicious drawing on of the little gray traveling suit she had bought to be married in. Her stockings, lighter in shade, her shoes a bit darker, and her neat hat fitting closely about the temples were all pleasing as she stared at herself in the mirror.

Only when everything was ready, Gracie there, her father fussing to go, the car waiting outside, did she notice how pale she was. She ran her lipstick over her lips again, and when that didn't help much Gracie, laugh-

ing at her, rubbed a little rouge into her cheeks.

Zona was aware of very little about her wedding. At first she saw only Roger standing ready, the wave in his hair slicked out, more solid than ever in a dark suit, a tiny twitch that wasn't a smile playing about his even mouth. She saw the boy standing with him and hoped she didn't look as scared as he did. She was annoyed at her father's important hopping about, as if he were the one who was responsible for all this and should get the credit. She was greatly conscious of the minister standing in his ceremonial garb, patiently solemn.

The clearest impression Zona had of her wedding was something the minister said. "Into his holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

Zona was seized by a great panic, so that she thought she might faint. She wanted to scream out the truth, stop it, not let it go on this way. Yet she feared, with an agonized fear, that someone else was actually going to speak. In the church, in back of her like giants, sat Jimmie Wilson and Grant Matthews. They could speak, one and then the other. Jimmie! She wasn't marrying Jimmie, yet he was the one she loved, the one she wanted, had always wanted. No, no, she loved Roger, she loved Roger, loved him above all else.

Before she knew it the ring was on her finger, and then came Roger's kiss, a confusion of embraces, and her mother's tears, the first she had ever seen.

The ride to New York was made through a blinding snowstorm that added to their excitement and made them hold closely to each other all the way in. The great hotel at which they were delivered was more glittering and suave and comfortable because of the storms through which they had passed. Zona darted here and there in their room, exclaiming at all the wonderful things, touching some of them to see what they were like or how they worked. She peered into the bath and then returned to plop herself down on the bed with a cry of pleasure.

Roger sat beside her and they embraced, whispering endearments. In his arms Zona forgot everything except the quick beat through her brain. Now is my wedding, now is my wedding, now is my wedding. She wanted to remain forever here, quickening and requickening with his arms about her, with no yesterdays or tomorrows. She held fast to him, as if she was safe at last from some unknown danger.

The next noon, Zona in her fresh new green negligee, Roger in his dressing gown, they were shy with each other as they sat at their very own combined breakfast and lunch in their very own room. They could speak of how much they loved each other only by making stiff, curious remarks about coffee and toast. When they admired the bacon and eggs they really meant that they adored each other. When he gave her a cigarette he was giving her himself; when she held the lighter for him she offered the flame that she had become.

Roger leaned forward and said, "Zona, I didn't tell you, but I've sort of—well, not exactly picked out an apartment for us already—but I've seen one."

"You have?"

"Of course, I wouldn't decide on it without you. But I think you'll like it. Anyway, I hope you will." He went on to describe the apartment. He had the enthusiasm of one who has found something all by himself. He had made an appointment to see it that afternoon. They would go as soon as they got dressed. And he had the rest of the day all mapped out for them. They would have dinner at a place he knew, and in the evening—

Zona interrupted him by laughing at him lightly, affectionately. She didn't know why she objected to his planning for them in this way, his arranging what she would do on the first day of her married life. She would rather have it come spontaneously, without blueprints, as it was wished at the moment. "Oh, Roger, we don't want to look at apartments today!"

He glanced at her solicitously, full of his love. Like a little boy anxious and willing to learn he asked, "No?"

"We just don't want to," she told him, "that's all."

"Well, I've made this appointment to see it."

"It'll keep."

"But it might not. It's a very good—"

"Everything will wait for us today, darling."

He smiled, approving the sentiment but not the facts.

"Still—"

"Let's not do anything we have to do today."

"All right," he agreed, but it was necessary for him to hide a slight chagrin at the upsetting of his plans.

"What will we do?"

"Well . . ."

"Let's go to a show. I mean a regular play."

"That would be nice, but maybe it would be better to save it for some other time."

"Then a movie?"

"Oh, we can go to the movies any day."

He considered, thoughtfully. "What I should do is take you to see Mr. Wirt."

"Wirt?"

"Lynton Wirt, the lawyer. The friend of my family who's looked after me in New York. I told you about him."

"Can't I meet him later?"

"I suppose so. How about a ride on top of a bus? It's not too cold and—"

She shook her head. "I've got a better idea."

"What?"

Zona gave him a long look before she glanced down and said in a low voice, "Let's stay here."

"Oh."

Abashed, pleased, somewhat confused, Roger telephoned to the real-estate agent and changed the appointment to see the apartment to the next morning. Then he stood, staring at Zona solemnly, not knowing for a moment quite what to do with his wife.

She reached for him, pulling his head down to her breast and holding it there, caressing him and feeling his response.

Chapter Ten

ROGER WAS VASTLY pleased when Zona liked the apartment the next day. There were only two rooms and those not very large, and the kitchen was not much more than a kitchenette. But the automatic refrigerator caught Zona's eye and enthusiasm. And the apartment was bright, occupying a third-floor corner of a new building on a street leading into Washington Square. By leaning out one of the windows a little they could see a stretch of the park.

They signed a year's lease and then started out to buy their furniture. Some of it they picked up at secondhand shops, but the most important pieces they purchased new, out of the thousand dollars Roger's parents sent them as a wedding present. They were delighted to discover that they agreed on all of their purchases until Roger started looking at twin beds. Zona had never thought of sleeping apart from him, and in a sudden moment of alarm she saw the whole status of their marriage as baseless. That was what marriage was for, to be in your husband's arms at night. Roger saw the consternation in her face, and wonderingly, indulgently, ordered a double bed.

The week was a hectic one of rushing about, choosing, buying, arranging, struggling with curtains. Finally, on the last day of Roger's vacation from the office, all was ready. They moved into the apartment, Roger carrying her gaily over the threshold. She cried out in fright as he nearly dropped her and then hugged him in the middle of the living room when he put her down. They were home.

That night they held a housewarming. Roger thought it would be politic to have some of the men from his office and several from other offices. Zona would know none of them, but Roger assured her she would like them all. They were comers on the market, good men to know.

Hastily they completed their last-minute settling and then made preparations for the party. Zona was apprehensive; she had never entertained before for New York people, and hardly knew how to go about it. Roger told her all they had to do was to have enough gin; that would take care of everything. He proceeded methodically, with only subdued excitement, worried merely about whether or not he had enough liquor.

Their party arrived in a body. That, it turned out, was by prearrangement, as was the boisterous song of greeting for the newlyweds, making Roger and Zona flush and laugh with happy embarrassment.

From the very beginning there were no pauses or strain, only welcome confusion. Their little place was crowded by a dozen people. Some of the men brought their wives; the others had with them sleek handsome girls. All of the women were very friendly, even enthusiastic, to Zona. But at the same time she noticed appraising glances. A little unnerved at meeting so many new people at once, she took heart when she saw that some of the glances were admiring and even envious. Few of the other women had her slim perfection of figure or her youth.

It was hard for her to remember the names of all these strangers, and she noticed that one of the guests seemed to be a stranger even to Roger. He was a tall, dark man with an expensively bred air about him, a little older than the others. He had been brought to the party by a friend, a man from Roger's office. The assured expression on his face and the way he carried his well-shaped head were barely on the right side of insolence. His name was Graeme Foster, Zona heard. It was Foster who solemnly announced that brides ought to be kissed, and commanded every gentleman present to do his duty.

He kissed Zona, nodding his head afterward with the mock manner of a connoisseur, and the others followed. Roger, grinning, joined the line himself, and a protesting cry went up of "No fair! No fair!" His kiss lasted longer than the others. But Graeme Foster went him one better by appearing in the line for a second time. "Cheat!

Cheat!" they cried at him, and then "Robber!" when he made his kiss a greater thing than Roger's, and continued it.

Zona, standing there, caught in the surprise of being incited by a strange man's sure mouth on her lips, suddenly thought the fun was being carried too far. She suspected that Foster continued to embrace her just to see what she would do. Gently but firmly she released herself. The frown on the face of the ash-blond girl who had come with Foster didn't escape her.

After more drinks they sat down to play poker, apparently the favorite game of this crowd. Zona didn't know the game, and though they urged her to let them teach her, she insisted on sitting out, watching, and keeping the glasses filled. She was amazed at the activity this entailed, at the amount and the rapidity with which they drank. Their game wasn't very serious, though they enjoyed it. They seemed more intent on getting as much alcohol into themselves as possible. And though their talk and banter flowed faster and rose to a higher pitch as the evening progressed, they didn't get drunk.

Zona sat beside Graeme Foster, feeling again her first resentment toward him, trying to like him for Roger's sake, watching him play and listening while he explained the game to her. Toward the end, after she put a relieved expression into Roger's face by nodding that the drinks had held out, she took a few hands. And when she won sizable pots, with beginner's luck and Foster's coaching, a murmur of approval ran around the table.

By then Zona knew a few more of them by name and that they liked her.

Later, lying beside Roger in the darkness, she didn't know whether or not to take a satisfaction in this. It was nice to be liked by his friends. They seemed pleasant, too. But the evening wasn't the way she pictured their first together in their own apartment. She didn't want anybody else, only themselves. It seemed a desecration that on this, of all evenings, their little place was crowded so that you could hardly move in it and now was littered with glasses and bottles and cigarette

ashes. The drinks made her head swim until she hardly knew what she was thinking, and she cried out, "I don't want to know people!"

Roger shifted about, startled from drowsiness. "Darling! Didn't you like them?"

"Yes, but—"

"You had a good time, didn't you? I thought everybody did."

"I guess so."

"Well, then!"

"But I still don't want to know people."

He kissed her, patting her bare arm. "We've got to know people, Zona."

"Why?"

"It's the only way to get ahead."

"I don't see why," she said stubbornly.

While he explained why, Zona hardly listened. The singing in her brain did not permit her to accept any of it. She was right. She knew what was for her, for them. She remembered Graeme Foster, she felt a passionate jealousy for the particular time he and the others stole from them, and she sensed that somewhere in the evening were notes in the city's music that struck a discord in her.

They were trying to creep in at the very first, and she wanted none of them. She wanted only to be alone with Roger, always to be alone with him, choosing their own song, having only each other, with no one and nothing else to interfere. Like now. The two of them together in the night. There was something so sweet and precious and achieved about being with him here like this that she could hardly contain herself.

Softly she snuggled up to him and breathed, "Roger . . ."

Then her eyes in the darkness went wide with surprise, shock, disappointment, and resentment.

Roger was asleep.

Zona's delight in their apartment was almost excessive. She looked with supreme pride upon everything in it,

caressing the articles of furniture, rearranging them lovingly, dusting them with care, placing them in their appointed places as though they were valuable museum pieces. This was her entity, fulfilled when Roger came home to it. The apartment, more tangibly than anything else, proved to her that she was Mrs. Fane. Only Mrs. Fane could possess this particular rug, that very chair, and she was Mrs. Fane.

While she did her housework she repeated the name over and over to herself, as if speaking of another person, or as if she had become someone else, a lucky one to be envied.

Her mother, coming in from Cranston to see her, affirmed how fortunate she was to have such a good home and husband. Emma spoke of her own husband, with brightness in her face but a sigh in her voice, telling of how he was no longer with the real-estate company. He had sold nothing all the months he was there. It was difficult; things were against him. He was now working in a music store, selling pianos. "I'm sure he'll do very well," Emma said.

Zona saw that even the real-estate people didn't want her father around. She understood how he got his new job, that her mother bought music for her pupils at the music store and that the proprietor was a friend. She knew what it had again cost her mother to ease the way. "Of course he will," Zona agreed.

Her mother sat and stared at her, saying tentative things, asking half-questions she seemed not to dare express outright. In her gaze and in her words Zona saw expressed their mutual knowledge of what she had needed and obtained. It made Zona sure that her mother had guessed about Grant Matthews, about what she was like. For a moment this perception, so much more direct than spoken accusation, unnerved her. She had not thought of there being any question, ever, about her love for Roger settling everything. She was outraged that her mother had a fear for her. She would always be entirely happy with Roger. How could her mother think anything else?

Then she saw the love and understanding upon which her mother's concern was based. Her mother couldn't be blamed for entertaining this thought. She didn't know how much Roger had already become a part of her. Zona was glad for the sense of fidelity to him that her mother made her feel. She kissed her and put her cheek next to hers closely, impulsively, telling herself that if the time ever came when she couldn't trust herself (and it wouldn't come), she would think of her mother. For her sake she wouldn't let anything else happen. That was a certainty, not a doubt.

Yet when alone, after her housework and shopping were done, after she walked around the Square or up Fifth Avenue and nothing else remained for her to do, Zona entertained a curious sense of unreality. Suddenly she found herself married and settled down. It had all happened so quickly that she could not yet altogether realize it. Roger appeared a stranger to her, a man previously unknown with whom she was to live for the rest of her life. After her previous upheavals this hardly seemed actual. She knew it for a good thing, but she asked herself if this beginning was the end of everything else, the complete solution of all the future. She was ready to be with him always, but it wasn't convincing that her life was finally mapped out and planned, with no question in it, no sense of a coming ultimate.

Then, not knowing where her thoughts came from, pondering them secretly and guiltily, she questioned herself. Did she really love Roger? Did she love this man the way she loved Jimmie and Grant before? She loved him more than Grant, irrevocably more, for she hated Grant and despised the recollection of him. But Jimmie?

Perennially the memory of Jimmie, her sweet initiator, was with her. She couldn't, no matter how much she struggled, get away from it. The thought of him, any reference to him, made her heart jump as it never did for Roger. When she saw someone on the street, in a theater, or on a bus who looked like Jimmie, an excitement came to her that lasted even after she had assured herself that it wasn't he. Whenever there was wafted to

her the warm fragrance of a spring evening mixed with the particular, remembered odor of a man's new suit, she was assailed by a suggestion she could barely control. She wondered if she was not to get over Jimmie even though she was now married to another man. Jimmie was like an unwelcome stimulant injected sharply into her heart. He was to be removed only forcibly, when she cried out that she loved Roger, that Roger was the only one she adored.

But this passionate assurance wasn't enough. To be certain of the thrusting out of Jimmie, to be sure of her marriage, she needed Roger with her, must have his touch, possess him above all else, to the exclusion of other interests. Solely in this way could the sense of the reality of her existence be satisfied. And out of it emerged an increasing need for the all-important moments when Roger subjected her completely. Those were the bare instants, fleeting and passing, but constantly in her mind, when she was entirely positive of herself, the single, brief periods in which she triumphed over herself through him.

One afternoon she called Roger on the telephone at his office. When he answered there was a question in his tone, a comment upon disturbing him at his place of business. That was like a challenge to Zona, a dare to prove whether she or his work was the more important.

"Are you very busy?" she asked.

"Fairly so. The market's closed, but—"

"Too busy to come home?"

"Now?"

"I want to tell you something."

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you when you get here," she said softly. Then she hung up and waited. She felt her power pitted against his business, against his interests apart from her. She fought Wall Street, all the soaring stocks and bonds on the market, the entire business of the nation, everything that men have away from women.

She won when he came in a little later with a questioning look in his eyes and stood regarding her quizzically. With a glad cry she rushed to him and threw her arms

about his neck. Never before, as she kissed him, had she felt such a want of him, such a tumultuous maddening need.

Roger spoke her name and asked, "What did you want to tell me?"

She leaned closer and whispered in his ear.

He started, a little in pleasure, mostly in surprise. "But darling, only this morning—"

"It's this afternoon now."

He stared at her, at first shocked at the naked, wanton wish in her eyes for no delay. Then, when it rose in him that this was for him and that he was called on to meet it, he laughed. She laughed with him, quickly, snatching at the pendulum of his emotions as it swung her way. Her arms met his when they went about her, and her mouth, lips parted, was ready for his when it came for her.

Lost in their hurry, their hands caressed and worked at each other until with a cry they sank, where they stood, to the floor together.

Chapter Eleven

ZONA FELT ANTAGONISTIC toward Lynton Wirt long before she met him. A prominent New York attorney, a boyhood friend of Roger's father, the one who obtained his job for him, Wirt was supposed to be Roger's guardian in his career. Zona had heard of him from the first. Because Roger felt he should have taken her for approval to Lynton Wirt before he married her, she disliked the bare idea of the man.

They had put off having him to dinner during the first weeks of their married life, and Zona made excuses after that until the beginning of summer, when they could postpone it no longer. Then, to her surprise, Roger showed signs of nervousness the evening Wirt was scheduled to come to dinner.

Like Roger, Wirt came out of the Middle West. Twenty-five years ago, after studying law at an eastern university, he was admitted to the bar in New York. Almost as soon as he began to practice, he married an intelligent girl who could be expected to further the interests of a rising young lawyer. They enjoyed each other fully, in one of those perfect matings that are as accidental as they are rare.

Then, with the birth of their child, Norma Wirt was left a helpless invalid. The child, if it had lived, might have been enough to save the lawyer. But when it died in infancy he was left with empty hands and a vigorous body still eager, a sensual man who had tasted the promise of happiness only to have it snatched from him.

From a beginning of being a merely competent corporation attorney, Lynton Wirt blossomed into a criminal lawyer who was sought after. He took his compensation by settling important cases expertly out of court or brilliantly in court. He became wealthy and enjoyed what there was to taste of renown.

Throughout all of his phenomenal rise he remained

immovably faithful to his incapacitated wife. The desire to remain steadfast to her was nearly a mania with him. He took a perverse pleasure in its sacrificial glory. When his wife on several occasions intimated that she would not stand in the way of his leading a less limited life, he flew into a rage from which he did not recover for days.

Through the fighting climbing years he took pride in his fidelity in direct ratio to his feeling of regret for a wasted physical life. He became hard and severe and bitter. He had to have success and more success to repay himself, to forget and thrust out his natural inclinations as a man. When he contemplated anything else, it was only to denounce and reject it. He shouted at women clients who tacitly invited him to make love to them. He treated lovely dinner companions with a cynicism that repelled them. He refused to employ personable secretaries or clerks at his offices. At sixty Lynton Wirt was till prodded by his frustration to bend the world even further to his will.

The instant Zona and this man bowed to each other, the previous objection she had to him solidified itself. She saw in his tall spare frame, in his hard stubborn mouth, in his iron-gray hair, all that Roger had told her of him. He was the great attorney with a tragic domestic life, the grand inquisitor suspicious of the universe.

With his eagle eye he fixed Zona for inspection. Cleverly, subtly, not seeming to be getting at anything in particular, he drew from her her history. He learned of her girlhood, of her parents, of her schooling, of her work, how she met Roger, how they were married, and how they were getting along.

Zona felt swept clean of all the little pretenses necessary to her as a person. She was a witness against herself, squeezed dry of all her facts. She resented the cross-examination, silently protesting that he had no jurisdiction over her.

Wirt, when he had gauged his victim finally, looked at her a moment before passing judgment. When it was finally handed down, his words were a sentence after she had been found guilty.

"You didn't tell me, my boy," Wirt said to Roger, "that you had married dangerously."

Startled, Roger asked, "How do you mean, sir?"

"It is always dangerous," Wirt pronounced, "to marry a beautiful girl."

The epigram, couched in flattery, meant to be amusing, meant to show that even a great, embittered lawyer could have his light side, did not put them at their ease. Roger laughed and said he didn't think there would be any danger with Zona. Zona smiled, more pleasantly than naturally, as if to say the compliment was pleasing but absurd.

During the meal, with which Zona had taken great care, Wirt spoke of Roger's father and mother in Minneapolis. He had seen them off and on through the years. "I'm sure that when they meet your wife," he told Roger, "they will be pleased." Again Zona caught the innuendo of an opposite meaning in the lawyer's words.

After dinner, the lawyer glanced keenly at Roger and said, "You're looking a little thin, my boy."

At once Zona took up the defense, exclaiming, "Oh, I don't think so!"

"But you see him every day," Wirt pointed out. "You can hardly be expected to notice it. You've lost weight since I saw you last," he persisted to Roger.

Roger disclaimed it, then granted, "If I have, it's probably because I've been working hard."

"Of course," the lawyer agreed. "That's it. I'm glad to see you're keeping at it. But don't overdo it." He smiled, his eagle eye flashing at Zona.

After he had gone Zona sat silently for a little while. Finally she said, "He doesn't like me."

"Sure he does," Roger protested.

"No. He hates me."

"Zona, what a thing to say! Why should he hate you?"

"I don't know. That is, not exactly."

"Well, he didn't like it when we got married without even telling him first. And then waiting so long to ask him here. But that's all. He'll get over it. He's the best friend we have, Zona. He's thrown some good things my

way. And you heard him say he has some more."

In their best friend Zona found no approval of herself. There was instead a waiting, a skepticism, an accusation. Not at once would Lynton Wirt accept her sudden taking over of Roger. Never, probably, would he forgive them for not consulting him. And there was something else in Lynton Wirt's eyes, in the way he looked at her. She felt it rather than understood it, but of it she recognized one thing thoroughly: She and the lawyer were enemies from the start.

She thought of this when Roger saw Lynton Wirt apart from her. It was a part of her uncontrollable desire to claim all of Roger for herself. On another afternoon she telephoned him at his office. But this time, when she whispered she had something to tell him if he came home, he was skeptical.

"Is it the same thing you told me before?"

"Didn't you like that?"

"Of course, darling, but—"

"Well, this time I have more to tell you."

He was silent for an instant at the other end of the wire; then, "Zona!"

What he thought flashed to her. She hadn't meant it that way. She knew she ought to disillusion him. But she knew also it would bring him to her. For a moment she was torn between giving up her accidental advantage and keeping it. She couldn't resist it. "Will you come?"

"I'll be right there!"

He arrived in a state of excitement and enthusiasm, bringing a dozen fragrant roses.

Zona stared at the flowers. "They're lovely," she murmured. She gazed at him. She hadn't counted on his being quite so enthusiastic. She hadn't been thinking of that very much at all.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he asked eagerly. "Or didn't you know?"

"Roger," she confessed, "it isn't like that."

"How do you mean?"

"You misunderstood me."

"But you—"

"I didn't say that. I meant—"

"Then you aren't—?"

She shook her head, and at the look of disappointment and anger that came into his face she explained hastily, "I know I shouldn't have let you think that. I'm sorry, Roger, really sorry. I don't know what came over me. I couldn't help it. I wanted you so."

She went to him, but there was no response in him. He was chilled and cold. "Is that all you think about?" he demanded.

"Of course not."

"It seems to me it is."

"Roger!"

They glared at each other, shaken. Each hesitated, then each remembered the words they had spoken. Something that loomed between them, a larger question every day, had been mentioned for the first time. They regarded each other hostilely and stubbornly, but reluctant on the brink of the chasm upon which they stood.

As though unwilling to step into its depths just then, Roger picked up his hat, turned, and strode to the door.

"Where are you going?" Zona asked.

"Back to the office. Where I belong. And don't ever call me there again."

He slammed the door after him.

Going over it later, trying dispassionately to decide who was right and who was wrong, Zona would have found herself at fault if he hadn't slammed the door. He shouldn't, she determined, have done that.

For days they were estranged, their lives a painful association of tense, voluble silences, of polite, strange monosyllables. Each blamed the other for a cataclysm from which neither thought they could ever be rescued. A thousand dread thoughts passed through Zona's head. Why had she ever married him? Should she leave him? What was the matter with him? Was he going to keep this up forever? A thousand black speculations, too, passed through Roger's head. Why had he ever married her? He didn't know she was going to be like this. What had happened to her? What did she think he was? Why was

she so unreasonable?

Zona tried to make up to him, but her gestures only set the stiff line of his mouth harder, making him right and wronged. Then he weakened and tried to make up to her; she now was the adamant one who would have nothing to do with arbitration. His actions had wronged her; she was in the right all along. They hated each other to the full measure of their love, so actively that sometimes they sighed, exhausted with the effort.

Then because the human soul can entertain just so much contention, they both found regret and forgiveness at the same time. Remorse and affection welled up in them in a sudden, urgent desire to be happy. They broached it simultaneously.

"Roger—"

"Zona—"

They regarded each other. They smiled, became for an instant more solemn than ever, and then laughed.

"We're being silly," Zona said.

"We don't have to be this way to each other," he said with relief.

"It was my fault for letting you think—"

"No, I shouldn't have got so sore about—"

They very nearly quarreled again about who was to blame. Each gave up trying to find himself guilty in protestations of how fine the other was. Their love, sweeter after being momentarily discarded, overflowed in a meeting that repeated itself and whose pleasures, almost frightening, left them stunned and inert.

Roger plunged into a world of finance showing signs of madness. A million, two million, three million shares of stock were turned over in the market daily. Up went the figures in frenzied speculation, carrying everything, everybody before them. Fortunes were made overnight. This man made a killing, that man made a greater one. More money existed on paper than was ever thought of in actual existence. Yet it was accepted as real, as there, counted on and used. It evaluated success; it was the symbol of the age; you were something only if you had a lot of it.

People said it couldn't go on, that there must be a stopping place. People said it could go on, that it wouldn't ever stop. It went on. Roger went with it. He put every cent they had and could save into the market. By buying on margin he trebled the amount of their purchases. He made a few hundred dollars. Exultantly, he made a few thousand. He put the few thousand back into the spinning wheel. The goal was a few hundred thousand.

Zona caught only a part of Roger's enthusiasm. She wanted him to make money, but not at the expense of themselves. What they could be to each other was more valuable than money. She was disappointed when, after she had waited all day for Roger to come home, he returned tired and worn out. Her eagerness and impatience were dulled by his exhaustion. Sometimes he fell asleep right after dinner. Once he fell asleep while she was sitting on his lap with her arms around him.

The moments when he had a fierce initiative for her, never as frequent as she could wish for, became even fewer. She found it more difficult than ever to rouse him when he had little inclination to be stirred. She could still succeed, but she had to resort to more and more devices and means.

When Roger got up in the morning he was always harried. He was really thin now, and showing the signs of strain. "Darling," he told Zona, "you're wonderful. Don't think I don't appreciate you, because I do. I guess you know that. But we can't go on like this."

She didn't want to admit it even to herself. "Like what?"

"Well—so much, so often."

She felt an inexplicable resentment of anything that might lessen their union. She said the first thing that entered her mind. "Did Lynton Wirt tell you that?"

"Mr. Wirt? Why, no."

"You've been seeing him, haven't you?"

"I've had lunch with him a couple of times, but what has he—"

"He told you you weren't looking well. He put this

idea in your head."

"Well, he did say—"

"You care for him more than you do for me!"

"Zona, you know better than that."

"You think more of business than you do of me!"

The absurd degree of jealousy she showed put fondness in Roger's voice. "You know better than that, too." He took her in his arms. "I love you more than anything else in the world." Looking steadily into her eyes, he kissed her.

She was hard for a moment. Then his male touch melted her and she clung to him. "I shouldn't say such things."

"I don't mind. I like it." They held each other. "But regardless of Wirt and my work," he continued, "we've been—it's too much. We—at least I can't stand it."

She flared again for an instant. "Are you saying I can, that I'm abnormal or something?"

"No, no, darling. It just would be better if . . ."

After he had finished outlining a different course for them, Zona didn't say anything. She thought of Lynton Wirt, blaming him and trying to determine why he should insist upon working against her.

Their intimacy became largely a matter of his choice. Instinctively she felt it should be just the other way, but she sensed too that this was adjustment for the better. She fought to quell the rushing of the monster possessing her, and for the most part she succeeded. Sometimes she failed, and then she found herself unable to restrain herself from persuading him.

At night when she lay awake beside him while he slept, her compromise was magnified by the darkness. Then she resented him and the blame became his. She was contemptuous of him as a man and asked herself why her need must be sacrificed to his. She saw her life as passing, not being fully used. The waste was his fault. It was his doing that her sleep was shallow or altogether impossible. His lack sharpened her hunger until it became wild and insatiable and she was left tense, aching, and congested.

Chapter Twelve

ZONA WAS RELUCTANT when Graeme Foster invited them to a party he was giving. Roger accepted with enthusiasm. A closer friendship with Foster, who was a member of a powerful firm of brokers, would be a valuable step in business for him. Zona kept her thoughts to herself when they went to Foster's penthouse on top of a glittering new building on lower Fifth Avenue. They were let in by a manservant and didn't see their host, who was on the terrace with other guests, until some time later. Then he greeted them with his handsome insolence. He took Zona's hand and appreciatively regarded her, all of her, and said, "I've always remembered our bridal kiss." He turned to Roger. "How's married life?"

"Fine."

"That's what they say." He looked again at Zona, turned back to Roger. "Hitting things on the Street?"

"In a modest way."

"Get in on it while the getting's good."

"Don't you think it's going to last?"

"Like the story books, 'And all the little bears and lambs lived happily together ever after.'"

Roger laughed. "I wish I knew what you really meant."

"I mean," Foster propounded lightly, "this market is like a love affair. It can go just so high before it reaches the top, and then there's no place to go except down. The thing to do is know when you've gone high enough. That's almost beyond the powers of man, but with a little practice . . . Then get rid of them; they won't be worth anything."

Roger took this for solemn business wisdom. Zona interpreted it in the light of the stories she had heard about Foster, and knew he had been speaking more of women than of stocks and bonds. It was repellent. The only thing to admire about it was its frankness, and she allowed that because it could never have anything to do with her.

She was surprised when Graeme Foster became more in evidence at the places they went. Before, they had never seen him. Now he seemed to be nearly always present. Zona learned it was a habit of his to travel with several circles, dropping one in favor of another when a new interest cropped up. She was incredulous, then disconcerted, when finally she saw that she was the new interest.

Expertly, deftly, Graeme Foster began to attend her. Always he arranged to sit next to her during the poker games, instructing her even though she no longer needed schooling. Once his leg pressed against hers under the table until she moved her body away. He danced with her and whispered in her ear, "You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

"Please don't say things like that to me."

"You're much too beautiful to belong to only one man."

He was hateful. She didn't want him. She didn't want any other man. At first she didn't know how to treat this one who tried to convince her that she did. The more severely she discouraged him, the more delighted he seemed to be with her. He never gave Roger a chance to see anything except that he was being charming to his wife. Roger was pleased that Foster liked her, liked, as he thought, both of them. Roger was too straightforward and aboveboard himself to suspect anything else. Half a dozen times Zona was on the point of opening his eyes. Then she discovered a better way to handle Foster, meeting him on his own ground and not showing she was disturbed by his intent.

One evening, as he was helping her on with her coat out of sight of the others, Foster's arms went slowly about her. Easily she moved out of them, smiling at him as though nothing more than a coat were involved, and said sweetly, "Thank you."

This treatment wasn't enough to stop Graeme Foster. He was too sure that the world was his. He had been bred to have what he wanted. It had been a long time since a woman's objections had discouraged him. It was just as long ago that they began to spur him.

Zona answered a ring at her doorbell one afternoon to find Foster standing there. She regarded him, slightly aghast, while she hesitated about what to do. Then she adopted her role, smiling pleasure at seeing him. "Come in."

"May I?"

He was mocking her, but she showed no sign as she led him into the living room. They seated themselves, she on the love seat, he on a chair opposite. She began to speak, telling him it was nice of him to call, asking him what he had done with all the money he won at poker the other night.

He didn't answer. He sat there looking at her intently.

"You aren't saying anything," she pointed out.

"I've been saying a great deal."

"But you haven't."

"I have." He got up, came to the love seat, and sat beside her. "And you've been listening."

Zona drew back from him as he bent toward her, forcing her out of her role, taking it away from her. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"I'm forgetting that you're married."

