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R.I.D.

Evil of Dark Harbor

An evil monk's deadly curse—could Sabrina escape
its tentacles of terror?





Visitor from the Beyond

Sabrina searched the eerie midnight for a hint of the would-be intruder at her bedroom door. But now it seemed there was no one. Perhaps it had been part of a particularly vivid dream she'd had . . .

And as she began to accept this explanation something happened which in a split second made her think differently! Far down the hall and close by the window a figure appeared. It moved slowly into view until it stood silhouetted by the silver moonlight streaming in the window.

There could be no question about what she was seeing! It had to be the ghost! Starkly black against the moonlight there stood the figure of the monk in robe and cowl!

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**Evil of
Dark Harbor**



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Printed in the U.S.A.

To the legions of readers who have
been kind enough to write me and tell
me of their enjoyment of my books.

CHAPTER ONE

Dark Harbor! The very name of the unique old town on Pirate Island had always had a special meaning for Irene Moore. The descendant of a whaling family which had once lived on the island in the Atlantic near Cape Cod, she'd grown up on stories about the place. Her grandmother had walked the cliffs of the island in her youth and still relished telling tales of the eerie happenings, strange people, and weird freaks of the weather which gave the island its reputation for fogbound mystery.

And now the opportunity had presented itself for Irene to be a month-long visitor there. When Dr. Henry Taylor and his wife, contemporaries and friends of her grandmother, learned that she was a history teacher and had a great interest in Pirate Island, they insisted that she come and spend her next vacation with them.

So, on this pleasant August afternoon she found herself the honor guest at a tea being held in the patio at the rear of the doctor's house and small private hospital. About twenty people were attending the tea for vivacious, raven-haired Irene, and she was thoroughly enjoying the event.

Seventyish Dr. Henry Taylor approached her with a twinkle in his eyes and asked her, "This isn't too dull for you, is it?"

"Not at all," she said.

"My wife worried that we invited too many older people,"

the doctor said. "But many of them were friends of your grandmother and wanted to meet you."

"It's quite all right," she smiled. "I like older people."

"The general opinion is that you are better looking than your grandmother was," Dr. Taylor chuckled. "But I can't agree. I'm prejudiced. Your grandmother and I were once sweethearts and no other girl since has seemed quite as lovely as she was."

Irene laughed, "She's still a beauty for her age."

"I know it," Dr. Taylor agreed. "We had luncheon at the Ritz together when I was last in Boston and I found her simply amazing."

"She mentioned it to me," Irene told him. "Seeing you again made her very happy."

The veteran doctor winked. "Don't say too much about it to my wife!"

"Never!"

"I have someone I want you to meet," Dr. Taylor told her. "He's a little older than you but very nice. His name is Derek Mills, and his wife was ill for a very long while. Only recently she died."

"How awful for him," she sympathized.

"Perhaps it was better," the old man said with a sigh. "There was no hope of her recovery. Her illness was mental and it was a long, harrowing business for Derek."

"How is he coming out of it?"

"Very well," Dr. Henry Taylor said. "He is dedicating himself to his job. He's director of the island's museum, and good at it."

"I would think it interesting work," she said.

"Since your field is history, you ought to have a lot to talk about," he suggested. "He's a member of one of our oldest families, and very wealthy. He has no need to work but he would never think of being idle."

"Pirate Island people are usually ambitious," she agreed.

"Come over and meet him," the old doctor said, and he guided her across the busy patio to a corner where a handsome, brown-haired man was engaged in an earnest conversation with the doctor's white-haired wife. The young man was wearing a beige summer suit and had a serious, even-featured face.

Dr. Henry Taylor said, "Time I broke you two up. My wife has to give some time to her other guests and I want

you to meet our guest of honor, Miss Irene Moore." He turned to her. "Irene this is Derek, Derek Mills. Your grandmother probably taught his father in school before she left here."

A smile crossed the serious face of the handsome man. He told Irene, "As a matter of fact, your grandmother did have my father as a pupil in the first grade. And he asked me to have you apologize to her. He's sorry he caused her so much trouble."

"I'll remember to tell her," she said with a small laugh. "And I'm happy to meet you."

"Come along," Dr. Henry Taylor said to his wife. And with a parting wink for them, he said, "I guess you two can find something to talk about!"

Derek Mills smiled. "The doctor is a little clumsy with his matchmaking but he means well."

"I think he's great," she said. "I'm enjoying my stay with him and his wife."

"You live in Boston?"

"Yes."

There was a friendly gleam in his eyes. "The usual question—what do you do for a living?"

"I followed in my grandmother's footsteps. I'm a teacher. My subject is history."

"That's interesting," he said. "I sort of deal in history, also. I'm director of the museum here."

"I've been by there several times," she said. "Your collection of marine paintings and models of ships are the best I've ever seen."

"Thank you," he said. "I'm sorry I missed you. I often wander through the place, but my office is upstairs."

"Dr. Taylor told me everyone is pleased with the excellent work you're doing."

"I'd like to do more," he said. "But we have limited funds and so one must proceed slowly. Are you going to be here long?"

"Two weeks more."

"Excellent," he said. "Perhaps I can show you some more of the island, although it's not so large that you probably haven't already seen most of it."

"The Taylors have given me quite a few tours," she answered. "I've been out to see the old monastery where the lepers were treated. I imagine that's one of the island's most interesting spots."

"It figures largely in our history," Derek agreed. "From the time that ship was wrecked near the island and the sailors infected with leprosy came to live here, the monastery has played a prominent role in the lives of the island people. With the need of it as a leper hospital, it has passed through many hands. Presently it is the private estate of a wealthy New Yorker."

"So I was told," she said.

Derek Mills was studying her with interest, and he said, "What are your plans after the tea is over?"

"I haven't any."

He suggested, "Why don't you join me for dinner? There's a place along the shore with excellent food and an unsurpassed view of the ocean."

"It sounds intriguing," she said.

"You're willing to come with me?"

"Why not?" she said.

"Fine!" He brightened. "I hate leaving one of these affairs and having dinner alone. It sort of underlines one's loneliness!"

"I know what you mean," she said.

"I'll wait for you after the tea," he told her.

They parted for a while and she moved among the other guests. The party went by quickly and soon everybody began to leave. When the last of the other guests had gone, she and the Taylors returned to the patio to find the young museum director waiting.

The old doctor stared at him. "I thought you'd left!"

Derek shook his head. "No. I'm waiting for Irene. She has agreed to have dinner with me."

"Has she, indeed?" Dr. Taylor said with pretended indignation. "I think she should have at least asked my permission first."

Irene gave the old man a warm smile. "I didn't have to. I knew you'd give it."

Mrs. Taylor suggested, "You're both welcome to have dinner with us?"

"No," Derek Mills said, "I've promised to show her the eating place along the shore. I'm positive she'll like it."

"Bound to," the veteran doctor agreed and he waved a hand. "On your way, the both of you! And have a nice evening!"

They needed no other cue to leave. Derek had his own car

with him, a small red sports car. He opened the door of it for her, and as she settled down against its soft leather seats she was enveloped in a feeling of luxury.

He got in beside her and drove away from the doctor's place, took a road which skirted the town of Dark Harbor and then headed out along the shore road. He told her, "I have a place out here along the road to the monastery. I used to live out here. Now I have an apartment in the town."

"I imagine it's more convenient."

"When one is alone." He did not amplify on this.

She said, "There's one thing I've seen very little of thus far."

"What?"

"Your famous fogs. My grandmother said the fog could come in and hover around for days and nights. But so far the weather has been fine."

Derek smiled. "You'll see it soon enough. As a matter of fact, fog is predicted for this evening and I can feel the extra damp in the air now."

It turned out that he was right. By the time they reached the sprawled-out restaurant along the shore the fog was already beginning to move in. They parked and he took her inside where he was greeted as someone well known by the hostess. The place was fairly crowded for the early evening, and the hostess walked him the length of the long room before finding them a table at a window overlooking the ocean.

As she handed them menus the woman said, "I'm afraid having a table by the window won't mean much. The fog is coming in quickly."

Derek smiled at her. "At least this is a quiet table."

The middle-aged hostess nodded. "By the way, Derek, I had some people in here today who want to do some research on their families. They were Quakers and lived here a couple of centuries ago. I told them to visit the museum and someone there would help them."

"Jennie Simms is in charge of archives and all the historical records," he said. "If they come to see us I'm sure she'll take care of them."

"Thank you, Derek," the hostess said and moved on to return to the door and look after another party which had just arrived.

Derek ordered drinks for them. He gave a glance out the window and said, "You can't see the ocean for gray mist now. So don't complain about a lack of fog."

"Instant service!" she said with amusement. "You see, I came here thinking of the island as a foggy place fairly well sprinkled with haunted houses and ghosts to go with them. Instead, it has been so grimly sunny!"

"A complete disappointment!"

"In a way."

"I suppose the town name of Dark Harbor does suggest the eerie," he said. "Actually, its name comes from the dark granite of its cliffs. And because the Puritan families who first came here thought the few houses which formed the nucleus of the town belonged to believers in witchcraft. The Puritans avoided the place and settled on the other end of the island. They came to call the town Dark Harbor, and so it has remained."

"And the island?"

"Pirate Island was the name dubbed this lonely island in early days because actual pirates used to sail here to meet and hide treasure. Legend has it that their ghosts roam the main street on foggy nights. There are those who claim to have heard their voices raised in jesting and cursing in the after-midnight."

She smiled. "This is the sort of thing I expected to hear about. My grandmother used to tell us the most creepy mystery stories about things which happened here."

"I'm certain she did," Derek said. "And there are times when the island seems spooky enough. When the fog is truly thick there are often car accidents. It cuts the visibility down a great deal."

They talked on about the island. After they finished their drinks they ordered a typical island meal of clam chowder and baked stuffed lobster. Since they were not in any way rushed, they lingered over the excellent meal. By the time coffee was served Irene found herself in a state of blissful contentment, induced partly by the food and drink and partly by the pleasant company.

Over coffee, Derek gave her a direct look across the table and said, "Because this is such a small place I assume that somebody told you I'd recently lost my wife."

She was struck by his abruptness and told him, "Yes. As a matter of fact, Dr. Taylor did."

There was a touch of bitterness in the young man's handsome face as he said, "I don't mind so much since it came from him. There would be no gossipy taint to his mention of it."

"None at all," she told him.

He frowned down at his half-empty coffee cup. "You know what her illness was?"

"The doctor said mental but he didn't enlarge beyond that."

"It was mental," the young man said. "It began with a kind of breakdown. We lost a child tragically."

"I'm sorry."

"It was life. These things happen. Only when they happen to some people they are not able to stand up to them. My wife was one of those people. She insisted on blaming herself for negligence in the child's death."

"That was too bad."

"I tried to reason with her. She had the best medical care. For a while she seemed to respond. Then the illness struck her again and she had to return to the mainland sanitarium which had done her so much good before."

Irene said, "But they weren't able to help her in this new crisis?"

"Unfortunately not," he said. "I visited her often and it was a continual pattern of growing madness. Toward the end she didn't even recognize me."

"What a cruel waste of a sensitive mind!" she sympathized.

His eyes raised to meet hers in sadness. "She was beautiful and too sensitive for life."

"I'm so sorry."

He sat back with a sigh. "I'm over most of the pain now. It wasn't a swift process. We went through several agonizing years. The agony was made greater because there always seemed some hope."

"At least now it is over for you both."

"Yes."

"And you've had your work to help fill your mind," she said. "That surely was valuable."

"I would have had some sort of breakdown myself without it," Derek said quietly.

"The museum is a tribute to your dedication."

"Thanks."

"And as time goes on you can build another personal life," she said.

"I suppose so," he said with a wistful smile. "One never knows exactly how to go about it. It can't successfully be a mechanical, cold approach."

"Of course not."

Derek Mills sighed. "I guess you begin to adjust. The pieces fall into place and without knowing it you have started to rebuild."

"That surely would be the best way."

He smiled. "Meeting you for example. I'm sure it has been very good for me to talk with a stranger to the island, a young woman close to my own age. I feel that you understand."

"I think I do," she said sincerely. "And if talking to me is any help, just talk away."

"You may regret that invitation," he warned her with grim humor.

"Never," she assured him.

"If you want to see some of the haunted places of the island I'll be glad to show them to you," he said.

"Really?"

"Of course! As children we heard all the legends and came to know most of the places with grim reputations. There are a few of them left."

"When you have a chance I'd enjoy a visit to one of them," she smiled. "Blame it on my grandmother for filling me with all those frightening stories."

"It's normal to love the mysterious," he said. "I visited Ireland a few years ago, and if I hadn't come upon at least one haunted castle I'd have considered the visit a failure. As it was I came upon several of them."

"So you understand my feeling."

"I do," he said. "Mind you, I can promise you no excitement. You'll just see the grim old shell of a place. The ghost will never walk for us. But at least you'll have made some contact with one of the legendary places."

"That will be better than nothing," she said. "When can we go?"

He laughed. "You are an enthusiast! Any time! If it weren't so foggy, I'd say tonight."

"Oughtn't the fog to help? To encourage the ghosts? I'd think it would be the ideal time to look at a haunted house!"

Derek warned her, "The place is a wreck. You have to be careful. And there are no electric lights."

"What about flashlights?"

"You are enthusiastic!" he declared with some surprise.

She glanced toward the window and saw that the fog was indeed thick. She said, "It's exactly the kind of night my

grandmother told us about! We may not get one like it again!"

"And we may get four or five days and nights of it," he teased her. "Would you like that?"

"It would be a change," she said.

He eyed her with amused interest. "You're serious about wanting to visit a haunted house tonight?"

"Of course!"

"Very well," he said. "You shall. We'll have to stop by the museum and arm ourselves with flashlights. And you'd better not tell Doc Taylor where I took you or he'll come up to the museum and give me a lecture."

"I won't," she said.

They left the restaurant and drove back to Dark Harbor and the museum on a high hill overlooking the village. The fog was now so thick that car headlights showed as blurred, eerie circles of light and the street lamps overhead did little good beyond sending out a limited glow in the mist. Derek knew the road well and drove carefully.

At last they reached the museum and she waited in the car while he went inside to get flashlights for them. As she sat waiting alone she thought about the handsome young museum director, and decided he was one of the most likeable men she'd ever met. She found herself sincerely hoping that he would soon recover from the loss of his wife.

He appeared at the side door of the large brick museum building and came through the fog toward the car. As he got in he handed her one of the two flashlights he'd brought and said, "The batteries are pretty good. I've tested them."

She said, "I'm all on edge!"

"You ought to be," he said grimly as he started the car. "This could be quite an experience."

As they drove on in the thick, gray mist, she asked, "Where is this house?"

"On a hill even higher than this one," he told her. "An area very popular with the whaling captains in the old days. Many of them built mansions there with widow's walks on their roofs to watch for incoming ships. That was in the heyday of the whaling trade, when it seemed there would never be a substitute for whale oil."

"But things changed, didn't they?"

"And quickly," Derek said as he drove on. "One day a couple of men tinkering with earth oil in Pennsylvania found a way to convert it into oil that could be burned in lamps. The

whalers laughed at the idea. But within a few years the new earth oil had taken over completely and the whalers went to sea no more."

"And the island's prosperity suffered, didn't it?"

"Dark Harbor was a place of ghost ships. The harbor was lined with the masts of idle ships, and the captains who'd sailed them sat about in the taverns and spoke in awe of what had happened. It was the end of an era."

"But many of the whaling families were already wealthy," she said.

"True," Derek answered. "My own family's wealth came down from that period and was augmented by wise investments on the mainland."

"So I suppose many lived on in their mansions here as if nothing had happened?" she suggested.

"Not really," he said. "As you mentioned earlier, we islanders are an energetic and ambitious people. Idleness didn't go well with those men of the whaling ships."

"And?"

"The result was that many of them left Pirate Island for the mainland. Some of them sold their mansions. But in many cases there just weren't any buyers for the big houses."

"What happened then?"

"The thing that happened to the Hall mansion, the one we are on our way to explore. It fell into ruin and soon was beyond repair. Items which could be used such as fine old doors and gold plumbing, stolen from it. Today it is a ravaged shell."

"How tragic!"

"It happened to a number of the fine mansions. In the case of the Hall family, cousins of the main branch remained on the island and lived in a humble cottage near the town. And when a stretch of prosperity returned again they were able to take full advantage of it."

"So Pirate Island did have another spell of good fortune?"

"Yes. In fishing. That lasted a number of years and more modest fortunes were made. The Hall family I mentioned did well and still live on the island today, though now they operate a gift shop for tourists in Dark Harbor."

She asked, "Has the tourist trade become the important thing here?"

"Yes," Derek said. "It is our main source of income now. A few of the Portuguese who came here to live still fish but it doesn't give them more than a bare living."

She said, "I've learned more about the island in a short time than I ever knew. Grandmother talked to us mostly about people and not about the events which shaped the island's history."

Derek smiled in the semi-darkness. "Forgive me for doing the lecture thing. I picked up the habit from my work at the museum."

"I found it interesting."

"Thanks," he said. And he suddenly brought the car to a halt. Turning to her, he said, "We are now on the grounds of the deserted Hall mansion."

She peered out the windshield and was able to see the barely visible outlines of a great, tall building a short distance ahead of them though she could make out none of its details. She said, "I think I see it."

"The shadow against the mist is it," he said. "Before we go in I'll tell you something about it. In the beginning it was said to be haunted by a monk. The ghost of one of those who maintained the monastery which cared for the lepers. It is told that he came to the door of the mansion once and was turned away."

"Why?"

"Chiefly because the servants were afraid of him. He was a victim of leprosy and his face had been partially eaten away in a frightening manner. He died soon after his rebuff here and then, it is said, his faceless ghost began to make appearances in the house and on the grounds."

She shuddered. "That's gruesome enough!"

"In the tradition of your grandmother's stories?"

"Definitely!"

"Good! I'm trying to live up to her," he teased. "Later another ghost was supposed to haunt the house. The ghost of its last master. He was a former whaling captain who lost his left arm in a shipboard accident and was also lamed at the same time."

"What happened to him?"

"He was caught in a winch or something of the sort. He came back to the family mansion and never sailed again. But that time the slack had come in whaling."

"And so a one-armed ghost joined that of the monk?"

"Yes. When I was a youngster the one-armed ghost was the one they mentioned most. People still stay away from this old place because of its reputation."

"And it is too far gone for repairs now?"

"In far too bad shape," he agreed. "I have an idea that one day the Halls, who now live in Dark Harbor, will bring in a bulldozer and level the house, and then sell the land for new construction."

"Then I'm lucky to arrive here in time to visit it."

He gave her a wry smile. "If your thing is haunted houses I suppose that's true," he said. "Are you ready for the big adventure?"

"Yes." She picked up her flashlight.

"Let me warn you before we begin, stay close to me," the young man said. "The floors and stairs are rotten in many places and I don't want to take you back to Dr. Taylor with a broken leg."

"That would be an unhappy ending," she agreed.

"All right," Derek Mills said, and he got out of the car and opened the door for her. When she'd gotten out he told her, "Put on your flashlight and follow me."

She dutifully did as he told her and followed him along a gravel driveway which was overgrown with bushes in sections so that they had to push their way through. Now she could see the malevolent shadow of the old mansion a short distance ahead of them, and a chill crept through her. She was fulfilling her desire to visit one of the island's haunted houses, but she was no longer sure that it would be entirely a lark.

There was a quick movement in the bushes to the right and back of her. She froze where she stood and called out, "Derek!" At the same time she waved her flashlight in the direction from which the sound had come and could see nothing but the mist-ridden bushes.

Derek had been a few steps ahead of her and now he came back to her side. "What is it?" he asked.

She told him, "Something moved in the bushes over there!"

"Don't worry about it," he said. "Probably only a stray dog or cat, or some small wild animal."

Irene gave a deep sigh. "So you say!"

"True," he assured her. "If you're going to go through with this you have to expect a few happenings of that sort."

"Thanks for telling me now," she said.

"I'll stay closer to you," he said. "I didn't know I'd managed to get so far ahead."

She began to feel ashamed of herself and said, "It's all right. I was being silly."

Derek beamed his flashlight ahead as they came near to the old building. He said in a low voice, "This is the front entrance. It was here the monk with leprosy was rebuffed. They claim the doorbell used to chime and when they answered it the monk would be waiting with his alms box!"

She gazed up at the front entrance and saw that there was no door. She said, "No door."

"Gone years ago," he told her. "Doors like that were carved and fabulously put together. Those old ship's carpenters crafted a front door to be a pride to its owner, not like the factory-built items provided today."

"So someone stole it."

"And most of the other doors and all the fine paneling," he added. "Vandals over the years have stripped the place of the fine mahogany wood and everything else of value."

"Yet the skeleton of the house remains."

"That is exactly what it is, a skeleton or, perhaps better to say, a haunted shell." He took her by the arm. "Come along!"

She was glad that he had taken her arm. It gave her a little more confidence as they walked up the broad front stairs and stepped into the forbidding old wreck of a house. The smell of decay was prominent as they stood in what must have once been the reception hall.

He said, "It isn't safe to climb the main stairway any longer. But we can move along to the rear of the house. There was a huge conservatory out there but over the years every pane of glass in it has been broken. They claim that when the house was first built, the one-armed Captain Hall used to raise orchids and other hothouse plants there."

"How awful that a fine old house should end like this," she said.

"It is sad," Derek agreed as they slowly walked along the wooden floor. The planks creaked beneath their weight and, once, one sank alarmingly and made her worry about his warning that the house was not safe. A floor could easily collapse beneath them.

They reached the rear of the house and stepped out into what was now an area without roof or walls but which had once been the glass-paned conservatory. The frame which had held the glass still remained as mute evidence of the vandalism which had taken place.

She said, "I can see that this must have been a wonderful

area of the house. I can imagine the colorful flowers growing here."

"A very different life back in those days," he said. "And who can say that this era is better?"

"I certainly won't," she replied bitterly.

"Good to meet another historian," he said, squeezing her arm lightly as a mark of his appreciation.

They moved from the conservatory to the other downstairs rooms. She was continually amazed by the size of the rooms and the tall ceilings. And each room had its own ornate fireplace.

She said, "I try to think what it must have been like to live here. Such vastness!"

"You forget servants were low paid and easy to come by in those days," Derek reminded her. "Houses like this aren't practical now."

"I know," she agreed, trembling.

He stared at her. "You're trembling. I can feel it!"

"I can't help it," she said. "This place truly has a ghostly air about it. And when I think of all those things you told me!"

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to frighten you. Let's be on our way out."

"Yes," she said, willingly.

They left the back parlor and started slowly along the broad corridor again in the darkness. The beams of their flashlights were all that cut through the gloom around them. Then suddenly without any kind of warning there was a sound of wood breaking and Derek plunged down through the ancient floor just a few feet away from her. His flashlight went out as he cried in alarm. She stood there staring at the accident scene in dismay, too frightened to move!

CHAPTER TWO

Irene cried out, "Derek, are you hurt?"

There was no reply. Terrified, she swung the beam of her flashlight to the scene of the accident. To her complete distress she saw that the section of the floor under him had crumbled away and he'd fallen through, presumably to the cellar below. The beam of the flashlight did not find him down there in the darkness.

She stood trembling, not knowing how badly he might be hurt.

She called out again, "Derek! Derek, answer me!"

Still there was no answer. She realized that she must somehow get help, for Derek could be badly hurt. She would have to make her way out of the haunted house to the car and drive back to Dark Harbor.

Having decided this she groped her way toward the front entrance, terrified that at any moment she might fall through some rotten bit of flooring as Derek had. She reached the reception hall and flashed the beam on the doorway, only to see something which made her heart miss a beat! The figure of a one-armed man was silhouetted there!

"No!" she cried in horror and took a step backward.

"Is something wrong?" The voice which questioned her was

surely not that of a ghost. It was the voice of a young man with a definite New England accent.

"Who are you?" she gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask the same question of you," the one-armed young man in the doorway said calmly.

Her fear of a ghost now gave way to a new uneasiness that she might have fallen into a trap where she'd be threatened by some madman. She decided to tell the truth and hope he would help her.

"I'm a visitor," she said quickly. "I wanted to see a haunted house by night. Derek Mills was kind enough to bring me here. Just a moment ago a section of the flooring collapsed and he fell through. He may be badly hurt! I was on my way for help!"

"Why didn't you say so?" the young man demanded and he reached out his single hand for the flashlight, "Give me that!"

There was something of authority and sanity in his manner which eased her misgivings. She handed him the light without hesitation and said, "Back there in the corridor!"

The young man went in the direction she'd pointed, and she followed him. He halted by the ruined section of the floor and peered down.

As he shined his light down there, he called, "You there, Mills?"

From the cellar Derek replied wearily, "Yes!"

She moved a little closer and called down, "Derek, are you hurt?"

"Nothing to mention," he said. "I was stunned for a moment—that's why I didn't answer."

The one-armed young man was bending over the hole in the floor. She had her first good glimpse of him and saw he was dark, rather thin-faced and intelligent looking.

The young man said, "How are you going to get up here?"

"I know the way," Derek replied from below. "My flashlight is still working and there's a stairway at the rear. The steps are stone so they'll be all right. I'll join you in a minute or two."

The one-armed man straightened up and turned to her. "You heard. It's going to be all right."

"Yes," she said. "Thank you."

"No problem," he said casually. "I didn't know what to make of you when I first saw you."

"You frightened me," she confessed.

"I suppose so," he said dryly. "You were here looking for ghosts, especially a one-armed one."

She said nothing. It was too humiliating. She felt she'd been stupid in bringing Derek to the old house on this foggy night. If she'd guessed the real dangers the visit would present she'd have had second thoughts about it.

There were footsteps at the rear of the house and then the beam of Derek's flashlight was visible as he came along the hall to join them. He paused by the hole to examine it with the light. In a surprised tone he said, "It's a miracle I didn't break something falling down there. I landed partly on a heap of old rugs, mildewed and unpleasant, but still ideal for breaking a fall."

She went to him unhappily. "I'm so sorry!"

"No need to be," he said. "Very little damage done." He now gave his attention to the newcomer. "Thanks for taking an interest. May I ask who you are?"

"You may," the young man said with almost a sneer on his tanned, lean face. "My name is Hall."

"Hall!" Derek Mills said with some amazement. "This is the old Hall mansion."

"I know," the young man said. "This property belongs to my folks."

Derek whistled. "So we're the intruders! Sorry!"

"The young lady explained," the one-armed man said. "You're here at your own risk. And it looks to be pretty risky!"

"That's so true," Derek said. "My name is Derek Mills."

"I know," the youth said. "You probably don't remember me. I grew up here. But then I was away at college for two years before I went into the service. It's been five years since I spent any time on Pirate Island."

"You'd be Jerry Hall," Derek said. "You're the youngest of the family. Your father told me you were in Viet Nam and that you'd been injured, but he didn't go into any details."

"Right all the way," young Jerry Hall said. "I don't sleep too well at nights and I've formed the habit of walking up here and then back home. Kind of crazy habit!"

"I'm glad you were here tonight," she said sincerely.

"This is Miss Irene Moore," Derek introduced her. "She's a guest of Dr. Taylor and his wife. And her grandmother was born and lived here on the island for a while."

"How do you do, Miss Moore," the youth said soberly.

"I'd like to get out of here if you don't mind," Irene said. "I can't help it! The place terrifies me now!"

Derek laughed. "I'm the one who fell through the floor. Why should you complain?"

"I know," she said. "I won't lead you on any such wild trips again."

"I didn't mind it all that much," Derek told her. "As long as Jerry here doesn't resent our trespassing."

"Plenty of people do that," Jerry said with dry humor. "It's become a kind of horror shrine."

"You're so right," Derek said. "We have a car. Can we give you a lift back to Dark Harbor? It's dangerous driving but it is really unsafe walking in this thick fog. Especially without any kind of light."

"I hadn't thought about it," the young man admitted.

"Do let us drive you!" Irene urged him.

"All right," he said. "You can take me as far as you're going anyway."

So a few minutes later she found herself in the front seat of the car squeezed between Derek and Jerry. The fog was still just as thick as it had been when they arrived and Derek was forced to drive slowly.

He asked the young man, "Are you planning to live in Dark Harbor?"

"I haven't decided yet," Jerry Hall said. "I was studying engineering before I went in the army. I may go back to it. My folks would like me to work in the store, but it doesn't appeal to me."

She glanced at him. "You prefer an outdoor life?"

"I'd say so," the young man agreed.

"So you're just here until you make up your mind," Derek said.

"That's right," he said. "I hear your wife died when I was away. Too bad. She was a nice lady."

"Thanks," Derek said somewhat tautly.

Irene thought it might be discreet to change the subject. She asked Jerry, "Do your people plan to do anything with the old mansion?"

"They've had an offer from someone who wants to tear it down and build condominiums on the land. I have an idea that is what will happen."

"It's too bad it couldn't be restored," she said. "I haven't

seen it by day but I'm sure it is an interesting example of its period."

Derek said, "It might have been saved a quarter-century ago. It's too late now. There's nothing to do but have it torn down."

Jerry Hall said, "My folks hate to do it but I see it as the sensible thing."

They were nearing the main street of the town now. And Derek said, "I don't know about you two. But after my fall I feel like a drink. Will you join me?"

"Where?" she asked.

"The Green Heron," he said. "It's just ahead on the right. I wouldn't call it fancy but it's the closest thing to a proper lounge we have in the town."

"Do women go in there?" she asked.

"Sure," young Jerry Hall said with a hint of contempt. And he added, "I'll go along for a drink."

So Derek parked the car on the hilly, cobblestoned street and they walked across and went into the Green Heron. There were a scattering of island working folk at tables and several fishermen at the bar. They all stared at them as they took a table. Derek had a small rip in the arm of his suit jacket but otherwise he seemed to have suffered no harm.

After Derek ordered for them from the burly bartender he said, "I must bear a charmed life to have a fall like that and be hurt so little." He touched the back of his head gingerly with his right hand. "I do have a bump but not a really bad one."

Jerry Hall agreed. "You could have broken an arm or leg. I don't know why you didn't."

"The rugs," Derek said. "I hit them almost directly."

"Thank goodness for the rugs," she agreed.

The young man looked at his empty sleeve and with a bitter smile said, "I could have used a few when I lost my arm."

"What happened?" Derek asked. "That is, if you don't mind discussing it."

"I don't," the young man with the thin, intelligent face said. "I was shot down in the field. Machine gun fire riddled my arm. It could just as well have been my chest and I'd have been a goner."

"Bound to have been," Derek agreed.

The young man went on, "I was out there for more than a

day and night before they found me and brought me in. By then it was too late to do anything but amputate it."

"Lucky it was the left arm, since you've got an idea of being an engineer. You'll need to make drawings."

"I have a good artificial one the government gave me," he said with a slight frown. "I don't like wearing it."

"I can understand that," Derek said.

The bartender returned with their drinks and they sat back to relax and talk. Irene couldn't help enjoy the company of the young man and give thanks that their adventure hadn't ended in worse disaster.

Derek told Jerry Hall, "I remember you worked at the service station before you went to college."

"I did," he said with a smile. He was probably at least ten years the junior of the handsome Derek. It struck her that he must be about her own age.

"How long have you been home?" she asked him.

"A week," he said. "How much longer do you plan to be here on the island?"

"Another two weeks," she said. And with a smile for Derek, "At least I hope so, if I don't get into any more disasters."

Derek laughed. "We'll have to break the news about what happened tonight very gradually to Doctor Taylor."

"I won't say a thing," she decided. "You can tell him."

Jerry Hall's intelligent young face showed a look of interest as he asked her, "Have you met Captain Zachary Miller?"

"No," she said. "Who is he?"

"Who is he?" Jerry said, placing his glass down on the table. "You tell her, Mr. Mills."

The handsome man raised a hand in protest. "Derek will do—you left Mr. Mills behind a long while ago. And since you've brought up the captain I think you ought to tell her about him."

Jerry said, "All right." And turning to her he said, "Captain Zachary Miller is probably the oldest man on this island. He was a skipper on freighters in the old days and he knows all the ghost stories about the island. If you want to hear real goose-flesh tales he's your man. I guess he's close to a hundred years old!"

"Not quite that," Derek said. "But he's well over eighty. And he occasionally drives around the island at the wheel of his own ancient car."

"That must truly be something to see!" She smiled.

"He's a good driver," Derek assured her. "But the car is something of an antique."

Jerry Hall laughed. "He brought it into the service station before I left. And we had to find parts that would fit it and replace almost everything, including the shocks and the muffler. But he's been able to drive it ever since."

Derek said, "Jerry is right. Captain Zachary Miller is someone you definitely should meet."

"And he can tell you the whole history of that house you were in tonight, including all about my ghostly ancestor with the one arm," Jerry told her with good humor.

"You must have given her a shock," Derek said.

"I think I did," the young man admitted.

She shook her head. "I'd never want to live through that again. In fact I'm so cured I don't know whether I want to hear the story of the house or not."

"Would you rather I show you some more haunted places?" Derek teased her.

"Never!" she said.

"Well, at least I cured you of that morbid phobia," the young director of the museum said.

Jerry Hall finished his drink and said, "If you two will excuse me I'll be on my way. My place is just down the street."

"Of course," she said. "It was fun meeting you."

"Same here," he said rather awkwardly as he got up. "Thanks for the drink, Derek. My turn another time."

"Sure," Derek said, also rising. "It's been pleasant seeing you again. Drop by the museum when you have a moment."

"Thanks," Jerry Hall said. And he left them.

Derek sat down again and said, "Well, he turned up at just the right moment."

She lamented comically, "And I first thought he was the ghost!"

Derek laughed. "He knew that. It was the one arm. It gave me a start at first."

"He's very nice."

He agreed. "I remember him as a boy at the service station. Five years have changed him. They were a stern five years, of course. I didn't recognize him at first."

She gave a small frown. "I wonder if he's feeling well? He spoke of not sleeping and of walking up to that old house almost every night. It doesn't sound too healthy."

"I agree," Derek said. "I wondered about that as well. He

likely has insomnia. His injuries in the service and the strain of trying to adjust now that he's back. It can't be easy."

"It surely can't."

"He lost no time in helping," Derek pointed out. "I think he's probably lonely and feeling out of things."

"I'm interested in his Captain Zachary Miller," she said. "I'd like to meet that old man."

"You shall," he said. "I'll arrange for us to drop by and see him one evening. He's very spry for his age and he'll tell you all the ghost stories you ever want to hear."

"At the moment I could do without ever hearing any more," she said with a wry smile.

"You'll change your mind," he predicted.

They remained at the table chatting for a little longer. By that time most of the other patrons in the place had left. Derek paid the bill and they went out into the fog again. As they crossed the street to his car, he said, "That tavern has quite a history."

"Really?"

"Yes. The man who waited on us was Matthew Kimble. He's the great-grandson of the original owner. He was away from the island for years, and the story is that he was in prison. In any event, he doesn't have much to do with anyone. He goes his own dour way operating the tavern and the inn above it."

As Derek opened the car door for her and let her in, she asked, "His great-grandfather built the inn, you say?"

Derek waited until he was behind the wheel to reply. "Yes. The story is that he piled up a fortune in black ivory and then came here and built the inn."

"Black ivory?" she asked as Derek started the car.

"The slave trade," he told her. "The old people say he had all kinds of money when he arrived here, but he would never say where it came from."

"Is this Matthew Kimble still wealthy?"

"No," Derek answered. "His father made a series of bad investments until he had only the tavern and inn left. It's a strange story."

"This island seems to have a great many of them," she said. "My grandmother doesn't seem to have exaggerated things a bit."

