Gothic terror and romantic suspense in the Victoria Holt-Mary Stewart genre – the compelling story of a desperate girl caught in an unholy web of evil

THE WHISPER OF SHADOWS

J. L. H. Whitney
"I had no trouble finding the path. When it dipped into the forest, the day was already dead. Rain had ceased to fall, but the leaves still dripped water from their surfaces like tears falling from the moaning wind overhead. The dampness of my clothes turned clammy. I trotted to keep warm. And suddenly I fell.

"I couldn't imagine what I might have stumbled over. It had been too yielding to be a tree or a branch. I stood up and turned around. I could see something lying behind me on the path, and went over to it. The damp gray light touched it horribly. I made a sound that was neither scream nor sob.

"I had found her—what there was left of her. I seemed to see with ghastly clarity: her damp hair lying like seaweed on the path, her staring eyes, the blood. Compulsively I touched one of her outflung hands. It was cold and stiff . . ."

THE WHISPER OF SHADOWS—a spine-tingling novel of love and hate, suspense and adventure, enchantment and violence . . .
The pilot of the charter plane gave me an air map as soon as we took off from Seattle. I hardly needed its help to follow our northward course.

To the east, the Cascade Mountains chopped off the view with their rugged grandeur. To the west, the Olympic Mountains defined the horizon. Between the two mountain arms, the sparkling restlessness of Puget Sound broke the early June sunshine into a million glints.

And then the Olympics descended abruptly to an arm of the Pacific Ocean that thrust itself between the United States and Canada. For a matter of moments the dignity of Victoria, capital of British Columbia, was visible beneath the plane. Then we had left it behind, and the plane was swinging down for a landing in Sydney Harbor, Vancouver Island, Canada.

The Canadian Customs and Immigration officials were polite and thorough. If they found anything unusual about a young woman entering Canada to work as a librarian for six months, they gave no sign of it.

Airborne again, we were soon over water and land that was wholly in Canada. Below us the Strait of Georgia em-
braced the Canadian Gulf Islands briefly and then let them go to widen out. East of it the mainland of British Columbia was first the fan of the great Fraser River Delta, with twin smoke smudges marking the cities of Vancouver and New Westminster. Then it was fold on fold of mountains retreating from the Strait like petrified waves. The bulk of Vancouver Island sunned its mountainous backbone in the west.

And then my destination, Coronet Island, came up abruptly on the horizon. On the air map it was no more than a dot. From the plane it looked like a solitary emerald moored on the changeable sapphire surface of the Strait.

Until I saw the island I think I had been afraid that my whole venture might be a dream, or a mistake. But as I watched the irregular shape of the island slip away under the plane my excitement lost some of its anxiety and took on a happier tinge.

Ten years had passed since I had seen the island last, but I could still name the landmarks I had known when I was seventeen. On the north end of the island, Kelleher Castle loomed up, its red tiled roof fronting the evergreen forest behind it with self-conscious arrogance. The plane banked and headed southward for its landing. Halibut Bay, with the straggle of buildings and houses around it that made the island’s only town, was soon behind us. Lighthouse Point thrust like a finger into the Strait. Where the Point joined the island, Miss Danby’s pink frame house stood with the air of an architectural dowager. The plane banked once more and made a smooth descent. It swept through the entrance of Coronet Bay and its pontoons settled on the water with a gentle bounce. Then it taxied toward the shore and Stephen Bonner’s new home, Chinois.

From my seat beside the pilot I got the full impact of the great house that sat above the bay. My breath lodged in my throat. Not a vestige of the modest fishing lodge I remembered remained and none of the dreams I had once idly fashioned around Stephen Bonner approached the reality he had created for himself. When I had taken off from Seattle I expected to land at a somewhat familiar destination to begin a job I was confident I could do. Now I had the feeling that I was landing in the middle of a Chinese fairy tale that
had lost nothing in being transplanted to Canada. And I was more convinced than ever that the job Stephen had offered me was a sympathetic gesture instead of a necessity.

I fumbled in my purse with a motion that was partly automatic, partly a means of holding onto reality. I succeeded in finding my mirror and peered into it. No magic had changed the long oval of my face. The crown of pale blonde braids on top of my head, the slim, slightly arrogant length of my nose emphasized the reassuringly familiar shape of my face. Automatically my hazel eyes—two months of grief shadowed them and making them look larger than ever—checked to see if the pale pink lipstick on my full mouth needed freshening. It didn’t. I slipped the mirror back into my purse just as the plane bumped gently to rest on the sandy beach of Coronet Bay.