"I'm not."

"Well, try."

"But Roger is your friend," she protested. "How can you—"

"Roger is a very nice young man. I like him. He has a good head on his shoulders and he's going somewhere. I could speed up the process by letting him in on a few things." He looked at her. "I might do a good deal for him."

"That's hateful! It's—"

"You're comic, Zona. But adorable. Life is short and there's nothing wrong with making all we can of it. And taking all we can."

"I don't think that way, and I never will."

"Then you shouldn't be so beautiful."

"You think," she flared, "you can have anything you want. You think you can have me. Well, you can't! Don't you know that you're beastly?"

"I've been sure that's what you think of me."

"Then how do you ever believe I could—"

"Because," he answered slowly, "it isn't altogether a question of how you feel toward me."

Zona stared at him. "What do you mean? You'll hold Roger back unless—?"

He looked at her a moment before he understood. Then he laughed. "You've been going to too many movies. No, nothing as crude as that." He shook his head. "You're not as happy as you might be, are you?"

"Of course I am. What makes you think I'm not?"

"I have two eyes. I can see that marriage hasn't quite lived up to expectations for you."

"Well, you're wrong. And you haven't any—"

"Why not take what you need? When it can do no one any harm. When it will be with someone who won't have any illusions about anything. Who won't want you to run off with him, or change your life in any way. Why torture yourself?"

"I don't—"

"There are some women like that," he said bluntly. "You're one of them. No one man can ever be enough for you."

Zona's eyes went wide with shock and anger. What horrible thing was he saying? What right had he to say it? It wasn't true, it couldn't be true. Was it as evident as that? Could all the world see? Or only such as he? And did he know or was he merely guessing successfully? She wanted to tell him he was wrong, to cry her outrage at him, to be rid of what he made her bring home to herself. But the thing he had seen or hit upon was too dreadful. She could only feel weak and laid bare.

Pulling away from him, she asked in terror, "What do you want of me?"

Softly, as though he had hurt a lovely thing and wanted to make amends, Foster leaned over her and took her in his arms. The touch of his lips on hers sent a wild confusion through Zona. She was repelled as she never had been before. Yet she was also drawn to him in a helpless fascination. She hated this man with her whole being,

but apart from him, apart from herself, swift and assertive, there was once again the sweetness that quickened her above all else. Shot through with it, she didn't want it. Stiffening against it, she had to have it. In her hysteria there came to her the feel of her cheek against her mother's, the promise to herself that if ever she couldn't trust herself she would think of her mother.

Frantically she pushed Foster away and sprang up. He rose to the bitter things she flung at him, to the cry that he go away and leave her alone. A moment later he was gone, saying nothing but leaving a silence behind that told her he would be back, that he had only begun.

Then Zona stood, staring at nothing, not blinking, wondering what kind of woman she was that there could be any question of a struggle, that she should have to call upon the thought of her mother, that she considered Roger not at all.

With the increased business Roger managed to bring to his office, most of it by grace of Lynton Wirt, his salary jumped steadily until it reached one hundred dollars a week. Investing their modest capital in the right places had augmented this, so that no longer did all their savings and profits go back into the market; a certain amount they spent on themselves and on the apartment.

During the first six months of their marriage she had done all her own housework except for the dubious help, several hours each week, of a lanky girl named Gladys, who half accomplished general cleaning. But in August, after long weeks of hot weather, Zona found her greater share a task. Her pride and joy in it began to diminish; there was nothing very wonderful in washing dishes, even if they were her very own. Gladys was interviewed about doing all the housework and also preparing the meals. She exhibited a latent animation at her increase in salary and proved to be a surprisingly good cook. Zona was glad to have someone in the apartment with her all day, for it meant at least partial protection from another visit by Graeme Foster.

When she saw Foster at evening gatherings he said

nothing. She wished he would speak so that she could scorn him. But as far as his comments were concerned, their incident might never have occurred. Zona saw that he was waiting, as if he realized he had struck too soon and too forcefully and must be patient a little, only a little, before it was time to strike again more effectively. The waiting was in his bold eyes, in his every gesture toward her. She treated him politely but coolly, with aloofness that was sometimes almost insulting. In a wave of anger with him she thrust out any possibility that he could ever mean anything to her.

Zona found herself spending more and more time at her dressing table these days. Beyond cleansing cream, lipstick, and a little powder, she had never needed the aid of cosmetics, but her cheeks had lost their color in the city, and she fancied her skin was not as smooth or as clear as it once was. She covered her table with bottles and jars of creams and lotions and made up the difference artificially. Her long dark red hair she had cut and waved. She was careful to keep her nails perfectly manicured and delicately tinted.

She thought of this as being merely the result of a natural wish to keep herself as attractive as possible, but knew it for more than that. She realized that she was trying desperately to awaken in Roger a greater wish for her than was natural to him, so that her own call for anything else might be dimmed.

Determinedly she told herself she was successful. She cried out defiantly at any further need, and attended Roger's every comment and observation in connection with her appearance. When he decided he liked her hair better the way it had been at the time he met her, the wave disappeared and she visited the hairdresser no more. When he thought her eyebrows too finely plucked, they very soon appeared hardly touched. After he noticed and liked a perfume, she would never use any other.

Soon, however, Zona had to admit to herself that she was no nearer to being satisfied than she had ever been. Then, once again, she was left aching and suffused, wondering what more she could do.

Seated before her dressing table one afternoon, she was startled by the sharp sound of the doorbell. Her hand, applying lipstick, jerked, slashing a red streak across her chin. She frowned and wiped away the mark while waiting for Gladys to answer the door. It was good to have the girl here. But as she finished the making up of her mouth, pressing her lips together, no movement or noise came from the rest of the apartment.

The doorbell rang a second time. Zona suddenly remembered it was Thursday, Gladys's day off. She was alone.

She rose, stood for a moment, and then sat down again. She wouldn't answer the door. Not if it was what she had been expecting. It was absurd to have to do such a thing, humiliating that it must be done, but best this way. She sat, very still, staring at her pale face in the glass.

The bell rang again, this time insistently. Zona moved. She looked about. She felt her security by remaining where she was. She also sensed the admission of her fear. Whoever was out there ringing the bell was like a challenge to her, a test of her strength. It became to her worse to ignore it than to meet it. Instead of what she thought, it was probably a salesman or an innocent friend. She tossed her head impatiently and went slowly, then quickly, into the living room and to the door.

The bell rang once more as she reached the door. She hesitated, put her hand on the knob, hesitated again, and then called, "Who is it?"

"It's your father, Zona."

Gladly, with an exaggerated confidence, she pulled open the door. "Hello, Father!" She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"I rang so long I didn't think you were home."

"I—I was just finishing a bath."

"Well, you look glad to see me, all right. That's the way it should be. If every child respected his parents like you, Zona, the world would be a better place."

She closed the door and he followed her, daintily, down the hall. She arranged cushions on the couch, telling him, "Sit here, Father. Have a cigarette." She took one herself

and held the package out to him.

"No," he told her with some dignity, "I have my own. I'm always smoking yours when I come here."

"Don't be silly. You take this package. You can smoke them on your way out on the train." With a show of reluctance, he accepted. "How is Mother?"

Will Dodd's eyes darted about, more interested in other things, before he answered. "Well, she's fine. That is, she's still fooling around with those music lessons. I've always been against the idea. No need for it. Especially when I've got the deal on I have. That's why I'm in New York today. Big thing, Zona."

He explained the deal. Its details were extremely vague, and even its general idea, though huge, impressive sums were connected with it, was hardly clear. To Zona it meant but one thing: He was no longer connected with the music store. He couldn't even keep that job. No one wanted him around.

Zona let her father boast his way on. Before her eyes the great scheme went through; he became rich, successful, and important once again. She agreed with him, encouraged him, flattered him. It was the easiest and most pleasant way out.

They visited together on this false basis until it was time for him to catch his train. Then, as diplomatically as she could after he had, but a moment before, become a millionaire, she put a folded ten-dollar bill in his hand.

He protested, a little more genuinely than she expected. There was something of alarm in his voice when he said, "I can't take this, Zona. You and Roger've already been pretty good to us and—"

"Get something nice for Mother," she told him. She knew how much of it her mother would ever see. But it didn't matter.

"Well, I don't like it. You ought to give me a chance to pay back what I already owe you. This is only another loan," he said as he pocketed it. "You understand that, all right, don't you, Zona?"

"Of course, Father."

When Roger came home that night and she told him

her father had been to see her he said, "Yes, I . . ." He stopped. The words had come out involuntarily.

"He went to see you?" Zona asked.

"He dropped in for a minute."

"What did he want?"

"Nothing. Just to say hello."

Zona searched Roger's face. He was too honest to lie well, too straightforward to keep a secret. Everything showed in his candid, still boyish face. In a low voice Zona announced, "He borrowed money from you."

"Your father?"

"He did."

"I didn't mean to mention I'd seen him, Zona."

"How much did you give him?"

"I promised him I wouldn't say anything about it."

"How much did he get?"

"Well . . . fifty dollars."

"And I gave him ten. And he took it."

Roger comforted her in this shame, saying there wasn't any reason to feel bad about it, and defending her father.

Zona could find no excuse for him. She determined that whatever further money went to her family would be given solely into her mother's hands, and she wrote her mother a long letter telling her what happened.

Zona didn't go to Cranston again until the day before Gracie Warren's wedding at the end of summer. Zona was to be matron of honor. Gracie was marrying a newspaperman from Pennsylvania, and said she was sure Zona would like him.

Zona did like him. Not altogether sober, with an engaging smile, Johnny Leonard was one of those persons who immediately struck an accord with everyone he met. In his less intoxicated moments he was a good newspaper reporter. Gracie confided that she knew from the beginning about his drinking, and she meant to reform him.

It was strange to Zona to think that Gracie, always the more sophisticated in school days, was getting married on this naïve basis. Pert little Gracie, excited at the idea of making over an attractive drunk, confident she could do it, head over heels in love with him. Zona felt an as-

cendency over her until they spoke intimately of marriage the night before the wedding, and she offered, unthinkingly from her own vexation, the advice of not demanding too much of her husband. Gracie looked surprised and said, "I never thought it was like that. I always thought the husband wants too much of the wife."

All at once Zona was covered with confusion as she realized that her advice had turned out to be admission. "Sometimes it's the other way," she murmured.

Gracie stared at her.

The next day Gracie looked lovely, but Zona looked lovelier. She wished Roger were here to see her, but he had been too busy to come. Instead, at the wedding breakfast, there was Ernest, greeting her cheerfully and saying, "I've missed out again, Zona."

"Someday you won't, Ernest."

Instead of replying to this, he told her how well she looked.

She replied that she was sorry Roger wasn't here.

"I hear he's getting to be a big man in Wall Street."

"He's doing very well."

"I may be located in New York myself soon."

"Ernest, that's fine! Will you come to see us?"

He considered before answering. "I'd like to feel I can. But you'll understand, I mean really understand, if I don't?"

His words filled her with regret and pride. Between the two emotions she was unable to analyze her feelings toward him, except that to her, as before, he was more of a friend than a man.

She lost him in the hilarity of the breakfast, at which none was more celebrant than the groom. Johnny drank every toast. He absorbed strong liquid in astonishing quantities. He joined every quartet that raised its voice. He made a speech in which he appeared to be somewhat confused about whose wedding it was, and sat down in the middle of it to kiss Gracie and drink to her. He had such a good time at his own wedding that he had to be pulled away from it by force. And as he and Gracie drove away, he called back to Zona, "Listen, Bridesmaid,

if she doesn't stick with me I'll be back for you!"

Zona wondered how Gracie would fare, and feared for her.

In New York her father dropped in again, as casually as before, on another afternoon. This time Zona's reception was skeptical. He noticed it at once and with elaborate craft explained, "I haven't been to see Roger. Now, don't think that."

"I haven't said you have, Father."

"Well, I haven't. That isn't what I've come to the city for at all. Nothing to do with it."

"I hope not."

"Why, certainly not! I know I shouldn't have gone that other time, even though I don't see the harm in a little loan. After all, if a person's relations can't . . ."

As he offered his extensive defense, Zona, watching him, knew that he was lying. She should, she thought, have known as soon as he opened his mouth, but she hadn't fathomed his lack of subtlety in doing the same thing twice. Anger mounted in her as she interrupted him. "Did Roger give you anything?"

"Why, Zona! I've just been saying—"

"Did he give you anything?"

"I haven't seen him. I haven't seen him since the last time. I don't see how you can think—"

"Oh, Father! It's written all over you."

He opened his mouth to deny it further, his leonine head held stiffly, his handsome face shocked. He closed his mouth before her certain accusation. For a moment he was silent. Then he said, "Of course I wouldn't have gone to the boy unless we had to have it, Zona."

"You know very well that if you and Mother need anything we'll do all we can. But not this way. Not behind my back. Not behind Mother's back."

"It isn't like that—"

"Is *is* like that! I know what you've done!" Her anger rose as she faced the weakness in him. Resentment flooded her as she recognized his weakness reflecting her own. From him came her difficulty and her pain. At his guilty feet were to be laid the times she had bowed in trial be-

fore, and the threat of bending in the future, of fearing always the thing within her that represented him. That was the unenviable heritage he awarded her, and she flung the present version of it at him without restraint. "You can't do this! You won't do it to me! You won't!"

"Why, Zona, I don't see how you can speak to your own father like—"

"I don't care who you are! I'll speak to you any way I please when you do a thing like this! I only wish you weren't my father!" She was on her feet, her face flushed, the veins in her throat pulsing. He was silent, gazing at her in alarm. "You've got to give it back," she told him. "How much was it?"

"I haven't said there was any—"

Zone strode to the telephone. "Will you give it to me, or shall I call Roger and ask him?"

Will Dodd's eyes strayed from one side to the other. He was willing to humble himself, but not if it meant giving up his prize. He didn't speak. Zona's hand moved toward the phone.

Before she touched it, the instrument, as if entering the argument, rang shrilly.

Zona picked it up. A voice immediately said, "Long-distance calling. One moment, please." She waited, wondering what it could be. Another voice, as if from far away, made an announcement that caused her to cry out.

When she hung up and stared at her father, all the anger had left her face. In its place was a shocked despair. She didn't seem to see her father as he sat there, and she didn't say anything until he made an inquisitive noise.

"Mother's been run over by an automobile," she said dully. "She's dead."

When she was able to think coherently again, as she sat with Roger and her father on the train to Cranston, one thought surged relentlessly through her mind, repeating itself endlessly with the steady beat of the wheels on the rails: Why, why couldn't it have been her father? Why did it have to be the one she needed most? Now her only solid prop was removed, gone, and she was left alone, with no one to sustain her but herself.

Chapter Thirteen

AT FIRST, SITTING in disarray before her dressing table, Zona was stunned and bewildered. She knew only that Graeme Foster had come and gone.

Slowly, taking possession of her like a dread inspiration, the realization filled her mind that her determination against him had been so vehement that it could only express its contrary. To that was added the picture of the absolute certainty with which Foster came, of how he stayed as though ordained, of how deliberately he went. Even the moment of his coming had fitted into what seemed only a schedule, strange and authoritative.

Zona's head throbbed and burned. Her eyes felt hot, and her muscles, except where here and there they quivered, were as stiff as a statue. She thought aimlessly. What had she done? How could she have done it? How could it have been she herself, incredibly, who sent Gladys, her arranged protector, away? Bits of recollection darted up to her against her will. The moment she knew the whole unwieldy mansion of her defense was to collapse. His complete assumption. The things he said, not persuasive, but sure. His expert movements. The knowledge that she had been waiting for them, even annoyed that they had been delayed. The old sweetness, visiting her wildly, with unconquerable abandon, beyond anyone, beyond everything. The click of the door after he went.

What would she do, now that this had been done; now that she had obtained a dull hate for herself instead of gladness; now that she was left with a burning shame instead of the relief pictured in her moments of want? No dissatisfaction could be greater than the one she had found. She felt she had lost everything. With her mother and her self-respect both gone, there seemed nothing to live for.

Again and more clearly she was overwhelmed by the

realization of what she was. She was not like other women, but special, set apart, and exiled, her vulnerability a brand upon her.

She clung to the thought of Roger, with a love for him she had never felt before. Her previous love seemed little more than an excuse in comparison with this new feeling. All at once she wanted to make it up to him, to be better to him, to do everything for him, to ask his forgiveness through every service. That was her salvation, and she wished he would come home quickly, at once, so that she might have it.

Yet she wondered how she could ever face him and not let him see. She thought of the added thing she must bottle up in herself, away from him, and quailed before it. Hysterically wanting him to know it as much as she wanted to keep it from him, she feared she would blurt it out. Somehow he would discover it, in something she said, in some way she looked, in something she did. She was sure it was evident in every line of her face.

She looked in the mirror. Her face was solemn and drawn. She looked into her eyes. They were dull and set. The mirror gave back almost white contours from her mouth, and the delicate ellipses of her nostrils were distended.

A glance at the clock told her it was nearly five. Her eyes brightened with fear as she reached for the assisting powders and colors on her dressing table.

She was nervous when Roger came home, afraid of everything she said, of what he might suspect. She busied herself with doing things for him, careful not to exaggerate the precipitate, eager gratitude she had for him. It would be necessary to tell him that Graeme Foster called that afternoon, for Gladys was here when he arrived, but she put it off, unable to bring herself to speak of him. She continued to put it off until it was tight within her, and when Foster's name finally passed her lips she knew it would have been better to speak immediately.

But Roger did not notice what seemed to her to tremble in her voice. A sharp pang passed through Zona when

he expressed his appreciation for what he thought to be interest in them both by the man he had adopted as an example, whom he had placed on a pedestal. He recalled Foster's recent attentions to her. "You seem to have made a hit with him."

"He was just passing by. He thought you might be here, too."

"Hope you were nice to him."

"Yes. Of course. I—"

She was thankful for the interruption of his musing. "He's in on the stock pools. That's what I want to hit. That's what makes it. But I don't suppose he'll ever think of me."

Zona was astounded at the ease with which she ultimately carried her secret. Her first nervousness passed in an adoption of innocence that nearly convinced herself. She never knew she could be so adept at being casual.

She was sorry for Roger because he did not know. Somehow she felt superior, and entertained a curious pride in her deception. She recognized her further love for him now as a mere refuge. In it, mixed somewhere, was pity for them both, but little more. As for Foster, Zona tried to erase any thought of his ever visiting her again. Over and over she told herself there could be no question of it. She despised the man. Yet she knew she had to guard against despising him too much, because the very depth of her hate had already betrayed her once. She realized that in all hate there is need for the person hated, and that a need, however repellent the fulfilling of it, is loved more precious than what has been attained.

When next she saw Foster, at the apartment of a friend, he said nothing, indicated nothing, and she had a sudden hope that he had lost interest in her, that his pursuit would not be continued. It was not until she and Roger attended another party at his penthouse that she saw that he was merely waiting again, ready to gauge the moment when her recurring need was stronger than her revulsion.

Foster, after dancing with her, led her out onto the terrace. They stood, leaning on the balustrade, with the sky reddened by the city above them and the city itself

below. She had nothing to say to him; he seemed lost in contemplation of the scene before them.

Without looking at her he said, "You don't regret anything."

For a moment Zona stared out at the rooftops without answering. As if speaking to them she said, "I do. Everything."

"You can't. You must remember—"

"Nothing." There was ice in her voice.

For a long moment he was silent. Neither looked at the other. "If you come here Thursday at three no one will know."

"How can you ask that?"

"I'm not asking. I'm telling you what you want to do."

"I don't. I—"

He turned to her abruptly and took her hands. She tried to withdraw them but he held them tightly. In the touch of his flesh on hers there was a revulsion and a fascination she could hardly bear.

"Why feel remorse?" he asked. "When two people can have what we can have, and not hurt anything, there's nothing wrong with it."

"Everything is wrong with it."

"Everything is wrong with your not recognizing what you are. I know what's ahead of you if you don't. I'm offering the best way out. You'll take it, Zona."

"No!"

"Thursday."

"I'll never—"

"I'll expect you." For an instant the pressure of his hands around hers was painful as he stared with command into her face. "There's nothing else for you to do." Then he was gone.

Alone on the terrace, Zona trembled with the extent of her indignation. She fought his subjection, resolved to have none of it. The last place she would think of on Thursday was this. She would not obey his command or admit that what he said was true.

Looking over the balustrade, she saw the street hundreds of feet below. Street lamps made ghostly, slow-

moving shadows of people there. Directly below her, several stories down, the setback of the building jutted out. The wild thought came to Zona that it could be cleared in a jump. Then there would be only space to the street down there.

The desire to climb up on the balustrade and leap into eternity that would settle for all time the turmoil within her was irresistible. Her muscles moved her toward the act. The sweet, ironic thought that there was nothing else for her to do came to her as her fingers clutched at the stone.

But the hard, ungiving surface awakened a fright in her, and she shrank back. She could not do it. She could no longer bear to look down there and think of what she had almost done. She turned away, her eyes filled with the bitter tears of the caught and the defeated.

She didn't go on Thursday. At the last minute, after what seemed a losing battle, she managed, desperately, to chain herself to her will. But that didn't matter. At the very moment of triumph she knew it didn't matter. Only Thursday was settled; nothing else. The problem still remained, until she had to go, until she wanted to go, until nothing could stop her from going.

Foster didn't pretend that he loved her. She had that to thank him for. He was straightforward in what he wanted and what he could give her. That existed, shockingly, by itself, apart from anything else. Though incisive, he was never cold. In his way he could have a real affection. Always he had a genuine appreciation for something special in its category and pleasing to him. He told Zona that never before in his life had he had a woman like her. "You're magnificent."

"Am I?"

Even after she had visited Foster many times, she still wondered how she could permit herself any intimacy with him. To accept that from him was unnatural, phenomenal, and monstrous. You did that only with someone you loved. You didn't think of it casually, and you totally refused it from someone you hated. With delectable un-

reason, her hate for Foster reached its greatest height when she realized it was not he who had brought this about, but her own involuntary hunger.

With dismaying frequency she remembered the name Gracie Warren had given to women who could not get along without men, any men, many men. She knew she had to accept the name as her own. She had answered to it, and it was proved. It was proved every time she went to Graeme Foster's door and applied for the willing crucifixion that is not an end but a beginning. It was proved by the perfect tact of Foster's manservant when he admitted her. It was proved by the chromium splendor of the penthouse high above a world to which it assumed superiority. Lastly it was proved beyond any rebuttal by Foster himself.

Their greeting and her departure might be those of parties to a business arrangement who did not entirely trust each other. He adopted the withdrawn attitude she brought with her and seemed to take a delight in it, as in a new experience to be explored to the full.

They never forgot that they were opponents. Even in consummation, as they fulfilled the most poignant contract known to human beings, they fought each other. No matter how completely they were able to complement each other physically, in spirit they remained apart. Each to his own body allowed no reservation, but each to his own heart clung jealously.

Then, when the one thing was gone and consumed, she was silent and inert. Sometimes great tears formed in her eyes and spread themselves on her cheeks, and she murmured that she hated him and despised him and wanted him to die. When she did this he urged her on, asking her to tell him again that she would like to kill him, listening eagerly. He watched her tears and seemed to find a pleasure in them, bending over her in order to see them better.

As it progressed, as she climbed her precipitous path, her feeling toward Roger changed subtly. From being contrite and self-accusing, she became revengeful. She remembered and magnified the times he starved her. Every-

thing he had ever done or failed to do became wrong. She wrapped his weaknesses about her like a cloak, warming the cold fear in her soul. It was his fault. This was only what he deserved. What else could he expect?

Before long Zona was reasoning desperately that she must be in love with Foster. She had to be; otherwise she would not go to him. She would pretend no longer; a woman cannot be what she was being to Foster without loving him. It must, it must be true. At least he was a man. He was one who could meet her on her own ground. Roger, from the beginning, had never been an expert or consistently impassioned lover. That was a secondary thing to him, not to be studied, continually valued, or treated as an art. He would never consider most precious the nuances, the prolongings, the more delicate attitudes. It was Foster who came to her in the manner of her dreams. He knew and appreciated all there was to know about the art of lust. To him, it was like tasting a fine wine, which he could drink in large draughts or sip like a connoisseur. To him as to herself it was not merely a thing to enjoy while living, but life itself.

In all ways, Zona told herself vindictively, Foster was a greater man than Roger. Foster was a lover first and a businessman next. Roger was the opposite. Roger let himself be dominated by the stock market. Foster dominated his considerable portion of it.

How much he controlled it and led it to his use she learned when Roger came home one evening in a suppressed state of excitement. He didn't say anything for some time, while Gladys was in and out of the room, but it was obvious that something had happened.

For a wild moment Zona wondered if Roger had learned or suspected anything. She looked at him closely. He didn't appear to be a man who had discovered that his wife was being unfaithful to him. There was a happy gleam, an expectation, a triumph in his face.

Finally he was able to tell her. "Graeme Foster is operating a stock pool with several other men," he said. "He asked me to come in to see him today and told me about it."

Zona had forgotten Foster's saying he could do a good deal for Roger. He was doing this. She felt as if she had been slapped, as if she had sold herself.

"The whole thing is confidential, absolutely confidential," Roger went on. "But he's letting me in on it. I never expected it, and it's the chance of a lifetime. You see," he explained, "you can only make money with money, and the hardest part is to get enough to start the process. This is it, for us. I'm putting everything we've got into it, every cent I can raise. We'll be rich, Zona!"

Zona listened stolidly, as if he told her sad news instead of happy facts. She managed to bring animation into her face and say, "That's fine, Roger."

"They'll run this thing up until there's no telling what it will amount to," he said. "Of course, we won't make what Foster and the others will take out of it, but it will be some fairly real capital for me to work with."

He talked on enthusiastically after they left their dinner table and sat smoking. Zona hardly listened. She drew in lungfuls of smoke and let them out, containing herself. She gave the right answers, though they were mostly monosyllables. He didn't seem to notice her lack of excitement for the coming project. Not until he had talked himself out did he see any side to it other than his own. Then he was astounded when Zona leaned toward him and pleaded, "Oh, Roger, let's go away."

"Away?"

"Leave New York."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm afraid of it."

"But we can't leave New York. My work is here, everything we want. What is there to be afraid of?"

"Well, something might happen."

"What could happen?"

"Oh, I don't know. But something. I feel it."

"You're hysterical, Zona."

"No, it's more than that." When he looked at her keenly, she hastily added, "Isn't this stock pool, or whatever it is, risky?"

"Is that what you're afraid of?" Roger laughed.

"There's not much risk to it the way these boys work it. They're the only ones who stand a chance. Old John Public pays for it and they collect. Why, men in my office, the chief himself, would give their ears to be in on this. Opportunity isn't knocking at our door, Zona; it's banging, and we're going to be home to hear it." He smiled, through his anticipation, at what he thought to be her fears.

Zona condemned Foster, when she saw him, upbraiding him bitterly for doing this to her. "It's like buying me," she accused.

"Nonsense," Foster told her. "That was no bargain between us. I admit I offered it, but you can't say you accepted it."

"No," she said, clutching at this sorry bit of honesty.

"Take what you can get," he advised, "any way you can get it." His eyes flashed darkly at her. "And when you can get it."

"But why, why are you doing this?"

"Because I feel like it."

That was all she got out of him. She understood that there was no altruism in his action. It was a mere exhibition of power; he had taken a man's wife and he wished to show his domination in still another way. Also she saw that he would someday give her up. In spite of the illusions she had entertained from time to time, she knew that their association must resolve itself one day.

Meanwhile, she found, ironically, that she was enjoying a more adjusted life with Roger. She had no more need to make exorbitant demands upon him. Now she was not forced to resort to ways and means of rousing his initiative. With her larger life spent away from him, what remained struck a more even balance between them. He was delighted with her new content, and happy that she had recovered from her first strange and upsetting fervor. Zona had been afraid that, after having been with Foster, she could be only wooden and unresponsive with Roger, but she found she had underestimated her capabilities.

Her only real difficulty now was explaining to Roger why she was sometimes not home when he got there.

Several times she had been late for dinner, once nearly an hour past the set time. Her hours with Foster could not always be arranged easily, and when she was with him she was drowned in impassioned forgetfulness. Zona used shopping, traffic delays, and the movies as her excuses. But as these were repeated through the weeks of the fall, and Roger became openly irritated at her unpunctuality, she resorted to the expedient of telling him that she had been to Cranston to see her father. The afternoon train from Cranston didn't get to New York until six o'clock.

She did actually go to Cranston once. Will Dodd lived alone in the old house, somewhat bewildered, pitying himself a great deal, but still unable not to boast of what he would someday accomplish. He and Zona had seen each other seldom since Emma's death, but now Zona renewed his affection by giving him money. "Father," she told him, "I want you to do something for me."

"What is it, Zona?" he asked importantly. "What do you want?"

She explained that, without letting Roger know, she was keeping up her music. Roger was going to make a great deal of money, and sometime, maybe next year, they would have a larger apartment, with a piano. Then she would surprise him. But it was difficult to keep it a secret from him, because her teacher could take her only late in the afternoon, which made her tardy getting home. There must be some explanation for this, so she had told Roger she was making frequent trips to Cranston. All her father had to do was to back her up in this if Roger ever raised any questions.

"Is that all?" her father asked, as if she had not wanted enough to meet his talents. "Why, that's easy. There's nothing to that at all."

"Then you will, Father?"

"Certainly I will. That is," he added, glancing at her slyly, "there's nothing else connected with it, is there? Of course, I don't mean to say anything wrong or—"

"Father, no! I just want to surprise Roger by being able to play for him. He likes music and—you'll be careful?"

"Careful as a bee. I guess you can rely on me, all right."

Chapter Fourteen

THE DECEMBER EVENING was heavy. A mist in the air made an effulgence of the street lights, of vehicles, of buildings. Sounds came slowly through it, the pavement glistened with its presence, returning shoppers bowed before it.

Through it Zona returned home, walking briskly because it was late, after six. Impatiently she waited at Eighth Street for cross-town traffic to pass. Then she reached the Square, reached her own street. In a moment she hurried up the stairs, experiencing as she went the breathlessness she always had when returning like this, the unpacific sense of something successfully risked.

Letting herself in, she saw in a glance that Roger wasn't there. She felt a relief.

Gladys poked her face out of the kitchen. Zona asked as she took off her coat, "Mr. Fane isn't home yet?"

"He ain't here now, Mrs. Fane. He was here, but he went out again."

"Gone? Where did he go?"

"Didn't say."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, fifteen-twenty minutes."

Gladys went back into the kitchen and Zona drew off her hat slowly. Going into the bedroom, she sat before her dressing table and looked at herself reflectively. She began to brush her hair. Absently she watched it glisten and lift under the strokes and heard it crackle like the fear in her.

It wasn't clever to be late today. This day was special, the day set for the stock pool to liquidate. Roger had talked about it for weeks. He knew the approximate figure at which his small holdings would go. He knew about how much they would make.

Zona wondered if anything had happened. Roger had never gone out again like this after returning from work.

Why had it occurred on this particular day? Did he suspect something, and had he gone to verify it, or had he merely, not finding her here, gone after something with which to celebrate? She told herself that he would come in soon with a bottle of wine under his arm, a bunch of flowers in his hand, innocent of all achievement except his own.

She heard Gladys unfolding the gate-leg table in the living room. She put down her brush, got up, and went into the other room. She wanted to ask Gladys for more details of Roger's coming and going, but when the girl began to lay the table and was there to be asked, Zona didn't know if she could trust her voice. She felt it would sound peculiar and suspicious to make inquiries.