At last they reached the Taylor house. Derek helped her out of the car and saw her to the door. He looked up and said,

"You'll notice that the fog you wanted so badly is still lasting?"

She laughed. "I'll will it to vanish in the morning."

"I warn you. Your magic may not work."

"We'll see," she said. "And I do hope you didn't hurt yourself?"

"Extremely superficial injuries," he joked. "Just so long as you don't tell Dr. Taylor."

"I won't," she said. She gave him a grateful look. "Thanks, Derek, for a lovely evening. In spite of all the disaster it was fun."

"For me as well."

"I've enjoyed meeting you," she said. "I hope we'll see each other again."

"I guarantee we shall," he said, seriously. "I've had my problems, and being with you has helped me forget them a little."

"I'm glad," she said. "Goodnight, Derek."

"Goodnight, Irene," he said. And he drew her to him for a gentle kiss.

She went inside feeling a good bit confused. While she had expected the kiss she'd not realized what her reaction would be to it. She found that she liked Derek Mills much more than she'd realized. And she couldn't help wondering whether their friendship might develop into something more serious. At the same time, the rather wistful, manly face of young Jerry Hall remained in the back of her mind.

In the morning it was sunny again! Irene was so amused by this that immediately after breakfast she put a call through to the museum and asked for Derek. When he came on the line, she said, "Well, I hope you'll never doubt my magic again!"

"Never!" he said. "You have a dedicated follower."

"I'll count on that," she said. "Is all well?"

"Never felt better," he assured her. "And my suit has gone to the lady who does invisible weaving. She's promised to make it like new."

"You should send me the bill!"

"Never thought of that," Derek laughed. "Thanks for the suggestion. What are your plans for this sunny day?"

"Some tennis," she said. "I know a girl who plays at the town courts. We meet there every morning."

"Sounds wildly athletic," Derek said. "While you are pounc-

ing about in the hot sun I'll be doddering among my dusty ship models here."

"To each his own," she teased him. "I had to call you."

"I'm glad you did," he told her. "I'll be in touch with you later. And remember, not a word to Dr. Taylor."

"I'll remember," she promised.

She changed into her tennis outfit and started to walk to the town court. The old doctor stopped her and said, "Let me drive you down."

"I don't mind the walk," she said.

Dr. Taylor gave her a sly wink. "But I'd enjoy your company that far. I have to make a call down that way in any case."

"All right," she said. "As long as it won't put you out."

The doctor drove a big limousine with air conditioning, and she sat back on the front seat in comfort. "This is a lovely big car," she said.

"I like a big car," he told her. "And it sometimes doubles as an emergency ambulance so I need plenty of room and the air conditioning."

"I hadn't thought of that."

The white-haired doctor gave her an interested glance as he asked, "How did it go last night? I know you didn't get in until quite late."

"We had a fine evening," she said.

"I worried when the fog came in."

"It was bad," she said. "We had a nice dinner with a lot of talk. Later we went to the tavern and sat with a young man called Jerry Hall." She was careful to omit the details of their visit to the Hall place and Derek's accident.

"I've had the Hall lad in as a patient," the old doctor said. "Nice boy. Took a bad beating in the war. Sad about that arm."

"Yes, it is," she agreed.

"Still, I'm more worried about his nerves," the old doctor told her. "He needs to get out of his present gloomy mood."

"He seemed in fairly good spirits last night."

"Perhaps being with you and Derek was good for him. He's stayed too much alone since he's come back here."

"I hope we were company for him," she said.

"What about you and Derek?" the doctor wanted to know. She stared at him. "I don't know."

"I mean do you like him? He's a widower and he could do with the kind of wife you'd make."

Her eyes widened. "Now wait a minute! I've been warned that you like to play matchmaker but I'd never guessed you'd be as bad as this!"

"Sorry!" the old man said.

"You'd better be!"

"Just would like to see two nice people happy!"

"We are happy now, thank you, doctor," she said firmly. "And we're apt to go on being better friends if you stop trying to push us together."

"I won't ever interfere again by word or deed," he said with a chuckle. "I guess maybe you like him a little or you wouldn't make such a fuss!" And he let her out by the tennis courts and drove off still chuckling.

She was blushing as she made her way toward the courts. The doctor had been completely shameless in his suggestions. And while she hadn't really minded, she wanted to put an end to any attempts at pushing her and Derek together. It would probably only end in one or both of them getting hurt and she didn't want Derek to be exposed to anymore pain. As for herself, she told herself firmly, she had come to Dark Harbor for a holiday and not for a husband.

Ellen, the girl she played with every day, was five years younger than herself. She was spending the summer on the island with her grandparents, and she was an excellent tennis player.

Ellen waved to her as she approached the last court, and in a few minutes they were busy playing and she'd forgotten all about the embarrassing episode with the doctor.

As usual, the game went well. At least it went well for the freckled and blonde Ellen, who won every time. But the truth was that Irene enjoyed the game more than winning. And she had done better on other occasions. When they completed the last set, Ellen crossed over to her hurriedly.

"Sorry, I've got to run!" she said. "I'm late for a date. This super boy is taking me for a ride on his motorcycle!"

"Be careful," Irene smiled at the younger girl as she warned her. "I want to be sure of my game tomorrow."

"I'll be here!" Ellen promised, and rushed away.

Left alone, Irene slipped on her white sweater and started walking back toward the pavillion and the benches where spectators usually sat. She felt a little lost, since she and Ellen generally had a cold drink together after their games.

As she headed for the sidewalk a voice called out, "Just a minute!"

She turned and saw Jerry Hall coming toward her. He looked healthier in the daylight and he was smiling.

She said, "I walked right by you and didn't know you!"

"I thought maybe you'd decided you didn't want to know me," he suggested with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Never!" she said. "Not after your rescue of me last night."

He glanced toward the tennis courts. "I saw you play."

"I was in bad form today."

He shook his head. "You played well. It just happened that she played better."

"That's a nice way to look at it," she agreed.

"The only way," he said. "I like tennis."

She couldn't help saying, "You used to play?"

There was a quiet pride in his smile as he told her, "I still play."

"Honestly?"

He laughed. "And I'm not the only one-armed tennis player in existence. As a matter of fact, it was part of our therapy at the veterans' hospital in Florida. The idea was to teach us body balance and to compete without feeling we were limited." He paused and shook his head. "Long-winded!"

"No. I'm interested in hearing about it," she said. "We must have a game."

"You're tired now," he said, but there was such a note of wistful hope in his voice she couldn't deny him.

"Not that tired," she said with a smile. "Anyway, I have an advantage."

"That does it!" he said. "I have to take you on."

They returned to the court, and in a few minutes were well into the first set. She was astonished at his agility and balance. She felt he must have been an excellent tennis player before his accident, and he was doing very well now.

Their game attracted some onlookers, and she was amused that all of them were on Jerry's side. And when she wound up the sets with a slight margin there were cries of disappointment.

Jerry came to her with a boyish grin. "I lost, but you must admit I have my fans."

"They were all I could think of the last few minutes," she laughed. "I was sure they'd lynch me if I won!"

"It wasn't that bad," he protested. And then, as they strolled

away from the courts together, he said, "I haven't come out here much since I've been home."

"You should. If you play every day you'll improve your game."

The one-armed young man said, "Somehow it didn't seem to matter. I've been in a kind of mental slump. I guess you wouldn't know what I'm talking about."

"I think I do."

"Anyway, when I woke up this morning and thought of last night and the great time we had together I sort of felt I wanted to come over and play. I hadn't any idea you'd be here. I never saw you here before."

"We were probably here at different times," she said.

They went inside, got cold drinks and sat on the verandah of the clubhouse to watch other players on the courts. It was pleasant being with Jerry and she couldn't help wishing that all would go well for him in future. He was showing so much courage in facing his disability.

The young man smiled at her and said, "I wonder how Derek feels this morning?"

She said, "He's fine. I phoned him."

"A nice fellow," Jerry said. "He's a lot older than I am. I felt like a kid with him."

"You're grown-up now. And I'm sure he thinks so."

"I'm twenty-four," Jerry said seriously. "I guess maybe he's about thirty-three. He had a pretty wife. It was too bad about her."

"Yes. I know," she said.

Jerry gave her a questioning look. "Are you and he close friends?"

"I have a great admiration for him," she said carefully, "but we've only just met."

Jerry's boyish face brightened. "Is that true?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad," he said, and then he hastened to add, "I mean I'm glad he doesn't know you any better than I do. Or something like that!"

She laughed.

He put down his drink and stared at her. "Now you're laughing at me!"

"Never! I like you too much! I may laugh with you but never at you!"

He slowly smiled. "That's all right, then."

She said, "When am I going to meet this Captain Zachary Miller. I want to hear all about your ancestors and the haunted house."

"I'll arrange it," he said.

"Please do."

"How about tonight?" he asked.

"I'm free," she said. "I'd enjoy going to see him if he's not busy."

"I doubt that he will be," Jerry Hall said. "I'll drive over to his place right after lunch."

"You can let me know later."

"I will. I'll drop by Dr. Taylor's and leave word if you're not there."

"Good!" And then she said. "What about Derek? He might like to come along."

Jerry looked dubious. "You think so?"

"I do. And he knows what to ask the captain. He is an expert in the history of the island. You should invite him."

"All right," Jerry said. "If the captain can have us at his place tonight, I'll drop by the museum and let Derek know." But he didn't sound at all happy about it.

CHAPTER THREE

Irene was sunning herself on the patio when Jerry Hall arrived. She sat up and greeted him with a smile. "What news?"

Jerry, in fawn slacks, yellow open-necked shirt, and dark glasses, looked debonair and almost handsome. One hardly noticed his tucked-in shirt sleeve and missing arm.

He said, "I've just come from seeing Captain Miller. He wants you to visit him this evening around eight."

"I look forward to it," she said.

The dark-haired young man smiled rather sheepishly and went on to say, "I've also seen Derek Mills. I have no car at present so he'll pick you up," Jerry said. "I'll meet you at Captain Miller's."

She smiled. "I'm glad you asked Derek to come along," she said.

Jerry showed no expression. "I knew it was what you wanted."

"So I'll finally hear the story of Hall House," she said.

"One of them," Jerry suggested. "I think there are several legends connected with the house."

"It was good of you to arrange this for me."

"The captain looks forward to meeting you," Jerry said with a smile. "I told him you were young and pretty."

She laughed. "I take it his interest extends to young and pretty girls."

"Very definitely," Jerry said. "Well, I must be getting on."

"Will you have a drink before you go?" she asked.

"Thanks, no," Jerry replied. "I'm working in the shop this afternoon. I like to give my parents a little time off when I'm home."

"I think that's very considerate of you," she said, rising.

He shrugged. "I don't mind being there for a few hours." He turned to leave and then paused to tell her, "I sent a letter to Boston University today to see about picking up my engineering."

"I'm glad you've made a decision," she said.

"Maybe if I'm in Boston we'll be able to meet now and then," he suggested.

"I'd enjoy that," she said. "Let me know when your plans are definite."

"I will," Jerry said. "No need to see me out through the house. I can leave by the patio gate."

"All right," she said. "I'll see you at Captain Miller's at eight."

Jerry left and she sat back on the lounge and stretched out to get the best of the sun again. She was pleased that Jerry seemed to be in such a good mood. She had known the young war veteran for only a short time, but already there seemed to be a change for the better in him.

If he did decide to resume school in Boston it would be nice to meet him occasionally. He was about her own age and she felt they must share a lot of the same interests. And she was glad that he'd stopped by and invited Derek along for the evening. Derek, while older, was still excellent company and she was also fond of him.

It amused her that after a long dearth of meeting attractive men she'd suddenly met two at the same time. Now she was having difficulty in deciding which of the two she liked better.

At dinner she told the Taylors of her plans for the evening. Dr. Taylor told her, "You're going to enjoy the old captain. He's one of Pirate Island's true characters."

"So everyone seems to say," she agreed.

The doctor continued: "Zachary is close to ninety, but you would never guess it by him. Of course he looks old, but he has a lively manner."

She smiled. "He's promised to tell me a ghost story. About the old Hall mansion."

"There's plenty to tell," Mrs. Taylor declared. "Some strange things have happened up there on the hill."

The doctor gave Irene a teasing glance. "So Derek is coming to pick you up?"

"Yes," she said. "Jerry Hall asked him to."

"Sounds to me like you have both of those young men at the end of a string," Dr. Taylor chuckled.

"Of course I haven't," she said. "I enjoy their friendship. I think they're both very nice."

"I agree," Mrs. Taylor said.

The doctor sighed. "I'd consider Derek the more stable of the two."

"He's a lot older," Irene reminded him. "I'm sure Jerry will be just as settled when he's the same age."

"That could be true," the doctor said. "But Jerry has always been more of a rebel than Derek. It will be harder for him to settle down. And especially hard because of his war experiences."

"I understand that," Irene agreed. "But I think he is doing very well. He has adjusted to the loss of his arm in a remarkable fashion. He even played tennis with me this morning."

Mrs. Taylor informed her, "Jerry is not the first Hall to have lost an arm. He had an ancestor who was crippled aboard a whaler. I have an idea Captain Miller may tell you about him."

"Perhaps," she said.

The doctor nodded. "I'm almost sure he will. You see he was the Hall who was involved in one of the grimmest of the ghost stories."

This left her anticipating the account of the haunting of the Hall mansion. She was waiting in a crisp, yellow linen dress when Derek arrived to pick her up a few minutes before eight.

When they were driving to the captain's, he said, "You look especially lovely this evening."

"Thank you," she said.

"Forgive me if I say so," he went on, "but I have an idea Jerry Hall has fallen in love with you."

She gave a tiny gasp. "But I hardly know him."

"I can't help that," the handsome, brown-haired man said. "I listened to him and watched him when he came to my office this afternoon. And if I'm wrong I'll be surprised."

Irene smiled. "Whether you're wrong or right I don't expect to know."

"You mean you wouldn't encourage him if you knew he cared for you?"

"I mean I haven't even thought about such a thing!" she protested.

"I would," was Derek's advice as he brought the car to a halt before a picturesque cottage on a sidestreet lined with elms.

The discussion about Jerry had embarrassed her and she was glad that from now on the evening would center around the ancient owner of the cottage. Derek accompanied her to the door and rang the bell. Jerry Hall opened the door for them. He was looking his best in a brown summer suit and blue shirt and tie.

"Glad you're on time," he said with a smile. "Captain Miller is ready for you."

He showed them into a screened porch at the side of the house, where a frail, wizened-faced old man with white hair stood waiting to greet them. Jerry introduced them and the old captain welcomed them and invited them to sit down.

She and Derek sat on a wicker divan with the captain seated opposite them in a wicker armchair. Jerry hovered about ready to serve drinks.

"Do you like martinis?" Captain Zachary Miller said. "I have a weakness for them myself and I've had Jerry make up a pitcher."

"I enjoy martinis," she agreed, impressed by the brightness of the old man.

It was a warm evening and the combination of the screened porch and cool martinis seemed delightful.

"I understand it is your first visit here," the old captain said, fixing his sharp blue eyes on her.

"Yes," she said. "My grandmother was born and lived here."

"I knew her," the veteran Captain said. "Not well, because she left here when she was fairly young. Lives in Boston now, doesn't she?"

"Yes," Irene agreed as Jerry handed her a martini and then moved on to serve the others, after which he sat down in a chair near her end of the divan with a drink for himself.

Captain Zachary Miller sipped his drink. "Good on a warm night!" he said, smacking his lips.

"I'm surprised that it is so warm," she said. "When the fog came in last night it was cold."

"The island is a place of quick changes," Captain Miller said. "I understand you are interested in stories about its past?"

"Yes," she said. "Both Derek and Jerry tell me you are the man to talk to."

The old captain smiled. "I think that's only because I've lived longer than most on the island. I can tell a story or two."

"I'd like to hear about the old Hall place," she said. "We were up there last night."

"And I almost broke a leg," Derek said with a rueful smile.

"It's in bad shape," Captain Zachary Miller agreed. "I took a look at it not along ago. Made me feel sad."

"It must have reminded you of the ghost story connected with it," Jerry Hall said.

The captain glanced at the young man. "It did. And seeing you with the one arm made me think of one of your ancestors in particular. Captain Dennis Hall only had one arm, you know."

"So I've heard," Jerry said.

"Left the other in the Pacific. Lost it in a shipboard accident. He came back here to live in the old mansion in the early 1870s. I remember my father talking about him. They were friends."

"Please tell us more about him," Irene urged him.

The light on the porch was fading. The old captain gazed at her over his glass with a thoughtful gleam in his ancient blue eyes. He said, "To tell you the story of Captain Dennis Hall I'll have to tell you the story of Sabrina Wyler. For Sabrina played a most important part in it all."

Sabrina Wyler stood on the deck of the ferry gazing ahead at the distant island. It was a morning in June, 1872, and since the ferry had made a late start from the mainland, its captain was now straining the engines of the doughty little craft in an effort to make time. Sabrina's fine-featured face was solemn as she studied the blue outline of the distant island with its high hills, and she decided that she didn't mind how late they might be in arriving. In fact, it had not been her idea to go to the island at all. It had been the brainchild of her Aunt Ivy.

To be the poor relative of a wealthy family was, Sabrina felt, infinitely worse than merely being poor. And she was the poor cousin of the wealthy Boston Wylers. To make it even worse, she was an only daughter and an orphan. When her schoolmaster father died the Wylers decided she must be taken care of by the family. So they had summoned her to Boston quickly taken stock of her good looks and adequate education and decided that she could very well make her own living as a governess to the children of one of their wealthy friends.

Their first choice, perhaps to be on the safe side—since this was her initial experience as a governess—was the family of a *nouveau riche* brewer. Sabrina had found the five young children spoiled and not at all eager to pay any attention to her. Unhappily, the reverse was true of their boorish father who lost no time in displaying his eagerness for her. The result was a dramatic scene, dismissal, and a stern reproach from her Aunt Ivy.

Sabrina then found herself dispatched to a family in the country to the north of Boston. The master of this household was a lawyer, and the mistress suffered from consumption and so had little to do with the care of her two children. These youngsters, a boy of ten and a girl of six, proved to be likeable though strong-willed. But Sabrina was fond of them and they responded to her. It seemed that she had come to a safe harbor at last.

Then tragedy reared its dark head and she found herself in trouble again. One day while she and the little girl were seated in the library reading, Sabrina was called to another room to speak to the cook about the preparation of the evening meal for herself and the youngsters. While she was gone the little girl began playing about the fireplace and her dress became ignited. She ran out of the room a blazing torch!

Sabrina met her, seized a rug and managed to smother the fire and extinguish it. But the rescue came too late. The little girl died that night as the result of her burns. That Sabrina could continue on as governess to the remaining child was out of the question. Again she was dismissed, and this time under a cloud of negligence. The charge had not been spelled out against her, but it had been made clear the accident might not have happened had she not left the child alone in the room.

Sabrina felt anguish on two counts. She had loved the little girl and to have her come to such a shocking end was terrible.

Often, at night, she still wakened to the screams of the unfortunate youngster. The memory of it would always haunt her. And also, it was another failure in her role of governess. This time her wealthy Aunt Ivy had accepted her back into the Beacon Street mansion with coldness, and allotted her a tiny attic room, smaller than that given to the lowliest of kitchen helpers.

Every unpleasant errand and menial chore that fell outside the duties of the servants was given to Sabrina. Life for her in the elegant Beacon Street mansion became a series of humiliations. She was not accepted as a member of the family, nor was she able to fraternize with the servants, who carefully avoided her. She existed in this limbo for some months until at last she made up her mind she must run away and somehow make a living.

The year 1872 was not an ideal time for a young girl with only an academic training to manage this. She had heard that some of the more expensive Newbury Street shops hired seamstresses, and she wondered if she might find employment of this sort. But she also heard the young maids who worked in the house furtively whispering of lurid traps which often awaited these young girls who sought only honest work. It was rumored that many times they became the prey of madams catering to the profligate males of the city in houses on side-streets with shuttered windows.

Sabrina had no wish to meet such an end. But she knew she could not put up with the cruelties imposed on her by her wealthy relations much longer. The chances of her getting another post as governess were slim. The rumors of her neglect in the death of the little girl had been repeated and exaggerated. She was given no opportunity to plead her case, but languished in the cold, dark attic room in grim silence.

Then, out of the blue, there had come this offer to go to Pirate Island, a place she had never heard about before. Her Aunt Ivy had summoned her down to the sewing room to give her a stern lecture about her responsibilities.

"You are to have another chance," the hatchet-faced woman with iron-gray hair drawn straight back and tied in a bun at the nape of her neck said.

"Am I?" Sabrina had asked.

"Do not dare to be insolent about it," Aunt Ivy warned with a glare. "You have humiliated and disgraced us with two of our

friends. Now we are about to give you the opportunity to redeem yourself in a third post."

"You know I will do my best," Sabrina had said, worrying at the same time what dreadful place her aunt might have decided to send her.

"Mrs. Jane Hall, a friend of mine, somehow heard of you," her Aunt Ivy went on. "And despite the fact that she knows you were responsible for the death of one of your last charges, she is willing to give you employment."

"The little girl's accident was a tragedy," she said. "But how could I know she would lean into the fireplace? I had warned her of the dangers and thought she understood."

"No need to try and clear your record," her aunt snapped. "Everyone knows what happened! However, it appears that someone is ready to give you another chance. Mrs. Hall would like to hire you to go to Dark Harbor and care for her two grandchildren, a girl of six and a boy of seven."

"Where is Dark Harbor?" she'd asked.

"On Pirate Island off Cape Cod," her Aunt Ivy said. "I suspect that Mrs. Hall is willing to offer you the post because few young women wish to journey to a lonely island for employment. You, with your record, haven't much choice. You will pack your things tomorrow morning and take the train to Cape Cod. I will arrange for lodging for you there overnight, and early the next morning the ferry will take you to Dark Harbor and your new place of employment."

"Thank you, Aunt Ivy," she said quietly. At last she knew the worst. And it seemed to her that even an island could not be more awful than the existence she was living there in the attic of the Beacon Street mansion.

"You can thank me best by making a success of this post," her aunt informed her.

"I shall surely try."

Aunt Ivy glared at her again. "And mind how you behave! Your red hair and saucy good looks seem to invite male attention, though I should think that the several freckles across your nose and cheeks might put them off. We Wylers are noted for our creamy, unblemished skin, so you must have inherited the freckles from your mother."

"Yes, Aunt Ivy." She was rather proud of it.

"Green eyes and red hair are a bad combination," her aunt went on. "Keep your eyes cast down when being addressed by

males, pretend to be of humble spirit, though I know you are not. The master of the household to which you are going is a widower and I shall depend on your discretion not to become involved with him."

"You know I won't, Aunt Ivy!"

"I know what happened before!" her aunt said with anger.

"It wasn't my fault," she protested.

"Who can say that? It happened and they sent you packing back here. So avoid this young widower as much as you can."

"I will," she promised.

"You may find this easier," her aunt continued, "since Captain Dennis Hall is a cripple. He was injured at sea, losing his left arm and suffering a permanent limp of his left leg. He had hoped to come home and live a quiet family life. Unfortunately, his wife was recently stricken with typhoid and died. You will care for his two motherless children!"

"Yes, Aunt Ivy," she said quietly.

"The mistress of the household is presently his mother, Mrs. Jane Hall. And it is she who selected you in spite of the shadow hanging over you. So you must be respectful and grateful!"

"I intend to be."

"If you're not, I'll hear about it quickly enough," her aunt promised. "Also living at the Hall mansion is Hilary Hall, younger brother to Captain Dennis and manager of the family's ship business. I have heard that he is a wild young scoundrel, so I suggest that you carefully avoid him."

"If it is at all possible," she said. "When one lives in the same house with a family it is difficult not to meet all of them."

Aunt Ivy glared at her. "I will accept no excuses. You know what is expected of you!"

"Yes, Aunt Ivy."

"And give the children your undivided attention!"

"I shall."

"We do not want any more tragic accidents," her aunt said darkly. "This will be your last opportunity. If you fail in this post, your uncle and I will feel we are no longer responsible for your welfare."

"I understand, Aunt Ivy," she said in a low voice.

"The streets are not a pleasant place to be! Remember that!" Her aunt ended the interview with this threat.

So now she was aboard the ferry on the last lap of her jour-

ney to the island. What would she find there? She hardly dared to guess. She could only hope that fate would be kinder to her this time. If she failed again she knew that she would not be able to return to the mansion on Beacon Street. She would have to face the world on her own.

A shadow crossed her pretty young face as she stood there by the ferry's railing, prim in the plain black dress and black bonnet which her Aunt Ivy had insisted she wear. These drab clothes were to stifle any vanity which she might possess and also to help to ward off the attentions of any males. Sabrina felt bitterly that her outfit would do exactly that.

She was lost in her thoughts when a voice at her elbow asked, "Is this your first visit to Dark Harbor?"

She turned to see a buxom, pleasant-faced woman in her thirties. The woman wore a light green dress and a white bonnet tied under her chin. Sabrina told her, "Yes. I have never been on the island before."

"I hope you like it," the woman said. "I can't judge what anyone from the mainland might think since I've been an islander all my life and I'm married to one."

Sabrina smiled. "I'm sure it must be pleasant. It is a famous whaling center, isn't it?"

"It was," the buxom woman declared. "But there's a slump in whaling now. Brought on by the refining of the earth oil, they say. Whale oil is no longer required. It's a sad day for most of us on the island. Money is scarce and dozens of ships are tied up in the harbor."

"I didn't know," she said.

"You wouldn't, not being an islander," the woman said with a friendly look on her round, pink face. "May I ask if you are a young widow?"

Startled, she stared at the woman and asked, "What ever gave you that idea? No!"

"I'm sorry," the woman apologized. "But so seldom do I ever see a girl your age in black unless she is in mourning."

Sabrina smiled grimly. "It is my aunt's opinion of a modest attire."

"It is all of that," the buxom woman said. "I oughtn't to have mentioned it. But then I talk too much. My name is Miller, Mrs. Julia Miller."

"I'm glad to know you, Mrs. Miller," she said.

The friendly woman went on: "My husband's name is Zach-

ary. He was a salior on the whalers, but in this year of 1872 he is trying to be a farmer and he loathes it. We have one child, a little girl. And if heaven smiles on us we shall have a boy. If we do, I intend to name him Zachary after his father. And my Zachary swears that any son of his will be a captain if there is so much as a single ship left afloat."

"I'm sure there will always be ships," Sabrina laughed. "And I think it is a noble ambition to want one's son to be a captain."

"Zachary is ambitious and a saver. I thank the good Lord for that," Mrs. Miller said piously. "We can at least face the coming fall and winter knowing we will not suffer. There are those on the island not nearly so fortunate."

Sabrina gazed in the direction of the island again and saw that it was much nearer; she could make out some of the details of the houses on the hills above Dark Harbor and see the sails of the ships anchored there.

She said, "I believe I'm going to live with a wealthy family. I'm to be employed as governess by a Mrs. Jane Hall."

Mrs. Julia Miller's eyes widened. "The Halls! You are going to work for the Halls!"

She nodded. "Yes. Do you know them?"

"Everyone on the island knows them," the buxom woman said. "You might call them the first family of Dark Harbor. They own one of the big shipping firms. And though their whalers are idle now, the family is still worth a lot of money."

"So I was told."

"It is a fine house," Mrs. Miller informed her. "And I believe Captain Dennis Hall is a good man, though he had a dreadful accident at sea which has left him partially crippled."

"His left arm and leg, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Mrs. Miller said. "He lost the arm, and the leg is badly impaired. You can tell him at a distance by his limp. And with the death of his young wife he seems to have become an old man. He took her death hard."

"Really?"

"Yes," the older woman said solemnly. "Coming after his own accident as it did, it was a terrible blow. But he does have the children. And according to Parson Brown he intends to dedicate his life to raising them and honoring the memory of his dead wife."

"It is a worthy but sad purpose for one's life," she said.

Mrs. Julia Miller nodded. "I couldn't agree more. I see no harm in devoting himself to his children, but to shut himself off from the world and vow never to marry again is sinful in my eyes."

"Perhaps he will change his mind later."

"By then he'll likely be a dried-up old man," Mrs. Miller said. "Of course his mother likes to dominate him. And she's a strange one."

"I'll be working directly for her," she said.

"Then you must be careful," Mrs. Miller warned her. "That woman has moods. She lost her husband at sea long ago. She has been a widow during most of her sons' lives. And she likes nothing more than to dominate them and rule the house."

"Being the only adult female I assume it is her right," Sabrina suggested.

"It is," the buxom woman agreed. "But she makes the most of it, I can promise you. There are times when she withdraws to her room and is seen by no one for perhaps a day and a night. She claims to suffer from a fever contracted in the East when she sailed with her husband to foreign ports. But there are whispers on the island that her problem is opium."

"Opium!"

"Don't breathe that I mentioned this to you," the woman warned her.

"Of course not."

"Doctor Meadows, the only doctor on the island, is getting old and easy for a woman like Mrs. Jane Hall to manage. They say she gets drugs from him, supposedly for her fever but really to fill her need for the drugs themselves. And she regularly goes to the Webster Brothers General Store and buys the large-size bottles of Mrs. Colley's Remedy—and everyone knows that the main thing in the remedy is tincture of opium!"

"What a dreadful addiction for her!"

"Of course, none of the Halls will admit it," Mrs. Miller said. "But I've felt sorry for those two children, Georgette and James. And I'm glad you're going to be looking after them. I can tell you're the sort of young woman who can be trusted."

Sabrina saw that they were getting really close to the harbor now. And she turned to the woman, and asked, "How long does it take to dock?"

"Not long," the older woman said. "And they'll have some-

one at the wharf to meet you. The house is a long distance away. Do you have much luggage?"

"Only a small trunk."

"That will be no problem with a carriage waiting there for you," Mrs. Miller said. "My Zachary is bringing the cart down for me."

Sabrina said, "About the Halls. Isn't there another brother?"

A shadow crossed the pleasant face of the older woman. She said, "I'm glad you mentioned him. I intended to tell you about him and then we began talking about something else."

"Please tell me," she said.

"He's handsome," Mrs. Miller said, as if it were a warning. "A lot better looking than his older brother. And he has an evil reputation as a gambler and a womanizer. He drinks too much as well. He's one of Matt Kimble's best customers. Old Matt owns the tavern on the main street."

"I heard he was wild."

"You didn't hear wrong. And a pretty face like yours in the house will make him uneasy. You'd best be careful of him."

"I'll try."

"I know how difficult it is," the woman agreed. "If he bothers you don't hesitate to tell his mother or his older brother. That ought to keep him at bay."

"I'm glad there will be someone to complain to," she said. "At a place I worked earlier there were only the master and the mistress and she would not take my word against his."

"If you complain about Hilary they'll believe you, since they know him. If he weren't a Hall they would have jailed him many times. I wish he would leave the island but I doubt that he will."

"Why not? I should think he'd prefer the mainland with its attractions for a person like him," Sabrina said.

"He goes there often enough," Mrs. Miller said dourly, "but he always returns. He has an easy living. He goes to the office every day but does very little. And they say he has set his sights on the pretty widow in the estate next to his own mansion, Ann Gray."

"Indeed!"

"But Ann Gray will have nothing to do with him. Or at least her father, Colonel Stephen, will allow her to have nothing to do with Hilary. Colonel Stephen is a stern parent and a veteran of the Civil War. He gives talks to the different groups on the island about his experiences in the Union Army."

"I assume he is also wealthy?"

"People say he has more money than any of the Halls," the buxom woman confided. "But he intends to keep it and not have it squandered by a wastrel like Hilary Hall!"

"What is the daughter like?"

"Ann Gray is most attractive if you like cold, blonde types," Mrs. Miller said with a sigh. "I'm not fond of them myself. Her husband died here on the island of wounds suffered in the Civil War. He was older than she. I believe he was actually a friend of her father, and it was he who urged the match on her, though she didn't love the man!"

"That is always tragic," she said.

"I'm sure she wasn't happy," Mrs. Miller said. "My Zachary did a bit of carpentry work for them after he lost his job on shipboard. He said that two or three times he heard them quarreling."

"And this Gray didn't live long?"

"No. The marriage wasn't a lengthy one. And now Hilary is after her."

"Do you think she has any interest in him?"

"It's hard to say. If she has, her father wouldn't allow her to show it. I do know she was friendly with the late wife of Captain Dennis Hall. And I'd think he is more her type than that Hilary."

"But Captain Dennis Hall isn't interested in finding a wife, you said."

"That is true," the woman lamented. "So you see how perverse life is. I never can properly understand it."

"I find it difficult myself," Sabrina agreed.

Now the ferry was moving into the area of the docks with its sidewheels thrashing as it reversed speed to slow down and gently glide into its proper wharf. All around them in the harbor were giant, masted schooners at anchor. There seemed to be no life aboard them and they made a strange sight.

The wharf to which they slowly moved was lined with people, and there were carriages and wagons waiting in the background. She saw that the wharf was located at the bottom of a steep street lined with gray buildings containing shops.

Mrs. Miller studied the wharf and with elation in her voice informed Sabrina, "I see Zachary! He's there waiting for me!"

"I'm glad," she said. "I wonder if there's anyone waiting for me!"

Mrs. Miller was silent a moment and then she exclaimed,

"You needn't worry about that! There is! I can see that young rogue of a Hilary Hall standing there on the wharf!" She gave Sabrina a warning glance. "It seems you're to be put to the test at once!"

CHAPTER FOUR

The ferry gave a loud blast as it finally came to a halt beside the dock with a jarring thud. Horses below deck began a nervous whinnying and pounding about while a cluster of passengers gathered excitedly at the dock side of the ship and began sorting out those waiting to meet them. There were jovial cries from ship to shore and back again.

Mrs. Miller touched Sabrina's arm and, above the clamor, cried out to her, "Do get in touch with me after you are settled in your new job."

"Thank you, I will," she promised.

"Anyone can tell you where I live," Mrs. Miller said. And with a nod and a smile she moved on to leave the ship.

The crew were putting out planks to join ship and shore. And within a very short time she joined the others in marching up onto the wharf.

She saw the dandified young man whom Mrs. Miller had pointed out as Hilary Hall obviously taking note of all the female passengers as he kept a lookout for her. Now that she was nearer to him she was better able to take stock of his various attributes. He was of medium size and he had features almost too even, so that they had little character in them. He was what might be called handsome in a weak way. His light gray trousers and blue coat were smartly cut and he wore a

tall, gray silk hat. Indeed, he was dressed far more elaborately than any of the other males gathered there.

Deciding she had better take over the situation she crossed to him and said, "Are you Mr. Hall?"

He at once doffed his top hat to reveal slicked-back yellowish hair. "I am Hilary Hall, yes. And are you by any chance Miss Wyler?"

"I am," she said.

He offered her a smile of undeniable charm. "Then you must know that I have been sent here to meet you."

"Thank you," she said. "That is very kind of you."

"It is my older brother's children you are to look after," he went on hurriedly to say, as if anxious to establish this point. "What about luggage?"

"I have only one small trunk," she said. "It should soon be taken off the ferry."

"If you'll excuse me for a moment I'll take care of it," the young man said. And he put his hat on again and with his pearl-headed cane under his arm languidly made his way to where the crew was discharging the freight from the vessel.

She watched with some interest as he very casually touched one of the workers with the end of his cane to get his attention. And when he had done this he spoke to the man, apparently describing her trunk. That his method worked was proved a moment later when she saw the worker swing the trunk up onto the wharf beside the young man. He gave the seaman something and then walked straight up the wharf to a group of waiting carriages. He singled one out and told the coachman where the trunk was, again pointing with his cane. And when he'd started the coachman on his way to carry up the trunk he came back to her at the same languid pace.

He said, "I have your trunk. So we may as well go back and sit in the carriage. John will have the trunk packed on it in a matter of minutes."

She smiled. "You're very efficient."

"I'm used to this," he said. "We journey back and forth a lot. This is your first trip over here, I presume."

"It is," she said, as they strolled back to the carriage together. "I had never heard of Dark Harbor or Pirate Island."

"Your education must have been greatly neglected," he said jokingly.

"It must have been."

"I doubt if we're all that important," he said. "Especially

now that the whaling business has come to an end. I spend my days in the office trying to dispose profitably of our fleet."

"Then you have no hope of the whaling having a revival?"

"None," the young man said firmly. "We have come to the end of our era. Now the refined earth oil will take over until one day some new fuel takes its place."

They had reached the carriage and he helped her up onto the rear seat of the open vehicle and then got up and took the seat beside her. At about the same time the big coachman arrived puffing with her trunk and worked for a little lashing it on the back of the carriage. When he finished he climbed up onto the driver's seat.

He turned a dour face to them and asked, "Shall I start back?"

"Do, John," Hilary Hall urged. "The sun is very warm. I'll enjoy moving along. We'll get more breeze."

"Yes, sir," the coachman said and he flicked his whip and the prize team of bays started off.

They drove up the cobblestoned main street and she had a better chance to examine the shops as they went by. None of them was large except a single general store and Kimble's Tavern and Inn. At the head of the street they took a sidestreet which was little more than a country lane. And they followed roads like this as they climbed steadily upward to the highest point of the island.

Along the way Hilary Hall leaned on his cane and gave her a flattering amount of attention. He asked her, "Have you ever been a governess before?"

"Yes," she told him.

His eyes twinkled. "You don't look the type, you know. I rather expect governesses to be severe middle-aged women or very precise, plain young females. You're neither."

"Which proves there isn't any particular type of governess," she suggested.

"Probably not," he said as the carriage rolled on. "Do you enjoy working with children?"

"Yes. I like their honesty."

He nodded. "My niece and nephew score well on that."

"And it is a job. There are not all that many posts available for young women."

Hilary showed mild amusement. "Are you omitting the all important role of wife and mother which is supposed to be the ultimate goal of every woman?"

"I'm hardly ready for that role yet," she said evenly. "So I must content myself with the task of being teacher and foster mother."

"Well, you have it all clear in your head," he said. "I wish I could be all that sure about myself."

"Aren't you?"

"Not at all. I'm a half-dozen different persons, with an equal number of ambitions, and I'm not sure I approve of any of them."

She said, "Maybe that's the ideal state. At least life will not ever be dull for you."

"Has it been for you?" he asked.

"Sometimes," she said. "I have even occasionally found life frightening."

He eyed her with new interest. "Really? I'm sorry. Well, I hope you won't find anything to be frightened about at our home."

"I'm sure that I won't," she said. "I look forward to meeting the children."

"They'll be glad to see you," he assured her. "They miss their mother. She died about eighteen months ago and her loss is still felt by us all."

"I'm sure it must be."

He frowned. "My bother has been the hardest hit. But that is another story, too long to go into now. The children have been in the care of a maid most of the time. And occasionally a very charming, young widow who lives next to us has entertained them."

"How good of her," Sabrina said.

Hilary Hall raised his eyebrows. "Well, she has nothing else to do. I doubt that it is any great sacrifice for her." As he said this the carriage came out in the open before a large, wooden mansion of majestic ornateness. "Here we are!"

"You have a big place," she said, taking in the impressive front entrance with its arch over the door. She also was struck by the large wings on either side of the main building and the captain's walk atop the roof.

As the carriage came to a halt before the entrance he jumped down lightly and assisted her to the ground. He told the coachman, "John, drive around to the rear and see that Miss Wyler's trunk is taken up the back stairs to her room."

"Right away, Mr. Hilary," the coachman said, and he drove off around the old mansion.

She mounted the front steps with him and as they entered the semi-darkness of the reception hall she found herself feeling nervous. She knew that within a few minutes she would be meeting her actual employer and she worried whether or not she'd stand the test.

Hilary removed his hat and frowned as he glanced around. "My brother is probably off on one of his walks. He visits the cemetery twice a day and it is a fair distance from here. But I rather expected my mother to be here to greet you."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I can go directly to my room and meet everyone later."

"No need," he said, glancing up the broad stairway which led to the other regions of the mansion. "Here she comes now!"

And this was correct. Her hand clutching the railing as if to protect her from giddiness, a tall, frail-looking gray-haired woman came slowly down the stairs in a gliding movement which made it seem as if she were floating down. Her loose-fitting white dress added to this illusion.

Hilary went forward to meet her and said respectfully, "Mother, this is Miss Wyler, the new governess."

Mrs. Jane Hall had a gaunt, patrician face, with deep-set piercing eyes her most prominent feature. She gazed at Sabrina and then moved over to her as if to inspect her more closely.

Her first words uttered in a low voice, were, "I thought you would be much older."

Sabrina said, "I expected that my aunt would give you my age."

"I don't recall that she did," the old woman said in the low voice with a strained undertone to it, as if the very effort of talking were painful to her.

"She's had experience." Hilary spoke up. "I'm sure she'll do very well."

His mother's piercing eyes fixed on the young man with a suggestion of scorn in them. In her low, rather pained voice she said, "We can get along without you now. I'll call you if I need you for anything."

Hilary hesitated, and Sabrina thought that he was going to protest; but then he simply nodded and said, "All right. You know where to find me."

"I do," his mother said, and with chin upraised she waited for him to bow and slowly make his way up the stairs.

Then, not unkindly, the older woman said, "Let us go to my private parlor. We can talk more frankly there."

"Thank you," she said and she followed the tall woman down the hallway until they came to a door which led to a nicely furnished sitting room. "In here," she indicated, and so Sabrina followed her into the room.

Mrs. Jane Hall took one of the several comfortable big chairs and studied her. "I can see you have a hint of the Wyler look," she intoned.

"Thank you for hiring me, madam," she said.

"It wasn't I who thought about you," she said. "It was Mrs. Gray, a widow who lives next door, who had heard of you. Somehow she knew you were available for work."

"It was kind of you both, madam," she said carefully.

"Not all that kind," the pale older woman said. "You'll work for your money here. The children are as good as any their age but they can present problems."

"Yes, madam," she said.

"My son Dennis, the father of the children, will interview you when he returns from visiting his wife's grave at the cemetery," Mrs. Hall explained in her slow fashion.

"Yes, madam," she said quietly.

"You behave in a servile manner and yet I don't see you as a servile person," Mrs. Hall said. "You are a Wyler. I do not want you continually to kowtow to me. You're not a servant. Be respectful and when it comes naturally to you say Mrs. Hall. Let us dispense with the 'madams'!"

"Very well," Sabrina said with the ghost of a smile.

"Fine! Now I see you as a real person and not some sort of cardboard character," the frail woman in white said. "You like children, I hope?"

"I do!"

"And you enjoy the outdoors?"

"I do," she said. "I spent a great deal of my own youth in the outdoors at our country home. I have missed it in Boston."

"You would," Mrs. Hall agreed, the deep-set eyes studying her. "I rarely go outdoors. When I do I always wear a wide-brimmed hat or carry a parasol. The sun makes me ill."

"I'm sorry."

The gray-haired woman waved a slim hand to dispose of the problem. "It is a small thing. My health is not all it should be. I have periods when I'm confined to my room and must not be disturbed. Then the full responsibility for my grandchildren

shall be yours. You cannot properly depend on males to oversee children, can you?"

"It is seldom done, Mrs. Hall."

"Exactly," the frail woman answered. "You may have noticed that my younger son, Hilary has a great deal of charm."

"He was very nice to me on the drive here."

"Don't be deceived by him. His charm is completely superficial."

"I'm not sure I understand," Sabrina said cautiously.

The older woman gave her a warning look. "My son Hilary is not to be trusted. And this is especially true where young women are concerned. For your own safety and to preserve my family from any chance of scandal, I'm warning you now. Keep a distance from him whenever possible. Do not become too friendly with him."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hall," she said. "I shall remember your warning."

"It is difficult for a mother to speak of such things," the frail aristocrat said wearily. "But unfortunately I know my son and his weaknesses."

"I understand."

"It is different with Dennis, the father of the children. He is a true gentleman and will give you no trouble. Though I dare say you have learned to look after yourself."

"I try," she said. "Sometimes it can be awkward."

"Yes. That is true," the older woman said. "I'll ring for Mrs. Barber, and she will show you to your room. And when you have taken time to unpack and freshen up, come down to the nursery which is here on the first floor—the big room at the rear of the house and on the right. One of the maids will be there with the children, and she will introduce you to them."

"I shall look forward to that," she said.

"Yes. They are good children," Mrs. Hall said wearily. She rose and went to a draw cord with a tassel on the wall and gave it two firm pulls. "That will fetch Mrs. Barber," she told Sabrina.

And it did. Almost at once a short, stocky woman with a stern face and her hair done up in a topknot presented herself. Her lips were set firmly as she took Sabrina in at a glance.

"Yes, madam," the housekeeper said.

"This is the new governess, Miss Sabrina Wyler," Mrs. Hall said. "I want you to show her to her room and see that she is properly taken care of."

"Yes, madam," Mrs. Barber answered.

"She will take her meals with the children and on occasion she will eat with us," Jane Hall continued in her low voice. And now she turned to Sabrina and with a small frown said, "That black dress and bonnet are grotesque!"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hall," she said in surprise.

"I mean it," the older woman declared. "You should not be wearing mourning black. It is most depressing. Do you have anything else?"

"I have a pale yellow dress," she said. "And a white one. And another black skirt."

"Put on the yellow," Jane Hall ordered her. "At least it will be cheerful. I'll speak to Dennis and have him purchase some other more suitable clothing for you or it may be that we can find some here. You look to be about the same size as my late daughter-in-law, Louise, and I know Dennis has most of her clothing still stored away somewhere."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hall," she said.

"Take her to her room now, Mrs. Barber," the frail Jane Hall said. "I'm weary. I must rest."

On the heels of this regal dismissal the stocky housekeeper silently led Sabrina along the hall and then up the rear stairs, which were notably narrower and steeper than the gracious front stairway. By this time Sabrina had become accustomed to taking the less splendid ways of traveling about the houses in which she was employed.

Not until they were on the stairs did Mrs. Barber speak to her. Then the older woman said sourly, "The madam doesn't think the maids good enough to take care of the children. She doesn't care whether they receive love or not. She wants them brought up to have airs."

She ventured a small smile and asked, "Do you really think it is that? I'm sure it's more their studies which she wants attended to. Children mustn't get behind in their learning."

The stocky woman gave her a hostile glance. "Their father, poor man, has been doing that. And a fine teacher he is. And it is good for him to have something to take his mind off his sorrow, if only for a little. Now that you are here he'll have nothing to do."

This was something she knew nothing about. So she said, "I did not know he'd been tutoring them."

"And they've been doing well," Mrs. Barber said grimly. "Fine, healthy children they are in spite of everything. And

my own niece, a proper, trained lady's maid, has been looking after them."

"I'm glad to hear they've been well looked after. It will make my work less difficult," she said, as they halted before the door of a room at the rear of the third floor.

Mrs. Barber eyed her dubiously. "I'm not blaming you. You wouldn't know. It was that Gray woman! She's always interfering! Hoping to snare Mister Dennis! But she never will!" And she opened the door. "In here."

Sabrina went into the room and saw that her trunk was there on the floor. It wasn't a large room and the furniture consisted of a bed, two plain chairs, a dresser with a streaky-looking mirror, a commode with an enamel basin and pitcher, and a skimpy rug.

Mrs. Barber crossed the room and pulled back a curtain. "This is a closet," she said. "It should do since you haven't many clothes."

"That and the dresser will do nicely," she said. "Where are the children's rooms in relation to mine?"

"Down below," the stocky woman said. "On the second floor, almost directly beneath you."

"Fine! Then it won't be too difficult for me to reach them if they need me."

"No, just one flight between you," the housekeeper said. "You are from the mainland?"

"Yes."

"You'll find it different over here."

"I think I'm going to like it," she said.

"Maybe," the woman said dourly as she moved to the door to leave. "And then there may be some things you won't like! Especially about this house!" And with that parting comment she left.

Sabrina sighed. It seemed that things had a way of delicately balancing themselves. She had feared that Mrs. Jane Hall might be difficult to work for and instead found her disarmingly frank and rather pleasant. But in contrast Mrs. Barber, the housekeeper, was almost openly hostile since she felt she was taking her niece's job from her. So she would have to continually exercise diplomacy in dealing with the major domo of the household staff. There was always something!

Kneeling before her trunk, she unlocked and opened it and began to unpack. One of the first things she brought out was her yellow dress, and she carefully set it out on the bed to put it

on later. At least Mrs. Hall had freed her of wearing the ugly black her Aunt Ivy had imposed on her.

She kept on with the unpacking until she'd finished. In all it took only a little more than a half-hour. Then she washed and put on the fresh yellow dress and was at once pleased by the improvement it made in her. She was glad the children would see her in it when they met for the first time. First impressions were terribly important, especially so with children.

She realized that she was hungry. Aside from a light lunch which she'd taken on board the ferry with her she'd had nothing since her early breakfast. She decided to go down and meet the children first and then seek out some food.

This time she went down the front stairway, as she felt she would be using it when she had the children with her and she wanted to become familiar with it. The front part of the house bore precious little resemblance to her plain room. The walls were paneled in rich dark wood with fine paintings hung upon them. The stairway was carpeted in fine oriental style. And the rugs which covered the floors of the halls and main rooms were select choices from Persia and India. She recognized them from their similarity to the ones in her aunt's Beacon Street place.

She made her way rather hesitantly along the corridor running to the rear of the house, listening for some sound of the youngsters. She finally heard their cries and laughter from the room which Mrs. Hall had described to her. She knocked on the door and there was a silence within. After a moment the door was slowly opened by a rather attractive girl with tousled brown hair. The girl looked almost frightened at seeing her.

"You're the new one!" she said, wide-eyed.

She smiled pleasantly. "Yes. I'm the new governess. My name is Sabrina—Sabrina Wyler."

The girl looked a little less nervous as she said, "I'm Emma."

"I'm glad to meet you, Emma. Are the children inside?" She knew that they were, but wanted to make it easy for the girl.

"Yes, they're here," the girl said awkwardly, and she drew back the door for her to enter the nursery. It was a large room with a fireplace, chairs, a divan and stacks of children's books and all varieties of toys.

Standing staring at her from a position they'd taken before the fireplace were a white-haired boy of six or thereabout who would be James, and his slightly taller fair-haired sister, Georgette. Both children had rather thin, intelligent faces and

looked older in the face than youngsters of their age usually did.

She advanced to them with a smile. "Hello," she said. "I'm Sabrina and I've come to help you with your lessons." She held out her hand to Georgette first.

Georgette made no effort to take it. In fact she quickly held her hands behind her back as she said, "My father leads our lessons."

"But he needs someone to help him," Sabrina said and turned to James with a smile.

The white-haired boy looked sulky. "Emma can help him."

"Emma has other things to do," she said. "But I'm sure she'll be around to see you whenever you like. Isn't that so, Emma?"

The girl with the tousled head of brown hair looked a little less upset. "Yes, I suppose so," she said.

Sabrina took them all in with her most engaging smile. "So you see, nothing will really be changed, except that you'll have me around, extra. I'll show you some good new games and we'll go for long walks in the fields and along the seashore and I'll tell you things about nature. It will be fun!"

The children exchanged glances as if they weren't convinced of this. Then Georgette said, "Do you like to play croquet?"

"Yes, I do," she said. "Why?"

The sulky James was actually smiling. "Because we like to play. Our mother used to play croquet with us and Emma doesn't know how."

"Well, I do," she said. "And I'll not only play with you but I'll teach Emma when I get time."

Emma also brightened. "Would you?"

"Of course. We can arrange when you have time off and I'm not busy. It isn't all that hard."

"Thank you, miss," Emma said.

"Please call me Sabrina," she said. "And I want you to do the same, children. My name is Sabrina."

"Can we have a game of croquet this afternoon, Sabrina?" Georgette wanted to know.

"Later," she said. "First, I have to get something to eat and then I should see your father. But we ought to have plenty of time after that. Meanwhile, you go on playing with Emma."

James eyed her with the appraising frankness of a six-year-old, and declared, "You're not so bad after all."

"We were going to hate you," Georgette confessed.

Sabrina laughed and patted them on the heads. "That would be such a waste of time. I'd much rather we all played croquet."

She left the two children in a happy mood with Emma to oversee them and went on to the kitchen. It was a huge room with a stone floor and two big stoves. It was presided over by a woman of mammoth size with three younger female helpers. The big woman came over to meet Sabrina at once.

"Yes, miss," she said. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm the new governess, Sabrina Wyler," she said.

The cook nodded. "Mrs. Barber said you'd arrived. I'm Mrs. Stevens, the cook. Is there something you want?"

She smiled wanly. "To be frank, I'm hungry. I haven't had too much to eat all day."

Mrs. Stevens said, "Do you want me to make you up a tray and send it to the nursery?"

"No," she said. "There's no need for any such fuss. Just sit me at the end of a table here and let me have anything that isn't a bother to you."

Mrs. Steven's fat, red face broke into a smile. "Well, I must say you're a proper lady. I like that! No airs! It's a sign of the real thing!"

"Thank you," she said.

"Come over here," the big woman said, waddling across the stone floor. She halted by a table against the wall and pulled out a chair for Sabrina to sit down. "Do you like cold ham?" she asked.

"Yes, I do."

"I'll get you some and some hashed potatoes and peas and some fresh apple pie," the cook told her.

She sat down amid the heavenly odors of the kitchen, and her hunger increased. Within a matter of minutes Mrs. Stevens came over with a heaping plate of food and her feast began. It ended a quarter-hour later with the pie, cheese, and coffee.

She touched a napkin to her mouth and said, "You've spoiled me. I haven't had such a meal in ages."

The fat cook looked pleased. "We have good food here," she said.

"I'm sure of that," she agreed. "Thank you for your kindness."

"Don't rush away," Mrs. Stevens said. "Let me tell you, I'm glad the master has hired someone to take care of those chil-

dren properly. Emma means well but she isn't trained for the work."

"I know what you mean," she said.

The stout woman gave her a meaningful look. "I suppose you heard what happened to their mother?"

"Typhoid, wasn't it?" she asked.

"The doctor thought so. But he wasn't sure." The cook glanced around to make sure all her helpers were busy at the stoves before she leaned close to Sabrina to whisper confidentially, "There are those who believe it was the curse."

She stared at the woman, not sure that she'd heard right. "Did you say the curse?"

"I did," Mrs. Stevens said. "The curse of the Halls! It has been the talk of the island. You haven't heard?"

"No."

Mrs. Stevens didn't seem to know where to begin. She hesitated and said, "You know how the curse started?"

"I'm afraid not."

Mrs. Stevens glanced at her helpers again and when she was sure they were occupied at a distance, she said, "It began some time ago. It was when the master's father was alive. He was a quick-tempered, hard sort of man. We have a monastery on the island which cares for lepers. The monks look after the poor lost souls. It began a long way back when a ship was wrecked here and the sailors remained to live on the island and marry some of the island girls. Then their sickness showed itself and the doctors came and said it was leprosy."

"How terrifying!"

"It was," the cook agreed. "And it was then the monks came and built their monastery and dedicated themselves to looking after the lepers. And other cases came here from places where they'd heard about the monastery. It was the custom for the monks to come calling at the doors of the big houses just before the Christmas season, and one of them came here to ask the old master for a donation. The monk was a leprosy victim himself, they claim, a sad sight with part of his face eaten away by the loathsome disease. And the old master kept him waiting outside the door for near a half-hour in the cold and then ordered him away without giving him anything."

"That was cruel of him!"

"His wife, Mrs. Jane, was distressed. And that was when she first began to fail in health. The word came that on the way

back to the monastery the ailing priest collapsed by the side of the road and froze to death before he was found. It was a bitter winter that year!"

"I can't imagine that this would make the master of the house popular on the island."

The cook's fat face showed grimness. "He didn't mind that. He wasn't like his sons Mister Dennis and Mister Hilary. Neither of them is a money pincher, but he was. And he bragged about his meanness. It was not long after the monk died that folks first saw the ghost here."

"Ghost?"

"Yes. The ghost of the monk. Folks saw him wandering about the house and grounds in his cowed robe and with his face all consumed from the leprosy. And it is claimed those who see the ghost three times never live to tell about it."

Sabrina found herself shocked by the eerie story. She said, "People really take this ghost story seriously?"

The cook nodded. "There are those who won't come near the house after dark. And few of us venture about alone in the night. I know at least two of the staff who have seen the ghost."

"I'm glad you told me about it," she said. "At least now if anyone refers to the hauntings I'll know what they're talking about."

The cook gave her a worried look. "And you be careful for yourself and keep a special sharp eye on the children."

"You think they are in danger?"

"I do," the woman said. "And I know how much store the master sets by them. I believe the ghost brought about their mother's death and it will do the same to them if they aren't protected."

She gave the big woman an incredulous look. "Do you mind telling me how one seeks protection from a ghost?"

"Stay close to the children. Give them your best care," was the cook's advice.

"And if that isn't enough?"

"Then nothing will be able to save them," the big woman said with some drama in her manner.

"Don't say a thing like that!" she said, awed by the woman's apparent sincerity.

"It's true. Unless a miracle happens the poor children are doomed."

"You think the curse is directed at them particularly."

"They say that is what the ghost has vowed. To wipe out the Hall family. And what better way than through the children?"

"It sounds like primitive superstition," Sabrina worried.

"You wait and you'll find out," Mrs. Stevens warned her.

"There are forces at work right now to take those children's lives."

"You sound so certain of it," she worried.

"I am," the cook declared. "The mother of the youngsters died from the curse, I say, and look at poor Mr. Dennis, a living wreck with one arm gone and his leg not right. I say there is a curse, miss, and I warn you again—it's casting a shadow over this house and its people at this very minute!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Sabrina left the kitchen filled with the cook's good food and also with her dire premonitions. The ghost story the cook had told her was a chilling one, and the suggestion that there was a curse on all the Hall family surely wasn't comforting. She found herself feeling differently about the old mansion. It suddenly seemed to have taken on a brooding atmosphere of evil.

She attempted to discount her feelings and realized that her changed attitude was a great deal more due to what she'd heard from the pessimistic cook than from actual fact. Now she made her way back to the front of the house in the hope of being able to present herself to her employer, Captain Dennis Hall.

Just as she reached the reception hall, a man appeared in the doorway leading from the living room. On seeing her, he came limping toward her and she recognized at once that he must be her employer. He was somewhere in his late thirties, but his hair was already tinged with gray, his left sleeve was empty and pinned to his black jacket, and his face—while as handsome as Hilary's—had a gaunt, troubled look.

He halted before her and said, "You are the new governess?"

"Yes," she said. "And you must be Captain Hall."

"That is correct," he said soberly, his stern gray eyes studying her closely. "You have just arrived?"

"Yes," she said. "Mr. Hilary met me at the ferry and brought me here. I have talked with your mother and the children. I'm also settled in my room."

"I see," he said, his face showing an uneasy look. "Let us go to my study where we can talk more comfortably."

"Of course," she said.

He led the way back down the hall to the study, a large book-lined room with rich mahogany furniture. Over the fireplace was the portrait of a stern looking man in a captain's uniform who strongly resembled both Hilary and this older brother.

She gazed up at the portrait. "Is that your father?"

Captain Dennis Hall joined her in studying the painting and said, "Yes. That was done shortly before his death."

"I can see that you and your brother resemble him," she said.

"Yes. I've been told that many times," he said. "Won't you take a chair?"

She sat in a tall-backed chair by the desk and he limped over behind the desk to stand there staring at her again. He seemed to be trying to make up his mind about her.

He asked, "How is your aunt?"

"Very well," she said. "Not so busy now that the Boston social season is over for the summer."

Captain Dennis Hall looked bleak. "As I remember it she was the leader of her set. I imagine she still is."

"She organizes a great many affairs," she said. She had bitter memories of being a drudge in helping her aunt with the ground work of some of the social ventures but she could not tell this near stranger that.

He sighed and sat down behind his desk. "You are familiar with the background of things here? You know that not too long ago I suffered the tragic loss of my wife?"

"Yes. I heard that," she said. "I'm very sorry."

"Thank you," he said, his gaunt face somber. "Naturally, my two children mean a great deal to me."

"Naturally."

"I have a dear friend, a widow named Mrs. Ann Gray, who had been my wife's best friend. And during my wife's illness she came here and acted as her nurse. It was a devotion which shamed me by its selflessness. And since my wife's

death Mrs. Gray has tried to guide me in caring for my children."

Sabrina said, "You are fortunate to have such a friend."

"I think so," he agreed. "And it was she who suggested your name to me. She had heard of you from someone when she was visiting in Boston. And she urged me to write to your aunt and inquire if you were free to take on the post of governess here."

"I had no idea I had such a benefactor," she said. "If we meet, I must thank her."

"You shall meet," he promised. "The lady lives on the next estate with her father."

"I see," she said politely.

Captain Hall frowned and sat up in his chair as if he were having difficulty going on. He cleared his throat and said, "Unhappily when your aunt wrote me she did not tell me all about your background. And I'm sure Mrs. Gray knew nothing about you other than that you'd been a governess. But through a friend of my mother's who visited here a week or two ago from Boston, I learned something concerning you which has disturbed me."

"Really?" she said, trying to sound calm though she knew well what he was referring to. She added, "I hope it was nothing to my discredit which came to your ears."

"Unfortunately, it was," he said, giving her a troubled look at the same time.

She said, "Pray tell me what you heard."

"This friend of my mother's said that you had been involved in a rather nasty situation. That a child whom you were in charge of burned to death. And that it happened through your negligence."

"Not true!"

"Wait," he said. "The woman claimed that the parents blamed you entirely and that you were discharged on the spot. She also said that it was not the first post from which you'd been let go. From what she said you were working for your aunt because no one else would consider hiring you."

"Those are most malicious lies," she said bitterly.

He looked at her with a hint of sympathy. "I'm quite willing to hear your side of it."

So she told him, finishing with, "I had warned the little girl to keep away from the fireplace, but she'd deliberately ignored my warning."

He sat staring at her for a moment. Then he said, "The way I see it, Miss Wyler, is that I either have to take the woman's word or yours. I cannot see why she would lie or repeat malicious gossip about you if she didn't feel it to be true. She didn't know you and so can have nothing against you."

Her cheeks were burning as she said, "I'm sure she thought she was justified in warning you but I can tell you that the information given to her was wrong. Likely it had passed from tongue to tongue of a dozen gossips before she heard her garbled version of it."

"You think so?"

"The charges are unfair. What else can I think?"

"I want to believe you," he said. "Especially after having brought you all the way here."

"I can't deny the child was burned to death," she continued. "But it was I who rescued her and fought the flames until they were out."

"Commendable," he said with an approving nod. "But in view of what happened, I'm worried about your taking over my own two youngsters."

"I will give of my best to them," she said.

"No doubt," he said. "And since Mrs. Gray discovered you for me and sets great store by your talents, I hate to disappoint her by sending you back to Boston. She would feel it was her fault."

Sabrina looked down at her folded hands on her lap. "You must make the decision, Captain Hall," she said.

"I'm quite willing to pay you for time lost and pay for your expenses here and back to Boston," he said. "I'd rather be a lot out-of-pocket and feel satisfied my children were in the best of hands."

"I understand."

He sighed again. "I must say I like the personal impression I get of you. I had decided to send you back directly and keep Emma for the children, with myself to tutor them. But having met you, I can realize that you are competent and a cut above the usual sort of female available for such a position."

"What do you fear about me?"

"Simply that you might neglect my children."

"I have never been guilty of that anywhere. The little girl's death was an accident. You know how easily these things can happen even when one exercises care."

A shadow crossed his gaunt face. "I know it only too well."

Several times my own youngsters have nearly been the victims of freak accidents."

"And you have not stinted yourself in minding them?" she said.

"I have dedicated myself to them," he said. "I made a vow at my wife's deathbed that they should be my only concern in the years ahead. And I have kept that vow."

She said, "I respect your feelings and I shall understand if you prefer that I return to Boston—though I am not sure that my Aunt Ivy will."

The handsome captain frowned and rested his hands on the desk before him. "I wish to be fair."

"I'm sure you do."

"So let us make a compromise."

"Of what sort?"

"Suppose I allow you to remain here for a week or two on trial. And if I'm not satisfied at the end of that time, you will ask no questions if I suggest you leave."

It was a better set of terms than she'd hoped for in view of his wariness of her. So she said, "That is all right as far as I'm concerned."

He looked relieved. "Thank you. That is kind of you. My mother liked you on sight and recommended that I show some tolerance in this matter. And I'm happy to do so. As you know I have been tutoring the children."

"Yes. Emma told me."

"I'll show you their books and tell you how far I've gone in them," he said. "And you can pick up their daily lessons from there. Emma has been taking actual physical care of them, of course."

"May I offer a suggestion, captain?"

"Why not?"

"As an extra precaution and because she has surely been very good with the children, why not keep Emma on as a sort of assistant to me. I wouldn't require her services full time, but she could give me an hour now and then."

"It's an interesting thought," the handsome man said.

"I'm sure the children are fond of her and she of them," Sabrina said. "It would be less of an emotional jolt for them to have her stay on with them part time."

"I like the idea," he said. "I'm glad that you suggested it. And I will act on it. Emma shall remain as your assistant, to be called on whenever you need her."

"Thank you, captain," she said.

"I hope you will not allow the things I've said to make any difference between us," he said, seriously. "I believe one should be completely frank."

"I agree."

"So I brought this tragic business out into the open," he went on. "And now that we have come to an understanding I shall put it out of my mind completely. You must believe that."

She managed a forlorn smile. "It gives me some comfort to hear you say it."

He rose and limped around the side of the desk to stand and study her with one of his own rare smiles. He said, "You are such a fine lady I find it hard to understand that you should be seeking this type of employment. Surely your aunt and uncle could launch you into society."

"My aunt and uncle have stern feelings about their money," she said. "They feel it should be used only for their own children. My father was a schoolmaster and left me nothing but my education."

"I can see that he did a first-class job in that," Captain Hall said. "While you are with us, I wish you to consider yourself a member of our family rather than a servant. And I shall explain your status to the children."

"You are very kind," she said.

He waved this away. "Not at all. Mrs. Gray and her father, Colonel Stephen, are coming to dinner tonight. She is anxious to meet you, since you are here on her recommendation. I'd like you to join us for dinner at seven."

"Thank you," she said, awkwardly. "I'm afraid I have no really fancy clothes."

He studied her. "What you have on will do very well," he said. "We are not all that stylish here on the island, though I do believe that one should regard dinner as a formal affair. Even during my days on board ship my officers attended dinner in full dress. It was a fetish of mine."

She rose. "I'm delighted to meet you," she said. "And I shall look forward to meeting your friends."

"Yes," he said, with a thoughtful look at her again. "You have met Hilary."

"At the wharf. He came for me."

"I believe my mother requested it," Captain Hall said. "I

had gone off to the cemetery and completely forgotten it was the day for your arrival."

"Your brother was very kind."

He gave her a sharp look. "Was he?" And he seemed about to say something else, then appeared to change his mind. He said, "I won't keep you any longer, Miss Wyler."

She left the study with the conviction that the strange, gaunt, yet handsome man had been about to warn her of his brother. But at the last moment he'd thought better of it. He seemingly did not know that his mother had already offered her a blunt warning about the danger presented by her wayward son. It was a strange situation in the old mansion.

Her impression of Captain Dennis Hall was that he had not yet recovered from the tragic blow of his wife's death. Seemingly his closest friend was this widow who lived next door. But it was clear that, while he was grateful to Mrs. Ann Gray, he had no thought of showing a romantic interest in her. Sabrina had an idea this must be extremely frustrating to the widow who had offered him such kindness and who was herself without a mate.

She returned to the nursery and found Georgette and James playing a game of blocks, with Emma sitting by watching. She quickly told the children that, while she'd be taking over their lessons, Emma would remain on to help her look after them.

Georgette at once came to her and threw her arms around her neck and with a smile of happiness on her serious little face said, "I think you are a good person, Sabrina."

"I try to be," she smiled.

A block in his hand, James said, "I shall show you the hole where the mole lives."

"I'd like that," she enthused.

"It is a secret," he let her know. "Just Georgette and I have found it."

She smiled and said, "I'm going to let Emma look after you tonight, as I have to take dinner with the older people and meet Mrs. Gray and her father."

Mention of the woman at once caused a change in the children. They lost their air of gaiety and stood there with stubborn looks on their faces. She was a little astounded at this but did not want to let on that she had noticed. Better to wait and have them come out with what they thought.

The golden-haired Georgette was the first to speak up, saying, "We don't like that lady!"

"No!" James said with disgust. "She's too sweet! She asked us to call her 'mother'! And she isn't our mother!"

"And never will be," Georgette said with a firmness startling in a seven-year-old.

Sabrina glanced over at Emma. "Now what is all this?"

"They don't take to Mrs. Gray, and that's a fact," Emma answered. "Can't say that I blame them. I think she is a false sort, at that."

"I see," she said. "Does she have any children of her own?"

"She has cats!" James said with disgust. "I tried to drown one that scratched me and she had fits!"

"Hysterics!" Georgette corrected him with all the dignity of an older sister. "Her maid had to come with the smelling salts to revive her and she complained to our father."

"Drowning a poor cat would be a cruel thing to do," Sabrina told them.

"They drown kittens!" James informed her. "I saw old Hal-ey doing it. Dropping them in the sea in a bag!"

She sighed. "Yes. It does happen. We live in a cruel world and there are those who are willing to destroy animals and even people. But that doesn't mean it is right or that we should all do it. Animals are the Lord's creatures like ourselves, and deserve respect for what they are."

James was listening to this with the solemn interest of his six years. He asked, "Even pigs?"

"Even pigs have their rights," she said firmly.

Georgette burst into laughter and then quickly placed a hand over her lips. And she managed in her fit of laughter to tell her, "Mrs. Gray's father looks like a pig! A fat pig!"

"The colonel is a pig!" James chanted, picking it up. "The funny old Colonel Stephen is a fat pig!"

"Quiet, children," she rebuked them. "If you shout like that they'll hear it all the way upstairs and we'll all be in trouble. And you shouldn't say such things."

"Will we see you after dinner?" the little girl asked.

"I'm not sure," she said. "But certainly in the morning. I will be starting your lessons in the morning."

She left the children with Emma and went on up to her room. She liked the youngsters for their open dispositions, and felt she would have no difficulty getting along with them. And she was more than a little fascinated by their descriptions of Ann Gray and her father. She knew that children were often critical but they generally saw things pretty much as they

were. She couldn't wait to find out if their descriptions of the two next door truly fitted.

Time passed quickly, and she went down to join the family at dinner a few minutes before seven. As she approached the living room she heard a number of voices and she guessed that the guests had already arrived. And this proved correct. As soon as she entered the room she saw that—in addition to Captain Dennis, Hilary, and their mother—both Mrs. Ann Gray and her father were in the room. Ann Gray was a haughty-looking brunette and her father was bald and stout, and did, truly, look like an overweight pig in clothes.

Captain Dennis limped over to greet her, and said, "Come and meet our guests." And he led her to Ann and her father and made the usual introductions.

Ann Gray summoned a thin smile for her, and said, "You're a bit older and certainly more attractive than I expected from the description your aunt gave me of you."