The girl said nothing. She returned to the kitchen, where there were sounds of cooking, and then came back again with cutlery and plates. Zona watched her. She found a cigarette, lighted it, and began to draw on it. She looked about, saw the clock on the mantel saying it was nearly six-thirty, saw an evening paper on one of the armchairs. Picking it up, she sat down.

She read half a column without noting its subject. She put the paper down, looked up with decision to ask Gladys what time Roger came home, and found the girl wasn't there. She picked up the paper again and began to turn its pages as if reading instructions for what to do if Roger had found out. She would offer nothing, explain nothing, say nothing of where she had been unless he asked. She would say no, no, no, until he was convinced, until he credited her.

Gladys was back at the table at a quarter to seven when the door opened and Roger stepped in. Zona put the newspaper aside a little more hastily than she meant to and looked up. She started to rise, with a word of greeting ready. Then she sank back, the word dying on her lips.

Roger, after closing the door behind him, stood with his hat still on, his overcoat still buttoned about him, staring at her, at Gladys, at the dinner table. Gone were his usual poise and self-composure, his air of doing things

methodically, because he wanted to do them, because he had complete control over them. His cheeks were pallid and little lumps asserted themselves at the sides of his jawbones. His eyes were bloodshot and full of shock and bewilderment and fright and determination and anger. From them looked a man who had been jerked violently out of himself.

He knew. Or suspected. Above the fast beating of her heart a stillness came over Zona.

Roger stepped toward Gladys, who turned to look at him.

"Get out," he said.

"Mr. Fane?"

"Get out. Go away."

The girl mumbled something.

"Never mind dinner," Roger ordered. "We won't need you any more tonight."

Her eyes went wide, then the girl came to life with alacrity, dropping onto the table the dish she held and moving toward the kitchen.

Zona was up now and asking, "Roger, what's the matter?"

He didn't answer. His shoulders were hunched, and his neck, pulled in, was twisted and awry, his head turned toward the sounds of Gladys's hasty preparations for departure.

Zona took a step toward him. "What is it, Roger? What's happened?"

He didn't say anything until Gladys had gone. He watched, twisting his head, following her reappearing, her crossing the room, her opening the door, her stepping out, her closing the door. Then, slowly, as if with bitter reluctance, he turned and said in a low voice, "I saw you coming out of Foster's apartment house."

Zona looked at him, grateful that her agitation could be made to seem surprise. "Why, yes," she said, "I was there. I was out walking and I dropped in to see him."

"I tell you I saw you come out."

"But what—? You didn't want me to go?"

He glared at her for a long moment before he said with

an effort, "I didn't want you to give yourself to him."

"Roger!"

"You don't have to pretend. You don't have to lie."

"Do you know what you're saying?"

"I know what I'm saying. I know what I'm doing. I only wish to God I didn't."

She looked him squarely in the face, straight into his eyes without blinking. "Why, I don't see how you— Oh! It isn't true."

"It's true."

"It isn't. Oh, Roger, it isn't! It isn't! I don't know what you think, I don't know what you believe, but I've never—"

"I telephoned you this afternoon." His tone was so roughshod and so certain that Zona's heart sank. "After the market closed. About half past three. I wanted to tell you how much I made. It was a lot. Gladys said you'd gone out. You went at two."

"Yes. I did."

He went on, not heeding her candid corroboration. "Then I phoned Foster's office. I wanted to thank him for what he'd done. Letting me in on the pool. Letting me make more money than I've ever made in my life. Than most men as young as I ever make. He wasn't there. He'd gone. Such a big shot didn't have to wait for the pay-off on the pool. He could leave it in other hands, knowing they'd take care of it. Knowing they'd made him rich. Just the kind of man I wanted to be."

His flow of words, coming out of him as if escaping under pressure, stopped for a moment. She said, "Yes, but—"

"I still wanted to tell you. Get in touch with you. So I called Cranston, thinking you were there. I called your father. At first he said you weren't there. Then he said you were. I asked to talk to you. He said you'd left. Just that minute. You had been there, but you weren't there any more. You'd gone. You'd come early, right after lunch, and hadn't stayed very long."

Trying not to show her anguish, Zona said, "You know how Father is, Roger. He gets things mixed up."

"That's what I thought at first. I thought he must have made a mistake. I thought it was just the usual thing. But it wasn't. I knew it wasn't. I could tell he was lying."

"But what should he lie about? I—"

"That's what I asked myself. I tried to figure it out. I got thinking. I got thinking about Foster and why he'd let me in on the pool. I'd wondered before. I thought he just happened to like me. And you. It didn't cost him anything. Nothing except that men in the Street don't do things like that. Not unless there's a reason. They don't have to. There were others closer to Foster he didn't let in on it. I'd never thought of it like that before. I couldn't figure it out. I didn't try for a while, with all the money I'd made. I called myself ungrateful. Looking a gift horse in the mouth like that. Then I remembered some things. I remembered the stories I'd heard about him. I hadn't paid much attention to them. I did now. I didn't think it could be true, the thing I thought then. But I remembered a good many things."

Zona stood, drawing long breaths, forcing herself to look as if she didn't know what to make of his speaking so much, so fast, so jerkily.

"I didn't believe it. I couldn't think you . . . I came home. I tried not to think about it. I had to think about it. It kept at me, and I couldn't get away from it. You weren't here. Gladys said she didn't know where you'd gone. You hadn't said. That made it worse. I told myself you were shopping. I told myself it was all right, that I was making a fool of myself. I waited, and you didn't come. I wanted to do something. I went out. I'd go over to see Foster and thank him. That's what I told myself I was doing. I wasn't doing that. I got there. I was across the street. Then you came out."

Zona looked at him, still steadily, running her eyes over him as though astonished, as though now understanding. "Oh, Roger! And from that you think—"

"I was still just thinking it then, yes. I wasn't sure. But it made me surer. It made me so I had to see Foster."

"You—?"

"I went up there. I saw him. First I saw it in his serv-

ant's eyes. Then I saw it in his eyes. He couldn't keep it out. It was too soon after . . . I hit him."

"You hit him?"

"That was when he told me it took two to do it. That's what he said. That's how he tried to get out of it. That's how he tried to excuse himself. It took two, he said. Two."

Zona felt her eyes spread. She could dissemble no longer. She could control herself no longer. She was repelled and horrified. She thought she was choking. She stared, with a vacuity in her gaze, for a long time, without expression, as if she had no feelings. "Oh," she said, "oh. Oh." Shock and hate and revulsion and a desire to get away pulsed through her. She uttered a wild cry that was between a shriek and a sob, and whirled to dart across the room and then rush, trailing a ribbon of involuntary noises behind her, into the bedroom.

Chapter Fifteen

FOR A LONG TIME she lay bathed in pain, aware of nothing outside of herself. She became exhausted with weeping, but sobbed on because it was her only comfort and refuge. Then, when she was given to long, dry hiccoughs, she heard a movement in the living room. A door slammed. She thought Roger had gone out. It meant nothing to her, for she waited and hoped for nothing, was nothing.

A little later there was another noise. This time the bedroom door opened. Roger hadn't gone out. He came gradually into the room. He had taken off his hat and coat. Zona tried to stop crying, but couldn't.

He might not have been there at all for all he said or did. She thought he must be waiting for her to speak. It was up to her to say something. Explain it, she commanded herself. Defend yourself. Give a reason. Do impossible things.

Zona didn't make any sound beyond those she couldn't control. She didn't look at him.

At last he spoke. "Why did you do it?" His voice was strange and miserable.

It was impossible for her to answer at once. Her throat wouldn't let her.

"Why did you do it?" he asked again.

"I don't know."

"You must know."

"I don't. It just . . ." She caught her breath, sighed, and managed to get out, "I don't love him. I never loved him. I hate him. I've always hated him."

"It looks that way."

"It's true. I didn't want him."

"You went to him."

"No. No, I didn't want to."

"When you had me. You had me, didn't you? *Didn't you?*"

She had no reply.

"And you went to him. That's what I can't understand. I thought you . . . I thought we . . . When did it start?"

"Not long ago."

"When? I want to know."

"In September."

He considered this, as if it was in some way significant.

"When in September? First part? Last part?"

"Last."

Whatever it meant to him was lost in the fury it also made him feel. "How often," he demanded harshly, "were you with him?"

"I don't know. I don't remember."

"How many times a week?"

"Once or twice."

"More than that."

"No."

"Sometimes three."

"Yes."

"Four."

"Yes."

"Every day."

"No."

"It was!"

"No!"

"Then you came home to me?"

She cried softly.

"God."

Her sobs rose. She heard him fumbling in his pockets, and then there was the scratch of a match when he lighted a cigarette. He pulled on it and let out the smoke audibly. He began to walk about. Several times she thought he was about to say something, but he said nothing. Finally he stopped. In the dead silence he sniffed. He sniffed again. The sound arrested her. Was he crying? She heard him go out of the room, and then she heard the clatter of saucepans from the kitchen. Gladys had left their dinner over low flames on the stove, and it was burning. She could catch the odor now.

While he was gone she understood what it was that had been done to him. Everything he had taken for granted was swept away from him. His natural trust in the things he held most valuable was not only removed but shattered. All the boundaries around the world of his decency had been violated, and he was forced across them to be given the chance of striking a god, turned false, in the face.

She had to retrieve herself in some way, fair or unfair. She remembered his asking when she had started with Foster. That seemed important to him, and she understood, in the light of the way his suspicions were aroused, his questioning of why Foster let him in on the stock pool, what it could mean. That was in the early part of October, afterward. In that she recognized a slight hope, a faint promise, and she clung to it. The only good was restoration, which was the least she could do for him and the most she could do for herself.

She waited impatiently for him to come back. When he didn't appear, the sickening fear reached her that he wouldn't return. She wouldn't have the chance to offer her desperation; she would lose him forever. She half sat up as if to go after him, when suddenly she saw him outlined in the doorway.

"He was after me for so long!" she cried.

"What?"

"Since last summer."

"Well, why didn't you tell me?" He was furious and hard.

"I was going to. Then I didn't. I didn't think I could ever . . ."

"You did."

"He came here. One afternoon."

"It happened here?"

"Once. The first time I made him go. The second time . . . I couldn't help myself, I couldn't!"

"No? Why not?"

She waited before answering, gathering her forces, still half sitting, staring at him. "The way he put it. The way he put it from the first."

"How did he put it?"

"He—he said he could help you."

"Said he could help me?"

"He said he'd hold you back, hurt you, if I didn't."

He stared at her. "But he couldn't!" he cried. "He—For God's sake!"

She watched him consider it, praying it was what he wanted to hear. Could he believe it, would he accept it? His face twisted into a grimace of rage and chagrin.

"You wanted him," he accused. "You wanted him, too!"

"I didn't; no, I didn't!"

"You did!"

"I hated him."

"You wanted him. You must have. You—"

She sat all the way up and for the first time her voice reached out fully, rising to a pitch. "I tell you I hated him!" she cried. "I could kill him!"

She was startled herself by the venom in her voice. There could be, she knew, no mistake about his accepting that. The unalterable fact of it, brought vicariously to her support, racked her. She sank back, prone again, and burst into sobs that had no restraint but filled her convulsively.

Later, from far away, his voice came again. "Foster told you he'd let me in on the pool if you went to him. He'd get at me, hold me back unless you did. And you believed him. You helped me." He said this as if it were a bitter lesson to be learned by rote, something he tried to get through his head. "Well, you helped me, all right. You made twenty-three thousand dollars. Twenty-three thousand, four hundred and sixty-seven dollars and fifty-six cents. That's what he paid for you. You weren't cheap, anyway."

Neither slept that night. They lay awake side by side for long hours, not speaking, not moving, hardly breathing, painfully aware of each other.

They rose in the morning as enemies suspended in a situation that necessitated tolerating each other but indulging in no further association. He said nothing, and

she, ready to take her cue from him, offered nothing. In bitter silence he departed for the office, leaving her to a day of agony and remorse and uncertainty.

When he returned that night they spoke, or rather he spoke, and it was her privilege, granted by him, to answer. But their words were noises without meaning, mere required communication for the conducting of life. Zona tried to read from his expression what he felt and planned. But his face was set and hard and showed nothing except that he was thinking, thinking, trying to estimate the great path of destruction she had created between them, and from his inventory determine her sentence.

On the night of the second day she could bear it no longer. The torture of waiting, of not knowing, was more than anything he could mete out, and she cried to him, "What are you going to do?"

He looked at her, stared at her directly for the first time in two days, condemning her for the false assumption that she could force her punishment to a crisis. "Do?" he demanded harshly. "What is there to do?"

On this enigmatic question he left it, and she never learned what he believed. She thought he couldn't understand what she was, but only saw what she had done. In all his reproof of their maladjustment he had known only that she was possessed of an extraordinary ardor; either he had never heard of her special category, or it didn't occur to him to place her in it. Now he had been led to credit a case she contrived for herself out of frenzy, and she had no wish to disillusion him.

How much Roger accepted of her story Zona wasn't sure, but she could see he was ready to pretend as a means of continuing their marriage. Even though it was grievously damaged, it was better to retain what was left than to demolish the whole. Anything else would be like committing suicide with a part of himself. And to one as conservative and proper as he, it was better to contain shame instead of advertising it to the world. Faced with parading himself in so unattractive a light before friends and strangers alike, he chose the poison of secrecy.

While she waited in vain for Roger to forgive her, she saw in full what she had done to him. Before her eyes he changed from an enthusiastic young man to a more mature and skeptical person. His grave boyishness disappeared, and he grew up. Never again would he be able to place a human being on a pedestal. And though in most ways he remained thoroughgoing and methodical, in one thing he proceeded to contradict his whole nature. Faced with possession of the money Foster's machinations brought to him, he poured forth on it all the violence that had been generated in him and which he bottled up for the cruel sake of keeping up appearances.

Always Roger had wanted capital with which to build a fortune; that had been his goal, and he had reached it. But now he found that only in getting rid of it could he forget the way it had been brought to him.

Roger sank the entire amount of his earnings in a wildcat market. On the lowest margin he could obtain he bought a questionable stock, and then waited to be wiped out.

Roger met with the sardonic accident of watching, while he lifted no finger, felt no exultation, his stock go up and up. He waited for it to drop as, by all normal expectation, it should. It didn't drop. It climbed in sudden spurts. When it kept on and there seemed no ceiling for it, he got out before his money could be more than doubled.

He tried another, this time one of the unaccountable coppers. In three days it rose to the point where he had half again his doubled investment. He yanked it out of that and the stock promptly went down. He put it back in again on a falling market, and after a short period of further fall, it shot higher than ever before.

There followed a period of mad and dizzy speculation. Roger, goaded by bitter success and the determination that the money meant only something to be lost, put it into everything and anything. While other men searched passionately for good stocks, he hunted frantically for bad ones. Sometimes he lost, but he couldn't lose enough or fast enough to wipe him out. More often he won, until

the climbing sum of money reached beyond his first hundred thousand and raced well on toward a second.

He changed his tactics and put his money into the best stocks on the market, on the theory that, risen so high, they couldn't go anyplace except down. They rose insanely, without reason, defying all laws. The stock market seemed to challenge gravity itself.

Roger did not take Zona to Minneapolis at Christmas to exhibit her pridefully to his parents. He wrote that business prevented him from bringing her this year.

They spent a joyless Christmas alone in the apartment. It would seem intolerable to let the day go by without following its customs, so they gave each other presents, but Roger's gifts to Zona represented only a submission to form. Zona's gifts, however, were tangible pleas for forgiveness, offerings for truce. With stilted thanks he received the intimate things she had carefully picked out for him, a dressing gown, a new pipe, some ties. Zona didn't blame him for not being able to let himself go further than saying, in a subdued voice, that they were very nice. When she opened his envelope and drew out a check for five hundred dollars, she took advantage of the opportunity to exclaim, "Oh, Roger!" and throw her arms about him and kiss him. It was the first time such contact had passed between them, almost the first time they had touched each other, since the day he accused her with his knowledge. He remained hard, not returning her embrace, not encouraging her arms to remain about him.

Zona found herself thinking of the letter she had received from Gracie a few days ago. It was a brave letter, but between the lines Zona could read clearly that Johnny was the odd one in that marriage. She and Johnny, Zona thought ruefully, would have made a good pair. Gracie had written too that Ernest Marshall was in New York now, but that he expected to be sent to Cleveland soon to be the manager of his insurance company's office there. Zona wondered why he hadn't come to see her, and then she remembered his saying, when she asked him to come, that he hoped she would understand if he didn't. Well,

she couldn't blame him. Having lost Jimmie, she understood that seeing her again would only be painful for him.

Roger made no plans for New Year's Eve. The end of 1928 and the beginning of 1929 seemed to mean nothing to him. He sat silently through dinner, and afterward, when Gladys had gone, gave no indication that he was aware of the date. Zona wondered if it actually escaped him, wondered how much longer she would be able to stand this strain. She was surprised when abruptly he suggested they go out and have a drink.

She could not control the eagerness with which she jumped up and cried, "I'd love to!" Then, quickened with enthusiasm at the idea of going out, she asked him hesitantly if they could dress. "Please, Roger. Then I can wear my new dress. It's a darling, and you haven't seen it yet. You'll like it, and it will only take a minute for both of us. Please, oh, please!"

Reluctantly he agreed, and she rushed into excited activity. She was as pleased as a child and chattered to him as they got out their clothes, letting escape all the pent-up desire for natural companionship she had felt during the past weeks, and hardly noticing that his replies were brief.

Zona waited until they arrived at the de luxe speak-easy they decided to go to before telling Roger how well he looked. Then, dancing with him, actually in his arms, surrounded by diverting confusion and noise, she made the most of the opportunity to win him. She knew she was lovely and desirable in the evening gown she had purchased with part of his Christmas present. White, shining, and daringly brief, hardly reaching to her knees, it clung to her closely. Her stockings were sheer and smooth, and her eyes as bright as the buckles that glittered on her silver slippers. Roger looked at her, and though he didn't comment with words on her appearance, the admiration he couldn't keep from his eyes and the way his arm pressed a little more firmly about her made Zona cease to wonder if he would ever want her again. I've won! she thought exultantly. I've got him back again!

Chapter Sixteen

LYNTON WIRT'S HOUSE on West Seventy-third Street was one of those forbidding brownstone structures indigenous to New York. As Zona mounted its steps with Roger one Sunday afternoon she saw how well the hard, dark house suited the lawyer. She had never been able to forget him or entirely get away from him. Through subsequent visits to them, frequent references to him by Roger, he remained in her life much the same way he entered it, suspicious, discerning, unforgiving.

A thin-lipped housekeeper of middle age, her garments obtrusively black, let them in and directed them to the second floor. Here at the entrance to a large dim parlor Lynton Wirt greeted them. He shook hands with Roger, fixed Zona with his eagle eye, and told her he was glad to have her in his home. Polite in an officious courtroom manner, his tone added that she was welcome because she was Roger's wife, tolerated on that score and no other.

In a wheelchair placed at the side of a small old-fashioned table there sat a woman whose snow-white hair produced a startling effect above her pale, smooth face. Large dark eyes stared out at them, the only things about her that did not have an invalid air. They lighted up with a pleasurable gleam when Roger went forward to greet her. In a soft patient voice, sounding a hospitable key, she told him it was good to see him again.

It was Roger and not Lynton Wirt who presented Zona. Norma Wirt's eyes were startled when they looked up at her. The faintest flicker of a glance toward her husband showed in them before she said, "Sit down, my dear. Let me look at you."

Zona took a chair near her where they were in full view of each other and set apart a little from the men. She waited, as though on exhibition, while Norma Wirt gazed at her, not critically, but with interest and a slightly pathetic wonder.

"You're the prettiest thing I've seen in many years," the older woman finally said. "It's been a long time since anyone like you has been here."

All through that strange visit Zona saw why she had never been in this house before. Youth and all physical attractiveness had been shut out. Any reminder that people are male and female together was not allowed. As Lynton Wirt barred such suggestion from his office, he prohibited it in his home, and manifested here also the reason for the policy.

Watching, Zona was treated to the curious spectacle of Wirt's oversolicitousness toward his wife. In her presence he was a changed person. His attention was continually centered on her. He jumped up and down almost constantly to serve her, often anticipating her requirements, sometimes inventing them so he could wait on her. He seemed not satisfied unless he was doing something for her, drawing attention to her. In this way he emphasized his tenderness, his fanatical loyalty to a woman who could not, unaided, move from her chair. He had made of her his own particular goddess; she was his unhealthy religion.

Norma Wirt didn't say much. She took the excessive attentions of her husband quietly, but her smile reflected the whole course of her life with Lynton Wirt. In it could be seen that it had been harder for her to support her husband's faithfulness than it had been to bear her own disability.

Zona wondered why Roger was asked to bring her to this house at all, after so long a time had elapsed since the project had first been mentioned. She thought she saw the reason in Wirt's occasional glances at her. His eyes contained a knowing look, an expression of triumph at having been right in a prophecy. She remembered his telling Roger that it was dangerous to marry a beautiful girl. When she suspected that Roger had told him about Foster, had confided in Wirt and perhaps asked for guidance, she was resentful. But she could not readily protest, and her resentment soon dissipated itself in the conclusion that Wirt brought her here to show her what

morality was like, to point out how he faced it, to give her a lesson in his grotesque version of love.

Yet Lynton Wirt did not triumph in this little scene. He was not the true conquerer. He could not see that she carried a step further what lay inherent in the meeting. Zona learned the thing about him she could not fathom before. His career and position had not entirely compensated him for the tragic disappointment in his private life. He still missed, still searched for something; his pain went on. He could not realize its stimulus himself. But Zona sensed that when he looked at her, contrasting her with the helpless woman near her, Lynton Wirt gazed upon the symbol for which he would give up everything he possessed and all he stood for. She knew that Wirt would rather have the lost youth of his wife, even if embodied in another, than all the success and riches in existence. Zona shuddered at the armor, thick and strong, that this man wore, and at what lay hidden beneath it.

Zona knew she had gained only a truce with Roger, not a victory. If she lost control of herself once more, there would be no chance to win him back to her again. She invented errands and tasks to fill her time and her mind, to combat the force that had already driven her once to near disaster, and she took long walks to consume her energies. She walked south through the city, all the way to the financial district, where fourteen, fifteen, sixteen million shares of stock were being bought and sold in one day. She walked north to the park and satiated her body with woods and meadows lush with the maturity of spring. She walked east and she walked west. She covered the city, which, immersed in the greatest era of riches ever known to man, she felt must contain the one small treasure she needed—security from herself.

Searching for it so avidly, Zona believed she found it. In the stark necessity for victory and in the subjection of body to will, she garnered the priceless contradiction of her nature. There was a certain kind of pleasure to be found in insisting to herself that she suffered not because of any deficiency in Roger, but because of a profusion

in herself. There was a sensual delight to be taken in depriving herself, forcibly, of the extra rapture she wooed so constantly.

While in this mood of joyful penitence she heard herself addressed from the crowd on the street one day.

"Hello, Bridesmaid!"

She turned, and Johnny Leonard grinned at her engagingly.

"Told you I'd come back for you someday," he said as they shook hands.

"Johnny, what are you doing in New York?"

"Me? I'm here testing the liquids."

"Where's Gracie?"

"Gracie? Who's that?"

Zona stared at him.

"Oh, you mean Gracie," he said. "Haven't you heard?"

"Why, no. What—"

He waited a moment, studying with a solemn expression her alarm before he said, "She's fine."

He laughed infectiously with the unsobber exuberance that exuded from him by habit.

"What are you doing here without her?" she asked.

Johnny became extravagantly confidential. He looked about to see if anyone was listening and then whispered, "We'll go over to my hotel and I'll tell you."

"But—"

"I've got to show you. It's up in my room." He took her hand and tucked it in the crook of his arm. "Come on, Bridesmaid."

Accompanying him, Zona could not imagine what he had to show her. Perhaps Gracie was there as a surprise. But somehow it didn't seem as if that was it; Gracie would have let her know. She wondered if anything had happened between them, but Johnny would tell her nothing more. He remained mysterious and nonsensical.

When they reached his hotel, Johnny ushered her into his room with a flourish. She took a chair, and he went to his suitcase, set upon a stand near the window. Opening it, he took out a bottle of whisky, placed it with a

dramatic thump on the bureau, salaamed deeply before it, turned to her, and said, "That's it."

"Johnny! I don't understand." But Zona was afraid she did.

"We'll have a drink and I'll tell you."

He prepared drinks and handed her one. He went to the bed and cast himself upon it full-length. He raised his head to gulp from his glass, let it fall again, and said, "Come here, Bridesmaid."

Humoring him, Zona went.

"Sit down."

She hesitated, then sat on the edge of the bed.

He sighed as if the weight of the world were upon him. "Gracie's a wonderful girl," he began. "That's the only fault she has. She's too wonderful. I can't be that wonderful. I disappoint her. I couldn't stand it to disappoint her any more. I had to get away and be a disappointment all by myself."

"Johnny, you've left Gracie? You—"

"Not permanently, Bridesmaid. Oh, not permanently!"

"I see."

"I'll go back to her and be a disappointment to her some more. It's happened before. It will happen again. It's a regular thing. For a couple of weeks, for a month, I'm a credit to her. I'm pretty wonderful myself. She makes me over. She reforms me. I'm a new man. You ought to see me. I don't even know myself. I wouldn't take a drink. I wouldn't look at another woman. I look in the mirror and I ask, 'Is that you?' It isn't me. It's what she wants to make of me. But it can't be done, Bridesmaid. It isn't in the copy. I'm already written and there aren't any more words. I'm already printed and the type has been distributed. I'm a limited edition." He laughed as if this was a huge joke that made him happy.

Zona understood that here was another caught fast in the grip of an urge that could not be shaken off. He was like her, exactly like her. She remembered how she had thought Johnny the defective one in his marriage, she the defective one in hers, and that they would make a good pair.

Up until now she hadn't thought of their meeting as being anything extraordinary. She hadn't hesitated to come with him. Nothing occurred to her other than to come and learn about Gracie.

Now the effect of her long and acute privation suddenly made itself felt. He took her hand, and the mere touch of him was enough to set her afire. It was so great that her consciousness became clouded. She felt her sanity impaired. She finished her drink, trying to control herself. The drink didn't help. It seemed to make it worse, to fan the quick flames. Tumultuously she had an impulse to commit an act of violence, to pit herself against everything commonly accepted as good and right. Johnny was not Johnny, not Gracie's husband; she was not herself, not Roger's wife. These relationships were buried in frenzy as strange, hardly human sounds issued from her throat and convulsive tremors passed through her body.

In the ravening desire that took possession of her, words poured from her lips in an unceasing stream. She was like a madwoman. She didn't know what Johnny was saying, how he took it. She didn't care. To whatever it was she cried, "Yes, yes! Only take me! Take me!" And at the end she searched blindly with her hands and pleaded in a voice that settled it, "You must! You must!"

Chapter Seventeen

SHE COULDN'T WEEP. She was beyond weeping. She couldn't feel regret. No such simple thing touched her. Only special and intricate emotions were hers. Everything else was lost in the terrible power of the thing that overwhelmed her. She was stunned at the new black depth into which she had been thrust. In the darkness of it her mind closed. She was caught in mortal fear, intimidated by the savage force she had challenged and which once more showed itself to be her master.

Her face blanched, her limbs quivering, Zona stood before the mirror in the hotel room. She powdered her face. She applied lipstick. She combed her hair with weakened, trembling hands.

Johnny, in back of her, was prone on the bed. On his chest rested the bottle of whisky. From time to time he raised it to his lips.

"Often a bride but never a bridesmaid," he said.

Johnny in this state and at this moment was no longer engaging. But Zona didn't mind; nothing he said had any effect on her. Only when she thought of him as Gracie's husband was she roused. Then her feeling was not for what she had done with her best friend's husband, but a reprimand for Johnny's not being faithful to Gracie. She condemned him alone and not herself, as if she had given herself up before a struggle too uneven.

With unsteady but hurrying hands Zona was lifting her hat to put it on when there was a sharp click at the door. The next instant, in the mirror, she saw the door swing inward.

She couldn't believe at first that the face framed in the glass was the one she saw.

She whirled. It was no illusion.

It was Lynton Wirt.

In back of him were two burly men who stared into the room with stolid interest. On Lynton Wirt's counte-

nance was spread, like rancid butter, satisfaction. He looked about as if deeply and intimately enjoying, in his own strange way, this bedroom scene.

Zona could not speak. She stood, her hat half lifted in her hands, her lips parted loosely, her eyes widening as if trying to grow large enough to take in what was happening.

Johnny raised himself on one elbow to crane his neck and look toward the door. "Who're your friends, Bridesmaid?" he asked. "Who's the horse-face? Who's the—" He tried to get up but failed, and finally subsided.

Wirt spoke to the men, asking a question. One of them nodded and the other said, "O.K."

Wirt gave another glance around and then started to leave with his companions.

Her voice tight and strained, Zona managed to speak. "Wait," she said, "wait."

Wirt stopped with the two men. "Well?"

"What are you doing?"

"Do you have to ask?"

He turned to go again.

Zona took several steps after him, slowly, in a daze. Lynton Wirt was nearly gone, the two men ahead of him, before she got out, "I've got to talk to you. I want to say something."

Again they stopped. Wirt gazed at her, looking down upon her. He seemed to enjoy the situation and want more of it. He motioned for the two men to leave, then came back into the room. He closed the door and waited.

An anger founded on long resentment of this man rose in Zona. "You had those men watch me!" she accused. "You had them follow me!"

"You are mistaken," he informed her. "Those men are connected with the hotel."

"I don't believe it."

"I happened to be lunching late here and saw you come in and take the elevator," he went on imperturbably.

"You're going to tell Roger?"

He nodded. "Especially as I am aware that this is not

the first time this has occurred. He wouldn't take my advice before. I am in hopes he will see clear to do so now."

"It isn't like that," she defended herself. "Mr. Leonard is married to my best friend. We ran across each other and came here to talk. That's all."

Wirt smiled and looked at Johnny, sprawled inertly on the bed. "You have a peculiar sense of loyalty to your friends."

"It's true! It's true, and you can't—"

"I hardly think you will be able successfully to defend yourself against the evidence of the two witnesses who have just left here. Let me assure you with certainty that you can't."

"What has this to do with you?" she demanded. "Why do you mix yourself in it? It isn't any of your business."

"I am afraid it is useless for us to discuss that."

"It won't do any good to tell Roger."

"It would be wrong not to tell him."

"It's right not to tell him!" She flung her disagreement, her fury, and her plea at him.

"I find your viewpoint a little odd, to say the least. You want him, and yet you take something else. The least I can say is that you are selfish."

"I'm not! I'm not thinking of myself alone. Forget what it will do to me." Her voice was desperate. "Think what it will do to him. He believes in me. I'm his wife, everything to him. It doesn't hurt him now. Why let it? Why ruin his life?"

"It will be less ruined if he is separated from an unworthy person."

Zona opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again. She knew it would be futile. Nothing could move him. Nothing could combat the unfairness of her having to suffer because of his twisted relations with life and the impossibility of his sympathizing with what motivated her. In his mind there were no fine lines to be drawn between morality and immorality; there was only a broad swath cutting off black from white.

Her shoulders dropped. She was beaten.

Wirt opened the door and went out.

Back home in the apartment Zona sat through long hours of waiting. Alternately they were divided into periods of fright, anger, despair, dull self-vindication, the building of hopes only to have them collapse as soon as they were erected. She sat through dinnertime not wishing food, hungry only for something to happen, for Roger to come, to know what he would do.