Blushing, Sabrina said, "I think we make different impressions on people. They see us as they think of us. My Aunt Ivy first saw me as a young, awkward girl, and she continues to think of me that way."

"That must be it!" Ann Gray said, all the time appraising her.

Colonel Stephen was looking at her with his pig-like, tiny eyes and he said, "Wyler is a familiar name. You're not by any chance a relative of Major Christian Wyler of the Pennsylvania Blue?"

She shook her head. "I doubt it. My father was a schoolmaster."

"Oh!" the colonel had no comment to make on that, it seemed. Then he added, "Major Wyler was in the same company with me for a while. Splendid fellow! Great hero! Died at Gettysburg! A lot of them did!"

Ann Gray gave her father a reproving glance. "None of us wishes to hear about Gettysburg again, Father. Certainly Sabrina doesn't. I doubt that she was old enough to realize there was a Civil War going on."

"Yes, I was," she said. "I used to read the newspaper accounts of battles to some of the older folk in our village who couldn't read."

"Battles!" the porcine Colonel Stephen exclaimed. "I can tell you some battle stories that would put you in a swoon!"

"We are here for a pleasant evening, not to swoon," Ann told her father in an annoyed tone.

At that moment Hilary came to Sabrina's rescue, and said, "Come have a glass of sherry. Everyone else is." And he led her to the sideboard and poured out a sherry for her.

"Thank you," she said, taking it.

The handsome Hilary gave her an admiring appraisal. He said, "The yellow dress is an improvement. You look twice as lovely as the girl I met at the wharf."

She was glad they were distant enough from the others so that what they said couldn't be overheard. She said, "I think Mrs. Gray was upset to find me so grown-up."

Hilary laughed. "No question of it. She was the one who had my brother bring you here. Your aunt must have painted a dismal picture of you. Now she sees that you could be a rival for poor old Dennis, and that upsets her."

"You must be joking!"

"I'm serious," he said. "She'd like to marry him, you know. She hovered over his wife during all her illness and she tried to win over the children and failed. I'm willing to marry her but she doesn't trust me. She's right, of course."

Sabrina smiled in spite of herself. "That's not all that funny," she said.

"There are a lot of funny things about us," he assured her. "And some very strange things as well. Have you heard about our ghost? The faceless monk?"

"Yes. But I don't believe in ghosts."

He gave her a knowing look. "Remain here long enough and you will."

"What nonsense are you filling this girl with?" It was his mother, the regal Jane Hall, who had come up to them unnoticed.

Hilary lost none of his poise. "I'm being fabulously wicked, Mother. Trying to charm her into my clutches."

The gray-haired woman gave him a cool look. "I'm sure that would be quite in character."

"Thanks for your confidence in me," her errant son said, and he downed the rest of his sherry.

A smile played about his mother's lips. It was clear that she was fond of her younger son even if she might not approve of him. She said, "You will be shattered to know that I have already warned this child against you. So all your efforts have been wasted!"

"Stalemated!" he exclaimed. "And by my own mother! What an unhappy fate!"

Jane Hall tapped her younger son on the arm with her fan. "It is time for us to go in to dinner. Will you kindly escort Sabrina."

"Delighted," Hilary said with a broad smile for Sabrina. "This could be the most boring dinner party that you have ever attended."

It turned out that he wasn't too far astray in his prediction. She found herself seated between Colonel Stephen and Jane Hall at the head of the table. Jane was in a rather withdrawn mood, and the colonel could only conduct a conversation about one subject, his military exploits.

Captain Dennis proved the most interesting person at the table. And with some prodding from his mother he told some interesting tales of his adventures at sea. His contributions saved the day as far as Sabrina was concerned. While the meal of roast beef was excellent, she was relieved when dessert and coffee were served.

With the finish of the meal the men remained at the dinner table for brandy and cigars. The three women of the party went back to the living room. They could have an after-dinner drink of some sort there or merely more coffee and conversation.

Jane Hall, fragile in a purple gown, at once announced her intention of going up to her room. "Please do excuse me," she begged them. "I have a wretched headache."

"Of course, my dear," Ann Gray said solicitously. "Don't you stay down here a moment longer and suffer. Sabrina and I will understand. And when the men join us I'll explain that you were unwell."

Jane Hall gave the young woman a cool look and said, "Thank you, Ann." She then turned to Sabrina and said, "I hope you enjoyed dinner. You seemed very quiet."

"It was wonderful," she said. "But in a large company I would rather listen than talk."

"No one should complain about that," Jane Hall said dryly. "I'll be talking with you tomorrow. Goodnight." And she turned and swept regally from the room.

Ann Gray at once turned to her and said in a confidential voice, "I'm glad we have this chance of talking without anyone else to hear."

"Oh?" She played it cautiously.

"I want to tell you I have learned something of your past," Ann Gray said, "and I'm worried about whether I was wrong in recommending you to dear Dennis."

Sabrina met the other girl's near-contemptuous glance with a firm look of her own. She said, "Captain Hall and I have already gone over that ground."

The pretty brunette looked shocked. "You have?"

"Yes."

"So he knows about you?"

"He knows that I was once dismissed for negligence," she said sturdily. "But that child's accidental burning was really no fault of mine."

Ann Gray showed her arrogant side. "I don't care to argue the point," she said. "But I will say the person who told me was quite definite in stating the child burned to death because of your laxness."

"I can only tell you it isn't true," she said. And she was doing some quick thinking on her own. It had been the belief of Captain Dennis that this woman hadn't know of her wicked reputation, and yet it was obviously true that she had. And maybe it was for this reason that she had chosen her. She hoped that she would be careless with the children.

Ann Gray glared at her. "Since you claim Dennis knows, I'll say nothing more to him at this point. But I'm worried."

"You have no reason to be," she said.

"We shall see," was the other girl's reply.

And so they were stranded there in the living room with no strong desire to communicate with one another and with the men still absent. Dusk began to show outside the windows.

At last Ann Gray broke the silence between them by saying, "You will not find the children easy to cope with. They are little monsters and I don't care to have anything to do with them."

She said quickly, "They deserve sympathy. Losing their mother was a great shock for them."

Ann's shapely eyebrows lifted. "So you are championing them so soon?"

"I think they deserve it," she said.

Ann smiled sourly. "Wait a while and you might decide to change your mind," she said.

"I doubt it."

The exchange was ended by the men's joining them. At once Colonel Stephen sank into an easy chair and lit himself another cigar. Captain Dennis Hall went to Ann and begged her to play the pianoforte. After a little coaxing she consented. And she and he went over to the piano, she to play and he to turn the music.

As Ann began to play, in a somewhat amateurish fashion, Hilary gave his attention to Sabrina. He said, "Do you play?"

"Some."

"Probably a lot better than she's doing."

"I think so," she said in one of her own concessions to frankness.

Hilary seemed to enjoy this. He said, "You know you are a remarkable young woman!"

"I doubt that," she said.

"I'm sure of it," he insisted. "And I'm glad you're here. Those children need someone. Not that Emma doesn't do her best."

"She's going to continue to help me with them."

"Good!" the young man said. Then he cocked an ear toward the piano, and said, "She's playing a waltz! This is our dance, dear Sabrina!" And without further warning he grasped her around the waist and began to whirl her gracefully around the room in a lively waltz.

It was a most unexpected place to find herself. She wanted to withdraw from his arms and end the dance but she felt this might only draw more attention to the performance. It wasn't that she wasn't enjoying the waltz, but she felt it made her look brazen and cheap to be conducting herself this way on her first night in the old mansion.

The waltz music ended abruptly. She looked in the direction of the piano and saw that Ann was scowling at her over her shoulder. The brunette girl rose from the piano with some acid comment for Captain Dennis and went over to her father. The porcine colonel was asleep in the easy chair.

Going up to him, Ann exclaimed, "Father!"

He coughed, opened his eyes, and looked flustered. "Ah, yes, what is it, my dear?" he asked.

"You were asleep! How disgraceful!"

"Just a brief nod," the colonel said. "A knack I picked up when waiting at the edge of battle. A brief repose can do wonders for you."

"I apologize for him," Ann told Dennis in what seemed real despair. "It is time we returned home. Father is not up to late evenings."

The old man struggled to his feet, looking for all the world like a sleepy pig. "Nonsense," he said. "I have gone without sleep for forty-eight hours on end when in the field!"

"Father!" she reprimanded him like a child. "Come along!" She turned to her. "Goodnight, Sabrina. I'm sure you will find your new post challenging."

"Thank you," she said. "Goodnight."

Captain Dennis saw the two out, which left Sabrina alone with Hilary once again. The handsome wastrel gave her a fond look and said, "I really like you!"

"You hardly know me!" she protested.

"I have the ability to understand people right away," he insisted. "Did my mother really say a lot of bad things about me?"

"She did warn me you'd say things such as you have," she admitted. "But I heard more about you on the ferry coming over. You are quite a subject for gossip on the island, you know."

Hilary looked let down. "Believe me, most of the things you hear about me are lies."

Dennis limped back into the room at this point, and with a grim eye for Hilary told him coldly, "If you will excuse us, I will see Sabrina up to her room."

"Three flights up and your leg hasn't been too well lately," his brother said. "Why not allow me the honor?"

"No," Dennis said firmly. "My leg will withstand the ordeal, and I have some things to say to the young lady."

Hilary shrugged and turned to her. "In that case, I can have only one thing to say: goodnight."

"Goodnight," she said. And she and Dennis left the room, went to the broad stairway, and began the fairly long ascent to the third floor. As they mounted the stairs she was aware that every step was a strain for the man at her side.

He glanced at her. "I'm afraid my progress is slow."

"It doesn't matter. I can find my way to my room alone."

"I shall see you there tonight," he said. "And you will find a bolt on the inside of the door. Be sure that it is in place before you go to bed."

"I will," she said, as they continued on up the shadowed stairs. He had not mentioned his brother, but she knew that he was warning her that the bolt should be in place to protect her from the reckless Hilary.

CHAPTER SIX

Sabrina said goodnight to the solemn Captain Dennis Hall and entered her small room. A single candle burned on the dresser to offer light. She carefully drew the bolt on the door. This gave her a slight feeling of relief. It had been a long day and evening filled with a lot of revelations and her mind was brimming with all she'd experienced.

Nothing about the house or its people matched what she'd expected. She had felt that the Hall family might be a grim lot but they had turned out rather differently. Even the supposedly wicked Hilary had not seemed all that bad to her, and she had liked Captain Dennis. Jane Hall, though something of a mystery, was a person of fine breeding, and the children were delightful.

The house was something else again. In the beginning she'd thought it a fine old mansion and nothing more. Now she was gradually becoming aware of its somewhat dark character. The ghost which was said to haunt it sounded grim indeed, and the curse which was supposed to hang over the house and the Hall family appeared to have been real enough. There had been many tragic happenings there and if the pattern continued there could well be more.

This thought chilled her, since she was going to be responsible for the children. And it was taken for granted that she had

failed in a similar responsibility once before. She dared not fail this time. The children meant far too much to the unhappy Captain Dennis. It worried her to know how much depended on her.

At last she was ready for bed. Crossing to the dresser, she brought the candle back to her bedside table and set it there. When she was safely in bed she put the candle out and lay back on her pillow to stare up in the semi-darkness. There was a moon and some of its silver edged in around the window blind to light the room a bit.

She reviewed the evening in her mind. The haughty Ann Gray and her father, Colonel Stephen, had not struck her as particularly pleasant characters. And she was puzzled that Ann Gray had suggested her to Dennis Hall as a governess even though she knew that her record was blackened by a child's burning to death. Also, she found it even harder to understand that Ann Gray had denied knowing about this to Dennis and yet had admitted it to her. At least it proved that the beautiful brunette widow was devious.

As for the father, she could understand why the children made sport of him. It was an unfortunate fact that he did resemble an elderly, overweight pig and his voice had the unhappy quality of suggesting a pig's complaining tone when hungry. She smiled to herself at the children's aptness in seeing the stuffy old colonel as a pig.

After a little while she closed her eyes and sleep came. She slept deeply since she was tired. And it was only the intrusion of a foreign sound which roused her quickly to a waking state. She sat up in bed and stared at the door with eyes widened with fear!

Someone was trying the handle of her door, turning it and exerting pressure against the bolt in an effort to enter her room. She found it impossible to scream—fear froze any protest on her lips! All she could do was watch with fascinated eyes as this eerie drama continued.

Finally, whoever was on the outside let go the handle. And a moment afterward she heard footsteps retreating down the hallway. She still sat there terrified and motionless. Who had been out there? She could only guess that Dennis had been right and that it had been his dissolute brother who'd tried to break in on her.

After a long period of waiting she ventured from her bed and went over to the door and pressed her ear against it. There

was no suggestion of anyone's being out there. Her own heart was beating uncontrollably and she wondered what it had meant. There seemed no question that whoever had been there had now left.

Her overwhelming curiosity balanced her fear to the extent that she cautiously drew back the bolt on the door. She did it slowly so as not to make any noise. And then, just as slowly, she edged the door open and gazed out into the long hallway. Windows at either end of the hallway gave light to its narrow confines. And the silver moonlight streamed in the window nearest her room.

She searched the eerie midnight for a hint of the would-be intruder. And it seemed there was no one. She found herself starting to doubt that anyone had been at her door. Perhaps it had been part of a particularly vivid dream which she'd had. And as she began to accept this explanation something happened which in a split second made her think differently! Far down the hall and close by the window a figure appeared. It moved slowly into view until it stood silhouetted by the silver moonlight streaming in the window. There could be no question about what she was seeing! It had to be the ghost! Starkly black against the moonlight there stood the figure of the monk in robe and cowl!

As the first impact of the terrifying sight passed, she quickly drew back into her room and bolted the door again. It was a grisly welcome to the old house! And she could only assume that it had been the ghost who'd earlier tried her door handle. Trembling, she hurried back to her bed and drew the clothes over her while she kept her eyes fixed on the door.

And then, as she felt certain they would, the footsteps approached again. And once again the door handle was turned and the door tried. With rapid heartbeat she sat watching the door, scarcely daring to breath. Finally, as before, the attempts to open her door ended and the footsteps faded away. She then lay back on her pillow and realized she was drenched with perspiration. The second visit of the phantom had been more of an ordeal than the first!

She lay there, her nerves tense, unable to sleep. Far in the distance she heard a dog baying at the moon! The weird cry took on a special significance for her as she thought of the ghost stories she'd heard as a child in the country, stories of vampires, werewolves and the like. She had always scoffed at

ghosts and found humans much more to be feared. But the weird goings-on of this night made her wonder.

She had seen the monk around whom the legend had grown. The faceless one, turned away from the door of the old mansion, later to die in the cold as he battled a blizzard to reach the monastery. The embittered shepherd of the lepers, disfigured and dying of the dread disease contacted from his charges, who'd been denied alms by the cold-hearted father of Dennis and Hilary. And now he roamed the house and grounds exacting a toll in bad luck and harrassment which more than balanced the small monetary aid which he'd sought.

Jane Hall had been married to the elder Hall who had so curtly turned the monk away. And now it was claimed that she was an opium addict, lost in her drug-filled dreams much of time. Was it to shut out the vision of the faceless ghost that she'd turned to drugs? It seemed that it might be so.

She lay very still seeking sleep, which did not come. And now she was able to hear the pound of the waves on the shore. Hall House was located on a high hill with access to the cliffs. Below the cliffs there was a wide beach, so Captain Dennis had told her. And often Emma took the children down a steep path which led to the beach and let them wade in the ocean.

Thoughts of the children brought to mind that other, earlier time when she had failed so completely. The housekeeper had called her into the next room. And it was while she'd been standing there briefly discussing the evening meal with her that she'd heard the sudden screams. Screams which had sent an icy fear down her spine!

How many nights had she lain awake tormented by the memory of the screaming, burning child? How many more nights would she suffer this ordeal? And now she was in a house with a ghost and a curse on it. And she had the safety of two children in her hands. Was it any wonder, considering her record, that the fond father of the two had made her employment at the old mansion limited to a testing period?

She finally fell asleep with this going through her mind. She awoke to a knocking on her door. It was morning and there was sun streaming in around the blind at the window. She raised herself on an elbow and said, "Yes?"

"Hot water, miss," a young female voice on the other side of the door said.

"Thank you," she replied. "One moment." And she got up and opened the door to a diminutive young maid carrying a

huge, covered jug of hot water. The maid carried the jug in and filled the pitcher on the commode with the steaming water.

"There's cold down below in the basin," the maid told her.

"Thank you," she said again. "I hope I haven't overslept."

"No," the maid said. "The household never rises before this time." She gave her an appraising look. "You're the new governess?"

"Yes," she said.

"Emma told me about you," the maid said. "She thinks you are going to be good for the children."

"I hope so," she said.

"They need care now that their poor mother is gone," the maid said with a sigh. "That was a sad business."

"Was she ill long?"

"Months. At the start it seemed she was going to get better. Then she started on a downhill road and it kept on until she died."

Sabrina moved to the window and drew up the blind so that the room was flooded with sunlight. She turned to the girl and asked, "What exactly did she die of?"

"There was talk of fever," the maid said with a bleak look on her young face. "But as cook says, the fever never did take that long to kill anyone. Cook says that the reason the doctor couldn't name the illness was because she died of the curse!"

"Cook is a very superstitious woman," Sabrina said carefully.

The girl gave her a knowing glance. "But she's smart, cook is. There's not much she doesn't know." And with that bit of wisdom imparted, the maid went on her way.

Sabrina washed and dressed with memories of her eerie experience in the night much in her mind. She didn't know who she dare confide in about it and decided that, if the opportunity allowed, she might ask Jane Hall what it had meant. She also had noted the maid's comments that the children's mother might have died from the curse, and realized how much grim superstition had imposed itself on the day-to-day existence of those living in the old mansion.

When she went downstairs for breakfast with the children she found that Emma had already fed them and that they were now out on the lawn waiting for her to join them in a game of croquet. She went on to the dining room to have her own breakfast first. As she entered the big, dark-paneled room she

was surprised to see a thin, bald old man with a grumpy face and a white Vandyke beard seated at the table.

He gave her a piercing look as she came to join him and said, "You are Sabrina Wyler!"

"Yes," she said nervously.

"I'm Nathaniel Hall," he said rising. "Uncle to Dennis and Hilary. I was their father's older brother. Have a chair."

She sat by him and said, "You weren't here last night."

"I was here but I was confined to my room with an attack of gout," the old man said with a frown. "It has plagued me these many years. Are you familiar with gout?"

"Only by hearsay," she said.

"Keep it that way," the old man told her. "Fool of an old doctor doesn't do me any good. So I suffer my days away. I was the manager of the whaling company in the old days. I took care of business matters at Dark Harbor while our whaling fleet sailed the oceans under the command of my brother. Now the business has gone and he is dead and I'm left a useless survivor."

She said, "Surely the business will revive again?"

"Never," he said shortly. "Hilary is no business man and Dennis is allowing himself to wallow in a sea of depression. He has gone much too far in mourning his wife's death. And I must warn you he dotes on the children. Your position here will not be an easy one."

"I don't expect it to be," she said as a maid came to begin serving her breakfast.

"That is good," the old man said. "Just so long as you understand. This is not a happy house, as you will learn."

He did not enlarge on this and she didn't encourage him to. She did mention Colonel Stephen and the name of this next door neighbor drew an angry response from Nathaniel Hall.

"Thick-headed martinet," the old man said with disgust. "I have as little to do with him as I can. Treats his help like slaves. And always brags about his courage in the Civil War!"

Sabrina made no answer to this, and the old man shortly after touched his napkin to his lips and left the table. She was interested in meeting this other member of the Hall family and felt sure that he was forthright in his opinions. He struck her as someone she might depend on in a crisis.

When she joined the children outside they insisted that they have at least one game of croquet before they went in to begin their lessons. She gave way to them and the game was going

on when their father came limping out across the lawn to join them.

Looking rather severe, the handsome Dennis said, "I have been waiting in the nursery to begin turning the lesson material over to you, Sabrina."

She gave him an apologetic smile. "The children were so anxious for a game. I had no idea you were waiting."

Georgette came running up to her father and said, "James is winning! And it's the only time we've played since Mommy died!"

Dennis eyed his son who was standing firmly by the wickets with his mallet in hand. Then he turned to her, and said, "Very well, the sunshine and air won't do them any harm. Come to the nursery when you've finished. If I'm not there, Emma can call me in the study."

"Very well," she said. And she went back to complete the game.

James kept up his lead and was the proud winner. Georgette didn't mind as long as they had the game. And Sabrina gave Emma instructions as she'd promised so that by the end of the game the maid had a fair idea of what they were doing. Then they all went inside, and the first of what were to be daily lesson periods began.

Dennis proved very precise as a teacher and they did not complete the morning's work until it was time for lunch. She had lunch with the children and then she took them for a walk. Or rather they took her and showed her the way to the path leading to the beach.

They made their way to the cliffs and soon they were able to look back and see the old mansion high behind them on the left. The area by the cliffs was flat and on a lower level and it led to a kind of gully in which the path to the beach was located.

James marched beside her like a full-grown male, and confided, "We're not on our property anymore. This belongs to Colonel Stephen."

"Really?" She halted and saw that they were actually walking directly behind the other house.

Georgette said, "They let us come over here and we let them use our beach."

"That seems reasonable," she agreed.

James halted in his tracks with a strange expression on his young face. "Look! Here comes the ogre!"

His sister gave him a reproachful look. "You mustn't call him that! He can't help that he's a deaf-mute and Colonel Stephen is cruel to him! His name is Tod."

She glanced ahead and saw that the man they were referring to was making his way up the path in the center of the gully. His head was bent as he came up the steep path. He was a powerful man with broad shoulders and a thick head of black hair. As he neared them she was able to see his face, which was broad and coarse and covered with a stubble of beard.

She said, "We mustn't stare at him, children. It isn't polite."

"I know," Georgette said. "We should just keep on walking."

They did. And soon the deaf-mute called Tod went by them. He gave them an angry glance and made a guttural, animal sound in his throat as he continued on his way.

"I imagine he considers us trespassers," she said.

"They come on our land all the time!" Georgette said with indignation.

"Colonel Pig and Tod the Ogre!" little James chanted with delight as he danced around.

Sabrina raised a warning hand. "Don't say such things and don't run about screaming like some wild Indian. You know better than that!"

Georgette said, "There's a rowboat down at our wharf. Will you take us for a row? Mother used to. And so did Father before he started being so sad."

"Take us for a row!" James chanted, happy with a new refrain.

"Not today," she said. "Tomorrow if it is fine. Now we must start back."

As they were returning to the old mansion they met Ann Gray strolling along the path with a parasol raised to protect her against the sun. She halted when she drew near them and smiled at the children.

"Hello, my darlings," she said. "Are you having a nice walk?"

"We're having a walk," Georgette said, her little face clouding suddenly.

James gave the brunette widow a belligerent look. "And we're going rowing tomorrow. Sabrina is going to take us."

"Indeed!" Ann Gray said, rolling her eyes.

Georgette gave Sabrina a nervous glance, and said, "We'll go on ahead! Come, James!"

"Race you back!" he cried. Georgette accepted his challenge and they both ran off, laughing as they raced.

Ann Gray watched them go. "I must say they are completely wild. I don't know how you plan to manage them."

She said, "They are not all that difficult."

"I wonder if you'll say that a week from now," the young widow said.

"I hope so."

Ann Gray studied her. "Aren't you worried about harming your skin? I wouldn't think of going out in the sun without a hat or parasol."

"I've always done it," she said. "I lived a large part of my life in the country. We didn't worry about the sun."

"How odd!" the brunette girl said in her feline way. "In any event I'm glad Dennis has decided to keep you on for a while at least. It would have been absurd to send you back at once."

And with that Ann Gray moved on. Sabrina resumed her journey back to the house feeling that, regarding the catty Ann Gray, the children's instincts were right. She was not a pleasant person. When Sabrina reached the old mansion she went inside and found Jane Hall seated in the sewing room. The frail woman was in an easy chair with her eyes closed, but when Sabrina entered the room she opened them.

Sabrina said, "I hope I didn't wake you."

"No," the gray-haired mother of Dennis and Hilary said. "I was just resting my eyes. How are you and the children getting along?"

"Splendidly," she said. "I have their lesson books now. And they seem interested in their studies."

"Dennis has taught them, and he is gifted in that way."

"I'm sure he must be," she agreed rather nervously. "I have come to you because I want to ask your advice about something."

The thin woman eyed her in her weary way. "What?"

And so Sabrina quickly told her of her experience with the ghost the previous night. She finished by asking, "Can you give me any kind of explanation of what took place?"

The thin woman was sitting very straight in her chair and her emaciated face wore a grim look. She said coldly, "In this house we do not discuss such things."

"I didn't know."

"You will learn."

Sabrina said, "I only wanted your opinion. I haven't mentioned this to anyone else."

"You would do well not to," the older woman said.

"Still you must have some opinion," she insisted.

Jane Hall eyed her grimly. "In my opinion you had a nasty dream."

"No!"

"Other than that I can say nothing," Jane Hall told her. "You will do well to forget all about it."

"Even though I think I saw the ghost?"

"Yes," Jane Hall said. "Keep your silence no matter what you think you saw."

"Very well," she said.

The older woman glanced at her in a more friendly vein and said, "May I add that you have made a good first impression on everyone here. Please don't spoil it."

"Thank you," she said quietly as she left her. So there was no one to confide in!

That evening after dinner she went for a walk alone in the garden. Emma took turns at minding the children and was with them for the late afternoon and evening. It had been decided that Sabrina would concentrate on her care of them in the morning for lessons and for the early afternoon.

There was a small pagoda affair, a kind of miniature summer house in the garden and she stepped inside it and sat down. She'd only been there a moment or so when Hilary appeared. He stood in the doorway of the pagoda smiling at her, and she at once felt trapped.

He came inside and said, "I thought you were very quite at dinner."

"I prefer to listen many times."

"Wise Sabrina," Hilary said with a wink. "I hear you are doing fabulously well with the youngsters."

"They are good children."

"If you say so," he said. "I'm going to Boston tomorrow so I shall miss seeing you for a few days."

"Do you go to Boston often?" she asked.

"When I get tired of the island." And he smiled at her grimly. "I assume you took my brother's advice and kept your door tightly bolted?"

She blushed. "The bolt is there for that purpose."

"That is correct," Hilary said in his mocking fashion. "But I

think it an unfriendly gesture to bolt a door in a private house. It suggests a feeling of distrust of your hosts."

"I doubt if many people would think that," she said. And at the same time she began to wonder if it hadn't been he who had tried her door the previous night. He could easily come by a robe to disguise himself as the ghostly monk. And it would protect him if anyone in the house happened to be up and saw him.

Hilary said, "I shall expect to hear great things about you when I return."

"I hope I'll still be here," she said. "Your brother has made it clear that he's only keeping me here on trial. I could be dismissed at any time."

"You won't be," Hilary assured her with a twinkle in his eyes. "I have an idea he likes you. That is why he was so quick to warn you against me."

Before she could answer this, old Nathaniel Hall poked his white-bearded face in the doorway of the pagoda and said, "How very cosy! I thought it was the children Sabrina had been hired to look after."

Hilary laughed good-naturedly and they rose and left the pagoda. He said, "Don't be misled by appearances, Uncle Nat. I merely stopped by for a moment to give the young lady some good advice."

The old man looked at him belligerently. "I would say that she'd be wise to avoid any advice you might have to offer," was his comment.

"You all give me such a bad name I wonder she speaks to me at all," Hilary said, and with a wink for them both strolled on.

She had been standing beside Nathaniel Hall, and told him, "He isn't as bad as he pretends, I'd say."

The old man told her, "Young lady, I think you are far too trusting!"

That night passed without event in the haunted house. And the next morning, since it was foggy, she and the children were confined mostly to the nursery. They lamented that they would miss their walks. She promised them that they'd make up for the lost outings on the next fine day.

So it wasn't surprising that they were doubly let-down when a second day and night of fog came along. Hilary had gone to the mainland as he'd promised and she found the house quieter without him.

After dinner on the second foggy night Dennis Hall limped over to her in the living room where she was sitting reading and said, "May I speak with you for a few minutes?"

She put down her book. "Of course!"

He led her out of the room and up the broad stairway, saying as they slowly mounted the steps, "I wish to take the opportunity of telling you that I'm well pleased with the way you have taken over the children."

"I've only made a beginning," she said.

"They like you and I am impressed by the way you handle their lessons. I'm sure they'll make more progress with their studies under you, and they seem happier in your company."

"They are darlings!"

"I agree. They are my whole life since my dear wife's death." They had reached the second floor and now he limped along the hall to the door of a room which she had never been in before. He paused to unlock the door and open it. Then he showed her in and limped in after her. "This is a kind of sanctuary for me. All my wife's clothing is here."

She saw the closets filled with things, their doors open so that their bulging contents were revealed. She said, "You have kept all her clothes?"

"Yes," he said. "I had meant to keep them here intact until Georgette was old enough to know what she wished to do with them. I felt she might consider having them altered to the style of her day and wear some of them. But now I have changed my mind and will take the advice of my mother."

"Oh?"

"I want you to go over the things and choose what you like and need. I'm sure my late wife's size was about the same as yours and I want you to have any or all of what is here."

"You're too generous!" she protested.

"Not at all," Dennis Hall said. "Let us have some light here so you may make a proper selection." And he went to a round table in the middle of the room and removed the shade of a rose-bowl lamp which sat there and touched a match to its wick. Then he returned the shade and adjusted the wick to give proper light. A soft glow flooded the room. "That is better!"

She knew how much the clothes meant to him, and saw that caring for them was part of his revering his dead wife's memory. Because of this she was hesitant to take advantage of his

offer, though she could see at a glance the clothes in the closets were of fine quality.

She turned to him, and asked, "Are you sure you want me to do this?"

"Definitely," he said. "I'm glad my mother suggested it. You know Ann Gray wanted some of these things. And she was so kind to my late wife, nursing her day after day, that I almost gave in and agreed to let her have what she wished. But then I found I couldn't. It was impossible for me to part with anything."

"Yet you have changed your mind now?"

"It is different with you. You require a decent wardrobe and this one is here, wasting. Ann Gray has more clothes than she knows what to do with. You haven't."

She went to the first closet and was stunned by the array of fine dresses. She said, "They are all so lovely I don't know which ones to select."

"Why not take them all?" the handsome Dennis said with a smile. "I'm going to have your room moved down here and then when you have adequate quarters you can move the clothes to your new room."

She said, "I should try one on to make sure they do fit me."

"By all means," he said. "I'll leave you to do that. I'll be back in a while and you can let me know."

As soon as he left the room she sorted through the many dresses and found her attention taken by a beautiful rose-colored gown with a trimming of marabou feathers. With a tiny cry of delight she put it on and stood before the mirror in it. Her eyes moistened with happiness. In all her life she had never owned such a dress nor hoped to own one. And now all these lovely things were to be hers.

There was a knock on the door and she turned and said, "Come in."

The door opened and Dennis Hall entered. He saw her and his handsome face took on an awed expression. He stared at her hesitantly for a moment. Then he slowly limped across to her and placed his arm around her. He touched his lips to hers in a gentle kiss that lasted for a moment. Then an abrupt change came over him.

He removed his arm from her and stepped back in an upset state. "Forgive me!" he exclaimed. "That was unforgivable of me!"

She said, "I think I understand. It is the dress. It has memories for you."

Dennis nodded. "Yes," he said softly. "My wife wore it to the last party we attended together. I thought no one could look as lovely in it until I saw you just now."

She said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know when I selected this one."

He raised his hand in weary protest. "It was entirely my fault. You will do me a great favor if you will overlook the incident."

She stood within the glow of the lamp, and said, "I'm not offended, I can promise you. I understand it was the dress and what it meant to you."

"Yes," he said with a deep sigh. "I'm beginning to realize that Uncle Nat and the others are right. I have been selfish in my sorrow."

"That is understandable," she said.

"But I shouldn't indulge myself," he worried. "I make two pilgrimages to her grave every day. In some ways I'm more dedicated to my dead wife than I am to the living in this house. My mother is not well, as you know, and she deserves more of my attention."

She nodded. "That would be a good thing to remember."

"I have stayed away from the office and let Hilary take care of everything," the young captain went on. "The ships are mine. I have sailed in many of them. They mean something to me. I should go down there and have a part in the selling of them or whatever seems best."

"I agree," she said. "And a healthier outlook on your part would benefit Georgette and James."

"I can see that now," he said, with a look of thoughtful approval on his handsome face. "And I believe, that if you hadn't come along I would have continued in my selfish ways."

"No," she said. "I would say that it is time more than any other single factor. You have now had time to recover from the shock of your wife's death. A first sign is this gesture of offering her things to me."

"And a proper move," he said.

"You decide. Take your time," she said. "I don't wish to hold you to it unless you are sure."

"I am sure," he said firmly.

At that moment another figure appeared in the doorway of the room to stare at them in shock. It was none other than

Ann Gray.. She wryly observed them in silence for at least a full moment.

Then she said, "Your mother told me I would find you up here, Dennis, but I hardly expected you and this young woman to be holding a fashion show!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dennis Hall turned around quickly with a guilty look on his handsome face. He said, "My dear Ann, I didn't hear you come by!"

"That is obvious," she said acidly as she came into the room. She gave Sabrina a nasty smile. "Charming!"

It was a dreadful moment for Sabrina. She could tell the attractive brunette was angry on more than one count. She resented that she should be wearing one of the dresses which Dennis had refused her and she was also just plain jealous!

Dennis, in an attempt to make the best of a difficult moment, said, "I've decided that Sabrina should have some of these clothes."

Ann raised her eyebrows. "How interesting? Especially since you were so firm in telling me I couldn't have any of them."

"My attitude has changed," he said.

"I can see that," Ann said bleakly. She was wearing a handsome blue taffeta which indicated she had an ample wardrobe.

He said, "I think we should go downstairs and have a talk. Sabrina will want to change back into her own dress and go to her room." And he turned to Sabrina and said, "Goodnight. I'll have another talk with you tomorrow."

She said, "Goodnight," in a manner which would suffice for both of them.

Ann gave her a haughty glance and said, "By all means, let us go downstairs. I'm not in the habit of carrying on personal conversations before servants." And with that she marched out of the room.

Captain Dennis Hall lingered to tell Sabrina, "It's all right." And then he limped from the room and shut the door after him.

She remained there without moving for a minute or two after they left. It had been like a scene from some tawdry melodrama, and she'd been innocently caught up in it. So had Dennis, for that matter. But there was no question that Ann would make the worst of it. The thing which bothered Sabrina most was that Ann would attempt to burden Dennis with guilt about his dead wife and send him back to his grim mourning state just as he had been ready to emerge from it.

She quickly removed the lovely rose dress and put on her own simple yellow one. Then she hung the dress up in the closet and extinguished the lamp before leaving the room. She hurried up to her own room and bolted herself in. It was getting late but still somewhat early for her bedtime. She could picture the arrogant Ann below, giving Dennis a taste of her temper. It wasn't a happy thought!

Aside from these happenings, it was another uneventful night. And in the morning the sun returned. The fog which had hovered over the island for two days had vanished and the air was miraculously warm and pleasant. As she left the dining room she met Mrs. Barber in the reception hall.

The stocky housekeeper told her, "Mr. Dennis is having you moved to the second floor. A big room overlooking the ocean. And I'm to take the late mistress's dresses and put them there in the closet for you."

"I'll be busy with the children," Sabrina said. "You do whatever Captain Hall suggested. My things can easily be moved."

"Very well then, miss, I'll go ahead with it," the housekeeper said with a stolid expression on her red face.

Sabrina went on to the nursery and spent the next two hours drilling the children in their studies. By the time they finished this work, the youngsters were clamoring for a walk and the promised trip out in the rowboat.

She smiled at them. "We mustn't try to do everything in one day!" she protested.

Georgette said, "It may be foggy again tomorrow."

"And we want to play croquet, too," James informed her. She stood up. "Well, let's begin by first taking our walk, and then we'll see."

The children fairly danced along with joy at being able to have their usual morning stroll again. They crossed over onto the property of Colonel Stephen, and she kept a wary eye out for Ann. She was not anxious to meet her so soon after the unpleasant scene of the night before.

Dennis had not been in evidence when she'd come downstairs. She had an idea he also had been somewhat shy about the previous night's episode. Again she fervently hoped that it wouldn't set him back in his encouraging recovery from his mourning.

James halted and said, "Look! There's the ogre down on the wharf!"

She stared down at the beach and the thin gray wharf which extended from it and saw that the deaf-mute known as Tod was standing down there. She said, "You mustn't talk like that about him. I'm sure he's perfectly harmless."

Georgette said, "Emma is afraid of him. She always takes us in the opposite direction when she sees him coming."

Sabrina told the golden-haired little girl, "Emma occasionally does things which are wrong, as we all do."

"Let us go down!" James said, glancing up at her with childish courage. "We won't let him scare us away."

"Of course not," she said. "Just because people have certain limitations does not mean they are wicked. Tod cannot help being deaf and dumb."

Georgette said sensibly, "He could help glaring at us as he does."

She held the little girl by the hand as they descended the steep path, and said, "He probably does that because you look at him in a funny way."

James, who'd been running ahead in a precarious manner, turned back and made a face at her and Georgette. "Look!" he cried. "I'm making a funny face at you!"

This made them all laugh and they were in a general good humor as they reached the beach. The stocky deaf-mute stood on the wharf and watched their approach without any show of interest.

James asked her wistfully, "You will take us for a little row in the boat, won't you?"

She sighed. "I suppose if I don't you'll never let up on it."

"We'll sit still as we did for Mommy and be very good," Georgette promised.

It was hard to refuse them under the circumstances. They were near the wharf now, and still the strange Tod hadn't moved. As they strolled out on the wharf and passed him, she smiled and said, "We are going out in the boat."

James said, "He can't hear you!"

She told the boy. "He probably can read my lips. Many of the deaf can read lips."

They went on along the wharf where the boat was tied. It swayed slightly as the murky, green waves lapped it. She drew it close to the wharf and held it there. Then she told the children, "Step down in and sit on the seat in the stern while I keep the boat steady."

"I'll go first," James volunteered, always the brave one. His weight was light, and the boat didn't sway under his impact as he stepped down into it and made his way to the broad seat at the other end.

"Now you, Georgette," she said.

"I'm afraid," the golden-haired girl said, hesitating on the wharf.

Sabrina gave her a reassuring smile. "There's no need to be. I'm holding the boat steady for you."

"James can swim and I can't," Georgette said, holding back.

"You won't need to swim," she said. "If you want me to take you for a row please get in the boat."

"All right," the little girl said with a sigh. She stepped down into the boat and then turned to Sabrina with a smile to mark her accomplishment before she went on to sit down beside her brother.

The two of them were seated there waiting for her, and it was now her turn to get into the boat. She noted where it was tied and that the oars were in it. There was a tiny bit of water in the bottom, but nothing more than normal. She was about to balance herself and step down when the deaf-mute Tod came hurrying up beside her and made a kind of grunting noise and gestured. It was plain that he wanted to assist her into getting into the boat.

"Thank you," she said with a smile as he helped her step down.

He made a busy moment of untying the boat from the wharf. She saw his hands fumble with the rope. She took her

place with the oars and began to move the boat out away from the wharf.

She'd not been out in a boat since going to live in Boston with her Aunt Ivy. But she'd done a lot of rowing before that so she was adept enough at the oars. As she manipulated the boat out further from the wharf she began to relax a little and enjoy the experience.

James said, "Tod is walking back from the wharf now."

"Is he?" she said, not too interested as she concentrated on her rowing.

"Yes." Georgette confirmed what her brother had said. "He is crossing the beach and going back up home."

"It doesn't matter," Sabrina said. "We can take the boat back to the wharf and tie it up without anyone's help. I didn't like to turn him down when he so generously offered to assist."

James was staring down into the bottom of the boat, and now he said, "There's more water coming into the boat."

"I noticed some in it when we started," she told him. "There is nothing to be alarmed about."

The boy had his eyes fixed on a certain spot near the bow, and he said, "It is coming in fast!"

"It is!" golden-haired Georgette agreed with a hint of alarm in her tone.

Sabrina thought they were being unduly nervous but she began to have the uneasy suspicion that something might be wrong. She halted in her rowing and turned to study the spot which the children had mentioned. At once a feeling of horror coursed through her! The youngsters were right! Water was now pouring in from somewhere at the bow of the boat. It was gathering conspicuously all along the bottom. At the rate at which the boat was now filling they would soon be in danger.

She fought her natural inclination to panic and remained calm for the children's benefit. She said, "Yes. There is a leak. So we'll start back."

James studied the shore again and said, "Tod has gone. I don't see him."

She had quickly started with the oars again, and said, "We won't worry about Tod!"

Georgette suddenly looked as if she might be going to cry. She whimpered, "I'm frightened!"

Sabrina gave the little girl a reproving look. "Now don't be a foolish child! There's nothing to be afraid of!" At the same

time she felt the cold ocean water at her ankles and knew the boat was gradually settling.

James said, "I think we're going to sink!"

She said, "No, I think we can get to the wharf first." And she strained at the oars in an effort to make her prediction come true.

But the wharf seemed ominously far away and with the boat filling with water it was difficult to make time. She struggled at the oars and seemed to make little progress as the tiny boat sank deeper in the water.

Georgette got to her feet and began to cry. "We are going to sink!" she sobbed.

"Sit down!" Sabrina ordered her, and she attempted quickly to take stock of the situation. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw that they'd never make the wharf. It would be better to try to row directly to the beach and shallow water. So now she managed to twist the boat around in the water and started to row in that direction.

"It's filling quicker now!" James declared.

She knew this wasn't true but that it seemed so because of the large amount of water in the rowboat. And she also saw that it was going to sink before they could reach shore.

Pretending a calmness she didn't feel, she asked the little boy, "Did you say you could swim, James?"

"Yes. I swim well," he bragged.

"Good," she said. "I think we may have to swim to shore. I'm going to depend on you to look after yourself, and I'll take care of Georgette, do you understand?"

Georgette was sobbing. "I'm frightened!"

"There's nothing to be frightened about," she told her. "It will be fun! An adventure! I swim well and I'll see you safely in and James will swim at my side, won't you, James?"

"Yes," the six-year-old agreed.

The boat was tipping now, and she knew they hadn't much longer. She glanced toward the shore and saw that it seemed far away. She turned to James, "Are you certain you can swim that far?"

"I can," he said.

"Well, stay close by me. If you feel yourself weakening, tell me," she said. "I'll somehow manage to help you both." They were brave words, and she was by no means sure she could fulfill them.

The boat was almost filled with water, and she knew it was

no use to delay the moment of crisis. She turned to James and cried, "Now! Start out in the water now!"

The lad kicked off his shoes and plunged into the water. She waited until she saw him swimming and in the right direction. Then she grasped the sobbing Georgette and took her into the water with her. The water seemed icy despite the fact it was summer, and she knew that their clothing could be a danger in weighing them down.

She struck out for shore and held Georgette close to her. Happily, the little girl didn't struggle, so it was possible to guide her along in the water without too much trouble. Still, it took a lot of effort and the beach seemed frighteningly distant. She took a quick glance to the left and saw that James was still sturdily swimming.

She called to him, "Are you tiring?"

"Not yet," the lad gasped.

She pushed grimly on. And as she did so she kept thinking about the boat which had already foundered behind them. Something had been wrong. The boat had started to leak too suddenly. She recalled Tod's helping them get underway and she began to suspect that the deaf-mute might have tampered with the boat in some manner to make it unsafe.

Wonder of wonders, she was suddenly in shallow water. After a moment she was able to walk the balance of the way and drag a sodden Georgette in with her. James continued to swim, and as soon as she'd settled the little girl safely on the beach she plunged back into the water to meet the tired youngster and help him in.

James dropped down beside his sister, breathing heavily. He glanced out at the silver ocean under the blazing sun, and said, "The boat is gone!"

"Yes," Sabrina said. "It sank about the same moment we jumped off it."

Georgette was still crying. "I lost my bonnet," the little girl lamented.

"And I had to lose my shoes," James said.

"That doesn't matter," she told them. "Believe me, the one important thing is that you're both alive." She surveyed her own soaked condition and knew that her dress was probably ruined, but that was of small account.

Now there were the sounds of excited voices from the cliff, and she turned dully to gaze up and see a distraught Dennis Hall come hurrying down the path in the gully, accompanied

by Ann Gray. The brunette girl had not forgotten to wear her broad sunbonnet, and its tails of satin were caught in the wind as she raced to keep up with the limping Dennis. It was doubtful if she could have managed it had it not been for his limp.

Dennis came limping across to the beach to where Sabrina and the two children were stretched like stranded fish. He stood over her with his handsome face pale as he said, "How could you risk my children's lives in that fashion?"

She struggled to her feet. "They were never in danger. James swims well and I helped Georgette in!"

Anger continued to dominate his face. He said, "Why did you take them out in an unsafe boat?"

"I didn't know it was unsafe. I don't know what happened even now."

Ann Gray stepped forward and said, "I saw the boat sinking from my lawn and I ran over and told Dennis! I was sure you were all three going to drown!"

"It's a miracle that you didn't," Dennis challenged Sabrina angrily. "You should not have taken them out there without consulting me first!"

"I know how to handle a boat," she said, defending herself. "And I don't know what was wrong. There must have been something faulty about the boat."

Georgette went to her father, and he picked her up with his one arm and held her close to him. She whimpered, "I thought we would drown, Daddy!"

Dennis kissed the little girl and said soothingly, "There's nothing to be frightened of now!"

Ann Gray made a great show of sympathy for the stalwart James, who had gotten to his feet, dripping and sullen. She placed a hand on his shoulder. "You poor little boy! What a miracle you didn't sink to the bottom!"

He gave her a defiant glance. "I didn't sink because I swim. I swam all the way in by myself!"

"He did," Sabrina said. "He was splendid."

"Lucky for him," the brunette girl told her maliciously. "If he hadn't been able to swim it's likely he'd have drowned. You would never have managed to save both of them!"

Dennis, with Georgette still in his arm, said sternly, "Come along, James. I'll take you two back to the house. Emma can see that you're dried properly and get you new clothes."

James went over to him slowly and then turned to glance at her and ask, "What about Sabrina?"

Dennis frowned. "Sabrina will also return to the house and get dry things. There is no point remaining down here any longer." And he directly addressed Sabrina, telling her, "I shall want to talk with you later."

"Yes," she said, standing there feeling miserable. She'd not been looking for praise for getting the children in safely, but she also had not been expecting to be blamed for the incident.

Ann Gray gave her an appraising eye. "You really should go back and change," the other girl said. "You look a sight!" And then she turned and walked back up the path in the gully with Dennis and the two children.

Sabrina made no attempt to follow them for a moment. She remained standing there on the beach, wet and dejected. When they were out of sight, she slowly followed them. She had an idea Ann Gray must be revelling in her victory of the moment. Surprisingly, it was she who had seen the rowboat foundering and who had called Dennis to the scene.

What about the deaf-mute, Tod? He had vanished almost as soon as he'd untied the boat for her. Again she wondered about that. And she still had a strong suspicion that he'd done something to the boat as he'd gone about untying it, and whatever he'd done had brought on the leak. How to prove it?

Now she started along the path, thoroughly depressed. Dennis had clearly shown that he blamed her for the incident. And she saw that from his standpoint he might think himself justified. But she'd taken every precaution necessary and had felt the risk of going out for a row to be minimal. Could he blame her for the boat's suddenly becoming faulty?

By the time she reached the house the others had vanished. She went up the back stairs and found the room on the second floor which had been recently assigned to her. Mrs. Barber had kept her word, and all her things had been neatly transferred from the tiny room above to this more elaborate room. All of the dresses which had belonged to Dennis's dead wife were there. But under the circumstances she did not wish to take any of them.

She went through her own things and found that the most available item was her black dress, and so she changed into it. Her hair had been drenched, and she tried to comb it out and dry it as best she could. When she finally had it presentable, the better part of an hour had passed. Then she went downstairs in search of Dennis Hall.

She slowly descended the broad stairway to the reception

hall, aware of that brooding atmosphere of menace which she had come to associate with the old mansion. The curse was apparently in full force considering the morning's events. Moving on to the living room she stood there for a moment staring out the multi-paned window at the lawns. Then she heard his limping footsteps as he came into the room to join her.

She turned to him and in a quiet voice, asked, "How are the children?"

"They seem to be over their fright," he said, his handsome face looking a trifle more gaunt than ever.

"I'm glad."

"Emma is looking after them."

"Good," she said.

He gave a deep sigh. "I suppose you know what a wretched shock this morning was for me!" he said, and he gazed out the window rather than look directly at her.

"I understand that," she said. "I'm sorry."

"You came here under a cloud for negligence in the death of a child," he went on grimly, still avoiding looking at her. "I can only think that it was good fortune rather than good judgment that saved the lives of my two children this morning."

She said, "Are you being fair?"

Now he gave her a sharp look. "I think so! There was no need to take the children rowing."

"They asked me to."

"You did not mention it to me!"

"I didn't think it of any importance," she protested. "I only planned to have them out for a short row. I have handled boats since I was ten."

"Then how could you possibly have managed so miserably this morning?" he demanded.

"Something happened to the boat."

"In that short time?" he said with skepticism. "I find that hard to believe. If there were anything the matter with it, you should have noticed it before you started out."

She said, "I did see some water in it. But that is not at all unusual."

"So, without properly inspecting the boat further you took it out," he accused her. "Tell me that that was not an error in judgment?"

Sabrina was in a hard spot to defend herself. Helplessly, she said, "There was nothing to suggest the boat would fill with water almost immediately. I think Tod was responsible."

"Tod?" he demanded, looking surprised.

"Yes. He was on the wharf and he insisted on helping me into the boat and untying it for me. I noticed he fumbled quite a bit as he let the boat loose from the wharf and I think he caused something to happen to it then."

"Preposterous!" Captain Dennis Hall declared. "Why would that deaf-mute want to drown you and my children?"

"I don't know," she said. "I'm only giving you my personal impression of what happened."

"Tod probably wanted to be helpful. He should not be blamed for that. He has been around for several years and has done no one any harm. He came here when Colonel Stephen bought the house next door."

"I can't help how you feel about him," she said. "I'm telling you what went on."

"I don't think it of any importance," he said. "I do give you credit for getting the children in safely after the boat sank."

"Thank you," she said quietly.

Dennis Hall's face was still white and tormented as he said, "But I'm haunted by the knowledge that had you failed I might be childless at this moment."

"Wouldn't it be better to thank Providence that your children are still with you?"

He shook his head. "I consider that to be the epitome of irony," he said. "You create a situation and then expect me to be grateful that it didn't turn out worse than it might have."

"I did nothing but attempt to entertain the children," she told him. "They have not been taken out enough."

Dennis gazed at her with reproach. "And when that child burned to death you risked your life in trying to save her, just as you did with my children today. But in her case it was too late. Today you were luckier, but your negligence was equal to that other occasion."

She said, "Since you feel so strongly, I assume my period of trial is at an end. You want me to leave."

He limped over to the window and then turned to her again. "You know this cannot be an easy decision for me."

"I understand," she said.

"I brought you here knowing the errors you had made before," he said. "I believe in a second chance for everyone."

"And I failed."

"So it would seem," he said. "I've given this a great deal of thought. And my decision is that for the time being you act in

the role of teacher only for Georgette and James. You will give their lessons in the nursery, and then Emma will take charge of them for recreation and other times."

"I see," she said. "That, you assume, will reduce the risk to a minimum."

He nodded. "Frankly that is my thought."

"So, you would keep me on here but under a shadow," she replied bitterly.

"I'd prefer you not to think of it that way."

"How else can I think of it?"

He limped over to her and his eyes met hers earnestly. "I have a great deal of esteem for you and for your talents as a teacher. Otherwise I wouldn't make you this offer. You came here under a cloud—will it be so much more difficult to remain here under one?"

"I find it an unhappy thing to lose your respect, for that is what this amounts to," she said.

"No. You are wrong. I do respect you. But I'm confused and worried and I've tried to work out a plan which seems to be best for all."

"I see," she said, not knowing whether to accept his offer. Probably from his point of view he was being generous, but from hers it was a different matter. Yet, to leave now would be to admit failure. And she didn't want that.

"The children are fond of you," he said. "I don't know what they'd think if you decided to leave. They've known enough sadness. Please don't desert them now that they've just grown to love you."

It was the strongest argument he'd offered, and one which touched her. She said, "And I care for them. Perhaps I can accept your terms if I have your promise that you will investigate the cause of the boat's sinking. I have an idea an examination of it will show that it was tampered with in some evil way."

He showed embarrassment. "I'll do what I can," he said. "But it happens the boat is not mine. It is the property of Colonel Stephen. I will have to have his permission to raise it and examine it."

This surprised her. "I assumed the boat was yours or I would never have taken it."

"That is all right," he said. "The colonel and I jointly own the wharf. He would not mind your use of the boat. And I'm

certain he will have it salvaged. When he does I'll see that it is given a proper examination."

"Very well," she said. "I would like at least to remain here until that happens."

Dennis was staring at her. "You're wearing black, and I dislike it."

She blushed. "I have not that many things of my own, and my other one is still wet."

He said, "I gave you my wife's entire wardrobe."

"That was last night."

"What happened this morning makes no difference. I want you to have those clothes."

"Even though Mrs. Gray resents it so?"

It was his turn to crimson, and he said, "Ann is a strange girl. You mustn't allow her to bother you. She behaved very badly when she saw you in that dress last night and I told her so."

"Really?"

"So please find something a little less drab to wear," he urged her. "You are in the new room, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said. "Mrs. Barber moved me this morning."

"Good," he said. "So you have the dresses there and you'll have no problem."

"I'll see what I can find," she said.

They parted and she returned upstairs. After a brief search through one of the closets, she found a plain white dress with lace trim and put it on. She stood before the full-length mirror and studied herself. She was satisfied that it fitted well and yet was not so showy that it would attract attention as having been one of the dead woman's dresses.

Her conversation with Dennis had been a strange one. And she wasn't by any means satisfied with the situation in which she found herself. But she cared enough for the children and the gaunt, handsome man to remain there a little longer. If only she could prove she wasn't to blame, everything would be different.

As she turned away from the mirror, her hand reached in the pocket of the skirt of the white dress and she felt a folded paper. She casually took the paper out and looked at it. She saw that it was a bit of writing paper which had been crumpled up. It was as if the writer had planned to send a message and then changed her mind.

With a tiny frown she uncrumpled the paper and saw there was a message in neat violet handwriting on the pink paper. She read: "Dearest Vinnie, I write this in haste and despair. I fear that my life is in danger. That my illness is due to my being given tiny doses of poison each day. If I speak of this to Dennis he will tell me my mind is sick, but I—" And here the message ended.

She stared at it, with her concern mounting, and then she read it again. And when she finished she could only think that it must have been written by the dead Mrs. Hall, who must have had these fears and been trying to communicate with someone. Perhaps she had decided that her fears were unwarranted and so had not sent the letter after all. But here it was, proof of a tormented mind.

The ghostly message in the violet handwriting served to trigger a number of thoughts in Sabrina's mind. She recalled what the cook had told her of the terminal illness of her late mistress. She had said that in the beginning it had seemed the girl might recover, but suddenly her condition had changed and she'd gone straight downhill. The cook had blamed it on the curse that shadowed the mansion and the family.

Dennis had been strangely vague about the details of his wife's death, and so had the others. He had mentioned her friendship with Ann Gray and had given the young widow full credit for being faithful to the sick woman until the end. But beyond this, nothing had been said.

His great dedication to her in death seemed to have erased any memory he held of her illness and final days. This seemed morbid and hardly normal. Could this exaggerated grief have guilt as its basis? Was Dennis Hall trying to cover up some role he might have played in the death of a supposedly beloved wife? The old doctor who attended the family was said to be in his dotage and easily manipulated!

It was too shocking to consider! She did not want to believe that the handsome, one-armed man could be capable of causing his wife's death! Yet, there was the possibility. She stared at the letter again and tried to decide what, if anything, to do about it. Surely she did not want to bring it to the attention of Dennis at this time. There were already too many problems for them to cope with now.

And yet she felt she must confide in someone. And the only person whom she could think of was the frail Jane Hall. Per-

haps the supposedly drug-addicted mother of Dennis would give her help on this. Thus far she had always found her understanding. With this in mind she put the note in the pocket of the dress and left the room to call on the older woman.

CHAPTER EIGHT

She had never before visited the matriarch of the Hall family in her own room. But now she felt that the urgency of her mission might excuse her for this possible intrusion. She made her way along the shadowed hallway until she came to the bedroom door of the older woman. She hesitated and then knocked gently.

There was so long a delay that she decided either Jane Hall was asleep or that she might be out of the room. Then, as she was about to turn and walk away, the door was opened a fraction, and the thin, anxious face of the older woman peered out at her.

"Yes?" Jane Hall asked.

"May I speak with you a moment. It is urgent," she said.

The thin face looked dubious. Then Mrs. Hall opened the door enough for Sabrina to enter.

She stepped inside the bedroom and was surprised to note that the room was almost in darkness, the blinds and curtains all drawn. Jane Hall, in a robe and slippers, shuffled across the room and lifted the blinds so that the place was suddenly flooded with light.

Sabrina saw that the older woman had been in bed. There was a weird, pungent kind of odor in the air, a medicine, it

seemed. Her eyes wandered to the dresser and she was shocked to see that it was lined with tall black bottles of "Mrs. Colley's Remedy."

Mrs. Hall saw her staring at the bottles and said, "My medicine. It is the only thing that does me any good."

"I see," she said, remembering the many rumors she'd heard about Mrs. Hall's drug addiction and the claim that the chief component of the patent medicine she took in such copious quantities was opium.

Jane Hall clutched her robe around her and gave her a sharp look. "I recognize that dress," she said. "It belonged to Louise, my son's late wife."

"Yes."

The thin woman raised her eyebrows. "So he finally came to it. I didn't think he would, although I advised him it was what should be done. He actually made himself pass on some of her things to you."

"I didn't know whether I should accept them," Sabrina said.

"Of course you should," Jane Hall said briskly, seeming more herself now. It was as if she were gradually emerging from a drugged state. "Sit down."

"I'm sorry to bother you," she said, seating herself in the nearest chair.

Jane Hall sat on the side of the bed and picked nervously at the spread with one hand as she fixed her eyes on Sabrina. "That is all right," she said. "I've been told about what happened this morning."

"Already?"

"Yes." The older woman smiled grimly. "There is not much goes on here that I don't know about."

"It was a near tragedy," she admitted.

"And Dennis thinks that your judgment was responsible."

"I think that unfair," she said. "Something happened to the boat. It wasn't my fault."

"He is of the opinion you shouldn't have gone out in the boat with them."

"They begged me to take them."

"I know. Louise used to take them rowing before her illness."

"That is what they told me."

Jane Hall said, "I wouldn't worry about it too much. Just carry on and it will be forgotten in time. My son is keeping you on, isn't he?"

"Yes. On a more limited basis. I'm to act chiefly as teacher to the children."

"That was my suggestion," the old woman said with a smile of pride. "It seemed preferable to his discharging you, and that was what he'd decided to do."

"Thank you," she said.

The fragile woman eyed her kindly. "Is that what you came here to talk with me about?"

"No."

"What then?"

She hesitated. "It's something quite different. I was worried and didn't know who I should turn to. It struck me that you might be able to help me."

The older woman looked concerned. "I will if I can. What is this all about?"

She said, "It has to do with Louise."

"The dead wife of Dennis?"

"Yes."

"Go on," Jane Hall said, her eyes now fixed on her intently.

She reached in her pocket and brought out the letter. Rising, she went over and handed it to her. "I found this in the pocket of this dress," she said.

Jane Hall took it from her with an almost frightened air. "Did you?" she said.

"I felt I might ask your advice about it."

The older woman slowly read the letter, then dropped her hands still clutching it and gazed up at her. She said, "This was in the dress pocket?"

"Yes."

Jane Hall hesitated and looked at the letter again with fear showing on her thin face. "Will you leave it with me?"

"If you like."

"Please do," the older woman said, folding the slip of paper. She asked, "Louise wrote it, didn't she?"

Jane Hall nodded. "I assume so."

"Who was Vinnie?"

"She had a cousin Vinnie in Providence," Dennis's mother said. It was clear the note had shocked her.

"What do you think she meant?"

The frail woman looked uneasy. "Who can say? She was very ill. Strange fancies run through the minds of the ill."

She felt that Mrs. Hall was being evasive and not doing too good a job of it. She said, "Yes, I suppose so."

"She didn't complete the note, nor did she send it," Jane Hall went on to say. "And because of that, I'd judge she felt that she'd been making wild accusations."

"Perhaps," she agreed reluctantly.

"What other explanation could there be?"

"Might she not have been interrupted while doing the note and not had any later chance to complete it?" she asked.

A shadow of fear crossed the older woman's face. She said, "No. I don't think it was anything like that."

She said, "I felt I must discuss it with someone and I didn't want to talk to Dennis about it after what happened this morning."

"You were quite right," Mrs. Hall said. "Do not say anything to him concerning this discovery."

"Very well."

"I will look into it at the proper moment," she said. "I have several theories. Are you satisfied to leave it with me?"

"Of course."

Jane Hall rose with an anxious expression on her thin face. "And do not say anything about it to my brother-in-law, Nathaniel, or my other son, Hilary. They both are too inclined to talk."

"I understand," Sabrina said, but she really didn't. Jane Hall's obvious fear and her desire for secrecy about the letter only made her worry if her first suspicion mightn't be correct—that Dennis Hall was in some way responsible for his wife's death.

"I will see you at dinner," the older woman said. "You must put this morning's accident out of your mind and carry on just as if it hadn't taken place."

"That won't be easy," she said.

"It will if you start that way without any feelings of guilt," the older woman said. "I am on your side and I shall help you."

"Thank you," she said. And she left the older woman with the incompleated letter still in her hand.

When she left the room, Sabrina thought about it some more and decided that Jane Hall must know the meaning of the letter or she wouldn't have been so upset. What she would do about it was another matter. With her mind clouded with drugs, as it often was, she might simply put off dealing with it altogether.

But until Sabrina knew what the letter meant and what really had caused the death of Louise Hall she would be under extra tension in the old mansion. She stood by her window and watched Emma and the children on the lawn enjoying a game of croquet. She wanted to go down and join in, but in the face of the reprimand she'd received she felt that she mustn't.

Still wearing the white dress, she went down to the living room and found old Nathaniel Hall already there with a glass of sherry in hand. He gave her an interested glance as she came in.

"That dress becomes you," he said. "Louise used to have one like it."

She smiled faintly. "It is the same dress."

"It is?" the old man seemed surprised. "Does Dennis know you're wearing it?"

"Yes. He gave it to me."

The shaggy white eyebrows of Dennis's uncle rose and he said, "I'm surprised. But I'm glad to hear it. He's been carrying his mourning for Louise too far. She was a fine young woman, but enough is enough."

She said, "You know her well?"

"Fairly well," Nathaniel Hall said. "I was away for a spell. She and Dennis were married when I returned. She used to talk to me when the others were away. She liked to hear the old stories about the island. I was the first to tell her about the monk."

"The ghost which is still said to appear here?" she asked. She remembered her one encounter with it and that she'd told Mrs. Hall and nothing more had been said. So why should she expect any action on that letter?

"Yes," the old man said, giving her a curious look. "You have heard the story?"

She nodded. "It's rather gruesome. Especially the part about the ghost's face being eaten away by leprosy."

He frowned. "The unfortunate part of it is that the basis for the legend is quite true. My brother was a hard man. He did turn away one of the monks who came here for yuletide alms. But I cannot vouch that the man was devoured by leprosy or that he died on the way back to the monastery in a blizzard. I think those details were added and elaborated as the years have gone by."

"I see," she said. "Then what about the curse?"

The old man's face was grim. "I'd say we are cursed all right. But I question whether the monk is to blame. I think you might better put it down to my brother's stern ways, which made Jane an invalid and crippled one son while it made a wastrel of another."

She was startled by his vehemence. "How do you come to that conclusion?"

"I left the company for a few years, when it was most profitable, because I could not stand my brother's overbearing ways. I joined another firm in Gloucester and only returned here after his death. Then I tried to help the boys. Meanwhile, he had forced Dennis to take on commands for which he hadn't enough experience. As a result, he suffered the accident which robbed him of his arm and left him with that limp. And mentally he has never been the same."

"Really?"

"Without a doubt, it affected his mind as well as his body. It was a painful, awful experience to have that happen at sea. For days they thought he wouldn't live," the old man told her.

"I didn't know."

"There are certain matters never talked about here," the man said grimly.

"I see."

"Such as Jane's devotion to 'Mrs. Colley's Remedy' and the way she wheedles drugs from old Dr. Meadows," Nathaniel Hall continued. "My brother's hard ways drove her to seek escape in patent medicines. I know that. So does everyone else in this house. But no one says it."

"And Hilary?"

"Hilary!" the old man said with a grim smile. "Hilary was the rebel. He saw what had happened to his mother and Dennis and so he refused to be destroyed by my brother. And he has wound up destroying himself. A pity!"

"You've warned me about him, yet you sound as if you like him," she said, bewildered.

The old man's eyes met hers directly. "I cannot help myself liking him even though I know what he has become. Don't you feel somewhat the same about him?"

"He does have a charm," she admitted.

"There you are," the old man said. "Have a sherry?"

She hesitated. "Perhaps I should wait until the others join us."

"No need," he said. "You shall have one while I have another."

She realized that he had been drinking a good deal. He swayed just a little as he crossed to the sideboard, and there was a reckless air about him which she'd never seen before.

He came back, gave her a full glass of the red wine, and said in a confidential tone, "I heard about your trouble this morning."

"I guess everyone has."

"Bound to! Gossip spreads like flames in an oil rag here! What else do we have?"

"I suppose it was stupid of me to take the children out in the boat," she said. "But I didn't see any risk in it. I had no idea the boat leaked so badly."

Nathaniel Hall gave her a sly look. "I'm sure you didn't," he said. "And I'm just as certain someone else did."

"What do you mean?" She stared at him.

He tapped the side of his nose in a knowing fashion. "Wait a while, my girl. You will see."

She said, "If there's anything you can tell me now, I wish you would. I feel so terribly about it all."

"You were meant to," he said. "But let that be for the moment. Do you know how my cruel-hearted brother died?"

"No." She was less interested in that than she was in what he might know about the boat. But he seemed unwilling to reveal any more concerning that at the moment.

"My brother died as he lived!" the white-bearded man said with what amounted to grim satisfaction. "They found him in his study—his money box on the table before him—sitting bolt upright and staring straight ahead of him, his eyes filled with horror."

"How awful!"

"The story goes that the monk paid a call on him while he was at work counting his money. And when the ghost had accepted a donation refused him in life, he bade my brother to join him in the other world. It was an invitation impossible to refuse."

She said, "That's part of the legend I hadn't heard."

"I can fill you in on all the missing pieces," Nathaniel Hall said expansively. "The bits concerning yesterday as well as those having to do with today."

At that moment Dennis came limping into the room. He

gave them both an inquiring look and said, "It seems you are the early ones tonight." And he went over to the sideboard for a sherry.

His uncle asked, "May I inquire whether we are having guests?"

Dennis returned with his sherry glass. "As a matter of fact, yes. Ann Gray and the colonel are coming over."

"No!" the old man protested. "Colonel Stephen is the greatest bore of this century and Ann is a cat, and I find it difficult to be pleasant to her."

Dennis smiled thinly. "They are our neighbors."

"A calamity, not a benefit," the old man grumbled.

Dennis gave his attention to her and, noticing the dress for the first time, said, "I remember that. You look charming in it."

"Thank you," she said. "When is Hilary returning?"

There was a short silence, and then the old man answered, "That is another subject we don't discuss in this house. Hilary leaves when he likes and he stays as long as he likes. And no questions are ever asked. The family are satisfied as long as he doesn't wind up in the hands of the police."

Dennis objected, "Now you're being unduly hard on him, Uncle Nat."

"I'm simply stating the truth," the old man told him.

The discussion ended with Jane Hall's entering the room. Dennis quickly got her a sherry and she sat near the fireplace with the glass in her hand. It seemed to Sabrina that the older woman was tense, though it was hard to tell since she said very little. But every so often she gave Dennis a furtive glance as if trying to decide something about him.

She spoke pleasantly to Sabrina with nothing in her manner to suggest that they had discussed the note which Sabrina had discovered in the dress of the dead Louise.

Jane Hall said, "I must go to Dark Harbor for some shopping tomorrow. If you're not occupied in the afternoon I'd like to have you join me."

Sabrina said, "I expect to be free."

"Then I'll count on you for company," she said. And she told Dennis, "Please arrange for the use of a carriage. We'll probably want to leave directly after lunch."

"I'll attend to it," he promised.

Nathaniel Hall gave Sabrina a tart smile. "You have not had the privilege of visiting our shops here on the island?"

"No," she said.

"You'll find them a far cry from Boston," he said. "But Webster Brothers is a large and well equipped store. I'm sure that Jane will take you in there."

She remembered that Webster Brothers was where the older woman was supposed to get her stock of the tonic which contained large quantities of opium. And she suddenly realized that this was likely the main purpose of the expedition.

There was no opportunity to talk of this further, as Ann Gray and her father arrived. The colonel moved about greeting everyone and halted when he came to Sabrina.

The pink-faced former military man fixed his pig-like eyes on her and said, "You lost me my boat this morning, I hear."

Embarrassed, she said, "I didn't know it was your property or I wouldn't have taken it."

"Very solid little boat. Can't imagine what happened to it," Colonel Stephen said. "Did you hit anything?"

"Not that I know of," she said. "It suddenly began to flood and there was nothing to do but let it sink and start out for shore in the water."

"Queer!" the colonel mused.

"I imagine you'll be salvaging it," she said. "Then you'll be able to find out exactly what caused the damage."

The pig-like eyes blinked. "I hadn't thought about salvage. Nuisance and a costly business. Better to take my loss and replace the boat."

This upset her as she felt her sole means of justifying herself rested in the ship's being raised from where it had sunk. She said, "I think you ought to salvage it."

The porcine colonel merely raised his eyebrows. "Indeed?"

Dinner was served, and she was seated on Jane Hall's left next to the colonel. During the meal he began his usual recital of his exploits in the Civil War. Old Nathaniel Hall listened to all this with an expression of distaste on his lined, old face.

Old Nathaniel at once launched into a discourse on the island winters, in what seemed a fairly direct attempt to shut the colonel up. He spoke of the winter of 1857 and said, "The mercury went to zero all during January and February and the island was blockaded by ice and cut off from all communication for seven weeks. We called February trumpery month. Because of a lack of news we had to talk of trumpery things!" His tone indicated that he considered the colonel's talk trumpery.

When dinner came to an end the men and women separated as was the custom in the old mansion. And as usual, Jane Hall excused herself and went upstairs to her room. It seemed that she made a special effort to appear for the dinner hour, but once this was over she sought out the seclusion of her room and the solace of "Mrs. Colley's Remedy."