Endlessly she waited. She didn't know what time it was, and it would do no good to find out. That could not change his coming or not coming. She began to think he wouldn't be coming, when there was a noise at the door. She started up, then sank back again.

She heard him in the hall. He stopped and listened. Then he fumbled for the switch, and the overhead lights went on. There were footsteps, and he came into view.

At first he didn't see her. He looked toward the entrance to the bedroom as if expecting her to be there. His face was pale, deathly serious, drawn with consummate resolve.

He saw her. He stood rigid and silent looking down at her.

"Roger . . ."

He didn't reply. Taking no notice of her, he went into the bedroom.

Again Zona waited, until she heard him pulling out drawers, picking things up, setting them down again. Then she rose and went slowly across the room and into the bedroom.

Into two suitcases he was putting clothes and personal belongings. The sight shocked her as if she hadn't known, until she actually witnessed it, what he was doing. He didn't interrupt himself but went about it steadily, offering no acknowledgment of her presence.

When she saw that he meant to leave without speaking, without giving her a chance to defend herself, she began to speak herself. She told him, in agony, about herself. She explained all the things she had wanted him to know for so long and hadn't dared reveal to him. She knew it was her only chance now to save herself.

Without looking at her he continued his packing.

Zona pleaded with him to understand. She begged him not to go. She promised that if he stayed, if only he stayed, she would be anything he wanted her to be, anything, that every word she spoke, everything she did down to the minutest detail for the rest of her life would be at his command.

He snapped the catches of his suitcases.

Zona felt as if she had been struck. When she saw that he meant to go, that he was untouched by all her naked supplication, she was seized by an overwhelming desire to hurt him.

Hysterically she shouted at him that she didn't go to Graeme Foster to help him, that she wanted Foster because he was a greater man than he. She took a breath and went on to say that this wasn't all, not nearly all, not even the beginning. It started before she met him, before she married him. There had been two before that. If he couldn't understand anything else, maybe he could understand that.

Beside herself, she cried, "And the first one is the man I really love! Do you hear? He's the only one I love, the only one I've ever loved!"

Roger stood frozen. He opened his mouth to say something, but only the sound of a sharp intaking of breath came from him. With jerky movements he picked up the suitcases. Drooping under a greater weight than what he carried, he walked out the door.

Zona found herself alone. He was gone. A moment ago he was here, and now he was gone. Forever. She recalled no transition between the time she was shouting at him vibrantly and the time she leaned weakly against the wall for support. "Oh, Roger," she whispered. "Oh, Roger, Roger!"

Chapter Eighteen

LYNTON WIRT TOOK things into his own hands as if his right to run them from the first had been denied until now. For a time he was the absolute governor of Zona's life, the autocrat of her future. He fulfilled the threat he had been to her from the moment they met.

Wirt wouldn't at once acquiesce to her request to keep Johnny Leonard out of it. "We'll see," he told her, and left her in torture and suspense until she was ready to do anything rather than have Johnny brought into the untidy business being launched. Then Wirt made a pact with her: If she would not in any way contest the action for divorce he was bringing against her for Roger, but accept it on his terms, Johnny would not be mentioned by name. Anxiously, Zona agreed.

The lawyer arranged everything, and in the process grasped every opportunity to censure her. When he told her Roger meant to give her two hundred dollars a month he said, "I won't try to hide the fact from you that I tried, unsuccessfully, to talk him out of it. In neither the legal nor the moral sense is there any need of it."

Again he seemed to take pleasure in Zona's discomfiture and pain. On the grounds that these were personal matters, he executed himself many things his junior associates, his clerks, or even Zona herself could have attended to. He supervised, on the excuse that Roger was standing the expense, her moving into a smaller apartment. He might have been representing her instead of Roger when he oversaw the selling of the large pieces of furniture and settling her with the rest in a living room, a bedroom, a bath and kitchen, in the midsection of town.

She never ceased to ferment with resentment. When one afternoon Wirt came with a paper for her to sign, and sat looking at her as if to say that now she had become like him, cut off, and that she deserved it, Zona

felt that here was another man she could gladly destroy. Foster still remained with her, but Wirt was freshest and uppermost in her mind. Now there were two men she believed she could kill. And though she was frightened by the thought, she still wished constantly that she could see the two of them dead. It became an obsession with her. She dreamed about it, permitting it to become the large thing for which she lived, occasionally the only thing left.

Two weeks after Roger left her, Zona began to suspect that something was wrong. When another month went by, she was sure of it.

It seemed incredible that this could be happening to her. There was the impossibility, accusing and ugly, of being able to tell whether she owed her condition to Roger or Johnny. Then, a little hysterically, she realized that now it couldn't make any difference. If Roger were the father of the child she carried, he would never believe it; she didn't really believe it herself.

When she had first married Roger she had recognized, in a vague, instinctive way, that in motherhood, with its added interest beyond herself, might lie her salvation. But Roger was gone, the divorce proceedings had been started, and she knew there was no hope of getting him back. To have a child now was impossible.

The address to which she went was a large modern apartment house on West End Avenue. Everything was respectable about it, even ostentatious. Well-dressed children set out for walks with their governesses. Fancy dogs were aired. There was an impressive doorman in a magnificent uniform.

The door at which she rang was on the top floor, secluded by itself around the turn of a long hallway. On it was attached a plain calling card corroborating in neat black letters the name she had been given.

A young nurse in crisp white with a wisp of starched linen on her black hair answered her ring. To her question Zona gave her name and was ushered into a small sitting room. Behind a desk here, with his back to the

light, sat a small dark man with a cigar thrust aggressively between his teeth. He jumped to his feet, bowed ceremoniously, but didn't speak until at his gesture the nurse placed a chair for Zona, and she sat down. Then he reseated himself and looked at her critically. He took his cigar from his mouth and said in a sharp staccato voice, "You are beautiful. But I will make you more beautiful. I will make you happy. I will take away your worries." He put his cigar back in his mouth and puffed on it briskly.

Zona was repelled. She shrank from his forbidding appearance and manner, from this strange reception. In whose hands had she delivered herself? She remembered, in a flash, as she had thought over hundreds of times during the past few weeks, all the stories about quack doctors she had heard. Surely this man couldn't be one of the best in New York, as she had been told.

The cigar came out of his mouth again. "You are sure you want this done?" he demanded. "You have made up your mind to it? You will not regret it?"

In a low voice Zona answered, "No."

"I ask," he said quickly, "because I like to create life, not destroy it. How? I will tell you afterward."

Zona sat mutely, bewildered and frightened, wanting a friend, wishing now she had become intimate with the women she knew beyond merely being able to ask for a name to which she could apply.

"You understand," the little man asked, "that I do not admire checks? No. I do not care for checks."

Zona fumbled at her purse. "I have the three hundred dollars with me."

"Later! Later! That is not the important thing. Now, are you ready?"

Zona wasn't ready, but she nodded.

The nurse went to the door leading into the next room and held it open. Zona rose. She felt weak. She stood hesitantly. She didn't want to go through with it. Not in this atmosphere, with this curious man who instilled dread instead of confidence.

He spoke again. "Do not mind my manner. It is bad.

I know it. But it is what it is. It is what I am. It cannot be helped. It would not be right to change it. It would be dishonest. But neither is that the important thing. The important thing is what I do. It is always successful with me. I do not fail. I never fail. I cannot fail."

Zona stared at him.

"With me it is perfection," he continued. "In ten minutes it will be over. You will be happy again. In one hour you will go. I will have your three hundred dollars. I will be happy. Everybody will be happy except God."

Zona, after taking this in, and repressing an impulse to laugh out of pure nervousness, looked at the nurse. The girl smiled at her reassuringly. From her came confidence in the quizzical little doctor. Zona recalled the recommendation of him given her, his reputation as an expert and a specialist. She turned and went into the other room.

The professional aspect of the room she entered, with its white surgical table and medical cabinets, proved both disturbing and encouraging. Obediently Zona followed the nurse's directions, and in a few minutes found herself lying on the table covered only by a sheet.

The nurse was binding her hair in a cloth and admiring its shade when the doctor entered. Zona watched him with a sort of terrorized fascination while he washed his hands, while he donned a surgical gown. Meanwhile the nurse placed prepared equipment for his use. On an enameled stand near Zona's feet appeared a slim bottle with fine gradations on it, half filled with a pinkish liquid. On a shelf below this were instruments. The little doctor, more prepossessing in his white gown, came to her side and examined her. He counted her pulse and listened to her heart. "You are excited," he said. "If you knew how simple it is you would be bored."

Then the nurse's fingers were on her wrist and something descended gently over her face. She was told to breathe deeply. A pungent odor flowed sharply through her nostrils and into her lungs. She fought it for an instant, then gave way to it.

Almost as soon as she began to be forced to sleep, at

the beginning of her singing semiconsciousness, she felt a sharp, penetrating pain. It half awakened her, and her eyelids struggled to open. The mask over her face had been removed. She moaned and tried to move. She was ordered to lie still. The manipulations continued for a moment. They stopped.

In another minute the little doctor was at her side, asking, "How do you feel?"

With an effort Zona answered, "All right." The pain was dull and faint, more like an ache, but persistent.

The nurse went to the windows, opened them, and then left the room. The doctor pulled up a stool and sat on it beside her. "It is over," he announced. "Finished. That is all there is to it. Now you are better. I have done it. See," he said, picking up the bottle with the fine gradations on it and holding it before her, "one line is gone. One line of this and three drops of chloroform. The secret is to act after the third drop has done its work. Then the patient thinks she is going under. It is enough. It is not too much. You are able to tell your husband you have been to the matinee."

He put the bottle down. The thought and feel of his artistry was strongly in his face. "No one else can do it like I can. The others touch things they should not touch. I do not. I know the psychological moment. It is done. It is perfection."

He lit a cigar reflectively. "But even that is not the important thing. Not the most important. This is not what I want to do, what my hands are made for." He held up his hands, small and sensitive. "I want to mold life, not destroy it. How? I will be a sculptor. That is my real work. This is nothing. In sculpture there will be real perfection for me. But it takes money. Always money. How many are able to escape not selling their souls for it? That is why I am this kind of artist first. Then, when it is possible, I will spend my life at stone. I will shape it. I will cut it. I will create beautiful things. I will bring back all I take away here. God and I will be friends again. That is the most important thing."

He nodded his head contentedly. He sat looking off

into space at the project, at his atonement. Suddenly he shifted his gaze to her and said, "Now. I have told you about me." He didn't go on, but in his look was frank invitation for her to reciprocate and tell him about herself.

Amazed, Zona at first had anything but a desire to confide in him. Then in his patient waiting, which seemed to say she could tell or not tell and it would be well whichever she decided, she saw no morbid curiosity but sympathy and kindness. She thought for a moment, wondering if from his experience he could help her, and then began to outline herself.

When she was finished he laid his hand on her arm for an instant and said, "Poor thing. Poor girl. Poor woman. I know. Yes. I see many of you. None so beautiful, but the same. Always the same. It is that way since man made the colossal mistake of civilizing himself. You do not see it in animals. They are too wise. It is the result of what we like to call development. Education. Cerebration. Morals. All these are degeneration. Too many centuries of breeding. In the cities we see it most. In the cultural centers. In history it is there from the beginning. Jezebel, Messalina, Delilah, Cleopatra. Thais, Phryne, Aspasia, Lais. All these were as you. They look down on them. They call them wicked. No. That is wrong. They are ill. They are sick people.

"What can you do for yourself? Beautiful thing, I am sorry. I feel for you. I do not know. It is so little understood. You can do nothing. You can take sedatives, you can dull your senses, but you cannot always remain drugged. Sometime when you are not, it will break out. Worse than ever it will come. You can tire yourself out by exercise," he went on, "but that is no good. Often exhaustion brings on the worst attacks. It will not work. Nothing will work. Not even will power. There is no will power strong enough.

"You ask a doctor the best thing for yourself. He will not tell you. He is too respectable. He has what he calls ethics. No. He is not respectable. I tell you. I am respectable. The best thing is to go ahead. It is to be yourself.

It is not to try to stop being what you are. That way there is danger. That way it will get worse. You are lost if you cannot have what you need. You are doomed if you deny yourself. And do not pity yourself. There is nothing to pity in being as you are made. That is right for you. You are no less right because most of the rest of the world is not like you. The thing to do is not get in trouble with what we think is good. And understand that many things we believe to be bad—parasites, deadly germs—have as much right to live as we have. Do disease germs feel sorry for themselves? Do they suffer from their consciences? No. They march on. That is you. You must accept it. You must not be disturbed by it. There is no use in that."

He sat puffing on his cigar. Abruptly he patted her arm again and jumped off his stool with a birdlike movement, landing neatly on the floor as if from a flight, and asked, "You like wine?"

In her further amazement and perturbation at all the things he told her, Zona murmured that she did.

He went to the side of the room and returned with two glasses filled to the brim with red wine. She sat up, holding the sheet about her, and he handed her one. He raised his glass to her and she responded in like fashion. They drank to each other. The wine, flowing into Zona as if replacing something lost and regretted, was cool and refreshing. All at once she noticed there was no pain any more.

"You are ready to go home," he told her.

Zona was horribly lonely. She had never before been alone. She hadn't known it would be like this. If she had some friends, some real friends, it would help. A few of the Wall Street wives she knew came to see her, but only because they were curious and enjoyed a scandal, not out of friendship. She didn't respond to them, and when they failed to return she didn't care. They had always been Roger's friends, not hers.

She remained alone until she could stand it no longer. Then one evening she went, in desperation, to a speak-

easy located in the next block. Here, sitting before a table in a corner with a drink, she was at least with people. That was some relief, though far from satisfying. In a mood strange to herself, she angrily reviewed her present status. She was ready to admit that marriage for her had been a mistake, that it demanded too much and failed to offer enough.

But how could she have estimated the extent of the bondage to which she was, and always would be, subjected? The little doctor was right. Why should she blame herself, blindly, as Roger blamed her? Who could call her wrong for being attuned to her own nature?

Zona sat in the speak-easy arguing herself out of shame and into justification. She grasped this fiercely and aggressively. She wept over it to gain it and raged at it to keep it. Finishing her drink, she placed the glass back on the table so forcibly, as if to emphasize her endeavor, that the stem snapped and the bowl crashed to the floor. People turned to stare, but she didn't see them as tears filled her eyes.

Suddenly she was faced with proving herself to herself. A sturdy young man she never saw before was seating himself opposite her. He looked at her for a moment with calm brown eyes set wide apart. Then in a voice not brazen yet not apologetic, but full of masculine interest, he asked, "Can I do anything?"

She stared at him. Her first instinct, arising out of the habit of propriety, came and then went before the force of what she had been telling herself. Her arguments flashed through her mind again, and she asked herself why she should pretend any longer, why she should feel a sense of wrong that had been left so far behind as to be utterly irretrievable, why she should try to feel that in the man's question was nothing she wanted when it contained the only thing she could want. In the back of her mind she knew that if she replied to this man as he hoped she would reply, it would not be an isolated incident, but the beginning of a pattern. But the thought did not bear dwelling on, and the young man was becoming impatient.

In a suppressed murmur she replied, "Why not?"

Chapter Nineteen

ANSWERING HER TELEPHONE one warm summer afternoon, Zona heard a familiar voice.

"Ernest!"

"Can I come to see you?"

"Of course."

"You'd really like me to?"

"I'd like it very much."

"I'll be right there."

He sounded eager and hopeful.

But when he arrived it was not with the vivacity that sounded from him over the phone. On the wire he couldn't conceal his delight at what he had obviously learned. Now he seemed embarrassed, as if wishing to say the proper, conventional things, things he couldn't genuinely feel. "I was sorry," he told her, "to hear about your—that is, about you and Roger."

Wondering how much he knew, Zona replied, "There isn't anything to be sorry about, Ernest. We just didn't get along."

"I never thought—or expected . . ."

"We weren't happy together, and we didn't see any reason to stay married if we were unsuited to each other. That would have been dreadful."

"Yes." He studied her, pained by discussing this but excited at the opportunity it gave him. Plainly he hadn't heard of the real reason for the divorce, and it didn't occur to him to question why Roger was the one to get it. He gazed at her with admiration. "You're looking fine."

"So are you, Ernest."

Zona knew that she was looking well, and she knew why. Abandon, not expiation, was the tonic that vitalized her. She had never felt better physically in her life.

Ernest had changed drastically since the days when his sandy hair and pale eyebrows and lashes were his most

prominent characteristics. He had put on weight and looked more solidly a man.

Ernest told her about his job in Cleveland. He was in New York on business now, but he still hoped to be located here permanently. That was his ambition. He said nothing about his having been here for a short time before, and she didn't mention it. On that they understood each other.

He looked concerned, peering at her hesitantly, and said, "Perhaps you won't like my mentioning it—I don't know—but someone you used to know is living in Cleveland."

"Who?"

"Jimmie Wilson."

"Oh."

At the look on her face, he apologized, "I'm sorry, Zona. I shouldn't have—"

"That's all right, Ernest. I don't mind. We don't have to pretend with each other." She tried to still her heart and keep the tremulous interest out of her voice when she asked, "How is he?"

"He's doing pretty well. Has an automobile agency. He's married and has two children."

A great jealous thump in her breast made Zona fear something would burst inside her. She forced herself to ask, "What is his wife like?"

"I've only met her once. They had me out to dinner when we were writing his agency some insurance, and I felt I ought to go. I gathered she's something of a social climber and sort of uppish."

"What does she look like?"

"Tall and dark, with a nose. Maybe I'm not being fair, but—"

Zona laughed to hide an excitement she couldn't keep down. "How does he look?"

"About the same. He hasn't changed much."

"Is he happy?"

"I suppose so. No, I guess he isn't. I don't know. You see, I don't run across him very often. I—well, I mean, we have different interests."

Zona discerned that Ernest hadn't liked seeing Jimmie, that Jimmie was too acute a reminder of what she had once told him. But she didn't think of that as much as she tried to picture Jimmie married with two children. Those children might have been her own; they should be hers. She grasped eagerly at Ernest's suggestion that Jimmie was not altogether happy. He can't be happy with anyone but me, she thought exultantly. I'm the only one who could ever make him really happy.

She looked to see if Ernest noticed anything unusual in her queries about Jimmie Wilson. She decided he didn't when he went on to speak of other things.

Ernest spoke of the feeling he had always had for her, the feeling he still had for her, and while she saw that he didn't mean to press his hopes on this first visit, she knew that he meant to come again, and that he was only waiting for the right moment to give way to the yearning he had always clung to.

Zona knew she could not again bear to let him plan and then be disappointed. Struck with fondness for him, she felt she had to save him from herself. "I'll never get married again, Ernest."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I wasn't happy being married. And I could never make anybody else happy."

"But with someone else it might be different."

"It wouldn't. I'm sure of it."

Surprisingly, he announced, "Somehow I'm glad to hear you say that."

"How do you mean?"

"If you're so sure of it now, you're bound to change your mind later."

He didn't believe her. Her hint was not enough to quench the hope that was so bright in him. It was there in his eyes, not pleading as it did once before, but confident and sure. It required more than a hint to convince him. By his love he forced her to do more, to make it plain and unquestionable. For an instant Zona grew contemptuous of him for adoring her, as if anyone who persisted in wanting her was a fool.

She saw clearly that if she had hurt him before, she must hurt him now mortally, sting him away from her so that he would never want to come back. That would be best, no matter how much she cared to keep him for a friend. "Ernest," she said, "you don't know the real reason why Roger and I are getting a divorce."

"You said—"

"That isn't it." She told him. Once again, as on the porch of her parents' home in Cranston, she detailed to him the unsuspected part of her life. She didn't spare herself. She left nothing out, and she did not minimize the statistics of her life since Roger left her. She told him about the young man in the speak-easy, and about all the others that came after him—men she met casually, brought home with her, and seldom saw again.

There was almost a relief in this confession to someone else, no matter what its purpose. "That's what I am," she concluded. "That's why I'll never get married again."

Ernest had been sitting back in his chair as she spoke. Now he leaned forward. His face, normally a faint pink in a clear skin, went gray and mottled. His eyes bulged. His shoulders drew toward each other. All ease and assurance disappeared from him. He was like a man gripped with some acute internal affliction. "You aren't like that," he gasped. "You can't be. You're trying to discourage me. Like the time in Cranston."

"It's true. Don't you see? If I didn't care for you at all I might marry you."

"But you can't want what you're doing instead of—"

"I can't help myself."

Her statement was simple and final. It penetrated to him; he looked down helplessly, seeming to shrink even more into himself, and murmured, "Zone. Zone."

"You must hate me."

"I hate what you're doing," he muttered. "But I'll never hate you."

"But you can't want to ever see me again."

"I want to see you," he said miserably. "I'll always want to see you. You can't stop me from that. You've got to let me have that much."

Chapter Twenty

AS SOON AS SHE brought the man back to her apartment Zona knew she had made a mistake. In the speak-easy he had made himself agreeable, treating her with the elaborate, flattering manners of a foreigner. Rather short, extremely dark, he said he was a Spaniard. Now, in her living room, he glanced about speculatively, as if he had lost interest in her. Looking at him, Zona thought she must have had too many highballs ever to have thought of him. And when, baldly, he took off his coat and hung it over a chair, she experienced a revulsion that made her thank him for bringing her home and say she must ask him to go now.

He muttered something she didn't understand. Instead of making any move to leave, he went to a small table and fiddled with something on it by the lamp.

"I said I want you to go," she told him.

This time he didn't answer at all. Straightening from his action at the table, he looked at the door as if waiting for something. Zona began to address him angrily when there was a tap at the door. Instantly the man ran to it in his shirt sleeves and opened it.

Abruptly two more men were in the room, the door was closed behind them, and one of the newcomers pulled back his coat to reveal a police shield. The other strolled across the room.

"What is it?" Zona cried. "What do you want?"

The man remaining near the door replied cheerfully, "Guess you know what it is, all right. Sure, I guess you do."

"But I don't." Zona stared at him, then around apprehensively as the small, dark man retrieved his coat. She didn't know what to make of it when he went to the door. There was no objection when he left, but he exchanged a glance of understanding with the man at the door.

"What do you mean by—"

The man at the door chuckled. It was a hearty chuckle and not at all ironical, as if someone had told a good joke at which he was genuinely amused. He stood there laughing at her. Medium-sized, stocky, he wore a light gray suit. His face, with bunches of white skin for cheeks, was almost jolly-looking. It was a pleasant face. A person could like it at sight if it weren't for the eyes; extraordinarily small, deep-set, hard, they belied the rest of him. In their tiny depths was something animalistic. They were the eyes of a pig transferred to a man, almost rimless and coldly stubborn, portals through which no emotion passed in or out.

"We been watching you," he told her genially.

"I—"

"You been getting away with a lot."

"I haven't been breaking the law."

"Sure, sure, you ain't," he agreed. "As long as they don't pay you anything."

"Pay me?"

"I guess this is it."

Zona whirled at the sound of the second man's voice behind her. She looked to where he pointed. Money showed on the low table beside the lamp, money she had never seen before. She stared at it unbelievably; then in a flash she knew how it came to be there.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

The man near the door chuckled again. "In polite society it's called arresting you for vagrancy."

Zona protested wildly, "You had that money put there yourself! That man—"

"Sure, sure! That's what they all say. They say it so much nobody believes them any more."

The first man's jovial tone didn't change when he said, "Bring your checkbook. We know you got one. You're going to need it. Unless you want to take some courses at the Finishing School."

"What do you mean?"

"You must have seen the Jackson Market Jail from the outside. Inside, it's called the Finishing School. That's because it finishes you."

Zona knew the ancient red-brick building with its clock tower and high walls on lower Sixth Avenue by the side of the Elevated. It housed a women's prison and some courts of law. Passing it several times, she had observed the coarse faces of women looking out from behind high barred windows and heard them calling vulgarly to men on the street. She was repelled and outraged. She had nothing to do with that. She couldn't have anything to do with it. They couldn't make her.

The stocky man, as if reading her thoughts, told her, "Oh, you're coming." He looked at her admiringly. "It would be a pleasure to handle you, but we don't like to do it. Do you want to pay for a taxi or do I call the buggy?"

Zona, white and tense, rode between the two men in a taxicab to a flat-faced building with a large green lamp burning on either side of its entrance. Inside, she was taken into a bare cold room where a police lieutenant sat behind a high desk. To him the stocky man recited the fable of her crime. Zona heard him addressed as Bogart, Waxy Bogart. His companion corroborated the fiction. Zona cried out at its utter falseness. The police officer paid no attention but wrote in an unseen book.

"These men are lying," Zona said desperately.

The police lieutenant looked up to explain that after being photographed and fingerprinted she had the right to demand an immediate hearing before a magistrate, or she could wait and arrange for a lawyer to defend her.

Zona hesitated, bewildered and shocked. "But they had the money put—"

"Your bail is five hundred dollars," the lieutenant advised. "The legal rate for a bondsman to charge you for that is three per cent, or fifteen dollars. If you can make it you'd better wait and get a lawyer."

"Yes. All right."

Bogart led her toward the hall. On the way he whispered, "I got a bondsman waiting for you, and a good lawyer will be along."

Turning on him furiously, Zona began, "I don't—"

"Listen," he told her, "I can get the prosecutor to lay

down on the case or I can get him to push it. Unless you want to take your meals at the Finishing School, do it my way. Then you can go home and don't have to worry about nothing." He said even this cheerfully, without rancor.

In the hall, as if by magic, there sprang up a little man who startled her by piping guardedly, "How about a little bail bond, lady? For forty-five dollars I can get you out of your grave."

Zona didn't know what to answer except to protest that she understood the amount charged was to be fifteen dollars.

The bondsman looked pained and turned to Bogart, making a gesture to him to offer the explanation.

"This a better kind," Bogart confided, his little eyes on her. "This is the kind that really gets you off."

Still so bewildered at the sudden capitulation of herself in this place that she couldn't fully feel her resentment, Zona gave the bondsman a check for the amount he wanted. He told her he'd have her out as soon as he could and hurried away.

Bogart took her to a dark little room containing a camera and fingerprinting equipment. A weary middle-aged man greeted them with unconcern and went about his business. Sitting before the camera for front and side views, Zona thought, with a frantic singing in her head, that she must be witnessing this in a movie. It was a play given in flickering shadows, not happening to her. The illusion continued, mercifully, when her fingers were smeared with black ink and rolled, one by one, on a marked card.

Then she allowed herself to be led to another room, this time past a policeman at the door, and into a high, scarred chamber fitted out with straight-backed chairs and benches. Bogart patted her shoulder before she could draw away, chuckled again, and left her here.

Staring about the room, Zona saw she wasn't alone. A blonde girl, dressed rather garishly, occupied one of the benches. They looked at each other. The girl immediately asked in a dull, flat voice, "This your first time?"

Suddenly feeling faint, Zona sank onto a chair. She nodded.

"They jump-raid you?"

Zona looked blank.

"Did they bust in without a warrant or anything? They need a warrant to break into a place."

Zona explained what happened.

"Yah! They like their own evidence. That's why they use stools. It's better than the real thing. They're afraid of the miracle of some guy who might stand up for a woman and say he wasn't paying her anything. That's why these keyhole rats make their own plants."

"Keyhole?"

"Vice Squad. That's what your friend Bogart belongs to. And God help you if Waxy Bogart is after you. Him and that laugh of his will never leave you alone."

"You mean he—"

"You don't think you're through when you make this pay-off, do you?"

"Oh."

"And it won't do you any good to holler about it. Nobody'll listen to you. The best thing to do is come through every time and hope to God they don't get around to you too often. This frame has been going on for years. It don't make any difference if the woman is innocent or not. It's worse for the innocent ones. They got their reputations to lose if they don't pay. Or can't." A hard, vindictive note crept into her voice. "But someday—"

She was interrupted by a call from the door. "Marion Jordan!"

The girl got up, went to the door, and passed out of the room.

Zona waited alone until a quick, thin little man came in and sat beside her. "I'm your lawyer," he said. "For two hundred and fifty dollars I can get you out of your grave."

This appeared to be a formula. Before Zona could reply, he excused the amount with apologetic words that didn't carry to the policeman at the door. "I have to

divide between everybody—the judge, Bogart, the assistant district attorney, everybody.”

Zona paid him what he asked, glad that she could. He didn't ask her anything about herself before he left, merely telling her that he would be in court when her case was called.

An hour later, after being told that she was required to present herself tomorrow at an office of the Board of Health for a physical examination, Zona was free to go.

Back in her apartment she threw herself on the bed and stared at the wall with blank, unseeing eyes. How could this be happening to her? How could it possibly be happening?

A week later, following the deep humiliation of being examined for venereal disease, Zona obeyed the summons telling her to be in the Women's Court at Jackson Market at ten o'clock on Wednesday morning. With dread and anger suppressed by fear she approached the ominous red brick building. The doorway to the courtrooms, churchlike and prim, was on Sixth Avenue. She found the stone stairway leading to the women's division. On the second floor she entered the dark chapel of the courtroom, with its Gothic windows of colored glass. Benches like pews were placed both in front and in back of a low wooden railing. The upper half of a preoccupied man in black robes appeared above a long bench, at the side of which was a witness box. In back of him a large soiled American flag splashed the wall. A table surrounded by chairs was set on a lower level before the judge's bench. The place was crowded, the benches jammed with people.

Zona found a place to sit toward the rear and listened while names were called by a bailiff who came to the gate of the railing. A pale, frightened girl was led into the room through a door at the left. Men came forward. The judge looked down at some papers and spoke, asking questions, his voice sounding hollowly in the room and challenged by the Elevated roaring past outside.

A man stepped into the witness box, raised his right hand, and swore to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The girl, who had no lawyer, was

informed by the magistrate that she had a constitutional right to question the witness against her. She shrank in her chair, too frightened to challenge the man. But when she was asked if she wanted to tell her story, she stepped hesitantly into the witness box and repeated the oath in a low voice. Then her voice rose. Indicating the arresting officer, the one witness against her, she cried, "He invited me into his car. He offered me five dollars. I told him I didn't want his dirty money. Then he threw it on my lap and arrested me. He took me to the police station. I didn't know why. They looked in my purse and it was empty. That's the truth and he knows it!"

Her voice sank again to an inaudible murmur. A man leaning on the side of the witness box asked her several questions. She made gestures of denial. The judge consulted his papers. He said something. The girl began to cry. She was led out through the door at the left.

For a moment Zona's own reason for being here was forgotten. If ever she heard a girl speaking the truth, it was the sobbing creature who left the courtroom. If ever she heard a man perjuring himself, it was the man who testified against her. What ghastly thing went on here, what miserable state of justice was this?

While she waited for her own name to be called, her heart beating rapidly with apprehension, she watched the sorry spectacle. Different sets of people appeared and disappeared. Heavy, antagonistic women with bleached hair and cheap finery left the pews and went before the bar of justice. These were the professionals. In contrast to them were the amateurs, most of them girls from small towns who had come to get jobs in the big city and failed to find any. Sometimes their clothes were torn, occasionally they wore marks of physical violence, and not always did they succeed in choking back their terror.

The cases were tried one after another, mechanically, as if inanimate objects, not human beings, were dealt with. It was seldom possible to hear what was said, for the trials were conducted in low tones drowned out when the Elevated trains clattered past outside.

Most of them were freed, professionals and amateurs

alike. Few were led out through the door at the left to announce to the base little world of this courtroom that they had not been able to pay their way to freedom.