While they waited for the men to join them, Sabrina and Ann found themselves alone in the living room. The maid had served coffee, and now Ann poured out cups for them.

"Do help yourself to cream and sugar," she told Sabrina. And sitting back with her own coffee, she asked, "Have you felt any ill effects from your unexpected swim this morning?"

"No," she said. She'd taken the chair opposite the divan on which the brunette girl was sitting.

"The children are all right, too?"

"I believe so," she said. "Emma is looking after them."

Ann Gray gave her a taunting smile. "Yes, I know. Dennis told me of his decision. I'd say he is taking a most generous attitude toward you."

"Oh?"

"Well, of course I do," the brunette girl said. "You could have drowned those children this morning."

"It was an accident," she said. "It could have happened to you as well as me."

Ann took on a superior air. "I would not expose them to that sort of danger." She gave her another close look. "You're wearing one of Louise's dresses."

"Yes."

"Poor Louise!" Ann commented sadly.

Sabrina gave her a searching look. "You were her close friend?"

"I like to think so."

"Did you two know each other before you came to the island?"

Ann Gray frowned slightly. "Oh, no! We met after Father and I moved here."

"Then your friendship wasn't all that old?"

"No. But it was no less warm because of that." Ann began to sound slightly defensive.

"What sort of illness did she have?"

Ann hesitated. "I believe it began as a chronic weakness. Dr. Meadows couldn't seem to make up his mind. Then she

started to lose weight and appetite. She grew weaker and weaker until the end came."

Sabrina looked at the brunette girl directly. "I understand that you helped take care of her."

Again Ann looked uneasy. She said, "Louise had a regular nurse but I filled in for a few hours each day. It seemed a humane thing to do, and she seemed to enjoy my company."

"I'm certain she did," Sabrina said quietly.

Ann's eyebrows lifted. "Why your sudden interest in Louise? Is it because you're wearing one of her cast-off dresses?"

Sabrina's cheeks flamed. "Perhaps," she said, forcing herself to keep calm. She had no wish to be exposed to more abuse from the young and wealthy widow.

"I wondered," Ann said coldly.

"The dresses have made me think of Louise," she said as a means of continuing the discussion. "What were her own feelings in the last days of her illness?"

Ann stared at her over her cup. "That is a very odd sort of question."

"Why should it be?"

"Because, frankly, I think it none of your business," Ann Gray told her. "Your presence in this house is in a capacity of glorified servant. I'd say it is impudent of you to dig into the personal affairs of the family."

"Captain Dennis Hall told me I was to consider myself more one of the family than a servant."

Ann Gray sneered. "I must say you have taken him at his word. I'm afraid I shall be forced to discuss your attitude with him."

The men came in then, and their exchange ended. It left her feeling that Ann had something to conceal about Louise's illness. She had refused to tell her what Louise herself felt though she certainly knew. As far as Sabrina was concerned, this suggested that Louise had been in mortal terror and might well have intended to incriminate her husband and this attractive widow as the two trying to poison her. It was an unhappy conclusion, but one which she felt she must explore.

The rest of the evening went by without event. And that night she slept fairly well. Toward morning, she had a nightmare in which she was floundering in the cold ocean water with the children again. She gathered them to her in the water

and began swimming toward a shore which was forever distant. She awoke at this point.

The morning brought another foggy day. When she joined the children in the nursery they were delighted to see her. They talked of the adventure in the boat for long minutes before she could get them down to their lessons. They were not aware that she would only be their teacher and not their governess. They were used to being in Emma's charge a good part of the time.

After luncheon she changed into a suit for the proposed excursion to Dark Harbor with Jane Hall. And when she went downstairs dressed in the modish brown suit and matching hat with a feather, she encountered Dennis in the reception hall.

He limped over to her and said, "That suit is striking on you."

"It is of fine quality," she said.

He nodded, his face sad. "I remember Louise was delighted with it when she found it in one of the Boston stores. We made trips to Boston just for shopping in those days."

She said, "Your mother and I are going to Dark Harbor to-day."

His handsome face shadowed. "Yes. She will be visiting the doctor and doing some shopping on the main street." He paused. "You know she has a great dependence on certain patent medicines?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

"We are distressed by this, but there seems nothing we can do," he went on. "So we do not try to interfere. She is a lonely woman, and if this is her way of finding some contentment I dare not bring myself to criticize."

"As long as her health is not threatened by it."

He shrugged. "Surely she is more frail and withdrawn than she might otherwise be. Long ago it was much different. She took a great interest in the operation of the house. Now it means nothing to her. Even when Louise was ill, she rallied and often sat at her bedside and gave directions as to her nursing."

"Did she and your wife get along well?"

His expression was puzzled. "Why do you ask that? Ann Gray told me that you spent a good part of your time with her last night asking impertinent questions about the family."

She blushed. "She warned me she would tell you that."

"I'm beginning to wonder if it isn't true," he said. "Last night I put it off as imagination on Ann's part."

"Perhaps I am too interested in your late wife," she said. "But you can partly blame yourself. You gave me her clothes and I can't help thinking about her and the sort of person she was. It is a perfectly normal curiosity, but apparently one not to be tolerated in servants."

"You are not a servant."

"You make me feel like one."

"I'm sorry," he said. "The truth is that I speak of Louise with difficulty. It is still a painful business for me. Please try to understand."

His mother came down the stairway in a black suit and with a fox fur draped over her shoulders as protection against the chill of the fog. Her hat was wide-brimmed and flat-topped and she looked very much the aristocrat.

"Come along," she told Sabrina. "I mustn't be late for my appointment with the doctor."

Dennis saw them out to the closed coach which he'd ordered because of the fog. He helped them into its interior. Then he gave instructions to the driver perched in a seat at the front, and the carriage rolled on its way.

There was not much to see due to the thick fog. They sat back against the horsehair cushions of the carriage as it jogged over the rough roads.

Sabrina asked the older woman, "What is Dr. Meadows like?"

Jane Hall looked thoughtful. She said, "When I first lived here I considered him one of the most brilliant minds on the island."

"And now?"

"He is over eighty and he works too hard. There should be another doctor to help him. He sometimes becomes confused and it is a little alarming."

"Confused?"

"As to names and the nature of one's illness," the thin woman said. "I worry that his indifferent memory might allow him to prescribe the wrong medicine for the wrong ailment."

"Yet you still go to him?"

The face deep in the shadows of the moving carriage had a look of irony as she said, "He does very well for my needs."

Sabrina said no more. After quite a little drive the coach halted outside a neat two-story colonial house.

An elderly woman answered the door. The house was dark and smelled of dampness and decay. The servant showed them to a waiting room, and they sat down. The room was empty save for a half-dozen chairs and a sick-looking potted palm.

There was a slight delay and then the door from an inner office opened and a bent old man in a black frock coat, bow tie and checkered gray trousers came out to them. He had pince-nez set on a slant on his thin, purplish nose, and there was a look of benign expectation on his long, emaciated face.

He came over and peered at Jane Hall and with an air of discovery said, "My dear Mrs. Hall! I haven't seen you for some weeks."

"I try not to trouble you, Doctor," the thin woman said. "But then there comes a time when I must have my medicine."

The old man's eyes blinked nervously behind the pince-nez. "Ah, yes, your medicine," he said in his cracked voice. "Have you used all the last lot?"

"Yes," she said firmly. "I find that lately I need a somewhat larger dose."

Dr. Meadows nodded his bald head. Then he sighed. "I suppose that is to be expected." He ventured, "Do you wish any sort of examination to check on your condition?"

"No, doctor," she answered. "I am resigned to my condition now. I only require my medicine. If you will be so good as to fix me a bottle I shall be on my way."

"Yes, yes, of course," he said in his nervous fashion. He turned to Sabrina, and with an air of recognition said, "I have not seen you for a much longer while, Mrs. Hall. And how is your good husband? I hope that his leg is not giving him too much trouble these days."

Sabrina was at once embarrassed, since she realized that the old doctor had mistaken her for the dead Louise. The facts of Louise's illness and death must have escaped his failing mind for the moment. She said, "You have made an error, doctor. I am not Louise Hall. I am the new governess."

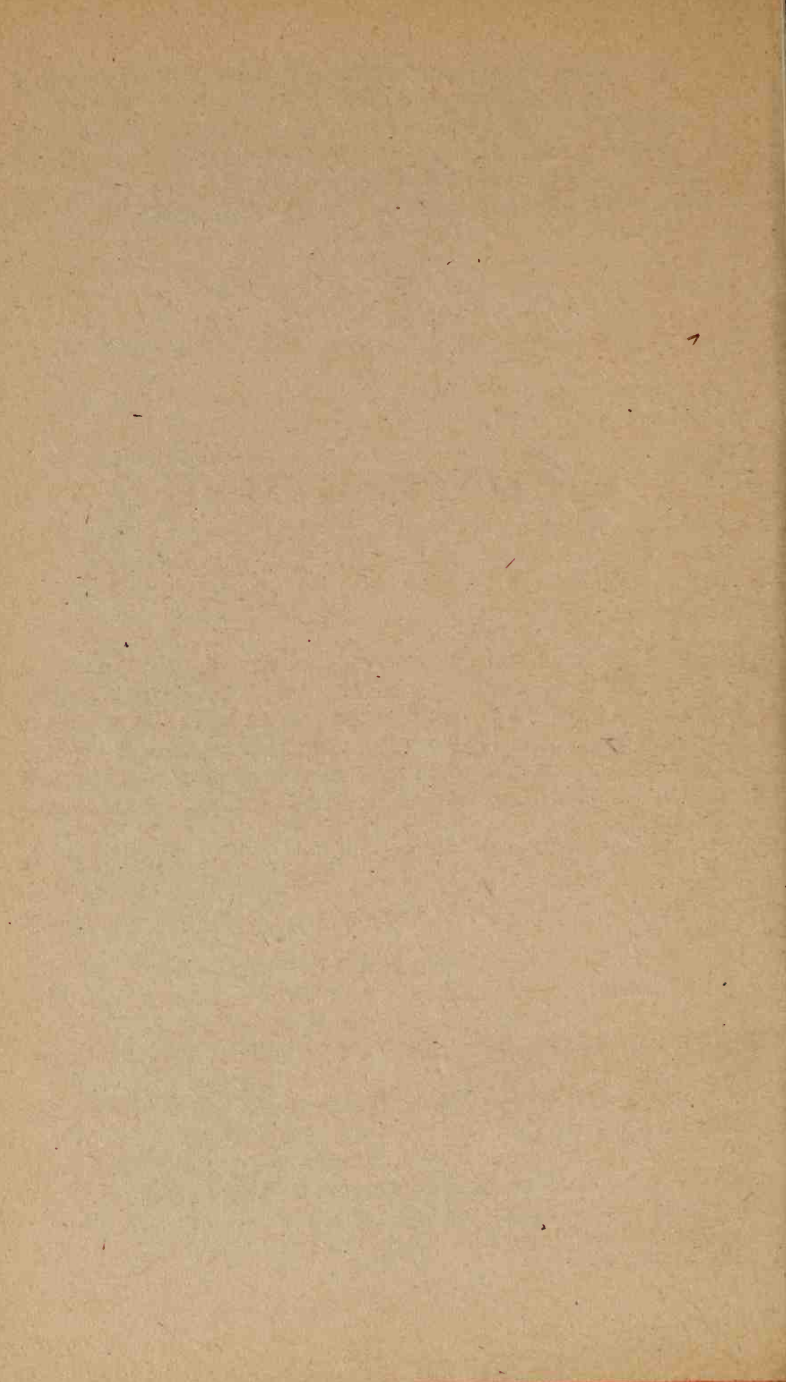
The old man registered surprise. "The new governess?" he echoed her.

"Yes," Jane Hall was quick to add. "You surely must recall that my daughter-in-law is dead. You attended her during the illness which took her life."

The old man stared at her a moment in confusion and then said, "Of course! How could I have made such a mistake!"

"It is some time since her death," Jane Hall said evenly. "Now, if you'll just get my medicine, doctor."

The old man seemed to be only partly listening to her as he adjusted his pince-nez. As if he were talking to himself, he said, "A strange case! I never could understand it! She should have recovered, and instead of that she kept failing and died."



CHAPTER NINE

Struck by the old doctor's words, Sabrina glanced quickly at Jane Hall and saw that familiar look of guilt on the older woman's face, a look she noticed on the faces of the others whenever Louise's death was mentioned. But she said nothing, and the older woman remained sitting in silence as the ancient doctor shuffled back into his inner office to get the all-important medicine.

When they were in the coach again and Jane Hall had the bottle of medicine safely in her cloth shopping bag, Sabrina turned to her and asked, "Have you made any inquiries about the letter?"

The frail woman eyed her evasively. "What letter?"

"The one I found in the pocket of Louise's dress," she said, feeling the explanation shouldn't have been required.

"Ah, yes," the older woman said. "I'd forgotten. Just leave it with me."

She gave her a sharp look. "I don't think you should just let it pass."

Jane Hall's thin face showed sudden sternness. "I must ask that you leave everything concerning that letter to me. If I remember rightly you agreed to that."

"Yes, I did," she said. "But I expected you'd do something about it."

"I intend to," the woman beside her said. "But for the moment I do not wish to discuss it."

"I see," she said quietly. There was no point in continuing the argument. It was evident that Jane Hall had already made up her mind what action she was going to take on the letter, if any, and she was not to be swayed in her decision. They rode on through the foggy afternoon on their way to the steep, cobblestoned main street and Webster Brothers Emporium.

The store was the largest in Dark Harbor. It was a composite clothing, hardware, and grocery store. Long wooden counters ran the length of the store on either side, and in the center there were tables stacked with every kind of goods. At the rear there was a raised section where the owners of the store had their offices and bills could be paid.

Clerks in shirt-sleeves and vests, wearing straw cuffs to protect their shirt cuffs from wear, greeted the customers. The clerks were all male and the senior ones were gray-haired and dignified. The younger ones ran to loud, striped shirts, hair parted sleekly in the middle, and imposing mustaches.

A pompous, elderly clerk named Clarkson greeted Mrs. Hall and bowed to them both, "Good afternoon, ladies," he said in a booming voice. And in a lower aside, he asked, "The same, Mrs. Hall?"

"The same," she said looking him directly in the eye. "Bring me a carton of a dozen bottles."

"Yes, Mrs. Hall," the big man said. "I have had Mr. Webster keep a good supply of the remedy on hand, knowing your needs."

"You're an intelligent man, Clarkson," Mrs. Hall commended him. "While you're looking after my order I'll take a look at some yard goods."

Sabrina walked over to examine a display of the latest in kerosene lamps and found some very interesting designs. She was giving all her attention to the study of the wide number of lamps when a buxom woman in a pink bonnet came up to her.

"Miss Wyler," the woman said. "Do you remember me?"

She glanced up and recognized that it was Mrs. Zachary Miller, the woman she'd met on the ferry coming over. "Of course I remember you, Mrs. Miller," she exclaimed.

"You're still on the island?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Miller glanced around and in a low voice asked her, "How are you finding it at Hall House?"

"Difficult enough," she said.

"I thought that might be the case," she agreed. "How about the children?"

"They are the least of the problems."

Mrs. Miller said, "Do come and see me some time."

"I will," she promised.

"Be sure you have one friend on the island no matter what may happen," the woman reminded her. "You can call on me or Zachary whenever you need someone."

"Thank you," she said.

"Good luck," Mrs. Miller told her warmly and she continued on her way out of the big store.

The clerk named Clarkson returned with a fairly large carton in his arms which evidently contained the medicine. He asked her, "Where will I put this?"

"In our carriage," she said. "It's waiting outside."

"I'll carry it out then," he said.

Sabrina returned to the side of the Mrs. Hall, who made a few more minor purchases and told the pompous Mr. Clarkson to see that everything was put down on her bill.

The clerk saw them to the street, and they got in the coach for the drive back. Mrs. Hall was in a tense, excited mood all the way. Her thin hands worked restlessly on her lap and she said little. When they arrived at the mansion she had Mrs. Barber take the carton up to her room at once, and with a brief word of thanks to Sabrina for accompanying her she quickly went up the stairway.

Sabrina was left in the reception hall in a somewhat startled frame of mind. The departure of the older woman had been so abrupt that she'd not been prepared for it. As she stood there old Nathaniel Hall came along the hallway.

Pausing by her, he said, "Did you have an interesting afternoon shopping?"

"Yes. In a way."

He glanced upward. "And Jane has taken her medicine up to her room with her?"

She nodded. "Yes."

A sour smile crossed his face. "Now that she has a fresh supply, we'll see very little of her for a few days."

"You really think that?"

"I'm sure of it," he said.

"It's an ugly business."

"This old house is filled with ugly things," he said. "One of

these days I will tell you a story or two which will stay with you for a long while." And with this cryptic comment he nodded and walked on into the living room.

Troubled by all that had happened she went on up to her own room. The larger room was more pleasant than the first one she'd occupied when she'd come to the old house. But on this day, when the island was shrouded in thick mist, nothing seemed too attractive. She stood by the window and stared out into the gray fog.

The words of the ancient Dr. Meadows made her more suspicious about the death of Louise. Even Jane Hall had looked guilty when she heard his comment. She'd refused to do anything about the agonized letter until it suited her. And now that she was about to embark on a drug binge, there wasn't much hope that she would take any action soon.

Sabrina moved away from the window and went to the closet where the wardrobe of the late Louise hung, and stared at the varied display of expensive clothing. What had really happened to the wife of the anguished Dennis? Had he somehow been tricked into taking part in her death? Had Ann Gray also been a partner? And did his mother know about these things? Old Nathaniel Hall had hinted that he knew something.

But no one seemed ready to tell her all the truth. For various reasons each of them held back. She was beginning to conclude that the dissolute Hilary was the most honest one of them all. But he'd be a weak reed to lean on.

Now she began to question her own role in all this. Why had she been summoned to the island? Ann Gray had recommended her knowing that she was under the shadow of having a charge die. And Dennis Hall had gone on to hire her even though this knowledge had come to his attention. To cap this there had been the puzzling incident of the boat capsizing. She knew that something had been done to that boat, and she believed it had been an attempt to drown both herself and the two youngsters. But would Dennis, even if he'd murdered his wife, want to do away with the innocent children as well? What need?

Who then would have a motive? And she could only think the culprit was someone who hated the Hall family and Dennis in particular and wanted to destroy him. And what better way to crush him than to rob him of his children? The vision of the monk returned to her mind. And she thought of the sto-

ry of the curse. Was the faceless monk bent on returning to destroy Dennis in this diabolical way?

Dinner was a subdued affair that evening. Jane Hall did not put in her usual appearance, so there were only Dennis, old Nathaniel, and Sabrina at the table. No mention was made of the missing woman, since they all knew why she was absent. After dinner Dennis limped off to his study with an almost tortured expression on his handsome face. Old Nathaniel went to the living room cradling a snifter of brandy in his hands, and she went back up to her room.

Because of her gloomy state of mind she went to bed early. And when she slept her dreams were a jumble of all the day's events. She tossed restlessly in her bed and then she was suddenly awakened by the sound of someone trying to enter her room. She at once sat up in bed with her courage fortified by the knowledge that she had bolted the door as usual.

Gradually coming awake she stared across in the darkness and listened to someone turn the door handle and then move around out there. Her nerves were taut and she remained in bed debating what she should do. Then she heard a new sound. Something was being slid under her door.

There was no sound at all after this. And when she'd waited for a little she slipped out of the bed and hurried across to the door. A small, square slip of paper was waiting for her there.

Trembling a little she picked it up and took it over to her bedside. She quickly lit a match and touched it to the candle in the holder on her bedside table. Then she examined the paper.

A simple, terse message was printed in rough letters. It read: "Meet me at the pagoda. Urgent. Come alone." And the last two words were underlined.

She stared at it with a troubled expression on her pretty face. All her good judgment told her that she should ignore the message. It was so obviously liable to be a trap. But she remembered that old Nathaniel Hall had given her his word that he'd have some important information for her at a later date. Perhaps this was it!

He'd finally decided to take a risk and tell her what evil was going on in the old mansion. And so he'd chosen this midnight hour and means to contact her. It made sense.

Having made up her mind to keep the rendezvous she quickly dressed and put on a cloak to protect her from the chill night air. Then she quietly opened her door and went out into the hallway and down the stairway. The house was quiet

as she stealthily made her way down and across to the front door.

Opening the door, she discovered that the fog had not drifted away. It was still as thick and wet as before. She stepped out onto the stone steps and after standing there a moment to gaze around her uneasily she went on out across the lawn toward the pagoda. Now she could clearly hear the distant wash of the waves on the beach.

She glanced back at the old mansion and saw that there were faintly lighted windows at various points even at this hour. Either some of those in the grim old house were sleeping with candles or lamps burning or some were still awake. She continued on the short distance to the pagoda.

Her heart was pounding as she made out its blurred outline in the fog. Searching for a sign of Nathaniel Hall's familiar bent figure, she moved on slowly. She reached the entrance to the tiny summer house and saw no one. Had she been the victim of some cruel hoax? Had someone lured her down here in this chill night merely to mock her?

She stepped inside the pagoda with the intention of waiting there for a few minutes. As she stared out the door she saw a figure gradually emerging from the gray mist and coming rapidly toward her. At first she thought it must be old Nathaniel and then she saw the robe and the cowl! It was the monk! She screamed in terror and as the phantom rushed toward her she ran out of the pagoda in an effort to escape back to the house!

But she was too late! The monk was upon her. He crooked an arm around her throat and she heard his snarl of delight as he exerted a choking pressure which left her gasping. She clawed to escape but it was useless. The breath was gradually being crushed out of her and she was on her knees frantically striking out at her phantom attacker to no avail.

Then she heard a shout. And the phantom dropped her. She fell on her side in the wet grass with a low moan. She was too weak and despairing even to attempt to get up and run. As she lay there she heard the voice again. And somehow it sounded familiar to her.

A moment later someone bent over her. "Sabrina!" her name was said tensely.

She looked up to see the tormented face of Dennis Hall bending over her. And even in her near unconscious state she saw that he was fully dressed despite the hour and she could

not help but speculate on how he happened to have been out there.

She groaned and said, "The monk!"

"The monk?" Dennis questioned her.

"Attacked me just now," she said.

As she said this she became aware of someone else running up to them. She remembered vaguely that there had been two voices at the time she'd been released by the phantom. The shouting had been confused and it was all somewhat of a blur to her. Now the other party joined them and she was startled to see it was the cloaked figure of Hilary Hall. The younger of the brothers wore a black homburg and looked as if he might have just returned from the mainland.

He also knelt by her and said, "What has been going on?"

Now she raised herself on an elbow. "I received a message to meet someone out here."

"Who?" Dennis asked.

"I don't know," she said. "It wasn't signed. It said to meet whoever it was in the pagoda. I came here, and the monk appeared from the fog and attacked me!"

"The monk?" Hilary said incredulously.

"That's what she told me," Dennis said.

Hilary helped her up. "Let's go inside and get this all straightened out," he said placatingly.

"You go with her," Dennis instructed him. "I'll take a look around here on my own."

They left him in the fog-ridden night and walked slowly back to the house. She leaned heavily on the young man and gradually the pain in her throat eased and she felt better. He led her inside and seated her in a chair in the living room. He took a candle from the reception hall, brought it into the other room, and set it on the sideboard. Pouring out drinks for her and himself he brought a glass over to her.

"It's brandy," he said. "Drink it down. It's good stuff for what you've been through." And he downed his own glass.

She took a big sip of the brandy and choked on it. "It's like fire," she complained.

"Drink it," he ordered her. "This is a fine reception for my homecoming. I came back to the island on a fishing boat, as I'd missed the ferry, and I expected to find everything calm and pleasant. Instead, I come upon a melee like this!"

The brandy burned her throat and made her feel better. She said, "Did you hear my screams?"

"Yes. I'd just stepped down from the fisherman's cart and come up the drive. I thought murder was being done."

"I'd say it was about to be."

"I came running as fast as I could," Hilary said. "I was at the other side of the house, so it took a few seconds."

"And it was Dennis who reached me first?"

"Yes," he said with a frown. "Though I must confess I don't know what he was doing wandering around at this hour."

"Nor I," she said. And again she wondered about that. Could it have been Dennis who attacked her garbed as the monk? Had he heard Hilary coming and quickly doffed the robe and behaved as if he'd come to her rescue! He could be out there now retrieving the robe and hiding it somewhere.

Hilary stood there in the soft glow of the candlelight looking as handsome in his own way as his brother. And she realized that she was glad he was back. She counted on him for support more than she'd realized.

"How have things been since I went away?" he asked.

"Not too good."

"If tonight is an example, I'd say not," he agreed.

She quickly told him about the boat episode. And she ended with, "As nobody seems to intend salvaging it, I'll never be able to prove that I wasn't at fault."

He frowned. "I'll see what can be done."

"Will you really?"

"Of course," Hilary said. "And I don't think Dennis should have reproached you in any way."

Dennis joined them at this moment. He was breathless and looked from one to the other of them. He said, "I saw someone."

"But you didn't catch him?" Hilary said.

"No," his brother replied. "I wasn't able to. He had too great a start."

"Could you tell who it was?" she asked.

"No," he said. "Just a blur in the night."

Hilary poured him a brandy and gave it to him with a grim air. "We don't seem to have accomplished much."

Dennis took the drink. "No."

Hilary was staring at him rather oddly. "How did you happen to be out there anyway?"

His older brother hesitated, "I couldn't sleep, so I was pacing up and down in my room. I looked out the window and thought I saw a figure on the lawn. That sent me down."

Hilary now looked at her. "And your reason for coming down was a message?"

Embarrassed, she said, "Yes."

"What sort of message?"

"Just someone asking me to meet him at the pagoda," she said.

Dennis gave her a troubled stare. "Surely you should have known better than pay any attention to a message like that? Why didn't you wake someone up? If you'd knocked on the door of my room—I was already awake and dressed."

"I didn't know that," she said.

Hilary was studying her with an odd expression. "What was the import of this message to so readily take you down there?"

Dennis nodded. "That interests me, also. How did you receive it?"

"I was awakened by someone outside my door," she said in a faltering tone, knowing that her reason for going down there would be impossible to explain. She could not say that she suspected one of them of murdering Louise.

"And then?" Dennis said impatiently.

"A slip of paper was put under the door. The message was on that."

"Where is it?" Hilary asked.

"The message?"

"Yes," he said.

"Here in my cloak pocket," she said. And she groped in her pocket for it. But she found nothing and she could not hide her feelings of shock and despair. "It's gone!"

"Where?" Dennis asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know. Probably out there in the struggle!"

Hilary said, "So we only have your word that there was such a message?"

"But there was!" she insisted.

Dennis looked weary. "We don't question it," he said. "I'll take a look in the morning."

Hilary wore a cynical look. "You'll never find it."

"Why do you say that?" his brother asked.

"I think whoever lured Sabrina out there will make sure it is out of the way." He turned to her. "How does your throat feel?"

"Better," she said.

"Are you harmed in any other way?" he asked.

"My hands are scratched a little," she said. "Not badly." Dennis was frowning. "Who would do such a thing?"

"Someone who hates us," Hilary said. "It's the curse working again."

"No ghost lured her to the pagoda!" Dennis said angrily.

"She saw the monk," Hilary reminded him.

"Someone is playing at charades," Dennis told him. "Using the legend to cover their crimes."

"Perhaps," Hilary said. "The important thing is that we managed to arrive on the scene in time to save Sabrina."

"Of course," Dennis said. "That is all that counts."

"In the morning it might be well to take stock and try and think who we might blame for this," Hilary said. "Meanwhile, since Sabrina is all right, I'm going to bed. I'm extremely tired."

The two men accompanied her to the door of her bedroom and bade her goodnight there. She went in and bolted the door and saw that the candle on her bedside table was still burning. It had been a short, violent episode which had given her a glimpse of the legendary monk once again and left her with a whole new set of doubts. She had a feeling that if Hilary hadn't returned at the precise moment he did, it might have been different.

Wearily she undressed and slipped between the sheets of her cold bed again. Because of her utter exhaustion she fell asleep almost at once despite her upset state. And when she next awakened, the maid was at her door with the usual jug of hot water. It was time to begin another day.

Hilary was at the breakfast table to greet her. He pulled out a chair for her and smiled. "You look extremely young and beautiful this morning. None the worse for your midnight experience."

"I feel somewhat less than well," she said, sitting down.

"I took a stroll out by the pagoda," he told her.

She gave him an eager glance. "Did you find the note?"

"No. I didn't expect to."

"Whoever it was must have found it."

"Probably. There was lots of trampled grass. Signs of the struggle."

"There would have to be," she said. "I tried desperately to get away."

Hilary gave her a thoughtful look. "What will this mean?"

"I don't understand you," she said, staring at him.

"Will you remain on here after last night?"

She hesitated. "I shouldn't."

"I agree with you completely," Hilary said, his brown eyes appraising her soberly.

"But I probably shall."

"Why?"

"For one thing, if I leave now my aunt in Boston will look on it as another admission of failure. I'll have another bad record to haunt me."

"You're referring to the boat episode?"

"Yes."

"And there also are some things I want to find out for myself," she said.

"Really?"

"I would like to have the truth about some of the things that have happened. The identity of the monk, for instance?"

"It probably has nothing to do with you," he told her. "It is more than likely someone trying to get at the family through you. As you must have discovered we are not the most popular people on Pirate Island."

"And there are the children," she said. "I'm terribly fond of them."

Hilary nodded. "They are good youngsters and their plight is pitiful. But it is not your concern."

"I find it hard to turn away from them," she said. "So for all those reasons I shall challenge fate and remain here."

He smiled. "I'm glad, of course. I have come to enjoy your company."

"You seem to have thrived on your stay away from here," she pointed out.

He crimsoned. "Not really. I found myself anxious to return."

"You couldn't have arrived at a better moment for me," she said.

"I mean to look into that phantom business more," Hilary said. "And I'll do what I can about the salvaging of the row-boat."

"I wish you would," she said, feeling hopeful.

He rose from the table. "First I must go down to my desk at the shipping office. I haven't been there for several days."

He left her to finish breakfast as he went out to take a carriage to Dark Harbor. When she completed her meal she went

back to the reception hall on her way upstairs. She was surprised to find Dennis there waiting for her.

He said, "I want to speak with you a minute."

"I've soon to begin the children's lessons," she warned him.

"They can wait for a little," he said. "This is important."

"Very well," she said.

He limped ahead and then waited to show her into his study. When they were inside he closed the door and came to her. "I've been out searching around the pagoda," he told her. "I didn't find that note."

"Hilary did the same thing," she said. "And he couldn't find it either."

"Did he tell you that?" Dennis seemed surprised.

"Yes."

"That at least gave him an excuse for being out there," he said bitterly.

It was her turn to be surprised. She said, "I don't think I understand you."

Dennis's face looked more ravaged than ever. He sighed and said, "About last night. I hadn't an opportunity to question you as I would have liked because of Hilary's coming on the scene."

"Oh?" She wondered what he was leading up to.

"When you saw this phantom last night," she said, staring at her hard, "did you get any look at his face at all?"

"No."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure," she said. Again she wondered whether it had been he and whether he was questioning her to be certain that she hadn't gotten a glimpse of him.

"You think the face beneath the cowl would have been partly visible?" he insisted.

"It was dark and foggy. Everything happened quickly."

"So you saw nothing?"

"No."

He hesitated and sighed. "You're not protecting anyone?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"You're not trying to spare someone because you're not sure whether he might be a friend or foe?"

"I can't imagine what you're talking about!" she protested.

"The face hidden by that cowl wasn't Hilary's?" he said.

"I tell you I saw nothing. And how could it have been Hilary?"

"He was there."

"So were you."

Dennis looked somewhat shaken at this. He said, "True. But I was here on the scene and alerted by seeing you moving about down here. He simply sprang out of nowhere."

She listened to the troubled Dennis and knew that in a way this was true. And it was a lot more likely that she had been attacked by someone with two arms than with one. In the struggle she'd known that her attacker had caught her neck in the crook of his arm and then exerted terrible pressure to throttle her. Yet, even a one-armed man could grip her in that fashion. So who could be sure?

She said, "Are you suggesting it might have been Hilary who attacked me?"

"I don't know. But he was there and he'd not been expected home."

"I think it was fortunate he came when he did. The sight of the two of you served to frighten whoever it was away. The intruder, or phantom if you like, might not have turned back if he'd only had you to deal with."

"I do have my infirmity," Dennis agreed. "But in most cases I can protect myself."

"I don't question that," she said.

Dennis said, "I didn't really ask you in here to discuss last night."

"No?"

"No," he went on. "I feel I should take this opportunity to apologize to you. I've thought over the boat incident and I now believe I made too much of it."

"It's over with."

"Not so long as I penalize you for it."

"I've considered it settled," she said.

"I can't," he told her. "I want you to go about freely with the youngsters as you did before."

She was surprised by his change of mind. "You're sure?"

"I'm positive."

She smiled up at him. "I appreciate your having this faith in me again," she said. "I'll try and justify it."

"I'm sure that you will."

"Is that all?"

He hesitated, his eyes fixed on her. "Yes and no."

"What else?"

"I want to tell you that I am grateful for the way you've helped my children."

"They are easy to help," she said.

"And also for the help you've given me."

Her eyes widened. "Given you?"

"You may not realize it," he said. "But your healthy outlook has helped me face the future again. I now begin to feel like trying to rebuild my life."

"I hope you do," she said sincerely.

He moved close to her and placed his arm around her as he told her, "If I do, I would like to have you at my side."

"Dennis!" she protested mildly.

"I mean it," he said. "Do you think you could ever love me?"

"It's a new idea," she said. "Let me think about it. Just now I'm so upset with what has been going on that I can't settle my mind on anything."

"I understand," he said. "Keep me in mind, that's all. I'd like to marry you and let you be a mother to Georgette and James rather than a governess."

She gave him a gentle smile. "Thank you, Dennis."

He drew her close to him and kissed her. Then he let her go, saying, "This is neither the time nor the place, but I wanted you to know how I feel. Now go on to the children."

She left him with a feeling of happiness marred only by the nagging uncertainties of why she'd been so viciously attacked the night before and whether her attacker had been a phantom or an enemy of the Hall family. There was also the disturbing possibility that Dennis had made his proposal to her to throw her off the track. It could be simply another trick to divert suspicion from himself.

CHAPTER TEN

Once more a deceptive lull settled over the majestic old mansion on the hill above Dark Harbor. Jane Hall made an appearance again after a few days, looking very frail and vague. With Hilary in the house there was a good deal more life. Even though he was regarded as the black sheep of the family, she found him always friendly and kind.

With the permission of Dennis, she again played croquet with the children and took them for walks. It was pleasant to have this freedom and the children also enjoyed it. Emma still took care of them part of the time and the arrangement worked out well.

Several times, when Sabrina and the children were strolling along the cliffs or walking down on the sandy beach, they encountered the deaf-mute, Tod. Sabrina had been wary of the ugly-looking man since the rowboat episode. And he also seemed desirous of avoiding them. On these occasions he turned and walked the other way or walked around them in a wide arc.

The golden-haired Georgette, perceptive as usual, noticed this and one day, after Tod had turned and fled from them, she tugged at Sabrina's skirt and said, "Tod is afraid of us!"

"He is!" The six-year-old James took it up. "Tod runs away! Tod runs away!"

Sabrina warned the children, "Whatever he does, you mustn't make fun of him. It will only make him angry and perhaps a danger to us."

"I'll tell my father," James said stoutly. "He won't let anyone hurt us!"

She gave the boy a wan smile, "Of course your father will protect you, but he wouldn't encourage you to bother Tod, either."