Shortly before noon Zona's name was called. Forcing herself to get up, she walked forward, her whole body burning with shame and revulsion. She passed through the gates and stood alone facing the judge. For a moment no one else appeared. Standing there, wondering if she had been deserted, she wanted to call out what was being done here, to shout it and advertise it to the world. But she had already seen that done, and witnessed what little good it did.

Then others began to come forward, Bogart as cheerful and jaunty as ever, the man she recognized to be her lawyer, a third man from the district attorney's office who had taken a large part in the previous proceedings. Zona looked at him closely. He seemed to be an ordinary man, like any other man, perhaps the head of a family. She wondered if his family could know the true nature of his practice. Through this speculation and the fright and torment that cloaked her, Zona noted that the man who had accompanied Bogart into her apartment did not even trouble to appear.

It was over with astonishing alacrity. Before she knew it, the few things said by these men brought it to an end. Upon the recommendation of the assistant district attorney, her case was dismissed.

On the way out along the aisle of pews she noted that few of the people sitting there looked at her. Those who did seemed to look with sympathy and an air of brotherhood. But for the most part they were not interested. They had their own troubles to think about.

At the door she looked back once, quickly and briefly. Another case was being called. But all she saw was the face of Waxy Bogart looking at her jovially above the heads of the crowd, smiling happily, as if business was brisk and he meant to use his little red eyes to make it better. His mouth didn't open, but she could hear his chuckle and his laugh just the same.

Chapter Twenty-one

SEVERAL TIMES Zona was on the point of simply leaving New York to sever herself from the jurisdiction of the Bogarts of the law, but she remained in the face of an attraction stronger than the mortal fear of anything that might be done to her.

Zona made the discovery, sweet and inspiring, that Lynton Wirt was in love with her.

Wirt had kept coming to see her. Still unasked and uninvited, he kept up his interest in her. Sometimes he came several times a week, sometimes but once a week. For his visits he had lofty explanations; to inform her of the divorce proceedings, to bring her final papers to sign, to give her Roger's checks, to be able to tell Roger how she was getting along. More frankly it was in his manner what he came for, to have the opportunity of further enjoying her unhappiness, to watch her partake of the fruits of the sin she committed.

Finally Zona felt she could stand no more of it. There was no reason why she should bear his distorted gloating, and she determined to expose herself to it no longer.

"Why do you keep coming here?" she demanded the next time he visited her. "You can send someone else. Why do you have to come?"

Stiffly he replied, "I believe I have explained the reasons I come here."

"It's more than that!" she flared. "There's something else."

"Certainly not! Will you kindly inform me what else there could possible be?"

It was on the tip of Zona's tongue to inform him, but she swallowed the accusation when she saw his face. Upon it was written another thing than what she had been about to tell him. She saw again what she had discovered before about this man. Only now, for an instant, it

showed in full force and was directly applied to her. Lynton Wirt's face twitched and a spasm seemed to pass through his spare body. From his eyes in their deep sockets blazed a terrible, devouring expression, and his hands made imperceptible movements, as if they would reach out for something forbidden.

Then Zona realized that in all his working against her there had been a hidden intent. Through Roger, his protégé, his attention was centered on a young, healthy woman as it had never been before since Norma Wirt began to sit in a wheel chair for the rest of her days. In Roger he saw himself as he had once been, and in Roger's wife he was reminded of what once was his. This, striking him on the threshold of senility, roused his tortured senses.

Zona made no more outward recognition of this than he. But in it she appreciated the miracle of chance. One of the men her whole soul called out to destroy was at her feet. Not to take advantage of it would seem a wicked thing, and compunction small and petty.

Carefully she nurtured the secret. It was like a hidden plant whose bloom would be beautiful. In every possible way she now invited Lynton Wirt's further association with her. She prolonged his visits and invented plausible pretexts to get him to come more often. She appeared before him in a filmy negligee, delicately scented, and sat beside him, brushing against him as if by accident. Instinctively she knew the mistake it would be to face him with his tardy and unlovely passion until it opened its petals of its own accord. She let the bud develop, and was so absorbed with its growth that she paid little attention to what happened, at the same time, in the world apart from it.

In October the financial foundation of the country cracked open with an explosion whose reverberations were like those of an earthquake. The great unwieldy mass of soaring stocks and bonds finally became so top-heavy that it fell with a sickening, resounding crash. It happened so quickly that people were left stunned, their fortunes lost overnight. They regained them partially

during the desperate rallies of the succeeding months, only to lose them again when no medicine could resuscitate the vitally stricken world of finance.

Shortly after the first of the year Lynton Wirt arrived to tell Zona that he had bad news for her. Roger, along with the rest, had been hit so severely that he could no longer give her two hundred dollars a month. The amounts in the future would vary, might possibly be very small.

Zona showed no emotion at the announcement. She had none. She accepted Roger's support coldly, as a convenient thing, but not caring much one way or the other about it. It was not the shrinking of her income that touched her now, but something else Wirt told her. After a little fumbling, he said that he was willing, under the circumstances, to help her if she needed it.

Zona thought the time for which she had been waiting had come. But she must be sure. Tentatively she asked, "Why should you want to do that?"

"Because I do not like to see a human being—you or anybody else—in distress," he announced. "No matter how much deserved," he added.

This afterthought told Zona she would do well to wait a little longer. Wirt still had the protection of his righteous superiority. Until there was some unquestionable sign that this had broken down, he was not sufficiently vulnerable.

She disappointed him and took the gleam of satisfaction out of his eyes by thanking him for his offer and saying she couldn't accept anything from him. She would get along somehow. He opened his mouth as if to insist upon her acceptance, his attitude seeming to say he needed it more than she. But his mouth clamped shut on silence and incredulity.

In the following weeks Zona found it necessary to pawn or sell many of her belongings. Her wrist watch went, then her jewelry, including her engagement ring, and finally many of her clothes. But she accepted these sacrifices as purposeful. She was ready to use all her resources and bring forth all her cunning to drive Lynton Wirt

mad. She was careful not to be home when she knew he was coming to see her. Promises, as far as he was concerned, were made only to be broken. She failed to listen when he spoke, asking him to repeat. Subtly she impressed on him her antagonism, until he saw it as greater than his own. Slowly his disapprobation became milder and took another form. His remarks lost a good deal of their caustic quality, and often, as if off guard, he was pleasant or downright solicitous.

The less she evinced interest in him, the more concerned he was for her. Tenderly he wanted to know what she did with herself all the time, warning her paternally against succumbing again to the thing, so wrong, that caused her to be outcast from decency, and recommending his own method. He wanted her to have a continence modeled upon his, so that he might value it like a jealous lover. He was anxious and perturbed when she wouldn't commit herself.

The opportunity to drive home his final capitulation arrived without warning. He came one day when she had a headache and had to get out of bed to let him in. Zona didn't think of it as an instrument of torture when she led him back to her bedroom and indicated for him to sit on the bench before the dressing table. Only when she was settled back in bed again did she see the strange look on his face. His eagle eyes blazed in his long solemn face at seeing her like this. He acted like a man forced to pursue a woman for a long time with success now in sight. He might be about to ravish her. In addition, he seemed to have brought something with him that excited him.

Zona waited, alert, her headache forgotten, as he began to speak. He told her that Roger had left New York and gone back to Minneapolis. His firm, among the worst hit, was forced to cut down or fail, and now he had nothing.

Zona experienced a pang for Roger that cut through her previous indifference for him. She was sorry, truly sorry, that he had lost so much. But this she didn't permit Wirt to see. "Well?" she asked.

"Don't you understand? You won't have any money at all now."

"What of it?"

"I am the only one you can turn to." He couldn't keep a note of triumph out of his voice. He believed that now he had a weapon to use for her complete subjection to him.

Filled with rejoicing, Zona recognized this to be the crisis of the long duel between them. The next few thrusts would decide who was to win and who was to lose. Now, definitely, had come the time to reveal him to himself.

She had thought she would be aroused and excited when this moment came. She found she wasn't. Coolly, with utter calm, she laid the covers of the bed back. She swung her legs to the floor and inserted her bare feet into her mules. She rose, shook a fold out of her negligee, and went to Lynton Wirt, seated at the dressing table. Without hesitation she put her hands lightly on his shoulders and with a quick movement that bared most of her breasts to him she bent down and kissed him, hard on his thin straight lips. Then she straightened and stepped back.

For a moment he showed no amazement. This might have been a most natural and expected thing for her to do. There was even the faintest hint of a deeply pleased expression on his face.

Only after this came delayed shock. His lips parted as if trying to separate and diminish what had been impressed upon them. Hoarsely he demanded, "Why did you do that?"

Quietly Zona answered, "Because you wanted me to."

"I—? Why, you—you're insane!"

"No," she said. "You're the one who is insane, if you don't know that by now."

He stared at her. Then he jumped to his feet to make his denial. He shouted his indignation and his scorn, stringing off great biting phrases as if delivering an impassioned speech of defense before a jury. But his eyes contained a fear, shining behind the heavy veil of his eloquence, and even his words sounded hollow.

He stopped abruptly, as if he had said everything he could think of and knew it was not convincing. He glared at her impotently as she stood in front of him, slightly smiling, and then, his face working spasmodically, he sank back onto the bench before the dressing table.

Zona began to talk to him, to tell him things about himself. She told him why he came to see her so much. She told him why he had to find out if she went with other men. She told him why he wanted to support her. She laid before him the whole panorama of the vicious way he had treated himself. And though at some thrusts he demurred violently, for the most part he summoned only a groan, while his head jerked in involuntary agreement and sank further and further to his chest, until he sat bowed and silent.

Through with this part of what she meant to do with him, Zona stood looking down upon him. She had no wish to break the silence. She wanted him to be forced to assume the initiative in receiving his complete punishment.

Finally he raised his head. "What do you want of me?" he muttered. "What are you asking?"

"I'm not asking anything of you," Zona pointed out. "It's you who want something of me."

There ensued an even longer period of silence. During it Wirt looked at her as one drawn and fascinated by another who would destroy him. Again, with a greater effort, he spoke. He called upon God to help him. He didn't know what terrible thing was happening to him here, but he admitted she was right. He wanted her. He had to have her. He mentioned what he would give her.

"It isn't enough," she told him.

"I'll give you what you name."

"Money isn't enough. That isn't what I want."

"I'll leave my wife. I'll desert her if you—"

"It isn't enough."

"Then I'll give up everything. I'll marry you."

The sight and sound of him pleading and groveling, ready to soil himself before the whole world, stirred one of those uncontrollable fits of virulence that visited Zona

on occasion. "Nothing you can give me," she cried, "is enough! I've got what I want from you now and you can't ever get it back. And let me tell you this: I need men—there was one here last night and there will be another tonight—but if you were the last man in existence I wouldn't let you touch me! Never! You can have that to think about, I'll give you that!"

The lawyer, still sitting on the bench before the dressing table, shriveled under the lash of her words as if senescence clamped down on him in all its fury. His shoulders bent, his arms hung lifelessly, his face went gray, his whole body shrank. His eagle gaze made a final effort to assert itself, fluttered, and then was gone. There remained only a beaten old man who had fought all his life for something he found at the end very different from what he was driven to want, and which now ate at his soul.

Chapter Twenty-two

WAXY BOGART, WITHOUT attempting to use a stool pigeon but simply forcing himself into her apartment and pretending to the evidence, chuckled at Zona again. She should have expected it. At times the threat of him was strongly in her mind, but the subjection of Lynton Wirt had occupied her. That had kept her in the city; that now made it possible for Bogart to hunt her down once more.

Zona was far from prepared to buy off the law a second time. She had nothing left to sell or pawn. During the last few weeks of the quizzical association with Wirt she lived largely on credit from the neighborhood shops. She owed the better part of a month's rent. The few dollars she had would not be sufficient to obtain bail from Bogart's pet bondsman, to say nothing of paying the crooked lawyer. With burning indignation she told Bogart she had no money this time, that he couldn't get anything more out of her.

"I ain't trying to get anything out of you, lady," he denied cheerfully. "I'm just performing my duty."

"How can you say that?" she demanded. "How can you—"

"Oh, you mean you'll need bail and a mouthpiece. Well, I guess you'll raise the coin for that some way. They always do. Or almost always."

"But I can't, I tell you!"

"Sure, sure! After a couple of days in the Finishing School you'll see things different."

"What good will it do you to send me there?" she asked desperately.

"Me? It won't do me any good. I'm just performing my duty."

"Oh, stop saying that! You don't know what duty is. Except to ruin the lives of women who are decent compared with you. No matter what they are!"

His tiny red eyes considered her. "You ain't question-

ing the integrity of the law, are you?"

"I don't have to! Not after I've seen what you do with it."

He chuckled. "O.K. You're questioning the integrity of the law. And we got a good place for you to question it in. Just to show you how bighearted I am, I'll pay for the taxi this time."

Zona again found herself in the old Jackson Market prison. When first she entered it, the cold calm she experienced lately at crucial moments protected her from the reality of it. It was unbelievable that she was here, behind bars, in jail. It can't be real, she thought. It must be a hallucination of some kind, conjured out of fear and terror. In a moment it would be over and she would be free of the dreadful illusion. She would awaken and return from the dream.

The moment passed, but there was no return. The long dark corridors through which she passed to come to the cell, the hard feel of the narrow cot upon which she sank impressed it upon her. The matter-of-fact, unheeding people, both men and women, who dealt with her made it unquestionable. And if that was not enough, there was the whole atmosphere of the place about her, the breathing and movement of unseen women, their intermittent talking, calling, and coughing, the slap of cards on a table, the faint stale smells of cigarette smoke, cheap perfume, body odors, and, permeating all, the stench of leaky toilets mixed with that of a sharp disinfectant that seemed to bring out all the other smells instead of disguising them.

Suddenly Zona was afraid. She had been afraid many times before in her life, but never so strongly as now. She looked about, shrinking from the soiled bedclothes on the cot, the flat grayish pillow, the ugly straight-backed chair, the sorry place to hang clothes, the long, dark, barred window. She felt she had been thrust into a huge open sore, whose festering would infect her unless she got out of it.

Springing to her feet, she went to the bars shutting her off from the corridor. She grasped them as she had

seen criminals in pictures doing, then took her hands away. She had been about to call out, to scream for help, for release. But she remained silent. The solid, icy touch of the bars told her how useless that would be. It told her, more than anything else, that she was in prison, *in prison*, and that you don't get out of prison by calling for help.

She stood, trying frantically to think of who could help her. Her first thought was of the one most fresh in her mind. Lynton Wirt was the one to get her out of this. At her beck and call, only too eagerly ready, was one of the most famous criminal lawyers in the city. But he of all people was the one she had no desire to ask for aid. She could not become indebted to him, give back in any way what she had won from him.

Zona thought of Ernest. He was the one. He would help her and ask nothing, want nothing, take nothing. She wanted Ernest, wanted him badly. While she stood there behind her bars wanting him, thinking that she must let him know of her predicament, someone called out from a cell close by.

"Hey, you!"

No one answered, though there was a slight dropping off of the noises and movements from the other cells.

"You," the voice called, "the one who was just brought in. The one in the brown dress."

Zona realized it was she who was being addressed. "Yes?" she asked.

"I know you," the voice announced.

Zona didn't know what to say. She didn't recognize the voice.

"Marion Jordan," the voice told her. "I met you in the cop house last year."

Then Zona remembered the blonde girl who talked to her in the police station when Waxy Bogart played his game the first time. "Oh," she said. "Yes, I remember."

"Bogart put another frame around you?"

"He—yes."

"Just like I told you."

"Yes."

Zona noticed that virtual silence had descended in the

other cells, while all the prisoners within earshot listened.

"He have anything on you?" Marion Jordan inquired.

"How do you mean?" Zona asked.

"Were you selling it?"

"What? Oh, no! I've never—"

From the other cells came catcalls, hoots, shouts, and here and there a cackling, gleeful "Hi-yah!" They were laughing at her, heaping the derision of the professional upon the amateur. Though no one could see her, Zona flushed with shame.

"Don't let these streetwalkers and hotel creepers bother you," advised Marion Jordan.

"No. All right. I won't."

"How'd you get here? No jack?"

"That's right."

"Can you raise any?"

"I think so. I want to write a letter."

"You can do that, all right. When the screw—the matron—comes through."

"I see."

"This your first time here?"

"Yes, it—"

"Hi-yah!" someone cried.

"Shut up!" Marion called. To Zona she went on, "Don't let it get you. But the best way is to spring yourself as soon as you can. You sure about raising bail?"

"Fairly sure."

"Know a guy?"

"Well—yes."

Marion Jordan was saying more when someone called in warning, "Swallow it!"

With the appearance of a matron Zona got a single sheet of thin paper and a pencil to write her letter to Ernest in Cleveland. She used an old magazine, furnished for the purpose, for a desk, and left the envelope, as instructed, unsealed. She outlined to Ernest what had happened, saying nothing, on the advice of the knowing voice from the other cell, of the vice racket, but merely that through a mistake she had been arrested and needed money. She asked him to lend her three hundred dollars,

approximately the amount her release had cost her before. She told him not to worry, sent her affection, and added a postscript asking, if he agreed to let her have the money, that he send it as soon as possible.

Zona was at first apprehensive at Marion Jordan's interest in her. Her fellow prisoners were an unlovely lot, and she had no more in common with this quick, brittle girl than she had with the others. But soon she saw that Marion Jordan had a contempt for the rest and a strongly objective viewpoint on the whole spectacle here. Marion was mostly concerned with the activities of the Keyhole Squad, for which she had a virulent hatred. Without expressing any curiosity about Zona's private life, tacitly acknowledging this to be her own affair, she asked only about the way Waxy Bogart went about mulcting her.

When Zona told her, a vindictive expression passed into the other girl's face. She looked at her speculatively and said, "They're writing their own pay-off by going after people like you. You're out of this class. But they're too dumb to see it. If they keep to us, the regulars, the shake-down ought to be good for as long as they push it. Nobody'll pay any attention to us. But the more of you they bring in, the sooner there's going to be a kick. There's something coming to them for this, and they're going to get it. They're going to get it sooner than they expect."

Marion Jordan became Zona's confidante during the next days, in the recreation periods and by calling back and forth between their cells. Zona didn't altogether understand Marion's prophecy about the Vice Squad, but she was heartily in accord with it and welcomed the other's friendliness. When she didn't hear from Ernest and saw no immediate chance of leaving the Finishing School, Marion looked at her sympathetically and advised, "Listen, kid, if something goes wrong and you don't beat this, you ought to know a few things."

"Nothing is going wrong. He'll send the money."

"Sure he will. I ain't questioning that. Not for a minute. But you ought to know a few things, anyway."

"What is there to know?"

"I mean, if they happen to send you away. In the first place, there's why they'll do it." It wasn't a question of law, Marion explained, but one of upholding an advantage. The rotten system went through with its threat to show what it could do if you didn't purchase justice. In addition, so many cases were fixed that it would look queer if a certain number of women weren't sent to the reformatory or to one of the state farms.

"That's one of the reasons you want to do anything to get out of it," Marion advised. "And they got fancy doctors now called psychiatrists and psychologists and God knows what. If you get sent up, they want to know all about you, what you dream about and what you did as a kid, to see if you're nutty or something. But you want to keep shut. Don't tell them nothing, because when you get out you're on parole, and sometimes they use what you spill against you. All you have to do is tell your name and where you come from, nothing more. They can't make you do nothing else. So don't fall for those guys. Say, don't look so scared. This is only just in case."

Marion's advice, with the possibilities it opened up, was disturbing. It added to Zona's fright when she hadn't heard from Ernest by the fifth day. Wondering what happened to her first letter, she wrote another. While she waited for his answer she breathed the undying stench diffused through the prison, tried not to hear the loathesome noises of the nights, and watched the procession of women back and forth in front of her cell.

Every morning some of them were taken from their cells to go across into the adjacent courtroom for trial or sentence. Those who came back returned defiant and cursing, or weeping. Marion was among those going across one morning. She was undisturbed and confident about the outcome. But before she went she managed to tell Zona, "Good luck, kid. You'll hear from him tomorrow and everything'll be all right. If it ain't, I'll be taking it out on them someday." She left waving a hand at Zona and thumbing her nose at the other inmates.

She didn't come back.

Without having heard from Ernest on the ninth day

after she sent her first message and the fourth day after she sent the second, Zona was sick with dread. She tried not to think that Ernest was deserting her.

The fact remained that he sent no word, put in no appearance. Each morning she expected one of the opened letters distributed by a matron to be given to her. None was. On the twelfth day she was allowed to get in touch with a secondhand-furniture dealer in the neighborhood and arrange for him to go to her apartment and make an estimate on what he would give for the furnishings. The next morning, miraculously, one of the opened letters was for her. It was from the furniture dealer, informing her that her landlord was holding her property against the rent she owed.

On the fifteenth day Zona was given notice that her trial would come up the next day. There was left for her only what she wanted least. All during the past days she had fought the choice between Lynton Wirt and prison. The latter seemed almost preferable to giving up her victory over him. But the sickening atmosphere of the Finishing School, which she felt had already penetrated her skin to cling forever, made her hesitate. And when she thought of the greater thing, what isolation from the world would be like for her, there was no question of her decision. With her unique need, prison would be a stern place indeed. The simple thought of it was hardly to be borne. Her choice at this last minute resolved itself between starvation and plenty, and with feverish haste she wrote to Wirt, addressing the letter to his house and sending it special delivery so that he would receive it that evening.

The next morning she was led from the prison across to the courtroom. The scene was the same as she remembered it. Only now she entered it from the door at the left. She looked about anxiously for a sight of Wirt or someone from his office sent to get her out of this. No one came forward. There were the judge, the court attendants, the assistant district attorney, Waxy Bogart, the stenographer, several women parole officers, the sea of faces in the public pews. There was no friend of hers,

no one to disinter her from this grave.

Zona seated herself at the long table in the well of the courtroom before the judge's bench. She remained there, staring down while the judge rattled papers preparatory to dealing with her case. Her head didn't come up when he spoke. Her eyes just then fell on a newspaper someone had left on the table, folded so that a top quarter of its front page was visible. There she saw in stubby black letters the name Wirt. She looked closer, and all at once the reason Lynton Wirt had not come to her assistance was shouted out at her.

"LYNTON WIRT COMMITS SUICIDE," the headline read. Her eyes quickly scanned the article below, and she read that the lawyer had shot himself.

As if she had fired it herself, Zona followed the course of the bullet, aimed at the heart and lodging there. She learned that no reason was known for the act, that the lawyer had seemed in good health, that though his wife had been an invalid for years there was no domestic trouble, that associates denied any financial difficulties.

Zona alone, of all the millions of people in the city, knew the reason for Lynton Wirt's suicide. She had driven him to it and destroyed at the same time her one last hope.

She couldn't bring her attention to focus on what went on about her. She hardly listened to what the men dealing with her said. Asked questions, she answered mechanically. She hardly knew when they began and when they ended. The only thing that impressed itself upon her outside of what she saw in the newspaper was the jolly face of Waxy Bogart with its pig eyes like two pink dots above the pleasant mouth, which once more gave its hateful chuckle. That was before her like an intruding vision in the thought of Lynton Wirt as, staring straight in front of her, she was led back to the Finishing School.

Three days later, still without having heard from Ernest and having been legally designated a second offender, she was sentenced to spend an indeterminate period not to exceed two years in the women's state prison at Chester Farms.

Chapter Twenty-three

AFTER A TWO-WEEK reception period, during which Zona was interviewed by the vocational director and the visiting psychiatrist, the routine of Chester Farms began. Remembering Marion Jordan's warning, Zona told the psychiatrist nothing. The vocational director was a little more successful; she learned that Zona could play the piano, and agreed to let her give lessons to some of the girls in place of the usual work in the laundry, in the sewing rooms, or on the farm.

Zona was given a small room in a two-story cottage, and was pleasantly surprised to find it was much more homelike than the dismal cell she had envisioned. There were fresh white curtains at the window, which was not barred, and a small potted plant, left behind by a former occupant, stood on the table.

Continually she wondered why Ernest didn't reply to her appeals for help. Then on the day following the end of her reception period she was handed a letter from him. Dated a week before, it had been kept in the prison office until now. It told her how he had been away on a business trip through the Middle West when her letters arrived in Cleveland. They had not been forwarded, but left on his desk as personal communications. When he read them upon his return he wired a lawyer in New York to do everything necessary and left for New York himself on the next train. There he learned to his horror that she had already been sent to Chester Farms. He went there, but was not allowed to see her. At this point he interrupted his account to say, "They told me why you were arrested and sent there. I don't believe it. It isn't true."

He went on to say that he wanted to do everything he could for her. He had gone to her apartment, paid her back rent and neighborhood bills, and put her furniture in storage. He sent the storage company's receipts for her belongings. He had deposited money with the commissary

department of Chester Farms so she could obtain any extra things permitted that she wanted. He begged her to write to him and let him know the earliest day he would be allowed to visit her, and sent perpetual love and deep belief in her.

Zona had as little to do with the other inmates as possible. For the most part they were a vulgar crowd, made more inelegant by the simulation of nice-girl manners required of them. There were women of all ages, from barely sixteen to over sixty, of every nationality, of all degrees of intelligence and physical and mental health. But they were not morons. Theirs was a quickness gained by being on their own against the world, their wits sharply attuned to shrewdness and trickery.

Zona soon learned that Chester Farms, with its solitary-confinement rooms and its section of soundproof chambers for violent cases on the top floor of the main building, could be a hard place as well as a humane one. Authority was recognized only in the measure that it could be used to mask and further license. Many in positions of trust used their privileges to break the rules. Though writing paper was strictly forbidden beyond counted sheets and envelopes for permitted letters, notes continually passed back and forth. A contraband letter could be sent to the outside world and even received. Lipstick and powder were supposedly unobtainable, but evidence of their use appeared furtively. When the genuine articles couldn't be had, substitutes were made by soaking the red label of a tomato can in water and pulverizing pieces of chalk filched from one of the school-rooms. Cigarettes, absolutely against the rules, were greatly sought after and frequently found. Often the lavatories reeked of smoke, and in the night the faint aroma of burning tobacco entered through the window.

Zona heard of visits being made back and forth between the locked rooms of the cottages at night. She listened to the rumor of a mysterious set of keys that could unlock any door at the Farms. She heard, in spite of all the vigilance of officers and matrons, the sounds of nocturnal wanderings, whispers for a moment in corners,

and observed obscene gestures and unnatural behavior.

For a number of weeks she was treated by the other inmates with reserve, as if she were being tested. Then one evening in the sitting room of her cottage, where under the eye of Miss Dutton, the matron, the girls congregated to talk, read, and sew, she was given a greater insight into Chester Farms and what it did to women kept there. One of the cottage group turned out to be the girl she had seen on trial at Jackson Market Court. Her name was Marjorie Dawes. Zona never got over the metamorphosis that had taken place in her. From a bewildered, frightened little creature who didn't know what was being done to her or why, she had changed into something sharp and cunning. Her dark eyes darted here and there, looking for an advantage.

There was a ouija board in the sitting room, part of the equipment to reproduce, quite unsuccessfully, a girls'-club atmosphere. Sitting over the board opposite Zona, Marjorie turned suddenly, from letting the tiny three-legged table have its strange way on the board, to obviously manipulating it. She spelled out, "What do you do without men?"

Startled, Zona manipulated the planchette to reply, "I am not bothered."

Marjorie spelled out, "Maybe you will be."

Zona looked at her. The other girl's eyes were blank. Zona answered, "No."

Marjorie's quick fingers spelled out a new message: "There's another way just as good. It's better and safer."

At this, when Zona glanced at the other girl's eyes, she saw something that horrified her so much she pushed the ouija board aside and got up. Her movement was abrupt enough to cause a slight disturbance in the room. Faces turned toward her, and Miss Dutton looked up over her book. But nothing was said.

Zona went to a vacant place on one of the wicker divans and sat beside another girl. Containing her revulsion, she picked up a magazine. Without looking at Marjorie Dawes, she hid behind it, trying to read but not reading.

In a moment, at her side, came a barely audible whis-

per. "I saw what happened over there."

Zona glanced out of the corner of her eye and saw that the girl beside her was the unattractive and unpopular student officer of the cottage, Spunky, a trusty.

Zona didn't reply. She did not know what to make of Spunky, but she knew that she wasn't liked by the other girls and was suspected of being a spy for the officers.

"That means the papas are after you," she went on, "and you'll have to watch out."

"The papas?" Zona whispered. "Who are they?"

"The lady lovers," came the reply. "The ones who use a woman instead of a man. They're called the papas."

"Oh."

"What did Dawes tell you on the ouija board?"

Zona repeated it.

"She's working for the papas," Spunky explained. "Sounding you out."

"I don't—"

"Then be careful and refuse any presents they offer you. And don't let them do favors for you. Maybe they won't want you if you aren't interested. But if they do, they can make it tough. Because they're in now. They've got an organization that can't be broken for a while."

Zona glanced with mixed fear and pity at Marjorie Dawes, to find the girl glaring at them suspiciously.

The next evening Marjorie was missing from the roster of the cottage. Her place was taken by another girl. Marjorie had been sent to the ward. The undercover discussion was hot and furious. Zona caught angry glances in her direction, and on the recreation field Marjorie's look, seen from afar, was malevolent. Zona, unversed in the espionage system of the Farms and the accepted code of never telling, had made an enemy, for she was responsible, through Spunky, for the change.

Quickly and in large doses Zona was tutored in the secret ferment of the prison, the unrest the casual visitor never saw, the ceaseless bubbling under the surface. Used to little or no restraint of their instinctive urges, the women of Chester Farms became restive, troublesome, and unhappy when the normal channels of expression

were blocked off. The inclination to adopt abnormal ways was aggravated by the very monotony of prison life, by the perverse delight of human beings to accomplish anything stringently prohibited.

Zona came to dread her hours at the piano, trying to teach the conglomeration of creatures who presented themselves as pupils. Among them were a few earnest girls, but on the whole it was a delegation concerned more with the competition of winning her favors than with music. Zona had little faith in herself as a teacher, and less when she began the curious association with her questionable pupils. The lessons, conducted at the piano in the recreation hall, took place in the presence of a trusty and were often visited by a matron, but this did not prevent ample opportunity for sly advances.

Zona found her hand clasped, her body caressed and pushed against, her hair touched. She was the unwilling recipient of amorous glances. She was given suggestive and lascivious notes. And there was little she could do about it, except pray she could be discouraging enough to stop it. She bore it most acutely during the session she had with a gangling, devious girl called Candy, as hard as a rock under the assumed exterior of being a model inmate.

"Do you smoke?" the girl asked.

When Zona said she did, Candy produced not a home-made cigarette, but a whole, unopened package. The temptation to possess it was great, but Zona refused.

"Take it," Candy said roughly. "It's yours."

"I don't want it. Now, let's do that scale again."

A sullen expression passed into Candy's bony face. "I'm trying hard," she said for the benefit of the attending student officer. In a low voice she accused, "Going to be high-hat on us, are you? Going to be a duchess, huh? Well, let me tell you something: You'll change your mind. Wait'll you've been here a while longer. Then you'll see what it's like. And don't think the superintendent is running this country stir. There are others."

Although up till now Zona had been too busy and too upset to think of anything beyond trying to adjust

herself to prison life, she was only too well aware that Candy's prophecy of hard times to come was bound to be fulfilled. For over two months now she had been shut up, cut off from any man, and she was terrified at the thought that one day she might not be able to help herself under the relentless pressure of the papas.

She was courted with a persistence, a cunning, and a singleness of purpose almost incredible in its viciousness. For her continued resistance she was threatened, first by Candy and then by others, with actual physical violence. Though this failed to materialize, she didn't doubt that it could. Another form of punishment for her defiance was instituted instead, a program of ostracism.

Her pupils dropped off until there was hardly any excuse to continue the lessons. When she spoke to others she was ignored. Her questions and comments remained unanswered. When she was addressed it was scornfully, as "the Duchess." Even girls with whom she had formed friendships were intimidated into giving her up. The papas, by the continual jockeying always going on to get in certain residences with certain women, populated her cottage with enemies, and finally worked it so that Spunky, who continued to bolster her, was transferred. She knew that those working against her would like to get her into the ward, where they would have more opportunity to force her into submission.

The new year of 1931 brought her little hope of any change. The first week in January, during a routine inspection, Miss Dutton found under her mattress a condemning assortment of articles—a forbidden book, the stub of a lipstick, a collection of indecent notes.

Zona hotly denied any connection with these things, saying they had been placed in her room by others.

"Can you prove that?" Miss Dutton demanded.

"But it's true! I don't see how I can prove it, but—"

"Then it looks like the ward for you, miss."

Zona caught a triumphant, malicious gleam in the eyes of one of the new girls in the cottage before her belongings were gathered together to be taken over to the main building.

Chapter Twenty-four

HER BED IN THE WARD was one of many. A row of them lined either side of a long room. Between her bed and that on each side of it were armless rocking chairs. Against the wall she had a green metal locker for her clothes and personal effects. Her only mirror hung on the inside of the locker door.

When Zona gazed upon herself in the mirror she was disturbed by the change in her appearance. Her face was drawn, her eyes slightly sunken, her skin sallow, and she was thinner. She wondered how Ernest could say he still loved her when he came to see her.

Ernest visited her every month. Each time, upon entering and leaving the room where the inmates were allowed visitors on certain days and in the presence of officers, he kissed her. She clung to the kiss more than she ever let him know, not because it was his, but because it was the touch of a man. She wished it was in her to return his love the way he deserved, but knowing it wasn't, she couldn't agree to the future he painted for her. "When you get out of here," Ernest told her, "we'll be married. I'm going to look after you from now on. You don't seem to be able to look out for yourself."

Life in the ward was made miserable for her. The program of ostracism instituted against her was intensified, making her feel not even welcome here, unacceptable as a part of this sorry sorority. Marjorie Dawes led the inquisition. "Well, if it ain't the Duchess!" she sneered when Zona appeared in the ward. And when she had maneuvered Zona out of earshot of the others she whispered venomously, "You'll spill on me, will you? Not if I know what's coming to you!"

The piano lessons were stopped when she was transferred, and now, in the rug-manufacturing department, she was surrounded by a hostile crowd expert at getting her accused of slackness and disobedience. Others forced

in ahead of her at the washstands and lavatories to make her late for meals and work. Her bed, carefully made according to the regulations, was found rumpled by unknown hands. Dozens of things were done to bring down punishment on her. It didn't do any good to deny the infractions or protest the reason for them; they were so slyly brought about that the officers had nothing to go on except the evidence before their eyes. They could hardly be blamed for not being clairvoyant.

Zona was reprimanded by Miss Willits, the hard unyielding matron in charge of the ward, who slept at the end near the door. Her privileges were taken away one by one. Miss Willits warned her that another infraction would mean several weeks of solitary confinement.

Zona, terrified and distraught, clutched eagerly at the faint hope offered by the incredible rumor that ran feverishly through the prison. First by word of mouth and then in the newspapers allowed the inmates, it became known that down in New York, as a part of a great reform movement going on, the activities of the Vice Squad were being investigated. It was finally revealed how innocent women had been falsely arrested, how professionals as well had been mulcted by crooked police, lawyers, bondsmen, and judges. The methods of the Key-hole Squad were laid bare. Zona thrilled when Marion Jordan looked out at her from a front page. Marion had come forward with the offer to testify against particular individuals when the formal hearings of the investigation were held. She was at last carrying out her threat of getting back at the Vice Squad.

When it was rumored at the Farms that the cases of some inmates recently convicted and sentenced might be reviewed for possible release, endless speculation and passionate claims became the order of the day. And though no official word about this materialized, the women talked about little else. The spirit of unrest common to the everyday life of the prison rose in a great murmuring. The women became nervous, irritable, and on edge. These manifestations made themselves felt on the officers and matrons. Punishments came oftener and

were more severe than ordinarily. Finally they were so wholesale that the solitary-confinement rooms remained constantly filled, and the overflow was put in the sound-proof chambers. But the strained air continued to diffuse itself, permeating the Farms, an undue suspicion, a strange, threatening potency in which the current differences and passions were magnified a thousandfold.

During the excitement over the vice investigation the campaign against Zona was dropped. She prayed it would be forgotten permanently. But the period proved to be a mere interlude, a waiting, a lull before the real storm. This was announced by the arrival of Candy in the ward. Candy's demotion from a cottage was of no accidental nature. The infraction of the rules she committed to bring her to the ward was premeditated and nicely calculated.

At four o'clock one morning, unable to sleep, Zona saw a form creeping toward her. It came slowly and cautiously at first; then, when in between her bed and the next, it darted silently to her side and knelt on the floor. Zona started to sit up, but a hand pressed quickly on her shoulder and a tense voice whispered, "Stay where you are and don't make a sound."

It was Candy. Her long face, her hard, gangling form looked like a thin ghost in the dim light. Apprehensively, trying to show a greater anger than she could summon for the moment, Zona demanded, "What do you want?"

"Listen, Duchess," Candy said persuasively, "you're only making it hard for yourself. Try it our way. It isn't so bad."

"Go away!" Zona said. "I've never done anything to you. Why should you—"

Candy interrupted her with argument. A bizarre tenderness, accentuated by the necessity to whisper lest she awaken Miss Willits, entered her voice.

"No," Zona said, "no!"

Candy continued her singular persuasion. When she reached out to touch Zona, with a queer, unexampled, caressing gesture, Zona anticipated it by thrusting her away. "Stop it," she ordered tensely. "If you don't go away

I'll call out."

"Why do that? Why—"

"I will, I tell you! I—"

"All right," Candy said sullenly. "I'll go. If you want to be a fool, be one." She waited and added before she left, "But think it over. We'll give you one more chance. And think this over: If you don't see it right, we'll send you to solitary and then pay you a visit there."

Two days later Candy managed to approach her and ask with her idea of graciousness, "Well, Duchess, are we friends? Come on—"

Zona turned disdainfully away.

That night, before Zona could formulate any defense against them, the papas struck. She was awakened by the loud screaming of a frowzy-haired, mouselike girl who occupied the bed opposite her. The screams aroused everyone in the ward. With the others, Zona sat up. The lights were snapped on. Miss Willits, angrily ready to pounce, came down the aisle, ordering, "Stay in your beds! Lie down. Don't move, any of you! Now, what's going on here? Brown, you! What's the matter with you?"

The girl, Brownie, as Zona knew her, cried hysterically. "She came over here! She wanted to get in bed with me! She tried to . . ." Brownie covered her face with her hands and sounds like sobs came from her.

"Who're you talking about?" Miss Willits demanded, glaring around suspiciously. "Who was it?"

Brownie took her hands away from her face long enough to point at Zona. "Her!" she exclaimed. "It was her!"

Zona, half sensing that this was coming, denied it quietly. "I haven't been out of my bed. This girl is lying, Miss Willits."

Another girl spoke up, corroborating Brownie. "I saw her go over," she said, indicating Zona.

"I was awake," still another offered. "I saw her, too." Miss Willits ordered silence as Mrs. Bowers, the head matron, entered the ward with another hefty, raw-boned matron.

Grimly Mrs. Bowers listened to a repetition of the

testimony of Brownie and her cohorts. Zona's indignation rose to assert itself against them, but was of little account. Three against one was too many.

The papas' method, clever in presenting no connection with Candy or Marjorie, whose word would probably be questioned, proved effective. Miss Willits said to Zona, "I told you what it would mean next time. Get your things."

Flanked by the head matron on one side and by the beefy matron on the other, Zona, carrying her belongings, was marched to the top floor of the building. The regular solitary-confinement rooms all being filled, she was taken along the corridor past them and to one of half a dozen steel doors leading into the soundproof chambers usually used for violent cases. The door was opened and she was thrust into darkness. The door was locked after her.

She groped about, dropping most of her things, until she felt the edge of a cot and sank down upon it.

When morning finally came, Zona saw that besides the cot, the place contained only a small rough table and a chair. The dark walls were unrelieved by even a window. Air was admitted through a tiny skylight of heavy glass reinforced with wiring. Through this also came her only light, for the switch for the ceiling bulb in the room was located outside.

No sound entered this chamber. She might have been living in a world of the dead. The lack of movement, of sound, was nerve-racking. The silence became loud in her ears.

She wondered if it would be possible for Candy to carry out her threat of visiting her in solitary confinement. She faced the unalterable fact that the papas, as they had promised, had sent her here. But she couldn't envision their coming in after her, out of the ward or cottages, up the stairs, and past the steel door of the room. She recalled a story about a mysterious set of keys supposedly able to unlock any door in the institution, but told herself no such thing existed, that it was fantastic. She couldn't imagine what the papas, having done this to her, wanted with her further, what more they could do to her.

She lay awake at night fancying she heard a scraping at the door, frantic for a light, for someone else about her, for a friendly voice. She started awake to find herself bathed in perspiration after dreaming that others were in the room. She waited, endlessly and excruciatingly, for daylight.

In the middle of her seventh night in the soundproof room she jerked awake to know, overwhelmingly, that this time the presence of others in the room was not imagined. By the door closed behind them two people were standing. Faintly she could hear their breathing, brief whispers, slight movements. In them she sensed a strange enmity before she forced a cry from her contracted throat and sprang up.

They were upon her before she finished her cry. "Let her yell," a voice said. "Nobody can hear her."

Zona kicked and struck out, but they were too much for her. One of them held her arms and the other clamped herself about her body, pinioning her legs and feet.

She was flung face down on the cot and held there. A strong wiry hand grasped the prison nightdress at her neck, and it was torn from her back with a loud crackling and ripping.

The next instant something descended on her back that sent a stream of fire running through her whole body. It came down again. Then again and again. She screamed. One of the women laughed. The blows continued to descend as she was held firmly to receive them. Zona gasped with pain and shock. Whatever they struck her with cut into her flesh. Her back quivered and worked convulsively each time it was struck. Across it suddenly ran a warm wet trickle, then another. The blows descended with a rain, faster and faster, until finally it was beyond her endurance to stand them any more. With a moan she lost consciousness.

Zona awakened to daylight and the impression that she was still in the soundproof room. But when her vision, blurred at first, cleared, she saw white walls and knew she was in the prison hospital.

She was placed on her side. Her back, under thick surgical dressings, felt like a field of pain.

The prison physician, the nurse, and the several matrons who attended her were efficient and solicitous. Zona read in their eyes horror at the sight of the wounds on her back when they were dressed each day. The doctor told her honestly that her back would probably be scarred, though not greatly disfigured.

Through the matrons she learned that Candy and Marjorie Dawes had been apprehended as they sneaked back into the ward that night. It wasn't known until the next morning, when Zona was found, what they were up to, but then punishment had been swift and fitting. Each of them now occupied a soundproof room and awaited further action by the authorities.

Zona also learned that a thorough shake-up of the entire personnel of Chester Farms was going on. Wholesale deprivation of privileges was being made. Girls, women, officials, and matrons alike were shifted about to break up any cliques and organizations. After detailed search, the means by which Candy and Marjorie had entered the soundproof room was unearthed—a small set of slim skeleton keys whose hiding place was the drain-pipe of a washbowl.

The superintendent, Dr. Davis, came several times to talk at length with Zona. Her story, which wouldn't have been believed before, was now attended as gospel. Zona told it all, beginning with her false arrest. Dr. Davis then advised her about the steps that might be taken. The superintendent didn't conceal how difficult her own position would be if Zona took her right of making a formal complaint to the state prison board. Rightly or wrongly, the resultant publicity would probably cost Dr. Davis her job. At the same time, she pointed out, it would mean a notoriety for Zona from which she very probably could never escape for the rest of her natural life.

In place of this the superintendent offered to bend every effort to obtain Zona's release on the grounds of her having been falsely sent to prison in the first place. With the vice investigation now going on in New York

this should be feasible, particularly because the cases of a number of women were already in review by the parole board. Zona saw at once the advisability of this plan, as a release obtained in this way would be unconditional, with no further period of parole.

Lying in the hospital cottage, thinking and feeling it out, Zona had no particular vengefulness toward those who beat her. Both girls had been made a part of the perverse life of women behind bars through no will of their own, but on account of the forces by which they had been surrounded. The one on whom her blame centered was Waxy Bogart. Bogart was the one responsible for this. He brought her here; he did this to her; he was the only one to profit by it. For hours she thought of this. When she first saw the livid welts on her back she could barely support the thought of Bogart. When the welts became ribbons of scar tissue, a raised, interlaced design, she ran her fingers over them almost lovingly at the thought they raised in her mind. She had always felt that at a correct time and place someone would be made to pay for all the wrongs done her, the entire provocation of her life. Now she had someone. Bogart was the one to reimburse her. He could have no right and no reason to live, and she waited only for freedom and the chance to get at him in some way.

In April, after endless probes and reviews by representatives of the parole board, Zona was given an unconditional release from Chester Farms and presented with the apologies of the State of New York.

Chapter Twenty-five

SITTING IN A CUBICLE in a rooming house on West Nineteenth Street through the first dusk of her freedom, Zona tried to get her bearings. Confused by the noise and movement of the city, strange after her months away from them, she needed to accustom herself to this world outside, and during the process determine where she was going.

Her first consideration was for her clothes. She was wearing the same garments in which she had entered prison. Her brown woolen dress was now noticeably out of fashion. With interest and envy she noted the smart new styles on the women passing in the street. But she had no money with which to purchase clothes. She could spare nothing from the precious fifty dollars she possessed, thirty from the prison authorities along with a ticket to New York, the other twenty left from the money deposited with the commissary by Ernest. All of this had to be kept for the bare necessities of food and shelter.

She hadn't let Ernest know of what had happened to her or that she had been released. He would be importunate about marrying her, and acceptance was no more possible now than before. She had never, even when kissing him hello and good-by at the Farms, felt any attraction to Ernest. Why, she couldn't fathom. She was deeply grateful to him. She was flattered by his continued love, and she was genuinely fond of him. But she couldn't think of him as her husband, and to marry him was out of the question.

If she were to see Ernest now she might weaken to his demand. And she cared to have nothing to do with any man for a time. The violence of her recent experience had given her a period of recess, but she knew all too well how deceiving the hiatus could be. Its promise had let her down too many times to let her believe in it any more as lasting. It required something more, something new to sustain it. Everything she had tried so far having

failed, there remained one more thing, a last resort, which, if it too was not effective, would leave nothing between her and final defeat.

This last means was work. Beyond her few months as hostess in Mrs. Lowell's tearoom, she had never worked at anything. She had had too much leisure. Having nothing to occupy her, she now recognized, was the thing that betrayed her. She took faith in having to spend all her energies laboring for her living, in getting a job, any kind of job, so that she would be driven incessantly. She wanted to enslave her body so that its requirements could be nothing more than a short period of rest before it was again applied to an all-enveloping task.

Along with this plan went the desire for satisfaction of the consuming passion she carried from Chester Farms. This flamed every time she looked at her back in the mirror, every time she ran her fingers over the hard, white, narrow welts there. Touching them became a habit with her. While she was alone and doing nothing else, her hand constantly reached out for her back to trace the unnatural design there. Always accompanying the action were delicious visions of what she would do to the one originally responsible for putting the welts there.

The opportunity to inscribe her own mark on Bogart's flesh was at hand. During the last weeks in prison she heard and read more about the vice investigations. The hearings on the activities of the Keyhole Squad were soon to be held. Marion Jordan was to be the star witness. She promised to name names in her exposé of the entire opprobrious system.

Zona decided there was a name she wanted to mention herself. Tomorrow morning she would go to the proper place and answer Waxy Bogart's fables about her with true stories. Now was her turn to tell a tale.

In the morning, seated before a slim breakfast in a cafeteria and reading the newspaper she purchased for the want ads, she saw something that made her choke with horror. In black letters the paper shouted out to her that Marion Jordan had been murdered. She could hardly believe it at first until she read on, taking in a vivid

description of how Marion's body was found in a ravine in one of the Bronx parks. She had been strangled to death with a rope twisted about her neck.

At first Zona told herself she wasn't afraid. This was more reason why she should offer her own story; certainly there could be no greater. Positive that Bogart must have had a hand in removing Marion—for he was undoubtedly one of those she meant to tell about—Zona felt that nothing done to him now could be sufficient. She gulped her coffee to remove the faintness in her and stimulate the determination.

Then, sitting very still, she admitted that she was afraid. Bogart could have given no more definite warning than this to others who might wish to speak. She saw herself being taken away, felt a cord going about her own throat, pictured herself being dropped, limp and blue-faced, down a ravine, and knew the intimidation had been successful. If that was Bogart's way, if he would go to such lengths, she could not fight him yet. She must wait for another time and method.

No one was ever arrested for the murder of Marion Jordan. When the vice investigation hearings were held, without her, the facts about the more flagrant members of the Keyhole Squad could not be proved. But doubt over their integrity had been cast, and a number of them were dismissed from the police force. Among them Zona read Bogart's name. With a fat bank account to which she herself had contributed, he was discredited before the world but set free without punishment.

The three weeks immediately following Marion's murder, while Zona's small capital disappeared dollar by dollar, quarter by quarter, cent by cent, were composed of repetitious days of despair. Before she went to prison the depression had become a large subject. The failure of Wall Street was reaching down to the common man. People were losing their jobs. Businesses were collapsing. In the side streets bread lines were forming, shelters for the unemployed going up. Now, less than a year later, these indications of a stricken economic system had grown

to enormous proportions. Everybody talked about it. It was in the air like bits of paper at a reception for a celebrity. Having a job now was more of a rarity than not having one. The bread lines were longer, the shelters more numerous. And in addition to these physical manifestations, a gloom established itself in the spirits of people that bit deeper than anything else. A fear possessed them in the mass, invading nearly every heart.

Zona didn't escape it. It did more to her than to most people. At the very moment when she wanted work for a double purpose, work was not to be had. She tried to find it at every plausible place. She answered advertisements, she registered at a dozen employment agencies, she hovered about the municipal employment bureaus. Either there were a hundred applications for one unattractive and usually temporary job, or she had no training to fill the pitifully few positions that from time to time became open. These were usually pounced on by people with far greater talents than her own. She was even laughed at for seriously expecting to find a job.

When she was down to less than a dollar, with another week's rent due in advance on her room, she didn't try to persuade the woman keeping the rooming house to let her stay longer. One look at the implacable, knowing face of the woman, the fact that she had only a small bag of luggage, decided her on the futility of asking for any credit. She packed her scarce belongings and left. She tried to apportion her few coins so that she would have something left for the next day, but by afternoon, with only a cup of coffee for breakfast and no lunch, she was so hungry that she spent all but a nickel for food. She had plans for the remaining nickel.

Late that night it went into the slot of a subway turnstile. And all that night she practiced a trick she had heard two women discuss in one of the employment agencies, that of riding up and down in the subway. This consisted of not riding to the end of the line where another fare must be paid to come back again, but getting off at express stations with an overhead runway or a tunnel leading across to the trains going in the opposite

direction. Nine times that night she visited Flatbush and ten times she journeyed to the Bronx.

When she emerged on Forty-second Street and Lexington Avenue shortly after dawn she was chilled and stiff. The streets were deserted. A cold breeze reached down between the high buildings.

She made her way to Madison Avenue and then turned north. Where she was going she had no idea. She thought of the day ahead, of all the days reaching out endlessly. She darted into a doorway and stood there trembling.

"What's the matter with you?"

Zona jerked about to discover she wasn't alone in the doorway. She saw a tall old man with a bush of gray hair and glowering blue eyes. No hat covered his head, and his suit, baggy and worn, fitted him like a shapeless sack. At first she thought he was another homeless one like herself. Then she noticed a pad of paper and a pencil in his hands, and that he was sketching.

"Nothing," she told him.

"The hell there isn't," he said.

Zona looked at him in surprise. He observed her fully and coolly, with a curious, almost objective interest. His voice and manner were brusque, almost boasting, as if the world was his and he knew it.

"When a pretty woman ducks in a doorway at six o'clock in the morning looking as if she's going to pass out," he told her, "there's something the matter."

"I'm all right."

"For God's sake, will you stop saying that?"

"But I—"

"Are you going to tell me now or are you going to come back to my studio with me and tell me there?"

Zona gave him a chilling glance and moved toward the sidewalk.

"Listen," he said, "I'm seventy. All I can do is regret I'm not capable of what you're thinking." He put his pad under his arm and his pencil in his pocket, and made a gesture of departure. "Come on."

"No," she said. "No, I—"

"Come on, damn it!"

Weak, astonished, and dazed, Zona followed him. She had trouble, when he broke into a vigorous stride, keeping up with him. He said nothing on the way, though they covered more than six blocks before they reached the old-fashioned structure into which he led her. Here they mounted four flights to the top floor and entered a hallway that almost immediately led into a huge cluttered studio with pictures, frames, and other paraphernalia piled about under the dull glare of a skylight.

"Kitty!" the old man yelled. "Kitty! Where are you?"

A woman almost as old as he, with a square, stoical face, entered from another room. She showed no surprise at seeing Zona.

"Breakfast, and lots of it, for twol" he bellowed.

As the woman went away he signed for Zona to sit in one of the several large overstuffed chairs that, with a model's stand with a wooden chair on it, a table, and a couch, constituted the only furniture in the room.

"It may relieve your mind, if any," the old man told her, seating himself and putting his feet up on the table, "to know that I'm Henry Dight."

The name struck a faint chord in Zona, but she couldn't quite capture it. "I'm sorry," she told him, "I don't—"

"Mean to say you've never heard of me? I'm the greatest painter in the world."

Then Zona remembered having seen his name and heard his disarming boast. "Of course," she said. "Now I know."

"God damn it, that's what fame amounts to! That's what men work all their lives for. So people know who you are after you've told them." He chattered on blasphemously, about fame, about art, about the rich, about the poor, about women, about food when the breakfast arrived. He said nothing about her, asked no questions, seemed to show no further interest in her. He consumed eggs and sausages noisily. Zona ate cautiously, taking warning from her protesting stomach.

The food brightened her deadened spirit. When she was through she said, "Now if you'll give me a cigarette

I'll tell you what you wanted to know."

"Know?" he demanded. "I don't want to know anything. But you can have a cigarette." He produced a crushed package. "Then you've got to get some sleep. I can't paint you if you're going to fall off the chair every five minutes."

While she smoked he hustled, uncovering the couch, already made up as a bed, and telling her that he would be out most of the day and that no one would disturb her. When he finished arranging her bed he said, "Now get in it," and went away brusquely with no further word.

Meekly, and amazed at this vitriolic old man and his treatment of her, Zona obeyed.

She was awakened by a hand shaking her shoulder none too gently. Henry Dight was standing over her crying, "Get up! Get up! It's three o'clock. You can't sleep while there's still some light left."

Zona sat up, holding the covers about her, but he made no move to leave the room. "I can't dress while you're here," she said.

"Oh, shut up! I've seen two thousand women without any clothes on. I won't even be looking at you."

Zona believed this when he busied himself with placing a clean canvas on an easel and went about, with absurd gravity, squeezing paint out of tubes. She managed to get into her clothes without coming under his gaze. When she was dressed, he told her to sit in the chair on the model's stand. "Just sit there and look at me," he ordered. "If you try to strike a pose I'll throw you out."

Sitting in the chair she watched him while he studied her impersonally for quite a long time, drew a quick pencil sketch, and then busily twirled a brush in the fresh worms of paint on his palette.

For three days Henry Dight painted her. And while he worked they talked. Now Zona did most of the talking, while he merely grunted or asked what appeared to be disinterested questions. Zona found herself telling him the story of her life, the whole story as she had never told it to anyone else.

It wasn't until she reached the present that she realized

how leading his questions had been, how cleverly and subtly he kept her talking. But he showed no sign of being startled or particularly concerned; her biography might have been commonplace, usual, and even boring.

On the afternoon of the third day Dight threw down his brushes and palette. "That's all I'm going to do on it."

Zona saw it for the first time, looking upon the face of a lovely young woman, hardly more than a girl. There was a warmth to her in shining hair, soft mouth, and slender white throat. Only in her eyes, upon which Henry Dight seemed to have concentrated, was there a certain hardness, a hurt, a bitterness. He caught her face as it had always been, her eyes as they had become.

She praised the portrait, expressing real appreciation at Dight's magic, but he had lost interest. For the first time he showed a curiosity about her as a person rather than as an object to paint. "The thing for you to do," he told her, "is to make some money out of yourself."

"I've tried to work, but—"

"Work, hell! I'm not talking about work. I'm talking about the logical thing for you to do. You're going to give yourself away, you know damn well you are. You can't help it any more than a river can help flowing to the sea. It's time for you to have sense enough to get paid for it."

She started to protest, but he stopped her before she could utter a word.

"Wait a minute, damn it!" he interrupted. "I'm not asking you to go out on the streets. Though you might get down to it at that, if you don't take my advice. Now listen."

Zona had heard of call-house flats, apartments where girls live with whom men get in touch by telephoning a central organization. What Dight spoke of was much the same thing, but on a de luxe scale and operated a little differently. Men made the contact by a series of telephone calls, identifying themselves in one, then being given a different number to call to fix the details of a meeting. These took place in big hotels. Before the depression a

girl was paid a hundred dollars a night for her services. Dight thought it was now fifty dollars. The girl kept half, the rest she turned over to those putting her in touch with the men. The principals, girls and those operating the organization, never met each other after their first agreement was made, though the girls were closely watched. They were assured protection by the political pull of their sponsors. Dight didn't know any of them, but he could put Zona in touch with someone who did.

"No," Zona told Dight again, "I can't do that. I couldn't—"

"You're crazy. You've done it already."

"Not that way. That's different."

"It's only different because you'll be getting something out of it."

"But with just any man—no, oh, no!"

"Listen, get it through your head that this is high-class. There aren't many men left who've got fifty dollars to spend on that. Those that have are as good and probably better than some you've known. This is just right for you. The trouble with you is that you've always fought yourself, and the more you fight it the more it fights you back. It'll always win. What you want to do is stop scrapping with it, and use it."

From a first inability to accept Dight's plan, Zona reached—under the sting of Dight's remarks—a sort of drawn helplessness. She knew for inescapable truth that the old man's prophecy would be fulfilled. She recognized against her will the plain argument, beyond decency and all morality, that here was a thing fitting for her.

Contemplating the course set out for her, Zona gazed at the portrait of herself. Upon the canvas, vivid and alive, was preserved her old, real self. That was Zona, and nothing could alter her. At least in one way she would be able to live, unchangeable and herself.

In answer to one of Dight's biting comments, to which she did not listen, she asked, "Will you give it to me?"

Dight stopped talking, looked at her, and followed her gaze to the portrait. After a moment he said, "I get you. Sure, you can have it. What the hell."

Chapter Twenty-six

ZONA HAD THE PORTRAIT framed, and it hung above her mantelpiece to be seen every morning when she returned from what she did by night. With it she deposited her conscience.

She needed almost no other solace. It did not require, as she expected, any great schooling of her emotions to take the road pointed by the diagnostic Henry Dight. Her own need asserting itself after the enforced suppression was too great. With her it wasn't the nature of men that counted so much as it was the required fact of them.

Most of them were out-of-town businessmen. She wished that some of them were younger, but she seldom wanted more consideration than she received. The delight many of them found in her was occasionally pitiful as a commentary on what they were accustomed to at home. They confessed to her, boasted to her, and generally took a boyish joy in their escapade. For them as well as for her it was a release and a finding, sufficient for her to receive at least one proposal every month and a dozen wishes to the effect that there was no such thing as marriage.

Zona was taken out to dinner, to the theater, to night clubs, and even given presents. She noted a pride in being with her that went far to soothe any qualms she had when she remembered that her company was purchased. After a time she found herself actually looking forward to what the next man would be like.

Zona never saw again the person with whom she dealt in arranging her new life. Both of the only two meetings she had with this representative took place in the lobbies of large hotels. Instead of a man, as she expected, it turned out to be a woman, a keen, sharp-nosed, smoothly groomed woman who might have been anywhere between the ages of thirty-five and fifty. She had no name that Zona learned. She stepped up to Zona in the designated

place they were to meet, and after identifying her, asked her to go to a secluded corner of the hotel's lounge. There Zona was observed sharply and questioned exhaustively. The woman spoke tersely and to the point. Evidently Zona gave the right answers and was found satisfactory, for she was advanced an amount of money, given certain instructions, and told to be at another hotel on an afternoon a week later for a second interview.

Zona had carried out the instructions to the letter, for she was more than willing now to make another person of herself. She dressed her hair differently and had it dyed jet-black, watching with awe and fascination her fine red hair disappear into the darkness. The shadows of raven hair made her face thinner, brought out its angles, and varied the cast of her face. She darkened her eyebrows and eyelashes. In contrast her skin became startlingly white, changing the shade of her eyes and further affecting the contour of her whole features. When she first saw herself in a mirror she hardly recognized herself, and felt sure even people who knew her well would have difficulty in penetrating her new appearance.

Finally, on East Thirty-seventh Street on the third floor of a small apartment house, she found three rooms that suited her purpose for a home. These she filled with her own furniture, obtained by using the receipt from the storage warehouse sent to her by Ernest. The name she put under the doorbell was Frances Carver.

Her metamorphosis was approved when she kept her second engagement with the woman. Talking with her again, Zona was startled and not a little disarmed at the amount known about her in addition to what she had told before. After she was given further instructions, advised not to employ a servant and to have few friends and no confidants, the woman said, "Forget about Waxy Bogart. He can't touch you now."

"How did you know—"

"The most important part of this business is knowing," she said. "Now, are you sure you understand everything?"

"Yes."

"Use your wits. Dress well, but save your money. And

expect your first call in a few days."

Between moments of adjusting herself to it, Zona marveled at the system when she came to experience it. Sometime in the hour between four and six in the afternoon, when she was required to be at the other end of the telephone, she received a call from a girl whose voice sounded like that of a gum-chewing switchboard operator. The girl never mentioned her own name or the name of Frances Carver. No name was mentioned except the essential one, and that in a way which, to anyone listening, would mean nothing. "I'm going to see Charlie tonight," the voice said in the midst of inconsequential chatter. "You know, Charlie Doran. Yeah, we're going to the Yorkbelle for dinner. I'm meeting him at six-thirty."

That told Zona that the name of the man she was to meet was Charles Doran and that she was to meet him at six-thirty at the Yorkbelle Hotel.

At the end of each week a messenger boy in a uniform marked with no insignia presented himself at her door and Zona gave him, in a plain sealed envelope, half of each fifty dollars received during the week. The amount she gave him was seldom less than a hundred dollars; often it was a full hundred and seventy-five. During the first two months she managed to pay back the money advanced to her.

When Zona lived up to one of the most strict regulations and paid her first weekly visit to an address on upper Lexington Avenue, she discovered there the curious little doctor she had once visited on West End Avenue. But he had come down in the world. His office was nondescript, he had no nurse, and he himself was more subdued. He no longer drew aggressively on a cigar, but puffed cigarettes. At first he didn't recognize her. When Zona reminded him, he brightened for a moment and exclaimed, "It is you! Yes, I remember. But I would not have known. Now it is different with both of us. You are here. I am here."