The boy went to his father about this and received a lecture on the proper behavior of children toward adults, any adults! And Dennis discussed this with Sabrina.

One sunny afternoon he joined her in the garden, where she'd been seated doing some embroidery. Since the morning after the attack on her, when he'd made her a marriage offer, he'd said nothing at all about a possible future for them. She did not consider this a token of a change of mind on his part, but rather a proof that he was prepared to wait for her decision. She had asked for time to think about it all. And surely she needed it.

She was finding herself torn between the quiet, gaunt Dennis and the exuberant Hilary. She still feared that one of them might have been her attacker, but she could not decide which of them it had been. And she could not make any plans until she did know. With the quiet which had come over the old house some of her fears had abated, yet she knew that the shadow of the curse still remained over them all.

Now Dennis said, "According to the children, this Tod is acting very oddly when you meet him."

"That is true," she agreed.

He frowned. "I must speak to Ann about him. I sometimes question the wisdom of her father in keeping that fellow on."

"There may be no harm in him," she said, "yet I have always wondered whether he did something to that boat."

"I know," he said. "I'll speak to both Ann and her father. If they will only keep the fellow more confined to their property, the situation would not present such an embarrassment."

Sabrina listened to Dennis's words and privately decided that he would not get much satisfaction from either the arrogant Ann Gray or her obstinate, pig-like father. Ann had lately been more unpleasant to her than ever and her attempts to gain the affection of the unhappy Dennis had become most obvious. Sabrina felt Ann was particularly bothered by the change which was coming over Dennis.

No longer was Ann able to exploit his sorrow. Dennis was showing less interest in his twice-daily pilgrimages to the cemetery than before. He had also lost a good deal of his melancholy. And to make his recovery from mourning for Louise all the more positive he was actually going to the shipping office every day.

He began by going only in the afternoons. Now he was making a visit both morning and afternoon and had made a few decisions about the future use of some of his fast sailing fleet. Hilary seemed glad that his brother was joining him in the business again.

Jane Hall mentioned all this to Sabrina during one of her rare periods of being downstairs in the afternoons. "There has been a great change in Dennis," the frail old woman said.

"I know," she'd agreed.

The thin woman gave her a knowing look. "I think you may have played a part in it."

"I hardly think so," she said. "Time is the great healer. He was bound to recover after a while."

"I'm sure he still grieves for Louise," the older woman said. "And I have no question but that he is as dedicated to the youngsters as ever."

"I know that."

"Ann Gray wants to marry him, you know," Jane Hall warned her. "She had her eye on him even before Louise died. But I feel my son prefers you. And I know Hilary dotes on you, though I wouldn't want you to marry him!"

Sabrina made no reply to this, though she sometimes felt that his family were unduly hard on Hilary. Still, they probably knew a great deal more about him than she did. His quick-tempered Uncle Nathaniel seemed to have an especially bleak opinion of the reckless young man and never missed an opportunity to say so. Yet, Hilary continued to do things which impressed her favorably.

She returned from walking the children along the cliffs one day to have Mrs. Barber offer her a message. The housekeeper said, "Mister Hilary is up on the Captain's Walk and he'd like to see you up there."

"At once?"

The woman nodded. "I think so. He went up there a while ago and came down to give me the message. He's up there again now."

"Very well," she said, a trifle puzzled. "I'll go up and see what he wants."

She left the children with Emma and made her way up the many stairs to the last flight which led to the rooftop and the Captain's Walk, from which a wide area of the island could be seen. It had not appeared to be a windy day, but as she stepped out onto the walk she noticed a breeze which rustled her auburn hair.

Hilary was standing by the railing of the walk looking out over the bay. His own hair was blowing slightly in the breeze. He smiled at her and said, "You received my message."

"Yes."

"Come here," he said. And she joined him at the railing. "Look down there," he told her.

She did. He was indicating the area beyond the wharf where the boat she'd been rowing had gone down. There were two boats and several men there. She turned to Hilary with an eager look and asked, "Are they bringing up the sunken boat?"

"Yes."

"You finally persuaded the colonel that he should see to it," she said.

Hilary grimaced. "No change. That autocratic old boor won't listen to anyone. He ignored my requests, so I've taken it on myself to raise the boat."

"Will he object?"

"I can't see why, since it will cost him nothing. Not even any bother."

She glanced out at the sparkling ocean again where the men in the boats were working. "Will it take long?"

"We should have it on the beach by this afternoon."

"I'm very excited," she said.

He looked amused. "I supposed you would be. That is why I asked you up here."

"Does Dennis know about it?"

"No. I didn't discuss it with him," Hilary said. "And the reason I didn't was that I feared Ann Gray might complain on her father's behalf and ask us not to touch it."

"That is possible," she agreed. "Ann always backs her father up."

"And in turn Dennis usually agrees with them both," Hilary said. "So it was best to go ahead with this on my own."

"I'll want to look at it," she said.

"I've instructed the men to let me know when they have the boat raised," he said. "I'll return and we can have a look at it together."

And so it was arranged. Hilary returned to the office in Dark Harbor. But he came back to the house at four-thirty and found Sabrina. He told her, "It's high and dry on the beach now waiting for our inspection."

"I can barely wait," she said.

They walked down to the beach, using the path in the gully, to the spot where the three men who'd raised the boat stood studying it. They moved back a little as she and Hilary approached.

Hilary turned to the young man who appeared to be the leader of the group and asked, "Have you found any reason for the sudden sinking?"

"Yes, sir," the man said. And he went to the bow of the boat and bent down to point at a spot which would be ordinarily below the water line. "See that, sir!"

Hilary and she went closer and stared at the spot he had pointed out. A round hole had been neatly bored in the boat! Clear through the side!

She gasped. "So that was it! I saw that Tod fumbling with something at the water's edge as he untied the boat. There must have been some sort of temporary plug in the boat and he removed it."

Hilary nodded. "And that would be why the boat began to take in water so quickly afterward."

"It wasn't leaking badly until then."

Hilary straightened up with a grim expression on his pleasant face. "So now we must speak to the colonel and Ann. The big questions are whether this hole was made deliberately and whether Tod removed the plug from it by accident or by criminal intent."

"No wonder they didn't want the boat salvaged," she said bitterly.

He gave her a warning look. "Don't be too quick to blame them. They might not know anything about this."

"Tod must certainly know something."

"I agree," he said. And he told the men, "Drag that boat up far enough so the tide can't reach it, and turn it upside down to dry dry out." Then he took her by the arm and they both headed up to the colonel's house.

The colonel was trimming a hedge in his garden when they arrived. He looked even more porcine in his wide-brimmed straw hat, his face purple from his labors. He halted as they joined him and peered at them suspiciously.

"To what do I owe the honor of this call?" he said carefully.

"It's about the boat," Hilary said.

Colonel Stephen glared at them. "I thought it might be. I think you have more than a nerve to interfere with my property."

"That was not our intention," the young man said. "I raised the boat to settle a rather important point."

Sabrina spoke up, "I was accused of negligence in the sinking. I felt sure by raising the boat this could be proved in error."

The colonel gave her a look of disdain. In his odd, squeaky voice he said, "I have not the slightest interest in your problems, miss!"

Hilary gave him an even glance. "You may be when I tell you an investigation has proved Sabrina to have been a victim in this affair. The boat had been tampered with so that it could be made to sink by someone's removing a plug from its side. Tod, your servant, did this!"

At this point in the confrontation Ann Gray came striding across the garden, full of indignation.

"I suppose this is about the boat!" she said with sarcasm.

"How did you know?" Hilary asked.

"I'm not blind," she said. "I've seen the men grappling for it all day."

"Interfering with our property!" her father exclaimed.

Ann challenged Hilary, saying, "That is true! You knew we had decided to leave the boat where it was."

"I decided otherwise," Hilary said calmly. "Neither you nor your father will be asked to pay any of the expense for its salvage."

"I should hope not!" Ann snapped.

"We did it to prove that Sabrina was not to blame for the sinking that day," he said. And he went on to explain.

When he'd finished, Ann gave her a sneering smile. "I think it is remarkable what lengths Hilary has gone to in his attempt to prove you free of negligence. But I don't see that it changes anything at all!"

"I do," she said. "I think that boat was prepared for my use."

It was a trap set for me. Someone deliberately drilled the hole in it and fixed it so that it could be unstopped at will."

"Ridiculous," Colonel Stephen said. "The hole was likely made for a proper repair and somehow the plug was lost."

"Of course!" Ann said. "And it was careless of Sabrina not to have made an examination of the boat before she took it out."

"I'll admit that," she said. "But I wasn't expecting Tod to make a criminal attempt on my life and those of the children."

"Tod never did any such thing!" Ann Gray argued.

Hilary said, "Let him come to us. I'd like to question him as best we can. He understands sign language, doesn't he?"

"Yes," the colonel said. "But you can't question him."

Hilary said, "Either I question him or I will fetch the police and they can do it."

Ann looked triumphant. "No they can't," she said. "Tod is no longer here. He has disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Hilary echoed, looking annoyed.

"He vanished yesterday," Colonel Stephen said. "I don't know where he has gone. He took his things with him. His room in the servants' quarters is empty."

"So he is probably off the island by this time," Hilary said.

"I'd imagine so," Ann replied.

Hilary turned to Sabrina and said, "I'm sorry. It seems that I was just a little late in my plan."

"At least you tried," she said. "And we can be sure that Tod didn't do what he did on his own. He must have been put up to it by someone else."

"Probably," Hilary agreed.

Ann eyed them coldly. "If you're trying to point suspicion at my father or me you'd better not try. Dennis will have something to say to you for all that you've done!"

Hilary said, "I'm not pointing a finger at anyone. I only wanted to find out the truth."

"And you've discovered nothing!" was Ann's reply.

They left the irate girl and her father and walked back to the old mansion in a somewhat less happy frame of mind. Hilary seemed to be especially cast down:

"I was so near solving it, and then we learned Tod had gone," he said.

"I'm sure others bear guilt," she said. "And if we wait and watch we may be able to pin this thing on them."

Hilary sighed. "I hope so," he said. But he didn't sound as if he truly believed it.

She was sure that Ann Gray was enraged about it all. And this was soon proved. Dennis came to Sabrina the following evening and said, "My mother, Uncle Nat, and I have an invitation to dinner with the colonel and Ann. I note that you and Hilary have been left out. I assume it is because of the boat business."

"I'm sure it is," she said.

Dennis looked troubled. "I wouldn't go except for Mother. She receives so few invitations and goes hardly anywhere. I think it might be good for her."

"I'm certain it would," she agreed.

"You and Hilary will be company for each other here."

"Yes."

Dennis sighed. "It's too bad about that Tod's vanishing. I'm sure he could tell us something. They say he left without giving any kind of notice."

"I'm not surprised," she said.

"A strange individual," he frowned. "I can't say that I'm sorry to be rid of him. But I do wish he had stayed on until we were able to question him about the boat."

"I know," she said.

"At least you have been proved free of any blame," Dennis said. "The unhappy thing is that we don't know who made that hole in the boat or why."

And so it remained a mystery. Sabrina still had fears of the old mansion. And many times she wondered about the frantic message Louise had written and not finished. Jane Hall had never made mention of it. The older woman seemed to be daily becoming more of a recluse. She was now only coming downstairs for a brief period at dinner. Sabrina could tell that her sons were worried. But neither of them mentioned her.

Old Nathaniel Hall was much more frank. He told Sabrina, "My sister-in-law is killing herself with drugs, and no one seems willing to try and stop her."

"Why not you?" she asked.

The white-bearded old man shook his head. "I'm the one here who is least listened to," he told her. "If Jane gets help it will have to come from someone else."

"Perhaps Dr. Meadows?"

"You have met him. You must realize he is far past his prime. There's no hope there."

"Would she listen to me?" Sabrina wondered.

Nathaniel Hall frowned. "I think not," he said. "Before her illness Louise tried to reason with her and only made Jane angry. She is most determined when it comes to her drugs—one might even say desperate."

She felt that the old man was giving her a veiled warning that the addicted Jane could be a dangerous adversary if she liked. So she accepted his advice and said nothing. She continued to believe that the old man knew more than he cared to tell her.

One afternoon he invited her for a carriage ride and took her out along the road to the monastery at the far tip of the island. He told her, "That is where our monk lived."

She studied the fortress-like building. And she asked him, "Are there monks still there?"

"Yes," he said. "They still have a colony of lepers. But we seldom see them these days. The government has taken over support of the institution, so they do not need to look to us for funds."

"Then they must send lepers from the mainland here for treatment," she suggested.

"They do," the old man said. "I don't believe there are as many as in the old days. But there are still enough of them."

As they drove back to the house the old man told her tales of the island. He chuckled over the tradition of putting a black cat or kitten under a tub or bucket the night before a ship was to sail. This was meant to create a head wind that would make the sailing out of the harbor impossible. Then he went on to tell of a visit of the governor of Massachusetts and how the ship bringing him to the island got stuck on a sandbar at the entrance to the harbor.

It was fortunate that the tide came in time to free the vessel and allow the governor to be received in state by the island officials. One of the young men of the visiting party was struck by the beauty of the island girls. When he told one of the girls that he regretted they would have to leave the island at day-break, the girl put a kitten under a bucket and such a stiff head wind arose that the governor was compelled to stay on the island another day with his full party.

Sabrina enjoyed this story and others the old man told her. And when they reached the house, she felt that they had become better friends.

As they were about to part, he said solemnly, "Don't think

because things have quieted down that our troubles are over. They could be just beginning."

It was a strange statement from the old man and she did not know just what to make of it. She could only suppose that he had some information not available to her which made him believe his pessimistic prediction.

This was the evening on which the others were invited to dinner at the estate next door. After they had left, she and Hilary sat in lonely splendor at the candle-lit table in the dining room.

The younger son of the family smiled across the table at her. "We have been left out of Ann's social scheme it seems."

"I'm sorry," she said. "It is my fault. She's still angry about the boat."

"I have an idea there's more than that," he said.

"Do you like her?" Sabrina asked over her soup.

He paused a moment. His eyes fixed on her with a glint of amusement in them. "That's a good question. I think I dislike her now. Though there was a time I wanted to marry her."

"And did you ask her?"

"Of course," he said, frankly.

"What did she say?"

"That she was in love with my brother. And that was when Louise was still alive. I reminded her that my brother had a wife. And she said she could wait until that had changed."

"How could she be sure that it would?"

"I asked her that. She said Louise was plainly too ill to live. And of course she didn't. But then Ann was faced by Dennis's vowing not to ever marry, but to dedicate his life to the children."

"A rude disappointment."

"But she hasn't given up hope. That's why they were invited over there tonight."

"I suppose so," she said.

"I'm positive of it," Hilary told her.

When the meal was over he insisted that she join him in a brandy at the table. "I'm quite alone. You don't want to desert me," he argued.

She smiled. "It is a new experience. Brandy at the table."

"Why not?" he said. After they'd been served and were sipping their drinks, he asked her, "May I put a bold question to you?"

She arched an eyebrow. "It depends on the question."

"It is most personal."

"Would you consider it insulting?"

"It shouldn't be. At least not coming from me."

"Very well, then," she said with a smile. "Get on with it."

He looked at her directly. "Has Dennis asked you to marry him?"

She felt her cheeks burn. "What makes you ask that?"

"Because of the change in him lately. He is a different man. He no longer haunts the cemetery. His obsession in protecting the children seems no longer out of hand. And he is taking an active part in the business again."

She said, "I think he might marry me if I said yes."

"Will you?"

"I don't know."

Hilary gave her a mocking smile. "If my memory is correct I believe I made you a somewhat similar offer. And mine was first."

"I'm not sure," she said with honesty, for she wasn't.

"Never mind," he said. "You'll marry Dennis. I can see it."

"Don't be too sure. There's Ann to remember."

"She will try to capture him," Hilary predicted. "But I somehow doubt that she will."

She and Hilary walked in the garden afterward. And when he bade her goodnight, he kissed her with an unexpected tenderness. She went up to bed somewhat confused again. It seemed to her that she never could be sure of how he'd act. He was completely unpredictable, which wasn't at all unpleasant.

The others had not returned from next door when she went to bed. And as she lay waiting for sleep, she thought of what Hilary had said about her marrying Dennis and she wondered if he'd been sincere. She had an idea he was merely testing her, seeing if she cared deeply enough for him to consider him for a husband.

She finally slept. And the sleep lasted until she was awakened in the night. This time there was no sound to account for her waking. But as she discarded sleep she realized that her nerves were on edge. She was all at once terribly afraid! The room which had held no terror for her when she'd gone to bed now seemed to hold a threat in every shadow!

She began to worry about the bolt on the door and whether she had put it in place. Quickly she threw back the bedclothes and went to the door and tested it. The bolt was where it

should be. With that discovery she felt a bit better, but moving across the room the icy hand of fear was still upon her. It was a moonlight night, and she went to the window and pushed aside the drapes to look out.

Glancing down at the lawn, she saw nothing at first. And then she suddenly spied a blurred figure moving slowly in the darkness. It came almost directly below her window and halted. And she almost fainted for it was the monk who stood there gazing up at her!

The figure stood out so clearly in the moonlight that there was no mistaking it. She realized that it was the eerie presence which must have intruded on her sleep and awakened her. And now the monk was here below her window as if to give her some sort of warning! Or perhaps to place some special curse on her!

She tore herself from the window. Rushing to the door, she unbolted it and hurried down the hall to Dennis's room. She pounded on the door and called his name.

After a short pause he opened the door. He stared at her sleepily. "What is it?"

"The monk!" she exclaimed.

"Where?"

"On the lawn. Gazing up at my window!"

He frowned. "You're not having a nightmare?"

"No! I saw him clearly!"

"All right," he said. And he brushed past her and hurried down the stairs to the front door and outside.

She followed him at a slower pace. The stone of the reception hall was cold on her feet, as in her hurry she'd not even put on her slippers. She realized with a sudden rush of embarrassment that she was also clad only in her flimsy nightgown. But she could not retreat to her room until she knew what was happening out there.

The front door was partly open, and she stepped outside and looked in the direction in which she'd seen the ghost. There was no sign of the monk now, though she did catch a glimpse of Dennis going down toward the path which led to the beach. He must have decided the phantom had fled that way.

She stood there in the chill night air waiting for him to return. And then she heard a rustling sound and she quickly whirled around to see a figure loitering in the bushes. She

cried out but at the same instant the figure came out into the open and she felt less afraid.

It was none other than Jane Hall, wearing a cloak with a hood on it. And as Sabrina stared at her she realized that there was a small possibility that she'd mistaken the older woman for the ghost.

Jane said, "Did I frighten you?"

"Yes," she admitted. "But first I was frightened by someone else. I saw the ghost of the monk. He came and stood beneath my window."

The older woman came close to her. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," she said. "I awakened Dennis and had him come down here in search of the phantom."

The woman in the cloak and hood offered her a sad smile. "You surely don't expect him to come back with the phantom in his grasp? That has never happened and never will happen."

"What are you doing out at this hour?" Sabrina asked her.

"I could not sleep," the frail woman said.

"How long have you been outside? It isn't safe at night!"

"I just came out a moment ago," Jane Hall said. "I walked as far as the pagoda and back. When I heard you on the doorstep I was frightened and stood in the shadow of the bushes until I saw who you were."

Sabrina asked her, "You didn't come and stand below my window, did you?"

"No," the older woman said. "If you saw someone there it must have been the real phantom."

"I saw the ghost," she insisted.

"No doubt," Jane Hall said. "I think I will go back to my room now."

Sabrina said goodnight to Jane Hall and watched her slowly ascend the stairs in ghostly fashion. Again she worried that it might have been the older woman whom she'd seen. But though the outfits were somewhat the same she was certain the phantom had looked different. She stood in the doorway shivering until at last Dennis came back across the lawn.

He came up the steps to her and, with a drawn look on his handsome face, said, "Nothing!"

"You didn't see any sign of him?"

"No."

"I'm sorry."

He stepped inside and eyed her sharply. "You're sure this wasn't all a bad dream on your part?"

"I'm sure!"

"Then I'm sorry. I've failed."

She said, "I met your mother a few minutes ago."

His eyebrows lifted. "My mother?"

"Yes. She said she couldn't sleep. She was out wandering on the lawn."

Dennis looked pained. "She's getting worse. The drugs are driving her mad!"

"She was wearing a robe and hood. At first I thought she was the monk."

He stared at her incredulously. "There's your explanation."

"No!" she protested.

"Why not?"

They stood there almost angry in their confrontation. She said, "I knew you'd try to make it seem that she was the answer."

"It seems clear enough."

"It couldn't have been her I saw at first."

"Why?"

"She told me she'd not been near my window."

"How would she know?" Dennis asked in disgust.

"I'm sure she was telling me the truth. She said she walked to the pagoda and straight back. So it couldn't have been her under my window."

"She's in a daze from drugs. She could have been there and not recall it."

She sighed. "If you must prove that, all right. There's no use in my arguing."

The one-armed man gave her a tragic look. "But don't you see? It fits!"

She said, "I can see that you want it to fit. As you've always wanted things to settle in place comfortably. You won't face up to the fact there may be things going on here you don't understand."

"Sabrina!" he said with reproach.

"I know what I saw," she said firmly. "I will not be tricked into believing I saw something else."

He hesitated. "There's no point in discussing it further. Time we returned to bed."

"I'm sorry I awakened you," she said as they started up the stairs.

"I was glad to help," he said. "I'm only sorry I didn't find anything."

"I know," she agreed, thoroughly depressed.

He saw her to the door of her room and then rather awkwardly left her. She went inside and bolted the door again, convinced he didn't believe her and that the ghost had come to warn her of dangers ahead.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

She made no mention of the midnight appearance of the phantom the following day, and neither Dennis nor his mother said anything to her about it. The morning was fine, and when she had finished going over the children's lessons they clamored for her to take them for a walk.

"Very well," she said with a smile. "But we mustn't be gone too long. It will soon be lunch time."

"The beach!" James exclaimed. "I want to go to the beach."

"It is a lovely day," golden-haired Georgette said. "Maybe we can wade in the water."

"That will have to wait until later," she told them. "But we will have time to take a short stroll on the sand."

They left the house and crossed over to the property line which divided the two estates. She saw Colonel Stephen working in his garden again, and the old military man glared at them as they passed. He had not spoken to her since the episode of salvaging the boat.

There had been no word of the missing Tod, so the boat's sinking remained something of a mystery. She kept the children close to her as they neared the path in the gully and began descending to the beach.

"Don't keep running ahead, children," she begged them.

"Why not?" little James wanted to know.

"I like you near me," she said. "And rushing on as you do, you might stumble and hurt yourselves!"

"I won't stumble!" James declared sturdily.

"And I won't either," Georgette announced, not to be outdone by her younger brother.

They reached the beach and the children became more unrestrained than ever. The animal spirits which had been carefully contained during their studies in the nursery were now released. They ran ahead, skipping and jumping, tossing stones in the water, and shouting back at her.

"Please be a little less active, children," she begged them.

But they had no intention of minding her. They went on along the area of the beach where the cliffs rose high above them. And now the roar of the incoming tide was so loud that it was difficult to hear. She gave up shouting to them as they frolicked a full fifteen yards or so ahead of her, but she did watch them closely. She could not help being a little fearful whenever they were in her charge. The unhappy incident in the boat had taught her that.

She looked up and what she saw on the edge of the cliffs made her gasp. Outlined against the nearly cloudless sky was a stocky figure which she was sure was Tod's. And now he crouched over the ledge, and to her horror she saw that he had pushed a huge boulder over the cliff to start a landslide. The boulder bounced and came tumbling down the cliff face bringing a mass of rocks and dirt with it.

Sabrina screamed out a warning to the youngsters. But it was useless! They didn't hear her! She cried out again and began running toward them, straight into the path of danger, unmindful of the falling rocks, bent only on rescuing the two. But the cataclysm of nature was beyond her. The ground shuddered beneath her feet and the earth poured over her as she came to a standstill sobbing and screaming.

It was over in a moment! She stood there in the sunlight stunned and covered with the soft earth. A distance ahead stood little James looking equally dazed. The rocks and loose earth lay between them. And somewhere amid that rubble must be Georgette!

She rallied from the initial shock and stumbled across to the little boy and took him in her arms. "Where is your sister?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I don't know!"

She hoped for a moment that Georgette might have gone on

ahead far enough to escape the landslide. But now she realized this had not been possible. She turned and stared amid the confusion of rocks and earth and after a moment saw the outline of the child's outstretched form. She raced over to her with James awkwardly following her.

"Georgette!" she cried, kneeling by the child's grimy body and turning her over so that her pale, little face was toward the sky.

James whimpered. "She's dead!"

She leaned her ear to the tiny chest and then shook her head. "No! She's alive! But we must get her back to the house and call Dr. Meadows!"

The minutes which followed were always to remain a tortured blur for her. She lifted the child gently in her arms and began to walk the steep path back toward the house. She had James at her side, crying and tugging at her skirt, in the fear which followed his shock.

When she reached the lawn of the mansion, Dennis was on his way inside. Seeing her and the burden she carried, he came running out to her. Horror was written on his gaunt face as he saw their condition and that Georgette was unconscious.

"Landslide," she said, handing the little girl over to her father. "Get Dr. Meadows!"

Dennis shook his head. "We can't depend on his getting here in time. The carriage I came in is still ready. Best to take that in to the doctor's house!"

"Yes!" she exclaimed.

She sent the frightened James into the house to find Emma and have her clean him up. She remained with Dennis and the little girl. The stable hand gave them a single surprised look as they came walking up to take the carriage. She got up and took a seat and Dennis handed her Georgette.

"You hold her and I'll drive," he said. He flipped the whip and the two bays started off.

The drive to Dark Harbor was another wild affair which would always return to haunt Sabrina. The light carriage swayed on sharp corners of the road, so that more than once she thought it might be overturned and they would all be sent plunging to injury or death. The wheels and the horses' hooves stirred up a cloud of dust which barely allowed them to see ahead.

When the carriage finally came to a frantic stop outside the doctor's house, the horses' were lathered in sweat. Dennis took

the child from her and tersely instructed her, "Tie up the horses." And he got down from the vehicle and headed for the doctor's front door.

By the time she'd safely taken care of the horses and carriage and entered the doctor's house the child was already being examined. She paced back and forth in the waiting room not daring to think what the verdict on Georgette might be.

After an eternity, the door from the inner office opened and Dennis came out. He seemed to have aged in the short time since the accident.

"How is she?" she asked.

"She's still alive. But she's also still unconscious," Dennis said in a strained voice. "If she lives through the next few days and regains consciousness she'll have a chance."

"Thank heaven even for that," she said in a weary voice. "I was terrified she might die on the way here."

He stared at her oddly. "You're injured as well," he said. "Your face is cut badly on the right cheek."

"It's nothing."

"The doctor must look after you as soon as he finishes with Georgette," the handsome man said.

"I'm sorry," she faltered. "I want to tell you about how it happened."

He gave her a bleak look. "Later," he said, and he turned on his heel and went back into the inner office again.

Not until then did she suspect that for a second time she was to be considered to blame for an accident to the children. It was clear that Dennis felt she'd been negligent. Otherwise he wouldn't have turned away from her so coldly. And it was so unfair, since she'd tried so hard to protect them.

She sat weakly in a nearby chair and stared ahead of her in despair. She was still sitting there when old Dr. Meadows came out to tend to her minor injuries. It was the better part of an hour before they were ready to leave.

The old doctor said, "It is better for her to stay here for a day or two. I can watch her closely, and she needs that sort of care. When she is conscious again, you can take her home to regain her full health there."

Dennis gave him a grimly questioning look, "You think she will recover, doctor?"

"Everything is on her side," the old man said.

With that small comfort, she and Dennis went out to the carriage. Dennis had already made plans to return and keep

watch over his little girl. He helped Sabrina into the carriage, and they drove off.

She waited until they were underway for a moment before she said, "You blame me, don't you?"

He kept his eyes straight ahead. "They were in your charge when it happened."

"I did everything I could."

"You'll forgive me," he said stiffly. "I find that difficult to believe."

"The children kept running ahead of me. I warned them."

"If Georgette should not recover," he said, tautly, "I shall first hate myself and secondly I'll hate you."

She gave him a pleading glance. "Dennis, I know how you must feel, but you haven't heard everything!"

"What else is there to hear?"

"The landslide was not a natural one."

For the first time she pierced his armor of coldness. He gave her a questioning look. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. The landslide was deliberately started to harm the children and me."

"How do you know?"

"I happened to look up. I saw a figure crouching over the cliff. He sent a rock pounding down and the rock started the landslide. It was Tod up there!"

His expression was one of astonishment. "Tod is no longer on the island!"

"How can you be sure?" she challenged him.

He kept his eyes on the road ahead again. "Colonel Stephen and Ann Gray both said so. They mentioned it again at dinner last night."

"You have only their word."

"Do I need more?"

"Tod could still be on the island without their knowing! Have you thought of that?"

He hesitated, his face white and tortured with indecision. He said, "You swear you saw him?"

"Yes. The children were running ahead. I just happened to glance up. I tried to warn the children in time. But there was so little time!"

"There's only your word for this," he said dully. "You could be making up the story to protect yourself."

"Do I seem that sort of person?"

He looked at her again, with more humanity in his face this time. "No," he said.

"Then do try and have faith in me! You didn't before and you found out that you had been wrong!"

"That was different."

"No."

He asked her, "Do you think James saw Tod up there?"

"I doubt it."

"We can ask him when we get back," he said.

"A search of the island should be made for Tod," she said.

"He might get away now without being caught."

"I'll think about it," Dennis said.

"And while you're doubting me you may be losing your one chance to capture that madman," she lamented.

They reached the house and went inside. All of the family were gathered in the living room along with Colonel Stephen and a shocked-looking Ann Gray. The brunette came rushing to Dennis as soon as he came into the room.

"Is she alive?" Ann asked with a sob in her voice.

He nodded slowly. "Yes."

"God is good!" Ann said piously.

Hilary stepped forward. "What are her chances?"

Dennis looked bleak. "It's a fifty-fifty business at this point. She hasn't recovered consciousness."

From a chair a distance away Jane Hall sobbed and said, "Poor little dear!"

Nathaniel Hall at her side patted her on the shoulder and said, "No need to give up hope. She is young and has lots of vitality. I say she'll recover."

Colonel Stephen glared at Sabrina. "We can hope so," he said. "I have always claimed it a foolhardy business strolling beneath those cliffs."

She met his glare unflinchingly. "Especially when someone above causes a landslide."

The colonel looked shocked. "Someone caused the landslide?"

Dennis spoke up. "It is Sabrina's claim that the landslide was started by a man on the cliff above. And the man was Tod."

"Tod!" Ann Gray said angrily. "That is utter nonsense! He isn't even on the island!"

"How can you be so certain?" Sabrina demanded of her. The other girl gave her a look of hatred. "Because he left

our house. I know he did! You're making up this story so you won't be blamed for carelessness again!"

"Let's not go over all that!" Dennis said wearily. "We can all pray for Georgette's recovery. Her life is in hands beyond ours at this moment."

Ann Gray said, "Is there anything I can do? Would you like me to take care of James for a few days?"

"No," Dennis sighed.

The brunette glared at Sabrina again. "I'm quite willing to if you wish. Obviously there have to be some changes made here!" And with that she turned to her father. "Come along, Father. We mustn't intrude on the sorrow of these good people any longer."

"Very true," Colonel Stephen mumbled. "Depend on us if we can be of any help." And the two made their way to the reception hall, with Dennis accompanying them on their way out.

Hilary at once came to her. "What about you? I can see you've been injured. Dennis didn't seem to be worried about you at all!"

"I'm all right," she said. "How is James?"

"Fine," Hilary said. "He's in the nursery with Emma."

"That will be best for him," she sighed. "Someone should let him know that Georgette is alive and likely to recover."

"I'll do that," Jane Hall said, rising with a surprising display of vigor. "I'm the child's grandmother and I've been neglecting both him and Georgette."

"And I'll go along with you," old Nathaniel Hall said.

They went, and Hilary and she found themselves alone in the living room. He said grimly, "I didn't think things would go on smoothly forever."

She said, "I'd like to examine the cliff where I thought I saw Tod."

"We can do it now," Hilary suggested. "At least we can if you feel well enough."

"I do," she said. "And I don't think Dennis will want to look. He's planning to return to the hospital soon."

Hilary nodded. "This has hit him hard."

"I know," she said.

They left the house and walked across the lawns and by the pagoda until they neared the edge of the cliffs. Then they followed along the cliff searching for the point where she'd been certain she'd seen Tod.

"The fellow's a madman," Hilary grumbled. "They should have made a search for him."

"For some reason he's tried twice to do away with the children and me," she agreed as they walked slowly along inspecting the grass at the cliff's edge for a sign of footprints.

"You're sure it was Tod?"

"I'm almost positive."

He gave her an uneasy glance. "Almost?"

"Now you sound like your brother," she said.

"Did Dennis blame you? I felt he was defending you at the house," Hilary said.

"I'm afraid it wasn't quite like that on the drive home," she said. "He thinks I was negligent. I know it."

"Ann Gray had no right to accuse you," Hilary complained.

"I knew she would," she said.

"Without a question. She's trying to turn Dennis against you for her own sake."

"And it won't take too much to do it now," she sighed.

"The curse at work again," Hilary said.

She turned to him. "I was warned last night."

He looked amazed. "You were what?"

"I saw the ghost last night. The monk came under my window as a warning something was going to happen!"

Hilary seemed shocked. "You aren't serious!"

"I am," she said. "I even awakened Dennis to search for the ghost. So he knows about it."

"And I'll wager he didn't find it?"

"No."

Hilary seemed dismayed. "I told you some time ago that you ought to leave this place. Go back to the mainland and your Aunt Ivy. Nothing could be worse than the trouble we're in here!"

She said, "No. I'm going to remain." And then she came to a sudden halt and pointed down at the cliff's edge. "Look!"

Hilary did and they both stood staring at the spot where the culprit obviously had waited to send down the rocks on the innocents below. There was fresh earth showing where the boulder had been torn away, and the grass was crushed with footprints.

She said, "Surely Dennis will believe my story now."

"I'll try to convince him," Hilary said.

But when they returned to the old mansion, he had already left for Dark Harbor and the doctor's house. Sabrina did not

see him that evening or the next morning. She did hear that Georgette's condition was the same. She went to the nursery in the morning and gave James some lesson work to do. But the child was depressed and so was she, so little was accomplished.

Now the time was hard to fill. Both Hilary and Dennis were away from the house most of the day. And Dennis went back to the hospital to sit with his stricken daughter every night. Dennis had said little to Sabrina, but she was sure that he still held her responsible for what had happened.

She began to review all that had taken place in the old mansion since her arrival there. And it seemed to her there would be a definite pattern about the incidents if she could only fit it all together. For the moment she couldn't.

She was startled a few days later when Ann Gray came to her in the garden in mid-afternoon. The brunette girl seemed in an oddly contrite mood and she at once asked her if she might sit and talk with her for a few minutes.

Sabrina said, "Of course. Sit here." And they sat on a wooden bench near the pagoda with a view of the garden.

Ann Gray adjusted her yellow crinoline dress and gazed at her from under the broad brim of her yellow hat. She said, "I felt I must have a private talk with you."

"Oh?"

"Yes," Ann went on. "Father and I have talked it all over and we feel we may have been unfair to you."

"Thank you," she said.

"I did suggest you for governess here," Ann went on. "And I do have some responsibility in all that has taken place. I think you have done your best and that the accidents you had were beyond your preventing."