"God and I have not become friends again," he said. "No. Because they arrested me. It took all my money,

everything, for lawyers. I have nothing left to make beautiful things in stone. Maybe I never will." He shook his head dolefully. "It was a mistake to do that to me. I made happiness. No one can say I did not."

He knew no more than she about the organization to which both their lives were tied. At first he was reluctant to discuss it, but on subsequent visits he told her that he was paid through the messenger service. He tapped his head and said, "I keep no records except here. Once a day I am called. I do not know from where. If a girl has not come to me I mention her name, or if there is something wrong—but this does not happen if she follows the way I tell all of you to care for yourselves. I do not know altogether what happens then. Certainly she stops coming to me. Or if she comes I cannot receive her or say I ever saw her before. I think she is dropped. And she can do nothing. She knows too little and there is too much influence."

He assumed without asking the reason he saw her again. "I have thought about you," he said. "And the others like you. No one knows why it is so. But now I have an idea. You want to know what it is? It will not bother you to know? Then it is this: Most think it is too great a development in that part of yourself. I do not think so. To me it is the opposite. That part is not great enough. It is inferior. Forgive me—you want to know about yourself? Then I must tell you that you are like that. From the other time, from now, I can tell. Upon that nature gets to work. It tries to compensate. It takes the means you know to prove itself normal and superior. It wishes too much to fulfill the function of the lacking body. In simple words—you do not mind?—it is not happy unless it is trying to impregnate itself.

"Yes," he said in answer to her low comment on this, "it might have been better if you had not seen me before. Sometimes nymphomania is adjusted by having a child. But not always. It is not yet understood enough. And often another thing goes with it. Then it is hard. This is when a girl does not get the man she wants. Then she is hurt. Then she will run to another man, to any man.

Perhaps it has been that way with you? Oh, my poor one. I feel for you. But do not pay too much attention to what I say. Maybe I am right. Maybe I am wrong."

Returning home after a lonely dinner one evening when she hadn't received a call, Zona found Ernest examining a half-dozen names on the letter boxes in the hallway. He glanced at her and stepped aside to let her pass in the narrow place, then looked at her. "Zona!"

"Ernest!"

"You—what have you done to yourself?"

"How did you know I lived here?"

They went up to her apartment to answer each other. He told his story first. After her release his letters were returned from Chester Farms and he wrote in inquiry to the superintendent. Dr. Davis couldn't tell him where she had gone. Ernest was worried, glad she was out of prison but wondering how she was. He was transferred to New York, permanently located there at last. During the busy period of moving and adjusting to a new position he didn't have much time to do anything about her. But when his quarterly check to pay the storage for her furniture was sent back with the information that the things had been taken away, he thought of a method to find her. He went to the storage warehouse, and after a good deal of trouble learned the address to which the van had taken her furniture. Tonight he had come here and was examining the names downstairs when she came in. "Why didn't you let me know, Zona?"

"I didn't mean ever to let you know," she said. "I wanted to see you again, Ernest, but only when it was safe for both of us."

"You're going to marry me," he stated. "I'm going to take care of you."

"No, Ernest. I appreciate it as I've always appreciated it. And always will. But we can't."

She impressed it on him that he was to look forward to nothing. But she found she didn't want to be as frank with him as before. She couldn't hand him the blow of what she had become since they met last. She explained

the change in her appearance and her taking the name of Frances Carver by saying she couldn't hold her job if her history were known. She worked, she said, as a model.

Ernest accepted this for a time, but during subsequent weeks when she saw him in her free evenings she watched disbelief growing in him. He faced her with it one evening when they sipped highballs in her apartment. "You're not telling me the truth about yourself, Zona."

"But I am, Ernest."

"No. There's something you're not telling me."

"What makes you think that?"

"Why is it you're out so much nights? You can't work that often. Why can't you ever make an engagement in advance—as if there's something else that comes first? Why is it that almost every time we see each other you have to telephone me late to let me know if I can come? Zona, nothing you've told me rings true."

Zona waited a moment before she said, "It will be better if I don't tell you, Ernest."

"I want to know."

Finally she saw how determined he was, and began.

He tried to keep from cowering under it. He made a courageous attempt, saying only, "I see." But once again her revelation made his body go tense and his head bend forward as if he had been mortally struck.

"Oh, Ernest," she pleaded, "why don't you give me up? I'm not worth it. Why torture yourself any longer?"

"I can't give you up," he said in a flat voice. "I can't find anyone else. I've tried—I've never told you—but I've tried. I've done everything. But it won't work. Not any more than you say you can stop what you're doing."

Her cry of compassion was the only sound uttered as they sat then for a long time in silence, neither knowing if he felt more sorry for himself or for the other.

Finally he spoke again and made her promise that if ever she was in any trouble of any kind she would call on him. "You'll come to see me first," he asked. "You promise that?"

Tears were heavy in her eyes when she answered. "Yes, Ernest. I promise that."

Chapter Twenty-seven

MANY MEN WANTED to know about the scars on her back. Zona kept them hidden as much as she could. Even her evening gowns came up to her neck in back. But she couldn't keep her consorts from being aware of them, and asking how she got them. The welts became, instead of a blemish, a source of interest and attraction.

The most persistent in wanting to know about the scars was one man among those she saw more than once, who asked for her and with whom she established a singular relationship. Ray Martin was a college man turned racketeer. Graduating from college when it was next to impossible to find legitimate work, he turned to a field that ordinarily he wouldn't have entered. His was the generation that could not sell its labor and its brains, but found a market for its person. Ray risked his big solid body in the policy game, the unlawful but widespread and lucrative form of lottery that accepted bets on certain numbers published each day in the newspapers. His connection with it changed him from a boy into a caricature of a man, knowing and ruthless, whose blue eyes contained the easy readiness to kill to obtain a desired objective.

With Zona he was kind. They got on well together and enjoyed each other frankly. "You and I don't belong to what we're doing," he told her. "Neither of us. It's the times that have brought us to this."

"You," Zona differed.

"You, too. You don't tell me enough about yourself, but it's on the books that if things had been different you wouldn't be here with me now. And I wouldn't be with you. We're a good pair. That's what gives me my idea. I've been thinking about this a long time. I want you to—"

"You know I can't meet you outside."

"Who's asking you to meet me outside?"

"Then I won't leave what I'm doing, if that's what you mean."

"I'm asking you to marry me."

After her surprise, Zona dissuaded him. He argued aggressively, but didn't hold it against her when she only thanked him instead of accepting the offer. Instead he wanted to do something for her. "I've figured out that back of yours," he said. "Some guy. Anyway, you're blaming him for it."

"No."

"Yes. So why don't you let me have the monkey's name and I'll put some of the boys to work on him."

She stared. "You mean you would—"

"I'll have him taken apart in any kind of pieces you say."

Considering this, Zona was at first taken with it, thinking it no more than Bogart deserved. Then she reviewed the history of her attitude toward him during the past months and wasn't so sure. At first there had been no possibility of forgetting him. The thought of him was continually with her. She lived to pay him back, personifying in him the instinctive hate for men in general her bondage to them generated. All her connection with men, her entire and repetitious tie to them, was centered upon Bogart. At moments a part of her very lust was to get her hands on his chubby throat and shake the life out of him. But when these moments passed, she saw she would only do herself harm if she pursued these dangerous impulses. She fought to restrain them until her hate for Bogart became dormant, flashing forth only at intervals.

Now presented with the opportunity of having him removed, she couldn't take it. To have him killed in cold blood, no matter how much he deserved it, proved impossible.

"Want to work on him yourself, is that it?" Ray asked.

"No," she said, "not any more."

"You say you don't. But you sound as if you do."

The next time she saw Ray Martin he flipped a small, flat paper packet at her, the kind of packet druggists used

for powders. She picked it up. "What is it?"

"That's a sleeping powder. For the monkey you were telling me about."

"I don't want it."

"You can't tell. See that phone number written on it?"

"Yes, but—"

"If you take him, call me there and I'll see that what's left is given a private funeral."

Zona pushed the packet away and turned her back on it.

Later, when she was about to leave Ray, the packet was there beside her pocketbook on the bureau. In gathering her things together she glanced at it, meant to leave it, and at the last instant was prompted by something to drop it in her bag. There it remained, half forgotten.

That winter Zona saw her father again for the first time in nearly four years. From time to time she wondered what he was doing, how he was, and finally she wrote to him, giving her address under her own name as General Delivery in the main New York post office. Applying there a week later she found a note from him giving the name of a hotel off lower Eighth Avenue and its telephone number. When she called him he was evasive about meeting her, wanting to come to her, and after she rejected this they arranged to meet in a restaurant.

He looked a little older, his clothes were soiled and unpressed, the shoes on his dainty feet were scuffed, and he needed a shave. But outside of these things he was still much his old self.

"I make out all right," he told her.

"What do you do, Father?"

"Oh, a couple of things."

"What are they?"

"Well, I . . ." For once he faced her and made a plain statement, as though accusing her. "I ask people on the street for money."

"You mean panhandling?"

"Some people call it that. I've been doing it ever since

I lost the house and came to New York. And I guess it isn't anything to be ashamed of, the way this country's going to the dogs. They wanted me to go on relief," he went on, "but I wouldn't do it. I've always made my own way, and I guess I can still do it."

"You live at that hotel, Father?"

"It's a good place and I mean to stay there." He paid thirty-five cents a day for his room. Zona could see that it wasn't much better than a flophouse.

He wanted to know about her, unbraiding her for not getting in touch with him sooner, demanding to know more about what she had been doing.

Zona cut short his censure, his curiosity, and his proprietary air. She felt no obligation to this man, even though he was her father. Her resentment faltered a little before the picture of what they had both come to, but not to the extent that she could take up a life with him in any way. Not because she really wanted to or felt she ought to, but out of pity and the thought of her mother, she offered to make a bargain with him. If he would give up panhandling, she would send him enough money to live on every week.

"I'd just as soon give it up," he said. "But what I want to know is—"

"I've told you, Father, that I won't let you know anything about myself. And you aren't to try to find out or learn where I live."

"Why, Zona, that isn't any way to treat your own father."

Hardening to him, she demanded, "Will you do it or not? That's the only way I'll send you the money."

He grumbled, dissatisfied with her terms, suspicious of them, pretending to be hurt. But finally, when he saw that Zona meant what she said, he agreed to her conditions.

Afterward Zona was stirred by this meeting. She always pictured to herself what it would be like to have her father worthy and good and capable. Not even in Cranton had she ever felt she lived in a proper home with a regular family. Continually her father's inability and his

senseless boasting cast a pall over the family life, making it special and set apart and somehow shameful.

Zona hadn't paid much attention to the name of the man when she went to the hotel. The fact that the men had names had become secondary. Besides, she rarely learned their real names. Like Zona herself, most of the men assumed different names at their meetings with her, and one after another they came and went, largely unremembered. But when this one opened his door to her he was anything but one of many. Instantaneously, with a leaping thrust in her breast, she recognized Jimmie Wilson.

She couldn't move for a moment. She couldn't speak except to stutter incomprehensibly. Her heart beat wildly, uncontrollably. It was appalling to her that she and Jimmie were meeting like this.

She managed to get herself into the room, and there, because she felt her legs wouldn't hold her up any longer, she sank into a chair.

He didn't know her. The different color of her hair, the conversion from fresh, eager, sparkling girl to mature, sharp, handsome woman, the fact that he never expected to see her in the woman coming to him, all combined in preventing him from recognizing in her what he once knew and had perhaps forgotten.

The ten years had changed him less. Only slightly heavier and but a little more grown-up in appearance, he might have been as he was when he first kissed her in the clothes closet. His hair was as dark and curly. His shoulders were as broad.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked.

Realizing how peculiar her actions must seem to him, Zona controlled herself long enough to say, "Hello, Jimmie."

He glanced at her quickly. He frowned to conceal a slight expression of guilt that passed into his face.

"Have I changed that much, Jimmie? Or haven't you ever thought of me?"

He peered at her now, bending forward a little to look.

Puzzled and uncertain, he remembered partially, but even then wasn't altogether sure. "What? You—you're—I thought there was something familiar, but . . ."

They stared at each other.

"I didn't—I never expected—you aren't—can't be—isn't there some mistake?"

"No, there isn't any mistake."

"Then you—? Zona!"

"Yes, Jimmie." Summoning her first clear feeling at this meeting after all the years of thinking about him, she said, "I'm glad to see you, Jimmie."

He tried to say the same. He mumbled something about having heard of her a number of times. But he flushed a deep burning red, and through his comments was shot the thing paramount to them both out of the past. The circumstances of their reunion heightened their feelings until it had to be spoken of, could not be ignored.

Suddenly Zona found herself defying the emotions of years; she wouldn't speak unless he mentioned it first. She was sorry for him when he said, "And I started you off."

From Zona came words not rehearsed but springing up out of the moment. "It doesn't matter, Jimmie."

"And then what I did. Running away and leaving you like that. And now . . . What must you think of me?"

She said, "I asked you that once. Do you remember?"

"I—yes."

"Do you remember what you said?"

"Well, I—I'm afraid I don't."

"You told me you didn't think anything, that you thought I was wonderful."

He peered at her. "But you can't—"

"I can!" she exclaimed, giving way completely to the unplanned feelings fighting so strongly for domination. "I thought if I ever saw you again I'd hate you. I wanted to see you and hate you and tell you what you did to me. But now it isn't like that. It isn't like that at all. I don't know what it is. It isn't hate. I hate what you did, but I've never been able to hate you. You were—oh, don't

you see I've thought of you always, that I've always remembered you?"

He stared at her incredulously.

"I don't want you to blame yourself," Zona rushed on. "You were so young, just going to college. We were both so young. It was my fault as much as yours. It's been my fault that I've never got over it."

He asked, "All this time—?"

She nodded.

"God. I never knew it was like that for you. I didn't have any idea. I—I'm sorry. Terribly sorry."

As if he had to do something but didn't know quite what to do, he went to a table where bottles and glasses were set out. He poured them both a drink. They consumed it in silence. He drained his off and immediately prepared another.

It was then his turn to pour out his feelings. He spoke of the chagrin he had always felt at what he had done. Often it preyed on his conscience, one of those things people regret all their lives and never get away from entirely. His remorse, taking hold of him, was spread before her while she sat smiling at him and shaking her head. But no matter how great his contrition, he was struck more than anything else by what she did for a living. He paid little attention when she assured him it had nothing to do with him. He wanted to help her, holding himself responsible.

"What can I do to get you out of this?"

"You can't do anything."

"I'm not rich, but I've got some money. Enough to—"

"Money isn't any help. Don't think about it, Jimmie."

He insisted on thinking about it. He had another drink and worked himself into a self-accusing rage about it.

The full effect of meeting her again made itself felt upon him. He seemed to absorb it with the alcohol he consumed, until he talked ceaselessly. She asked him not to drink any more, but he ignored her. He became lachrymose, telling her about his own life in Cleveland, about his children, about his wife, with whom he had no happiness. That was why on this trip to New York he chose

what turned out to be this grotesque meeting. And that made everything worse. Nothing could be more terrible than what she had told him.

Zona pleaded with him not to feel this way, but he was now too possessed to listen to her. He continued to talk and drink until, exhausted, he sank to the bed.

Zona looked at him. There, disordered upon the bed, was Jimmie, the man she had loved all her life, her sweet initiator, the one she always dreamed about. Out of remorse for what he felt he had done to her, and out of his own unhappiness, he had drunk himself into a stupor.

Faced with a task she had never dreamed would be hers, she put Jimmie to bed, getting the clothes off his insensible limbs as best she could. Touching him, seeing him, having her arms about him, her head close to his, Zona was astonished to find that she could regard him simply as a person who needed help in a difficult moment. And when she lay beside him, the purpose for which she was with him departed from her as much as it had from him. What she did with other men had no connection with him. She merely held him in her arms, petting him when he stirred restlessly. Once he moaned and clung to her, burying his face in her breasts for protection and consolation. She soothed him and warmed him, as if comforting a child.

Lying beside her that night, Jimmie became to her what he hadn't been since the moment he deserted her. He became a reality, a man like other men, no different from the rest. And though she felt that she would always love him, with him or apart from him, in this sight and touch of him she was disappointed. Here was something darling to her, but nothing to obsess her. The thing that held her to its power for so long was an illusion, not what she had thought it to be. It now called upon her, not she upon it. Finally she was the dominant one, reversing the position of a decade of pain.

In the morning, before Jimmie could change back to the god, holy and sanctified, that he had been to her only yesterday, she left without awakening him.

Chapter Twenty-eight

COMING IN OUT of the warm summer night to the heat of the high, busy lounge of the hotel, Zona stopped, stock-still, to stare.

In the middle of one side of an aisle of chairs and tables and lamps sat Waxy Bogart.

The sight of him caught her in a tight arresting grip. Again gazing upon those little pig eyes in that jolly face, she was at a loss. With her reason Zona wanted to avoid him. With everything in her that entertained a memory she cared to associate with him. Her emotions, hurrying on without her, recaptured scenes in the police station, in the courtroom, in the Finishing School. She quivered with them, feeling the blood draining from her face.

She circled Bogart, going around in back of him hurriedly. She went to the room clerk's wicket and stood there waiting for several people ahead of her to complete their business. While she waited, a train ride out into the country, the first sight of a prison, and nights alone in a cottage room flashed before her. Fast and then faster images from the life at Chester Farms passed in review, so that when she was next to be attended at the wicket her mind was so occupied she didn't give the name of the man waiting in one of the rooms above, but turned away without speaking.

Her gaze returned to Bogart. From where she stood she could see him clearly. She noticed something that had escaped her in the excitement of the first view of him. He wasn't altogether sober. She could see this from the way he held his stubby body, in the quirk of his head, and in the expressions that played over his puffy face.

The invitation this extended was irresistible. It gave her great confidence that he wouldn't recognize her. She had no specific idea of what she wanted from him, but merely knew a blind desire to deal with him in some way, not let him go without a reminder.

Zona went back, this time not around, but down the aisle where he sat. She walked slowly, past other people, studying the empty places. Not quite opposite Bogart, unoccupied and half in shadow, was a divan. She sat down.

Her movement drew the attention of people sitting nearby, including Bogart. Zona looked up to discover him staring at her. Fascinated, she stared back, holding her head low in the dim light where she sat, stirred by something electric in this abrupt meeting of their gaze. His tiny eyes, screwed into his round face like pink buttons, were misty and bloodshot.

Zona couldn't down a sense of triumph when she saw he didn't know her. He registered nothing from the past, only reflecting sudden cognizance of a good-looking woman. She didn't take her eyes away, nor did he. For a long time, sitting there, they held each other. She didn't change her facial expression and he didn't smile. There was in his face, to be seen on close observation, something different than before, a loneliness, a lack of his old cheerfulness; he was harassed.

She was startled when Bogart straightened his tie, smoothed his flat thin hair, and got up. Then she looked away.

Zona forced herself to remain still when he sat beside her. She couldn't answer at first when he spoke, slurring his words a little but saying affable things, sounding her out, making a suggestion. When she did reply, she found herself saying what he expected her to say. Her tongue, directing her, did not fall too readily into agreement, but issued remarks that fitted the procedure. If manipulated a bargain she herself had no intention of carrying out. Still she didn't know what she wanted from this man, except that he must not go unscathed, must be disappointed, must be told.

Keeping her face averted as much as possible behind her skimpy veil, Zona left the hotel with Bogart. The ride in a taxi to her apartment was sharply reminiscent of two other journeys she had made with the same man.

When they entered her apartment he grabbed her, and before she knew it he was kissing her. His mouth, warm and wet and loose, was the most loathsome thing Zona had ever experienced. His grasp made her flesh crawl. She had meant, as soon as she got him here, to tell him who she was, to let him see how he liked that. But the effect of his sudden and dreadful embrace scattered the things she wanted to say. It made her so frantic that she wanted only to get away from it to collect her wits, so that she might face him coolly and devastatingly. Releasing herself, she muttered, "I'll fix a drink," and left precipitately, going down the hall to the kitchen.

"Sure, sure!" he exclaimed behind her.

In the kitchen Zona turned on the light and stood for a moment trembling. She could barely conceive that Waxy Bogart, of all the creatures upon the earth, had embraced her. He had touched her back. The place where he touched it burned, sending a flush through her. She was filled again with her former concentration of hate for all men in the person of Bogart, beyond and greater than the original reason she had brought him here.

She trembled more than ever, and to control her nervousness she opened her bag and took out a cigarette. Her fingers, awkward in their shaking, spilled out half the contents of her bag. She saw, and for the first time there came to her mind, the little white packet given her by Ray Martin. She had transferred it along with her other things to each pocketbook she used, thinking little of it, giving it no great significance or plan. Now the suggestion it presented, lying there flat and gleaming, made her draw back.

She turned from it, to occupy herself with lighting her cigarette. She got it lighted. Drawing in long lungfuls of smoke, she breathed easier. Her heart slowed from the excited, protesting beat it began when Bogart touched her.

Feeling better, Zona went to the cupboard and took down a bottle of whisky and two glasses. These she placed on the table, at the far end from the tumbled contents of her bag. Going to the icebox, she took out a bottle

of ginger ale. Then, her still trembling hands making glass clink against glass, she poured two drinks.

For the moment, while occupied with this task, she lost slightly the sense of the presence of Bogart. But when she heard his voice from the other room she started violently.

"What're you doing in there?" he called.

Then she heard him moving, coming into the hall. She thought he was headed for the kitchen, but he stopped, mysteriously doing something, fumbling for something. She heard the click of a switch, and from the light cast into the hall knew he went into her bedroom. Listening, she heard the sound of his body descending on the bed.

Bogart chuckled.

It was the first time he gave that chuckle, so well known to her, so much a part of him, so greatly connected with her association with him from the beginning. In it she heard all his chuckles of the past, a great series of them, as if once again he chuckled her into prison, into a dark room where no sound penetrated, but where she was visited in the night.

Her hand darted to her back under her dress. She touched the hard welts there and felt the lash descending and descending again and again until the blood flowed copiously. She tried to defend herself, twisting and writhing to get away from the beating, which was being given not only to her but to Marion Jordan as well. A man beat Marion, Bogart beat Marion; he was killing her. With that Zona's struggle to defend them both doubled its effort. Her protest was so enormous that her mind was arrested in its normal functioning, turning inward on a blackness of her life's making.

Noises swarmed in her ears. She saw her hand, as if dismembered from her, holding a small paper packet upon which a number was written. It seemed silly that such a small weapon should be of any use. But it was the only thing available. There was a rushing like that of water between the high banks of a stream as she watched her hand, still as if having nothing to do with her, tear

the end of the packet and shake of its own accord, until the white powder exploded and disappeared.

She remembered nothing then until she stood before Bogart and gave him a glass. She retreated blindly from him, from what he said, and sank tautly on a chair. She thought she had been parted from all power over her faculties, had lost one kind of consciousness and gained another, allowing her only a helpless concentration on the unreality here. She sipped from her own glass while she watched, with a terrible fascination, as he sipped from the other glass.

"Take off your hat," Bogart said.

"I will in a minute."

"Say, this is lousy whisky."

"It isn't very good, but—"

"Sure, sure! I'll drink it. I'll drink anything."

She was amazed when she kept replying, continuing to say things to his questions and comments. She finished her drink and put it on the dressing table. He gulped his, making faces, creasing the fat white blobs of his cheeks.

It seemed a long time before it started. His hand, still holding his unfinished drink, began to twitch. It twitched so sharply that the glass dropped from it and crashed to the floor. A little stream of liquid ran out on the carpet and suddenly stopped as it was absorbed. At the same time Bogart's feet began to twitch. He sat up, looking at his hands and feet, astonished and alarmed.

Zona sprang to her feet. Above all things she wanted to introduce herself to him before it was too late. She swept her hat from her head. For the first time she bared her face completely to him and thrust it forward for him to see. He looked at her and his little eyes now were large, with a special exhilaration in them, a sharpening from what they saw. His limbs still twitching, he watched her.

In a low tense voice Zona spoke her name, the name he knew. Then he stared and stared and his mouth opened and he struggled up, but without warning his body was thrown violently backward. He was snapped first flat on his back and then bent into an arch. He relaxed, only to be thrown immediately back into the arch, his body rest-

ing on its heels and head. The corners of his mouth drew back into a grin, his jaws locked on clamped teeth, his eyes remained open and fixed upon her, glaring redly.

Zona's voice rose as she spat out the details of Chester Farms, as she accused him of the murder of Marion Jordan. A frenzy seized her so that she ripped at her dress until she got her back bare. Then she showed it to him, screaming at him how she got the scars, how he was responsible for them.

He struggled up from the bed. Shuddering and twitching, his mouth remaining set in the horrible grin that drew the skin back from his teeth, he came toward her.

He gasped out something. It sounded like the word "Help," repeated over and over from between clenched teeth. He grabbed out with a shaking arm, trying to grasp the air with stiff, outstretched fingers that wouldn't close, lurching on like a paralytic. As he reached the bench before the dressing table he collapsed, sprawling across it, the upper part of his body, caught in another convulsion, resting on the top of the table, the rest of him on the bench. There he breathed stertorously for a moment until his body arched again.

As she watched him, a rushing became loud in Zona's ears. It shut out all feeling of horror at a fearful sight. Instead she was glad for this sweet thing occurring before her eyes. There passed into her something that quickened her unnaturally but vibrantly. In the active body of the man before her were all the men she ever knew and all the men there were to be known. Each arch of the convulsing body was like a virile thrust to her. Her own body twitched and moved spasmodically. Little ecstatic stuttering cries escaped her. She swayed and quivered as though being ravished by a monstrous lover. And when finally he collapsed, crashing onto the jars and bottles on the dressing table and spilling their contents, she reached her own paroxysm, so great and so devastating that the world receded and she couldn't fathom, in a hysterical singing of her brain, what had happened.

Chapter Twenty-nine

A WAKENING AS IF FROM a violent dream in which there had been no dimensions, Zona was stupified at the sight greeting her. She stared at it soundlessly. Surely she had nothing to do with this. Certainly she had no previous connection with it, but walked in here and discovered it. For an instant she imagined herself in some hotel room to which she had come and found this. Then she saw it lay sprawled at her own dressing table.

She backed away. As if she couldn't turn from it, she backed to the door. As if it were a royal presence to which she had a fanatical devotion, she backed down the hall, into the living room, across it. Her heel struck against something. She felt the low maple day bed behind her and sank down upon it.

Weak, she lay back, dropping into a blackness, coming awake again, dropping and fighting her way up successively. To sustain herself she looked about, trying to fasten her attention on something. She saw her portrait above the mantelpiece. She half raised herself, making a movement of reaching out toward it in supplication. She whispered to it as though explaining to the world, "I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it."

She remained there, repeating the words over and over again, until the thought of escape forced itself into her consciousness. There must be some way to get out of this. She got up, and then stood irresolute, asking herself where she could go. Any place seemed better than this. But there was no other place. If she left and this remained behind her, they would track her down.

But she must do something. She crossed the room, stood hesitantly at the entrance to the hall, then forced herself to go down it. She didn't look in through the bedroom door as she passed it, but continued on down the hall past the bathroom and into the kitchen.

There she stood again, thinking only that killing

Bogart had been no part of her intent. She herself had rejected it when she thought of it, even when Ray would have taken the whole risk on himself. Someone else, some being strange to her, had done this. She could not be held to account. There would be no justice in prosecuting her for this deed committed by another. She sympathized with that madwoman, not holding her culpable before the obvious fact that Bogart deserved what had been done to him. It was only right, so right that it must not be made wrong.

She gazed about the kitchen. It seemed unfamiliar, a different place. The table, the two bottles on it, the other furnishings, its very tone and color seemed to have been changed by the thing she had done here. She saw on the floor a piece of paper, creased from being folded a number of times. Stooping, wishing a task, she picked it up.

Upside down, written on the paper, was a number. She recalled once in a dream seeing figures like this written on a paper. Then they had been magical figures. She turned the paper about. Something struck her in a flash to make the figures magical again, a source of divination. From it a hope was raised that made her whirl. She hurried, rushing, running down the hall, back to the living room, and snatched up the telephone to call the number written on the paper.

She bit her lips when she heard the ring of her call at the other end of the wire but no one responding. She listened for a long time before she was convinced it would not be answered. Her impatience then was as great as her frenzy. It was some time before she could think clearly enough to remember that people are not always home.

She grasped at that and decided to wait for an hour—anyway, half an hour—and then call again. Thirty seconds later the number was being sent over the wire again, with the same result as before.

Clutching the piece of paper, she wished with infinite regret that it still contained what had come in it. She remembered what Ray Martin told her: "If you ever take him, call me there and I'll see that what's left is given a

private funeral." The words were inscribed on her, niches cut in stone to cling to. They composed a noble motto. They made a creed to believe in.

Zona sat by the phone calling Ray Martin at intervals marked by the pulsation of her terror. She left the instrument to sink again exhausted on the day bed, only to spring up almost immediately and dial again the figures now known by heart. Through the night she called him, thinking this might be the only time to catch him in. But there was only deadness at the other end of the line.

In the morning, without having slept, and after another fruitless call, Zona made her way leadenly to the kitchen. The light was still burning there, as in the bedroom, into which she still didn't look. She turned out the kitchen light and went about making coffee, but when it was ready she couldn't drink it. She had appetite for nothing except her predicament. She devoured that to the exclusion of everything else, until she was gorged and heavy with it.

Before she left the kitchen she managed to down a neat drink of whisky. It choked her but stimulated her, so that when she returned to the living room she was able to stop at the bedroom door, reach around the doorjamb, and snap off the light.

The nightmare of the day passed slowly. She smoked cigarettes endlessly, lighting one, putting it out almost immediately, and then lighting another. The telephone was almost continuously in her hand. The hard black instrument remained moist and warm from her frequent touch. On the street outside noises rose and seemed to send heat in with them. The sound of people mounting or descending the stairs and passing her door made her start.

Zona began to blame Ray Martin. It was his fault for forcing her into this, for pointing and easing the way, for promising something he wasn't living up to. He should be where he said he would be.

Between four and six she hung over the telephone, not using it, hoping against hope that she would hear the switchboard operator's voice representing those with

whom she had been associated for the last year. If Ray didn't help her, they might. But no call came, and Zona admitted then what she had known very well from the beginning. They had dropped and disowned her. She had been warned what would happen if once she failed them. She had been advised specifically against Bogart. And if they knew that much, if as she additionally believed there were eyes to see her in the lobby of the hotel last night, she could expect no help from that direction, would not hear from it again.

That evening, out of the desperate knowledge that she must eat something, she reheated the coffee she had made in the morning. She made several slices of toast, but when she tried to eat them they sickened her. She forced herself to drink a cup of coffee and returned to the telephone.

Later, much later, when the noises outside had died away, Zona sprang to a sitting position from where she half dozed on the day bed. From nowhere came a terrible recollection as to why Ray Martin didn't answer at the number she called. Gasping slightly, she tried to remember where, when she had read it. In a newspaper . . . a few days ago . . . a month ago . . . Her sense of time was so confused she couldn't remember. To find out, to corroborate the tragic suspicion, she began to ransack the apartment for newspapers.

In a week-old evening paper she came upon it: an account of a drive against the selling of policy slips, a raid in which bundles of receipts were confiscated, the statement that a number of men connected with the racket were in hiding or had left the city. Ray's name wasn't mentioned. But it didn't have to be.

Zona wandered about the apartment like a crazed person. Her mind traveled through a maze, draining the strength from her already tired body. She felt utterly exhausted. She sighed and took long breaths as though suffocating. A great weight descended upon her, pressing her down to the day bed, where, with the lights full on, she sank into a dead sleep.

It was noon when she awakened to stare dully about her. She didn't feel rested. Her limbs were stiff and sore.

She shook herself, knowing she must not give way, must make an effort.

She had not undressed for two nights but remained in the same dress, still torn where she had ripped it away from her back. Steeling herself, she went into the bedroom. She managed not to see, directly, the thing sprawled there, until she had gathered what she wanted. Then she glanced at it, and it held her so that she couldn't take her eyes away. As if at the command of some diabolical teacher she studied the way its feet did not touch the floor, the way the legs, contracted up to the torso, stuck out into the air, the twist of one arm, the grotesque reaching of the other, the face distorted. Finally she forced herself away, escaping the chamber and pulling the door closed after her, shutting it out.

Who could help her? Who would help her? Who, out of the city, would come and get her out of this?

She kept Ernest stubbornly out of her mind. Because of her promise to call on him if she were ever in trouble, because he would come without hesitation, she wanted him the less. He was too good to have anything to do with her, and when he kept thrusting himself forward she put him back, casting about for others.

At first they didn't seem to exist at all. Beyond Ernest she had no friends. Never before had she regretted this so much. Her life necessarily had been a selfish one, allowing of no confidants. But among those she had known, even if in the far past, there must be someone, perhaps more than one, who might conceivably give her aid.

Going over them, she hit upon one who had a double appeal. She always resented never getting at Graeme Foster. The opportunity had not presented itself. Forever it rankled in her, the more when she learned he had weathered the depression and even assumed a more important role in Wall Street. Now, to draw him into this, perhaps by curiosity, she could collect what he owed her. And if something went wrong, to pull him down with her would be a satisfaction.

Without thinking it through further than this, Zona

called Foster's office. The inquiry of Foster's secretary for her name was a demand. Zona said, "This is a personal call."

"Who's calling, please?"

"Is Mr. Foster there?"

"Who's calling, please?"

She gave her name and after a moment was told, "I'm sorry, Mr. Foster is not in his office."

Zona hung up, and her indignation formed the spur she needed to continue the search. She thought of Jimmie. She would like him more than anyone else to help her, but knew she could ask him no more than Ernest. It must be someone she didn't care for. Besides, Jimmie was in Cleveland.

Johnny Leonard would be impossible; Gracie, so far away from her now, had never known and must never know.

Henry Dight died last winter.

She thought of Roger. She had never thought of him much. He was something she wanted to forget, and her mind had obediently put him out. Now, recalling him, she tried to conceive some reason he might take pity on her, even from Minneapolis. She could discover none. Long ago she realized that his support after the divorce had been given not out of continued love but to soothe his own hurt by asserting a magnanimous righteousness.

If only she knew a lawyer! A lawyer would know what steps should be taken, how to handle things so the police wouldn't be suspicious.

Zona stopped abruptly in her restless pacing of the living room, her mind locked on the name of the one lawyer she had known. Lynton Wirt. Wirt would have helped her, arranged things with his power, defended her legally if it came to that. But Wirt could never help her now. Wirt was dead, and he was dead because . . .

No! her mind shrieked. She couldn't think about that. She must think of someone living, someone who could help her. There *must* be someone to get her out of this impossible situation.

But as she resumed her pacing, she could think of only

one person who was even a remote possibility—her father. Dared she bring him into it? What would he think? But did it matter what he thought? Wasn't the only consideration what he might be bribed into doing?

Trembling, she snatched up the telephone book and fumbled through the pages, looking for the name of her father's hotel. But when she found it and dialed the number, a bored voice told her that Mr. Dodd was out.

Mr. Dodd continued to be out through that day and the next. Zona called the hotel at frequent intervals, and then dialed again the number Ray Martin had given her, in the vain hope that he might have returned. Throughout the night she battled against doing what her whole soul cried out for—to flee this place, get away from it—and managed to veto it again with the knowledge that it would be more dangerous to go than to stay and keep watch over the thing in the bedroom.

In the morning, when she dialed the hotel again, her father was miraculously brought to the phone.

"Father! Where have you *been*? I've been calling and calling!"

"Why, that's funny. I've been right here all the time. Well, maybe I *did* step out awhile yesterday, but—"

"Oh, never mind, never mind, it doesn't matter now," Zona said impatiently. She didn't care where he'd been or what he'd been doing, so long as he came to her now. "Listen, Father, I've got to see you. There's something I want you to do for me. Will you come? Right away?"

"Why, certainly I will," he assured her. "Certainly. I'll be right up there, Zona. It's about time I saw you again, anyway. I'll be there. You can count on your father."

He was eager, ready, and almost commanding when he arrived, but as he moved toward her Zona turned her head quickly from the sour smell of stale beer that followed him into the room. He sat on the day bed, admiring her apartment, fiddling with a folded newspaper he brought. He did not notice her distress.

"Father, there's been an accident."

"Accident? Here, with you? Something's happened to you? Why, I guess you do sort of look—"

"It hasn't happened to me. That is, not exactly. But it's happened here, in my apartment."

"Well, what is it, Zona? What's the matter? You just tell me and I'll fix it up, no matter what it is. You can count on your father, even if we haven't seen much of each other lately and I don't understand some of the things you've done."

Speaking with misgivings, she stuttered out the story she had prepared for him. She had some people in for a party, she said, and there was a good deal of drinking. Some of the liquor must have been bad. Something had happened to one of the men. At first they thought he had merely passed out, but he didn't come to. Then someone said he was dead. Her friends had deserted her and left her with a dead man. She couldn't report it to the police because she was sure she wouldn't be believed.

Her father stopped fiddling with his newspaper and clutched it. His mouth fell open. His leonine head threw itself back as if he had been tapped sharply under the chin. His little feet, which had been moving about in lively fashion, beating a happy, rhythmic tattoo on the floor, came to rest. He leaned back in his chair, sitting there like a pricked bubble.

Before he could say anything Zona gestured to him to follow her. She was halfway to the bedroom door before he rose reluctantly. He crossed the room gradually, his eyes no longer shifting about here and there but wide and vacant. And when the door was opened and he looked in he jumped away as if stabbed. The odor coming out through the door stung his nostrils and made them twitch. He gave a cry like a sob as he flattened himself against the wall, staring. He dropped his newspaper to the floor. He cringed, half turning his body to the open door to get away from it. Then, lowing like a badly frightened animal, he darted back to the living room.

Zona closed the bedroom door and followed him, imploring, "Father, you've got to help me! You've got to!"

He stood, terrified, eying the door to the outside hall, edging toward it. "I didn't know it was anything like that," he quavered. "I certainly didn't. Why, I—"

"Father, I'll give you money. I'll give you five hundred dollars."

"No, no, I can't do anything like that." Bleating, he reached the door.

"I'll give you a thousand. A thousand dollars."

He stopped for a moment. "You've got a thousand dollars?"

"It's yours, Father, if you—"

His terror seized him again. "No, no, I didn't know it was anything like that. I certainly didn't. No—oh, no, I couldn't! Why, that man's—no, no . . ."

He opened the door and, still jabbering, ran out, dashing down the stairs as if pursued.

Even for him Zona had no resentment. She did not possess the strength.

Early in the evening, in the growing darkness, she thought about the last one on her list. There was no one now but Ernest. She had sworn to herself she wouldn't use Ernest, but there was no else. And after all, what he wanted, what he had always wanted, was to do anything for her. Why shouldn't he be allowed to? Wouldn't this make him happier, no matter what happened, than anything else? Wasn't this his very purpose in life?

She picked up the telephone and dialed Ernest's number. She heard the ring at the other end of the wire. Then there was a click and Ernest said, "Hello." Then again, "Hello."

Zona opened her mouth to answer, to speak, to repeat the word. But it wouldn't come. At the sound of his voice she saw him, trusting, unaware, ready, decent, fine, not thinking of himself but only of her. Her ability to make herself known to him was lessened each time his voice carried to her. "Hello," he said, "hello. Hello!" His insistence on receiving an answer heightened her dread at uttering a sound. She couldn't do it. She couldn't destroy the one good thing she had known and had left in life.

Ernest's last "Hello" before he hung up was like a final farewell. Only then was she able to say good-by herself, whispering with an affection hot in her breast, "Hello, Ernest."

Chapter Thirty

THE DULL PRIDE to be taken in not calling on Ernest injected energy into Zona. Now that it was over and settled in this way, now that she had conquered by failing, by not taking her sure advantage, she was capable of facing flight from the city, the only possibility for her now.

In the newspaper her father dropped in his hasty departure Zona found the steamship news, the listing of outgoing ships. Her eye fell on the proud names of ships going to Europe and other far parts of the world. She would have liked to take one of these tonight, at once, and lose herself in some remote, hidden place. But that would require a passport, impossible to obtain so quickly, and making her movements known. And there was a night's work ahead of her in the apartment. She contented herself with a ship sailing south at noon the next day, to Jacksonville and Miami in Florida, hoping there would be room for her, praying it could take her.

She began an extraordinary housekeeping. She gathered all her personal papers, letters saved, receipted bills, accounts, canceled checks, everything with her name on it or making any mention of herself, and burned them in the fireplace. After a moment's thought she added her checkbook to the blaze. The several hundred dollars in this account, under the name of Frances Carver, would have to be left behind. If she withdrew it now, the authorities would know at once that she had left the city. There was enough for her needs in her savings account, which she was now glad she kept in her own name and placed in a separate bank.

Zona used a cunning that she had never before known she possessed. She swept every inch of the apartment, made another blaze with the debris, and scattered the ashes. These fires, even though small, made the apartment stifling, but she didn't let up her already drawn shades.

While she worked she stopped frequently to rest, for she felt completely spent. She found herself yawning, continually drawing in more breath than usual, and giving long sighs. To gain strength enough to approach each new task she was forced to sit down, resting a long time before she undertook the greatest, the most fearful.

The proximity to, the touch of, and the strong odor rising from the thing sprawled before the dressing table made Zona's flesh crawl. Every muscle and organ rebelled against going near it. She tried to feel glad, but there was no joy to be extracted from it, only terror. Nauseated, half-crazed, closing her eyes and trying not to breathe at all, she forced her hands, as if they were sticks, to go through the pockets.

At last she had a pile mined with almost insupportable effort. There were some letters, a watch, a wallet, a ring of keys, a handful of coins, a package of cigarettes, a packet of matches, a soiled handkerchief, two pencils, and an address book.

To these Zona added the labels from all her clothing. Of the entire pile she made a package, wrapped in several thicknesses of tissue paper, which went into the bottom of the small bag she packed to take with her.

In the kitchen she oiled a dustcloth, saturating it with a thick, creamy fluid used for mops. Drawing on a pair of gloves, she wiped all the furniture, the doorjamb, the doors and their knobs, the lamps, the switches, the telephone, the mirrors, the windows, all woodwork, the kitchen utensils, plateware and silver, the empty cans and bottles in the garbage pail, everything in the bathroom, every conceivable object she could find. She opened the outside door cautiously and wiped the doorknob in the hall. She even forced herself to approach the dressing table again and wipe the bottles and jars there, both broken and unbroken.

Zona rested as daylight crept over the city. Struggling for strength, moving slowly, she entered the bathroom, taking with her the fresh underthings, the light gray linen suit, the crisp white hat she had already chosen.

When she looked in the mirror she was shocked. She saw a person ten years older than herself. Her bloodless face was lined and stiff, her eyes somnolent in hollow sockets, her hair dead and flat. She looked like some mocking caricature of herself.

Taking off her gloves, she bathed and washed and prepared herself as best she could with hands that shook. Her lips moved as she worked, saying things she didn't understand. Once they uttered so loudly something about getting a cabin on the ship that she was startled by the sound of her voice. Finished at last, she drew on the gloves and went over the bathroom again, rubbing the objects she had touched as though wishing to make them proud and shining for expected guests.

She kept on the gloves until she was ready to go, and then replaced them with a spotless pair of white ones. Thankful that she needn't again enter the bedroom, Zona picked up her bag and looked about. She might have been saying good-by to a dear place instead of a dreadful one. She might have been regretting the part of herself left behind here, as parts of people always remain in places they have lived, instead of making sure she had forgotten nothing, overlooked no traces. At last, satisfied, she let herself out quietly, pulling the door shut behind her.

Carrying her bag, not heavy but to her a dead weight, Zona made her way uptown to Forty-second Street and entered a cafeteria. Putting down her bag, she obtained on a tray a substantial breakfast, knowing she wouldn't be able to eat half of it, wanting none of it.

Her attempts at eating were utter failures. Running through her was the worry about the ship, about getting a ticket. She got up abruptly, went to a phone booth, and called the steamship company. She said she might want to take its ship sailing at noon but wouldn't know her plans until the last minute. Could she go directly to the ship and make arrangements with the purser?

She was told that this would be all right, and was relieved to hear that ships to the south at this time of year were not crowded; there would be room.

Next door in a drugstore she bought tooth paste, a skin astringent, an eyewash, and dye to keep her hair black at the roots where it grew out red. She wouldn't be able to have her hair touched up at a beauty parlor any more, but would have to attend to it herself.

It was midmorning when she crossed the street to the bank and withdrew all the money in her account, something over a thousand dollars.

Picking up her bag again, she left the bank and walked to Fifth Avenue and mingled with the growing crowds, among which, after the last few days, she now felt safest of all. When a clock told her it was nearly eleven she retraced her steps to Forty-second Street, walked east to Grand Central, and went down the stairs to the subway station. She took the shuttle train to Times Square and there boarded a downtown express to Fourteenth Street. Emerging into the open air again, she took a taxi to the pier. There was a chance that the cab driver might remember her if a search for her was made later, but she had to risk it.

Carrying her own bag, unable to let its contents part from her for an instant, hoping the action wouldn't attract attention, she made her way up steps, past huge collections of packing cases, and to the dark side of the ship. At the gangplank she was questioned about being a passenger, was forced to reiterate several times that she had had no time to buy a ticket, and was finally led by a steward to the purser's office aboard the ship. Here she asked for a cabin to herself, and was almost overwhelmed with relief when the purser told her there was one available. He asked her for her name and she gave him the first one that entered her head, Dorothy Reynolds. He wrote this down and accepted her money, and the waiting steward took her to her cabin.

She locked the door and sat, cramped and tense, on the lower bunk. She didn't move until a whistle blew deeply, announcing churning movements below, making the tumblers over the washstand vibrate. Then she relaxed.

Chapter Thirty-one

THE HEARTBEATS of the ship steadied her. The throbbing, deep down, established a rhythm, stable and remote, of something far away reassuring her. The sea was a calmer place than the land. Its long low swells, to which the ship responded gently, cradled her. With a slow care she was rocked, as if the sea would soothe her after the jolting of the land. Gradually it washed away the past days, sending them back, farther and farther. Land and everything connected with land was replaced by a faithful pulsating, flooding and obliterating a city, a street, an apartment, a room, a sprawling body.

Zona enjoyed the stark comfort of lying in a safe place that moved, while she lifted no finger, away from danger. This voyage might be lasting forever instead of for three short nights. Escape seemed easy, almost assured, leaving her amazed that people trying to get away were ever caught. She saw no reason why they should be apprehended. Not if they took simple precautions. Casting her mind over any way she might be pursued and tracked down, she could think of none.

She stayed in her cabin, locking herself in its security, wrapping it around her like a coat against the cold winds of fear. All through that first afternoon, after ignoring the gong for lunch, she enjoyed the restfulness of safety, sleeping at times, dozing, or simply lying inert and feeling the movement of the ship.

Zona decided not to mingle with the other passengers, both because she had no desire to associate with anyone else and because she wanted as few people as possible to see her. At dinnertime she pushed the button on the wall of her cabin. An elderly stewardess responded, and agreed to bring her meals to the cabin. And though Zona consumed only half of what was brought, it was her first substantial meal in nearly a week.

Afterward there was a final duty to perform to cut

herself off from all evidence of what she left behind. It was like a furtive rite of some kind when Zona took from the bottom of her bag the package she brought with her. She dealt hastily with the first of its contents, thrusting out of the porthole the labels taken from her clothes, feeling them being torn from her fingers and carried away by the wind. Bogart's watch and keys, both held gingerly, she dropped into the sea. There was a moment's hesitation at the disposal of the wallet, letters, address book, and other things. She didn't want them to float. She looked about the cabin and her eye fell on a heavy metal ash tray. She tied this firmly to the little pile with a string, and thrust the package out the porthole. There was no noise of a splash, above the throbbing of the ship, as it hit the water.

It was not until late on the second night out, when Zona had slipped cautiously past the dark, silent cabins for a breath of fresh air on deck, that she remembered her portrait.

She looked wildly down into the rushing blackness below, gripping the rail under her fingers as if to stop the ship, arrest its taking her away from what would point to her more obviously than anything else. She wanted the ship to go back, to turn at once and retrace its course so that she could destroy this forgotten and damaging evidence.

The ship throbbed on. It changed from being a cradle rocking her gently to a vessel of torture carrying her to a sure doom. The sea, turning on her, was no longer her beckoning ally, but an enemy, dark and threatening.

How could she have possibly forgotten the portrait? Over and over she asked herself this, accusing herself. She remembered seeing it, even cleaning its frame. In the back of her head she had taken it into account, planned to do something with it. But more consciously she had regarded it simply as another piece of furniture, part of the decoration. Perhaps, too, there had been a reluctance about doing away with the girl it represented, as if only that were Zona, her real self, and to destroy it would be to wipe out of existence the last vestiges of her true

nature. With Zona dead and only Frances Carver living, she would be guilty, with no excuse or defense for the blood on her hands.

Explanations, reasons failed to help now. The fact, irrevocably behind her, remained. She made her way back to the cabin with terror in her heart once again. Her release from it, her peace and her freedom, had not lasted long. For having tasted them she was rewarded with a greater fright. She tried to argue herself into the belief that her oversight wasn't as bad as it seemed. After all, the janitor knew what she looked like; he could describe her. But this and other persuasions were not effective. She knew what it almost certainly meant.

That night escape no longer seemed an easy thing. She could understand now all too well why so many people were caught, for she saw her own flight aborted and virtually impossible of achievement unless some miracle reach out to pluck her from sure pursuit.

In the first flush of morning Zona was awake and alert to every sound when the throb of the engines slowed and there were recurrent blasts from the whistle. Through the porthole she watched the ship being tied to its dock. Beyond, over the roofs of long sheds and under a lifting haze, was a city. For a moment Zona considered leaving the ship here at Jacksonville, slipping away with no one knowing. Then reason told her this would be the worst thing she could do; the disappearance of a listed passenger would raise an inquiry.

She stayed on the ship, in her cabin, when it sailed again, this time along a gleaming, surf-clad shore on which palm trees waved long green fingers. Sometimes the ship passed so close to the shore that she could see bathers on the beach. Looking at them, she felt a longing to get to some out-of-the-way place on this endless beach and stay there until something, or nothing, whichever it was to be, happened.

The next morning she was startled out of fitful, tardy sleep by a knock at her door. A fear seized her that they had come for her already. She managed a response—and learned her stewardess was outside with breakfast. She

let the woman in and was told the ship would dock within an hour at Miami.

When the ship was once again tied to its dock, Zona waited until most of the passengers had gone ashore and then allowed a steward to enter and take her bag. She tipped the elderly stewardess liberally, received appreciative thanks, and walked down the gangplank to a waiting taxi. When it took her briskly down the pier and soon onto a busy, palm-lined avenue, she knew what she meant to do. To the driver's question she instructed him to take her to a restaurant in the business section of the city.

The cab stopped before a garish restaurant. Zona got out. Her bag was lifted to the pavement. She paid the driver. But instead of entering the restaurant, she stood in the blazing sun until the taxi drove off, and then, picking up her bag, made her way in the opposite direction.

In a cigar store on the next corner she used the excuse of buying a package of cigarettes to ask the man behind the counter for the location of the bus terminal. It turned out to be some blocks away. She got lost trying to follow directions, then, looking about for someone else to direct her, saw the sign and hurried to it.

Here she learned there was a bus to Jacksonville leaving in half an hour. To retrace her steps, at least partially, seemed best and most confusing to anyone who might wish to follow her movements later.

The half-filled bus swallowed up the white ribbons of road. Sitting alone near the back, with her bag at her feet, Zona watched the flat landscape go by.

At noon the bus stopped before an eating stand in a small town hardly more than a village. The driver slid out of his seat and announced that the passengers would have fifteen minutes for lunch. Zona descended with the rest. Not feeling hungry, she walked back a few yards to the cross street. Down it, several blocks away through the overhanging branches of mingled pines and palms, she caught a glimpse of blue water and buildings. She noticed the lack of movement, of any population except on the main street of the town.

She looked for its name, and saw a one-story building labeled "U. S. Post Office—Pano Beach, Fla." She glanced back toward the bus and saw it standing empty, a little to one side of the eating stand, into which the other passengers and the driver had disappeared.

It took only a moment to get her bag out of the bus. No one noticed her when she crossed the street and quickly turned the corner. She walked along the main street of the dead little town until she came to an automobile with a sign reading "For Hire" on its windshield and a pleasant-looking youth at its wheel. He scrambled out when she asked him, "Is there a hotel here?"

"Yes, ma'am. There's two. There's the Royal Palm, but that's closed in summer. The other one's Mr. Helton's on the beach. That's just a small place. He keeps open mostly because he lives there himself."

He took her across the highway where the bus no longer stood, over a long wooden causeway across inland water, up a short rise of ground, and to the roadway along the beach. Here, in a tiny settlement of cottages mostly boarded up, was a whitewashed two-story building whose blue sign read, "Helton Inn."

In a cool little lobby a plump, bald man in white rose to meet her and come forward smiling.

"You're Mr. Helton?" Zona asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Can you let me have a room?"

His blue eyes twinkled. "Ma'am, I can let you have sixteen rooms. That's all of them. If you don't mind being kind of lonesome, you can have the place to yourself."

"I won't mind that," Zona said. "Can you give me meals, too?"

"If you won't take offense at my not opening the dining room just for you, and have them in your room. All I've got here this time of year is a colored couple."

After accepting these conditions without letting him know how much they pleased her, Zona accompanied him upstairs to a room on the second floor. He named modest terms and they returned downstairs. In the register Zona wrote, "Helen Daskom, Washington, D.C."

Chapter Thirty-two

IN THE HELTON INN at Pano Beach Zona found not only comfort but very nearly happiness and contentment. Mr. Helton was solicitous, not inquisitive, and politely helpful. Knowles and Delilah, the colored couple, looked after her as though they had been bound to her for years. Knowles, a very black man from the Bahamas, wore a broad grin of pleasure every time he brought her a tray of food or the Miami newspaper she ordered. Delilah asked her what she would like to eat and laundered her clothes with great care. The people in the business section of the small town, where she went to purchase a bathing suit, were friendly in a straightforward, unassuming manner. Zona liked them all in a way she had never known before in her dealings with people. She wanted them to like her, as if she had to gain approval and the good will of a world whose primal law she had broken.

In the sun, taken guardedly at first on the terrace or on the beach, her skin acquired a deep, rich color. Her body responded to care and healthful living in spite of the continual dread hanging over her, the question of whether or not she was deceiving the people here, of when the paper would carry the news and what that news would be. She tried not to think of it, taking her mind off it by communion with the sea, bathing far down the beach. She battled great crashing breakers and learned the danger of the tides with their strong undertow. Afterward, lying alone in the blazing sun, warmed yet fanned by the constant breeze, there was time to think.

She wanted to live unmolested like this, unhunted and in peace, for the rest of her life. It seemed so little to have, hurting no one. Passionately she believed that she had struck a balance with life, just and right. Why could she not be allowed to go on, with no question? Who was there to say that things should not be left just as they were? Who could judge this to be wrong? What good would it possibly do anyone to punish her?

Added to this righteous will to live was an enormous hope that had visited her lately and which she now felt increasingly. She first noticed it shortly after she saw Jimmie again. Along with this had gone the domination that had become hers when she saw her father again and began to support him. In both of these meetings was a certain turning of the tables, and from them she gained a sense of power not present before, when both Jimmie's hurt and her father's great lack seemed to dominate and crush her. The terrible experience through which she passed with Bogart capped the effect of this, so she had the almost inconceivable suspicion that the mortal affliction possessing her all her life was no longer with her. Her familiar urge, the dread gushing and flaring she had never been able to control, seemed swept away, burned and destroyed by two revelations and a shock too great for it to withstand. In the last few weeks she felt it had left her at last.

Yet, remembering again the false hopes for this release in the past, she couldn't be sure. Her body, which had always commanded her, needed time to prove itself. Only after months could it give her complete and definite assurance. She prayed for the months to pass, wanted them over so excruciatingly that her wish was a pain.

Two days later, on the front page of the Miami newspaper, appeared the news she dreaded daily.

It had come. She read how the police broke into the apartment at the request of the janitor, and what they found. The description of the body sickened her. A good deal was made of the conclusion that she must have stayed for some time in the apartment with the dead body of the man. She was filled with revulsion when she read that the medical examiner ascribed death to strychnine poisoning. She hadn't known until now what it was Ray Martin gave her. There was speculation about the dead man. Most devastating of all was the comment about her portrait and the terrifying statements that the police suspected she dyed her hair and that Frances Carver was not her real name.

There began for Zona a waiting and a watching that

kept her tense and weak in alternation, jumping at the slightest sounds, fearful of everything.

The second day, all too quickly, her real name was announced. The police compared her portrait with photographs in the rogues' gallery and found its likeness in the picture they once took of her. Her identity was brought out in cruel black letters. Henry Dight's former servant was located, but the woman told little about her, remembering her hardly at all. Zona wondered if her father would be questioned, and if he would speak. She wasn't certain, but she felt he would probably keep out of it, if not out of fright for her, then out of fear for himself.

The third day, as if on an inescapable schedule, Bogart was identified, his history in connection with her brought out, the whole awful story outlined in all its nakedness. Zona visualized the sensation the New York newspapers were making of it. She thought of Ernest, and in her half regret, half gladness that she hadn't called on him, felt more sorry for him than she had ever felt for anyone in her life. She hoped feverishly that no one in Pano would recognize her from the detailed descriptions given of her.

Breathlessly she waited, counting her every desperate chance, examining and working on her hair daily to be sure no telltale red showed. But she realized that the change in her appearance made little or no difference to a camera; red hair showed up as darkly as black. The appearance of her photograph in the Miami paper she dreaded most of all. She knew the paper was read in Pano, that Mr. Helton received a copy of his own every day. Each morning when Knowles brought her own paper she snatched it up after he had gone, and when on the fourth and fifth mornings her picture hadn't appeared, and the story was relegated to a few lines on an inside page, she breathed easier. Perhaps she wouldn't, after all her terror, be discovered here. Perhaps in this remote spot she could go undiscovered and unsuspected.

Three more days went by. The paper no longer referred to the crime committed so far away in New York;

if it received photographs of her it did not use them. No hand touched her on the shoulder and said, "Come." No one looked at her and knew her. Mr. Helton was still as concerned for her comfort as before. Knowles and Delilah did not shun her.

Zona barely dared credit it. Was she, then, to have pursuit dropped, and go free?

On the ninth day after the discovery in her apartment, Zona sensed at once a change in Knowles's manner when he brought her her breakfast and newspaper. Previously he had always been cheerful, grinning, and talkative. Now he was glum and silent. He looked at her once, and in his yellow eyes she saw a fear that matched her own, along with sorrow. Saying nothing, he put down the tray and went out as quickly as he could.

In her heart, suddenly gone still, Zona knew what the paper contained before she picked it up. She opened it and stared at her picture, at herself, and gazed at the headline saying: "BELIEVED TO HAVE COME HERE." Someone who had been on the ship saw her picture in a New York paper and spoke.

Resting her head on the back of the chair in which she sat, Zona closed her eyes. For a moment she was altogether without volition of any kind. This was the end, her waiting and her exile over. The thought, coming strongly, of what must happen now, what she had determined, made her cry out in her mind how unfair it was, how unfair!

She remembered the other times in her life when she felt compelled to destroy herself. Vividly she recalled the first time, when she stood on the Cranston street in the summer night wanting to cast herself in front of the oncoming automobile. Clearly she saw the second time, when her muscles moved her toward jumping from the terrace of Foster's apartment. Since then, though it had suggested itself, she had restrained herself from entertaining the mad impulse in favor of the struggle and wish to live. Now her previous inclinations seemed petty. The present was like a course set for her, a course that she must follow because there could be nothing else.

Carefully and deliberately she dressed. She put on her best underthings; these seemed especially important to her. She pulled on brand-new stockings, being sure to get the seams straight. She stepped into her finest shoes. She powdered her face and applied lipstick evenly. She slipped into her prettiest dress. She combed and arranged her hair neatly. She groomed herself more elaborately than she ever had for life. She wanted to look well when they found her.

Ready, she left her room and went down the stairs. She didn't hesitate at the sight of Mr. Helton sitting behind his desk in the lobby, a copy of the paper before him. She felt more sorry for him than she did for herself, as if she had wronged him. He looked at her but didn't speak, hardly seemed to see her. His plump face seriously pouted with deep regret. He made no move to stop her as she walked through the lobby and left the hotel.

Zona made her way down the beach, not faltering, but going steadily. The sun was hot on her face, warm and good, and she drank it in as though she couldn't get enough of it. She walked until the hotel and the cottages diminished to a quarter their size, and then she stopped. On the dry sand above the wash of the huge breakers she sat down and stared at the sea without blinking.

She sat there letting out little sighs as if she were very tired, and noticed a number of things, some of them trivial, one of them important: the beauty of the shells, a crab racing to its hole, two coconuts washed up side by side as if keeping company, the tide running out.

All her life had been a running out of elements from herself, rarely a gathering in of anything useful to her well-being. On the whole she had never obtained lasting pleasure from the days she lived. The fleeting moments when she reached her single height were dear payments for a slim yield of happiness. She touched the cup with eager lips, but only tasted its contents, never drained them. Made to woo and court and tempt bliss, she did not attain it.

Up the beach in the direction of the hotel a small group of men appeared. There were three of them. Led by one

clad in blue, they came toward her.

Zona didn't hurry. Crazily, she now took off her shoes and stockings, feeling like a little girl going wading. She got to her feet and started into the sea.

As the water lapped at her ankles she thought of many things she had done and been and wanted and lost and loved and hated in her tormented journey from yesterday to this final destination. In the depths of the water before her, one side of her emotion was swept away and totally removed. She didn't hate anyone, not Bogart, not Wirt, not Foster, not Grant, not any of the men who had to do with her torment. She had compassion for Roger. She loved Jimmie, her mother, and Ernest. She even loved her father.

The men up the beach called out and started running toward her. She paid no attention but made her way on toward the breakers. As the water touched her feet, foaming about her ankles, and she felt its bold wetness, her hand darted involuntarily to her mouth. She bit on her hand to keep from crying out, sinking her teeth deeply into her flesh. She wanted to be dead.

Her plan and desire were not enough. She tried to wade on, but couldn't. She found herself rooted there. A fear like an agony of rage overcame her. And she knew she could not drown herself. Then she reached her greatest torment. Fierce indecision possessed her as no lover ever had. Afraid to live, she was also afraid to die. In her abject despair, hot tears started from her eyes, ran down her cheeks, and fell into the wash of the breakers, salt mingling with salt.

She glanced at the men approaching her, now close, as though to draw a last courage from them. They added nothing. She turned back again. She stood there helplessly, with the water merely reaching her ankles, silently weeping, violently trembling, shivering in the hot sun.

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