Surprised by this change of tune on the brunette's part, Sabrina said, "I only wish you had spoken this way before the others a few days ago."

Ann Gray shrugged. "I had not weighed the situation then."

"And now?"

"I think you deserve every consideration."

"Please tell Dennis that, will you?" she asked.

"If you like."

"It would mean a good deal, coming from you," she said.

Ann raised her eyebrows. "Do you think so?"

"Yes. I'm sure he has great respect for you."

The brunette looked pleased. "And I am completely devoted to him, though he appears little interested."

"He has gone through a great deal."

"Yes," the other girl sighed. "He has known little but tragedy, beginning with his crippling."

"I think that has bothered him less than the other things," she said.

"No doubt," Ann agreed. "Do you think Georgette will live?"

"She regained consciousness this morning," she told the other girl. "If all goes well, Dennis intends to bring her home tomorrow or the next day."

"How splendid!" Ann said.

"Yes. I think the danger is over."

"What a blessed relief for us all," Ann Gray said. "My father will be so pleased to hear the news. He has worried about what you said concerning Tod."

Sabrina gave her a surprised look. "But I understood you both believed Tod had left the island."

"Father isn't quite sure. Nor am I. How can we be?"

"I felt that from the start," Sabrina said. "I think he is on the island, that he is mad, and that he caused both of the accidents."

Ann sighed. "You may be right, you know. I hope not."

"If I am it is likely he will strike again," Sabrina said.

"Some people blame these misfortunes on the ghost," Ann reminded her. "The monk who was turned away from here."

"I know," she said.

"It's a very mixed-up business," Ann said. "But I at least wanted to set things right with you. I know you dislike me."

"How can you know that?" Sabrina asked.

"I think that is plain in your manner."

"Not at all," she said. "I may have been angry at some of the things you've said and done, but I would hesitate to say that I dislike you as a person."

Ann gave her a small smile. "You are generous enough to forgive me?"

"Why not? Georgette is recovering. It would be against Providence to hold hatred against anyone."

"I feel exactly the same way," Ann said, rising. "Let there be no more enmity between us."

Sabrina also got up. "I would like it that way."

"Now I must go back and tell my father the welcome news," Ann Gray said. "I'll return and see Georgette when her father brings her home."

"Please do!" Sabrina said.

She walked a distance across the lawn with the brunette and then returned to the area where the croquet wickets were set out. Old Nathaniel Hall was standing there with a grim expression on his white-bearded face.

"What did that one want?" he demanded irritably.

"She came to inquire about Georgette."

"Oh?"

"And, you won't believe this, to make friends with me," she said with a smile of irony.

The old man looked startled. "After the way she tackled you last night?"

"Yes. I was amazed."

Nathaniel Hall glared across at the other estate. "So Miss Arrogance came over here mealy-mouthed!"

"She stayed for quite a while. She apologized and almost begged me to be friends."

"I don't trust her!" the old man said vehemently.

"No?"

"No. I think she's up to something. She's a sly one and if she can't manage what she wants one way she'll try it another."

"What she really wants is to marry Dennis," she said.

"And she can't very well call over here to see Georgette while she's recovering if you and she are at odds," the old man said. "And her solution is to prepare the way for herself by patching up her quarrel with your first."

"It could be that," she agreed.

"Has to be!" he declared. "And as her friend you won't be in any position to criticize her. I'll bet she's thought of that as well."

"Quite likely."

Nathaniel Hall looked gloomy. "I thought you had better sense than to let her get away with that."

"I wasn't prepared. Her whole approach was a surprise."

"Sure it was."

"But I'll continue to be wary of her," she said.

"She can't bear your being around here," Nathaniel said. "She knows that sooner or later Dennis will turn to you again."

"There doesn't seem much chance of that now."

"Wait and see," the old man said. "So she's playing the same game with you that she did with poor Louise."

This startled her. "What do you mean?"

"She and Louise didn't get along at the start. But then after Louise's illness that Ann was over here every day just as pretty as you please. Always helping the nurse and sitting with the poor girl for long spells. Pretending to be her friend when all the time she was sitting there waiting for her to die."

Sabrina stared at the old man. "You really feel that?"

"I do," he said. "And I tell you, be careful of that young woman!"

"I will," she said.

She left the old man on the lawn and went into the house. She considered all that Nathaniel had said and realized that there was a great deal of truth in it. The old man was a shrewd judge of character, and he'd been around long enough to understand Ann Gray. The complete reverse in the brunette's attitude had made her suspicious. And it bothered her to hear the old man's comments about Ann and the dead Louise.

She now automatically thought of the note she'd found in the pocket of Louise's dress. It seemed an age since she'd discovered it and taken it up to Jane Hall. The mother of Hilary and Dennis had asked her to leave the note with her. She'd promised to look into it and since then not a word had been spoken by her about it.

Alarmed, she began to wonder whether the note was perhaps the key to the whole mystery. Could Louise have been referring to her husband and Ann Gray as conspiring against her in the note? No names had been mentioned, but the fear of foul play had been flatly stated. If the note had been completed, it might be that the two would have been named.

She found herself so troubled that she felt she must speak to Jane Hall about this again. So she went upstairs and straight to the older woman's room. The door was closed and she knocked on it. There was no answer. Next she tried the door. It opened easily.

The room was dark as she went inside. The shades still drawn. This did not surprise her since Jane Hall slept in a drugged stupor until dinner time. She saw the frail woman stretched out on the top of the bed in a seeming deep sleep. Because she was so desperate to question her she became bolder than she would have been otherwise. She crossed the dark room to the older woman's bedside, bent down, and touched her on the shoulder.

"Mrs. Hall!" she said.

There was no reply. She hesitated and then tried again. "Mrs. Hall, I must speak with you," she said earnestly.

The wan face of the older woman showed no expression. And it was then that an icy chill shot down Sabrina's spine. In a state of utter fear she shook the frail woman hard. There was no response. With a sob she ran from the room and down the stairway.

The first person she met was Mrs. Barber. She told the housekeeper, "Come with me quick to Mrs. Hall's room! I think there's something wrong!"

The buxom woman looked uneasy. "Yes, miss," she said.

They both quickly mounted the stairs and went to the room. Mrs. Barber crossed to the bed. Jane Hall lay there without having moved. The housekeeper bent over her and then lifted her head to give Sabrina a knowing look.

"Her trial is over," the housekeeper said solemnly.

Sabrina took a deep breath. "I was afraid so."

And thus it was that the homecoming of the tiny Georgette was darkened by the death of her grandmother. Both Dennis and Hilary took their bereavement in stoical fashion. They had known for a long while that the drugs which their mother had continued to take would sooner or later destroy her.

Nathaniel Hall sputtered at her stupidity and then broke into tears beside her coffin. Ann Gray, in suitable black, was on hand almost constantly. Colonel Stephen was one of the pallbearers.

The day of the funeral was suitably gray with the fog which so often came to shroud the island. There was a large turnout of islanders for the funeral. It was Sabrina's first visit to the town graveyard where Dennis made so many pilgrimages. She stood with the other mourners at the graveside, her mind filled with many thoughts.

When the funeral service was over, old Dr. Meadows came to Dennis and said, "You will come for the little girl tonight?"

"Yes," Dennis replied. "I didn't want to take her home until after the funeral."

"Very wise," the old doctor said. With a sad glance at the grave, he added, "There was nothing anyone could do toward the end. She was committed to death."

"Yes," Dennis agreed.

The doctor moved on to speak with Hilary and the others. Sabrina walked over to the headstone which marked the grave

of Louise. She was still standing there when Dennis joined her. She glanced at him and said, "I have never been here before."

"It was my shrine for a while," he said, staring sadly at the mound of grass and the white stone marking his wife's last resting place.

"I know."

"I thought I had gotten over all that," he said with a sigh. "I'm not sure now."

"Things will be better with Georgette back and recovering," she said.

"I hope so," he said.

Ann Gray came up, beautiful in her elaborate black dress. She said, "I thought you might drive home in the carriage with Father and I, Dennis."

Dennis looked slightly upset. He said, "I have my own carriage."

Ann linked her arm in his. "Sabrina and Hilary can ride back in it. I'm sure they won't miss you." And she led him away with her.

Sabrina was mildly shocked by the brazen fashion in which the brunette had taken advantage of Dennis's grief to take possession of him. It did not add up well for the future!

And then another odd thing struck her. They had been standing at the grave of Louise. And Ann, who supposedly had been the staunchest of Louise's friends, had come over to it and not even offered so much as a sad word or a glance at the tombstone. Somehow it did not seem at all right!

CHAPTER TWELVE

Hilary Hall, looking strangely somber in a plain black suit, came to stand with her by the grave of Louise. He said, "What are you doing here?"

"A great deal of thinking," she said.

"Oh?" He glanced across the fog-ridden cemetery to where the coaches were lined up to leave. "I see that Ann has whisked Dennis off with her."

"Yes," she said bitterly. "She didn't give him a chance to refuse."

"I can believe that, knowing her," Hilary said.

"And she not so much as glanced at Louise's grave," Sabrina said.

"She was glad to see Louise go," Hilary said. "Her show of friendship didn't amount to much."

"I gathered that," Sabrina said. "When we return to the house I have something to tell you."

He stared at her. "Something new?"

"Not really, but I believe it to be important," she said.

She and Hilary returned to the coach in which they had come. Old Nathaniel Hall was already sitting in it, huddled against the side and staring out at the fog in melancholy fashion.

He greeted them with, "Where is Dennis?"

They told him, Sabrina saying, "I don't know whether he wanted to go with her or not."

The old man snorted. "Of course he didn't want to go with her. But she's too clever for him. The woman is a sly one."

Hilary settled back in the coach and gave Sabrina a tired smile. "I'm sure we can all agree on that."

When they arrived back at the old mansion Nathaniel Hall at once went up to his own room. Though Jane Hall had only been downstairs for a few hours each day there was a void in the house without her. The knowledge that she was gone changed the atmosphere. As long as she'd lived she'd been the mistress of the house.

Hilary went to the sideboard in the living room and fetched glasses of sherry for himself and Sabrina. They stood facing each other in the big room.

"We're going to miss her," Hilary said.

"I agree," she said.

"In the old days when Dennis and I were young she was active and beautiful," he went on. "These last years she was only a shadow of herself."

"Did her drug addiction begin before Louise and Dennis were married?"

"Yes. By the time Louise came here, Mother was deep in drugs. But it became worse every year."

She gave him a troubled look. "The day I went up to your mother's room and found her dead I had gone up there for a special reason."

"Yes?"

"I was looking for an answer to something. An answer it seems I'll not get now."

"An answer to what?"

She told him, saying, "You are the first, aside from your mother, to know. I haven't even any idea what may have happened to the portion of letter."

"A letter written by Louise," Hilary said. "That's spine-chilling."

"I think the message was truly macabre," she said. "It sounded as if she believed someone were plotting her death."

Hilary sipped his sherry. "Dying people sometimes get morbid ideas. Ideas which have no relation to reality."

"Was Louise a morbid person?"

"No. At least not until her illness. And I don't think you could actually term her morbid then."

"So her suspicions may have been well founded," she said. "I hope not," Hilary said grimly. "We've had enough tragedy here already. I have no stomach for anymore."

She persisted. "Why did your mother put me off the way she did?"

"You think she did put you off?"

"Yes. She promised to do something about the letter and then never mentioned it again."

"Why would she do that?"

"I can't imagine. Can you?"

"There could only be one reason," he said at last.

"What?"

"She must have been attempting to protect someone."

"Who?"

Hilary shrugged. "I would think it was someone dear to her. Someone she thought might be hurt."

Her eyes met his. "Are you thinking of Dennis?"

"Maybe."

"I've wondered, too."

Hilary frowned. "I'd like to see that letter. I'd be better able to judge it if I could read it myself."

"If it still exists it must be among your mother's things," she said.

"Very well," he said in a quiet voice. "What do you say if we take a look?"

"Will Dennis object?"

"Is that important under the circumstances?"

"No. I suppose not."

Hilary nodded. "Then let's get on with it."

They were able to make an exhaustive search of Jane Hall's room before Dennis returned from the adjoining estate. They found nothing. Both agreed that she must have destroyed the letter, fearing that it might be incriminating to someone dear to her. So the mystery remained a mystery.

That evening Dennis brought Georgette back from Dark Harbor. The small, golden-haired girl was still weak, but she was beginning to be more like herself. Sabrina was on hand when the little girl was safely installed in her bed in the nursery. Emma had been delegated to take turns at her bedside with Sabrina.

After the child was asleep Dennis took Sabrina out to the reception hall and told her, "I hope that now we can begin a new and more pleasant existence here."

"I also hope so," she said.

"You don't mind being partly responsible for Georgette's care?"

"No," she said. "I'm glad to be able to."

"Dr. Meadows says she needs a long convalescence before she tries to move around. Children are so active that once she is on her feet there isn't much hope of keeping her in check."

She smiled. "I know."

"I hope you didn't mind my leaving you so abruptly at the cemetery," he said.

"I understood," she said.

He looked troubled. "Ann is a strange girl. But I'm certain you will agree that she means well."

"Of course," she said. There was little else she could say though she had severe doubts at this point. What particularly worried her was whether this man was more deeply involved with the brunette than he dared admit.

That night she suffered a series of strange dreams. In one of them Jane Hall came to her and tried to tell her something, but when she opened her mouth no words came. And finally the figure of the dead woman vanished. Her next dream featured the monk. And this time he came directly into her room and when his face was revealed it was the face of Colonel Stephen! She screamed as the pig-like face was thrust at her and the colonel reached out threatening hands to throttle her. Her third and last dream found her in the cemetery once again, and Dennis was there with a shovel. He was digging up Louise's grave. And when she cried out to ask him why he was doing this eerie thing, he changed into the monk! She awoke perspiring after this dream.

She lay awake staring into the darkness for a long while trying to make something of the dreams. But they didn't seem to point in any direction or really tell her anything. And so, at last, in frustration, she fell asleep again.

The next day and the ones which followed were uneventful. Once more a strange atmosphere of brooding came to the old mansion, but nothing unusual happened. She and Emma took turns staying by Georgette's bedside. The only problem they had was the noisy advent of James every so often. He insisted on playing in the room for a while every day and he always excited his sister.

Then Dennis came to Sabrina and told her that Ann Gray wanted to be of some use. He said, "I think it most kind of

her. She says she will gladly relieve you or Emma once in a while."

A wave of fear shot through her. She gave him a worried look. "I don't think it's a good idea."

He looked upset. "I hope you're not allowing your own dislike of Ann to keep her from being helpful with Georgette?"

"No," she said, quickly. "But I don't think it's good for the child to have too many people taking care of her."

Dennis looked obstinate. He said, "I spoke to Dr. Meadows about that, and he claimed it would make no difference."

"I'd still worry about it," she said doggedly.

"I'm sorry," Dennis said. "But if Ann comes over and wishes to sit with Georgette, I don't want you to refuse her."

She stared at him. "Am I to take that as an order?"

"Yes. I suppose so," he said irritably. "I see no reason why my friend's feelings should be hurt."

"Very well," she said quietly.

So it came about that Ann sat with the convalescing Georgette in place of Emma many times. Sabrina managed to put her off whenever she could, but even she had to give way to the brunette girl occasionally. Happily, Georgette seemed to like Ann's company.

"She reads to me," Georgette said with a little-girl smile.

Sabrina continued to resent and worry about the arrangement, but she was able to do nothing but go along with it. Dennis had made his decision, and that was that.

One evening about a week after Ann had begun this nursing of Georgette, she took Sabrina's place for an hour. And when Sabrina returned to the bedside of the golden-haired little girl she found her very sleepy. She didn't worry about this as it was getting late.

Ann had returned home and the house was very quiet. Sabrina read for a little and then something made her check Georgette's sleeping. And at once she was alarmed! The sleep was too deep to be natural. She tried to rouse the child without any success. And, in a near panic, she rushed out of the room and down to the study where Dennis was seated at his desk.

He glanced up at her. "What is it?"

"Georgette! Come! I can't wake her up!"

He got to his feet slowly. "Why try to wake her at this hour of the night?"

"I examined her! Her sleep isn't right!"

"Not right!" he said in a bewildered tone as he limped after her.

They hurried to the nursery and both went over to the child's bedside. This time an upset Dennis tried to waken the youngster and couldn't. He stood back with a look of fear on his gaunt face.

"I don't understand it!"

"Nor do I," she said. "The child was asleep when I took over from Ann. But I didn't worry. At last I noticed she was very still. She's usually restless!"

A strange light came into Dennis Hall's eyes and he reached across to the table where the child's medicines were kept along with spoons, water, and glasses. He grabbed a bottle and held it angrily in front of her.

"What's this?" he demanded.

She stared at it, dumbfounded. For she could readily see that it was a bottle of "Mrs. Colley's Remedy," the opium-filled patent medicine which his mother had taken until she died of it.

"I don't know how it got here!" she said, stunned.

"How could you let this happen?"

"I don't understand!"

"James" he said. "He probably found it in my mother's room and thought it would do her good! While you've been neglecting to watch properly he's given it to her! And God knows how much!"

"The doctor!"

He studied the bottle. "It's half-empty. I'll get a carriage." And he limped hurriedly from the room.

There followed another nightmarish interlude. This time Dennis refused to allow her to go to the doctor's with him. Instead, old Nathaniel went along. Hilary was not home when it happened and he returned about an hour later in a somewhat drunken state. She met him in the hallway and told him.

He sobered at once. He placed an arm around her. "You mustn't blame yourself or allow Dennis to blame you."

"He does," she said.

Hilary was businesslike. He said, "I think we should question both Emma and James before Dennis gets back."

"Do you think the medicine will kill her?" she worried.

"It probably would have if you hadn't noticed," he said. "She would have simply slept until she died. Now, if Dr.

Meadows is able to clear her stomach of the stuff before it takes a final grip on her, she should live."

"She's so weak anyway!"

"We can do nothing about that," Hilary said. "We must wait and see. But I think we can find out what Emma and James know about it. Who was with her last before you?"

"Ann."

They exchanged grim looks. And he said, "I'm not surprised. Let us rouse Emma first."

They did. Emma was half-asleep as the questioning began, and she began to cry when she understood what it was all about. She lamented, "The poor dear! She'll surely die this time!"

Hilary stood by the nightgowned maid and said severely, "We will have no hysterics. I want you to remember clearly. When you cleaned the table tonight was there any bottle of 'Mrs. Colley's Remedy' on it?"

The maid shook her head. "No, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir," the frightened Emma said.

"You know the bottles? They are black. The same sort that my mother kept in her room!"

"I know, sir," Emma said weeping. "There was no black bottle on the table. Just the ones the doctor left."

Hilary straightened up from questioning the girl with a weary sigh. "Is it possible that James could have found such a bottle and brought it in to his sister and given her some of it?"

"Not while I was there," Emma said. "He might have later."

"But you didn't see it at all?"

"No, sir," Emma was weeping again.

They left her and went to wake little James. He was even harder to talk to than Emma. He only turned away from them and went back to sleep at first. It was Sabrina who finally took on the difficult task of getting information from him.

"Tell me, dear," she said. "Did you find any of the medicine in the black bottle your grandmother had?"

"No!" he shook his head.

"You're sure?" she asked.

"I didn't ever see any black bottle," he told her.

Hilary chimed in. "And you didn't give your sister any kind of medicine?"

"No," James said. "Why?"

"Nothing," she told him with a smile. "We just found one of the bottles missing." There was no need to tell him the truth until morning.

They left his room and held a conference in the hall outside. She said, "Emma saw no such bottle. James says he didn't put it there or see it."

"If we can believe him!" Hilary said grimly. "Children often lie in cases like this."

"I somehow don't think he is lying," she defended the lad.

"Maybe not."

"Then Ann Gray took over with Georgette for an hour," she said. "And when I returned Georgette was sleeping the deep sleep which that drug brought on!"

Hilary stared at her. "And when Dennis came in, the black bottle with the drug was there for him to find."

"Yes," she said solemnly.

"So it had to be either you or Ann Gray who brought it there and gave it to the child," Hilary said.

She nodded. "And can't you hear Ann's story now? I let James bring it in and give it to Georgette. She'll have it all rehearsed and frighten James so that he'll give the impression he's lying. Just as you were ready to believe he was a while ago."

"It's diabolical!" Hilary said with a gasp.

"Carefully planned," she said. "I understand Louise's note now."

"You think——?" He didn't finish the sentence.

"I'd be willing to bet Ann systematically poisoned Louise's medicine. That is why she came over here to be with her so often. And she arranged to look after Georgette so she could manage what she did tonight. All along she's been able to make Dennis believe she's so saintly!"

"But why would Mother try to protect her?"

"It's only a guess," she said. "But I believe your mother thought Dennis might have been a party to the poisoning of Louise, that he and Ann were in on it together. So she tried to keep it quiet until she knew for certain."

Hilary said, "If this is all true, Ann must be mad!"

"I'd say she is," Sabrina agreed. "Or at least she is so selfish and strong-willed that murder means nothing to her. She first eliminated Louise, then she planned to be rid of the children. That is why she selected me as governess. With the shadow of

being negligent over me I made a perfect scapegoat for her murder scheme. I still am in that position!"

"All that to win Dennis," Hilary said, "And she refused me!"

"We can forget your pride for the moment," she said sharply. "If Georgette dies, Ann Gray is a double murderess."

"What about the business of the boat and the landslide?"

"My guess is that she had Tod do that. I suspect the poor deaf-mute is devoted to her. No doubt she's hiding him somewhere in the cellars over there and he's ready to do whatever she bids him."

Hilary gave her a knowing look. "Perhaps we can make her reveal herself."

"How?"

He said, "I suggest you send a note over by one of the servants. In the note write that Georgette is very ill and expected to die. Say you want to talk to her about it privately and that you will come over to her place at midnight."

"What good will that do? She'll lie as usual!" Sabrina said with despair.

"No," Hilary said. "It is my opinion that the ghost will appear again. The ghostly monk who has attempted to take your life on those other occasions will attack you once more."

"On my way to see her?"

"Exactly," he said. "And when the monk appears I will be close by to deal with him. Are you willing to risk your life to settle this business?"

"Yes," she said. "Ann must not be allowed to go on with her evil."

"I couldn't agree more," Hilary said. "Now let us go down and write the note and send it across to her."

When the note was written Sabrina gave it to one of the stable lads. Once it was on its way she began to have qualms about her role in the midnight adventure. But she knew she must go through with it, frightened or not. Her other great concern was about Georgette.

This was settled when Dennis returned with the child in his arms around eleven-thirty. Old Nathaniel Hall at his side looked thoroughly exhausted.

Dennis said, "She's all right. He took the poison from her stomach. She'll sleep until morning and when she wakes up she should be none the worse for her experience." And he took her in to bed.

Old Uncle Nathaniel shook his head. "I have to give Doctor Meadows credit," he said. "I've always said he was in his dotage, but he did well enough tonight."

Hilary said, "We can be thankful for that." And when Dennis returned to the room he told the two what he and Sabrina had found out and what they'd done.

Uncle Nathaniel's reaction was to say, "I never did trust that girl. I've always considered her a sly one!"

The handsome Dennis was the one most shocked. "I refuse to believe it!" he protested. "Ann was Louise's dear friend and she is mine as well."

Sabrina said, "Would you rather believe I'm to blame? There is no other answer."

His face flushed. "I don't know who is to blame," he said evasively. "But I can't see Ann in the role. My guess is that James brought that medicine in and gave it to Georgette without any of your noticing."

She said, "Negligence again. And probably on my part."

"But not a crime," Dennis said. "I'd rather believe you negligent than think that Ann is a murderess!"

"And what about your son?" she asked. "He denies any knowledge of the bottle."

"He's six years old!" Dennis said. "Six-year-olds become afraid and they lie. The boy can't be blamed. He didn't know what he was doing. He had the proper motive of wanting to help his sister by giving her the medicine."

Hilary stared at him. "You want to believe all this merely to prove Ann innocent?"

"Yes," his brother said.

Hilary said quietly, "Then you won't mind our going ahead with our little plan. Sabrina is going to become a decoy. If she is attacked on the way over there we'll know that Ann is guilty."

"It's an underhanded, dastardly scheme!" Dennis protested.

"It is all arranged. We are going through with it," Hilary said. "I'm going to follow close behind Sabrina and I invite you along."

Dennis stood there in a dreadful state of confusion. At last he said, "Very well. But when this is over I will ask you both to make apologies to Ann. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly agreeable," Hilary said. "I'll be arming myself. If you wish you can do the same."

"What need?" Dennis demanded.

Hilary said, "If Tod plays the ghost of the monk, as I think he will, he will be in a desperate mood. I don't care to deal with him unarmed."

"Do what you like," Dennis said sullenly. "I will carry no weapon!"

A few minutes before midnight Sabrina solemnly put on her cloak, glanced at Hilary and said, "I'm ready."

"So am I," he said. "Be a brave girl. I'll be near."

Dennis stood there white and still protesting. "I wish you wouldn't go through with this!"

"I have to," she said. "Not only for my own sake but for the sake of your children."

Dennis frowned at Hilary and accused him. "You have filled her with melodramatic nonsense!"

"The question is," Hilary said suavely, "will the ghost walk?"

That was the question uppermost in her mind as she left the comparative safety of the old mansion and started the walk to the next estate. The moonlit night was still. Only the wash of the waves on the shore broke the silence. She crossed the open lawn and then entered the area of brush which gave access by a narrow path to the mansion of Colonel Stephen.

Her heart was pounding as she moved briskly along, and she wondered how far behind her Hilary and Dennis might be. They could not stay too close. She stepped on a twig which broke with a crackling that seemed uncommonly loud in the eerie silence. And then, without warning, the figure of the monk came to block her way. She screamed and drew back. At the same time, the monk raised his hand—and she saw the blade of a knife flashing in the moonlight!

She continued to scream, and now the monk was upon her. From somewhere near she heard a cry of encouragement and triumph and she knew it was Ann coaching the murderer on! Then there was another shout. She heard the voices of Hilary and Dennis!

And as she struggled in the grasp of the phantom monk she was dimly aware that Hilary dare not use his pistol as he could not fire at the phantom without endangering her. And in the meantime the knife was only inches from her. Another figure sprang forward and the monk left her to deal with the intruder. His method of dealing with him was swift. The knife was plunged down into the chest of the newcomer and he dropped with a moan.

Sabrina was crouching in the path as the monk turned from his other victim to finish her with the same knife. But he never did get to her again. Hilary took advantage of the moment to use the pistol. A shot flared through the air and the monk dropped to the path beside his victim.

There was a weird, blood-curdling scream as Ann rushed forward from the bushes and surveyed the bloody scene. She first went to the monk and then she turned and knelt by the other victim. And when she saw that it was Dennis she collapsed.

Things came to a swift end after that night. Dennis died from the knifewound inflicted on him by a crazed Tod. And Tod died from the pistol shot fired by Hilary. Ann Gray emerged from her collapse in a catatonic state. She sat in silence and was aware of nothing. She died a year or two later in a madhouse outside of Boston. Her father quickly sold the estate and moved to Boston to be near her. It was said that he spent most of his time in a club there, endlessly retailing his exploits in the Civil War to the long-suffering other members.

Sabrina was faced with the challenge of remaining at Hall House to look after Georgette and James, since they had only their Uncle Hilary and great-uncle Nathaniel left as relatives. The events on that fateful night not only settled the ghost of the monk for all time, but they served to bring Hilary to a full maturity.

One evening in late October, as he and Sabrina sat before the blazing fireplace in the living room, he said, "We have a ready-made family. Isn't it about time you made up your mind whether you want to marry me?"

She smiled at him. "I made it up long ago, but you've never spoken to me about it. The answer is yes."

And Hilary, knowing that actions speak louder than words, lost no time in taking her in his arms.

"End of the story," Captain Zachary Miller said with a broad smile on his wizened face.

"There must be more!" Irene protested. "What happened to them all?"

The captain said, "Let me see! Old Nat lived to be over ninety, and died here on the island."

"What about Hilary and Sabrina?" she wanted to know.

"Had a fine married life. He'd sowed all his wild oats. They went to Boston to live, and he started a bank there. Did well.

Georgette married a fellow from New York and went to live there. James is still alive in Boston. President of the bank his uncle started.

Jerry Hall smiled wryly. "It seems to me that the one-armed man didn't do too well."

The old captain said, "I wouldn't worry about that, son. It doesn't always have to turn out that way. When you're in Boston you ought to look up old James Hall. He is a kin of yours."

"I'll think about it," the young man said.

Derek Mills turned to Irene with an amused look and asked, "Do you feel you know more about the island now?"

"I do," she enthused. "The captain made it so real. I thought I was really living back in those days."

"I've told the story a good many times," Captain Zachary Miller said modestly. "It's not too hard to do now."

"I'm terribly grateful for your kindness," she told him. "And now I should be getting home or Dr. Taylor will be worried about me."

Derek stood up. "It was a treat, captain."

Jerry was also on his feet. "I knew you wouldn't disappoint Irene," he told the old man.

The captain rose with care. "Never known to have that said about me," he replied with a wink. "A pretty girl always brings the best of my story-telling out."

They said goodnight to the old man and left him standing in the doorway of his cottage as they drove off in Derek's car. She sat in the middle with Jerry on the outside.

Derek said, "I think Captain Miller really took to you, Irene."

"I can promise that I liked him," she said.

Derek dropped her off first. And she left the car and gave them both a friendly goodnight. Then she went inside as Derek drove on to Jerry's place. She found that she liked them both, and it was hard to say which one was her favorite.

The next morning Dr. Taylor teased her about the two young men. She took it in good humor and went down to play tennis as usual hoping that Jerry might show up. But he didn't. And she knew that she was disappointed.

When she went back to the doctor's she discovered why he hadn't been at the tennis court. There was a letter from him which he'd left with the doctor's wife. She opened it quickly and read it:

"Dear Irene,

I had a phone call from Boston this morning about resuming my university course. They asked if I could come there right away. I'm sure it is what I want to do, so I'm leaving on the morning ferry. If all goes well I'll be in Boston a couple of years, finishing. When I get my degree I'll move on to wherever there happens to be a job.

When you return to Boston get in touch with me through the university. I'll have found myself lodgings by then. And I hope we can see each other. At least I'd like to. But judging by the way Derek Mills talked as he drove me home last night he may never let you leave the island. If that should be the way it turns out, I'll understand. My one-armed ancestor had to be a loser, too!

Until we meet, or whatever, I love you,
Jerry."

Her eyes moistened as she finished the note. She couldn't believe that she'd suddenly feel so lonely or that she could come to care for anyone so deeply in a short time. But that was the way it was. She folded the letter with a sigh, placed it in her envelope, and carefully put it away. It was something she felt she might always treasure.

That evening she had an urge to take another look at the old Hall mansion. She'd never seen it in daylight. So she borrowed Dr. Taylor's small car before it got dark and drove up there. She parked the car in the driveway and walked up to the entrance.

With the door gone and the windows all broken, the old mansion had a derelict look. Why, she wondered, wouldn't James have had enough interest in it to keep it up? But he was very old now, and it had been willed to Jerry's branch of the family, so the old banker probably had decided it wasn't his problem. Likely Jerry's people would sell the property for its land value, and a condominium would go up there as had been planned.

But now she stood admiring the old shell of a house for what it had once been. As she stood there in the fading sunlight she imagined she saw the phantom forms of all those who had lived and loved there. Louise and Dennis and their two children, frail Jane Hall, the handsome Hilary, and Sabrina.

And the dark and wicked Ann Gray! They all moved across the broad entrance verandah in her mind.

So lost had she been in her dreams of the past that she didn't hear the car that came up behind hers and parked. When she turned a smiling Derek Mills was standing there.

He said, "So you decided to return. I thought I'd be the only one here."

"I wanted to take another look at it," she said.

He nodded and studied the old house. "A lot of memories here!

"So many!" she said. "Jerry has gone to Boston."

"I heard that this afternoon. His father told me," Derek said. "I suppose you two plan to meet there?" He said it quite casually, but she felt it was an important question both for him and her.

"Yes," she said quietly, knowing the message of her own heart despite her fondness for the handsome, lonely man at her side. "Yes. I will be seeing him. In fact, I hope I'll see him a lot."

Derek smiled sadly. "I thought that would be your answer," he said.

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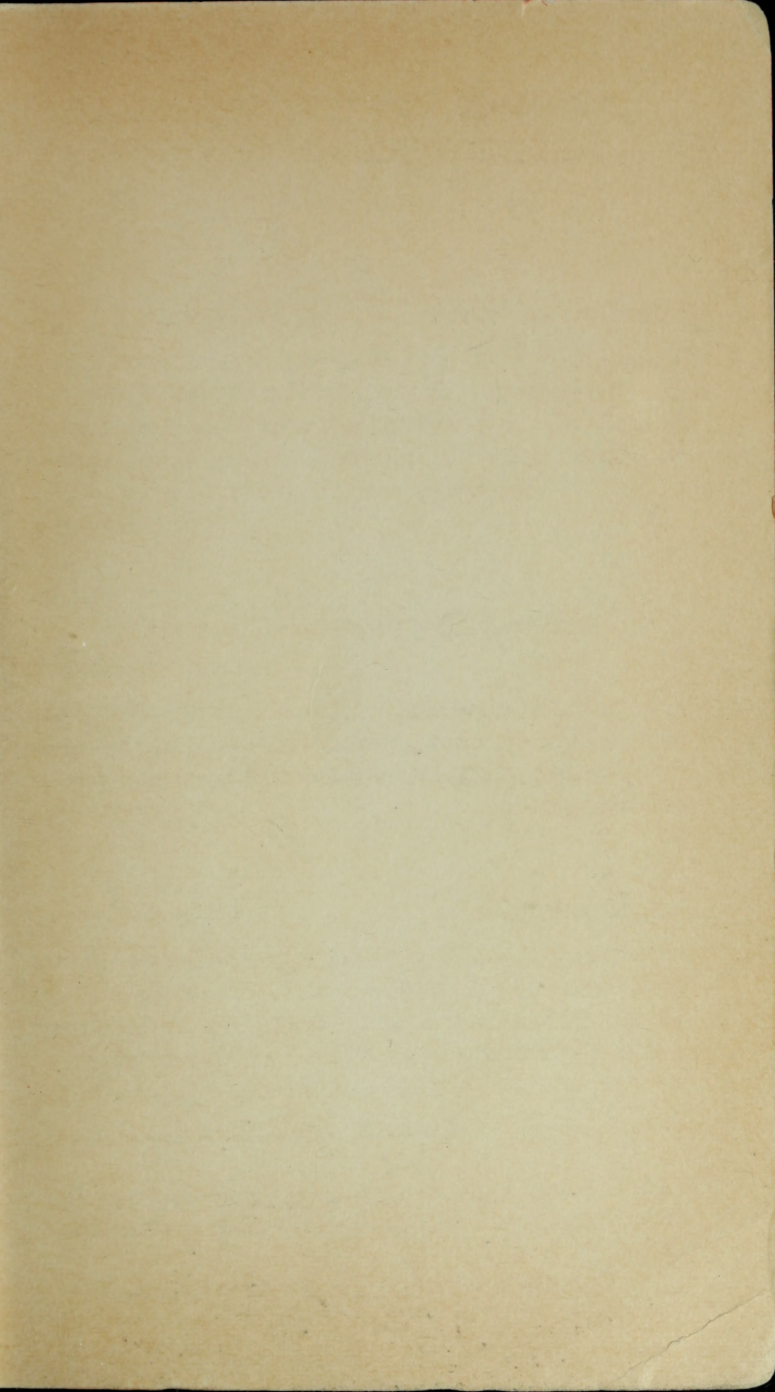
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