In the moment of silence that fell as the pilot switched off the motor—the moment I had before I must leave the plane—I almost panicked. I made myself undo my seat belt with deliberate fingers and confronted the panic with common sense. I had committed myself to work for Stephen Bonner for six months. At the end of that time I’d surely be strong enough to face the future by myself. Right now I hadn’t the strength; the last two months proved that well enough. If Stephen wanted to express his sympathy for me, his own grief at losing two good friends by helping their daughter, wouldn’t I be a fool to refuse?

I had the panic under control by the time I stepped out of the plane. Tsiang, Stephen’s Chinese butler, had come to the side of the plane. He helped me down to the beach. Against the unfamiliar background of Chinois, my eyes scanned his face with eagerness. Ten years hadn’t changed him at all. His smile was as quick and as genial as I remembered.

"Welcome to Chinois, Miss Carson."

"Thank you, Tsiang. It’s good to see you again."

He inclined his head. "I wish the circumstances that brought you here were happier," he murmured. "The tragedy of your parents’ automobile accident . . . Please accept my sympathy."

His well meant words unexpectedly twisted the dagger of
grief inside me. I made myself say, "Thank you." My eyes looked away from him, and only the unexpected sight that met them as they moved held the tears back. Three gleaming white boats were moored beside a dock which jutted out from the shore of the bay. One was an outboard runabout. Behind it was a sailboat no larger than that on which Stephen had taught me to sail. But at the end of the dock was a yacht at least sixty feet long. The only interruption on the gleaming white hull were the words Kwan Yin in gold.

The sound of Tsiang's voice brought my gaze back to him. "The jeep will take your luggage to the house. One of the maids will unpack for you . . . ."

"That's not necessary," I objected. "I can . . . ."

"It is Mr. Stephen's desire," Tsiang said, a note of gentle reproach in his voice. "He also wished me to say again that he was sorry he couldn't meet you himself, but as you know business made it necessary for him to fly to Vancouver this morning. Had it been otherwise, he would have sent his own plane for you. I hope your flight was satisfactory?"

"In every way."

Tsiang acknowledged my statement with a gesture and then excused himself to speak briefly with the pilot and the young Chinese who were unloading my luggage. Then he returned and said he would show me over the house.

We went up through the gardens which threatened to overflow with bloom. "They are but three years old," Tsiang told me. "Like Chinois they have not quite established themselves."

Both the gardens and the house seemed faultless to me. But it wasn't until I stepped inside Chinois that I realized completely how overwhelming it was. Tsiang murmured information with a humble note in his voice. Yes, that was a Tang Dynasty dragon in the entrance hall. Mr. Stephen's grandfather had received it from the Empress herself. The three matched landscape scrolls on the east wall of the drawing room were tentatively credited to Sheng Mou. Certainly they dated from the Yuan Dynasty. Later he would show me the gallery. There, for the first time, Chinese art collected by three generations of Bonners was finally displayed properly.
No, Mr. Stephen's interests in China were no longer extensive. The concession which the Bonners had held from the time of the Empress had been confiscated by the People's Republic. The office Mr. Stephen maintained in Shanghai was no more than a formality. His main business interests were in Canada now.

But I must be anxious to see the library since that was where I would work. If I would follow him? Tsiang led me out of the drawing room and across a broad, tiled hall. We stepped through an archway.

I stared. Directly in front of me and about ten feet inside the room was a Chinese modern desk and chair. Banks of windows, some distance behind the desk, brought in clear sunlight and a view of the extensive back gardens. Between the windows were French doors, and at each side of the doors, a crimson lacquer file case was placed. Ceiling-high bookshelves lined three sides of the room. On the east wall a fireplace was barely visible. Packing boxes four high had been piled throughout the room with aisles running between them. Considering that the room itself was the size of a standard branch library, the job ahead of me seemed enormous.

My mixed response of surprise and relief wasn't wasted on Tsiang. "You feared perhaps that Mr. Stephen was offering no more than generosity to the daughter of an old friend?" he inquired.

I could feel my face flush as I nodded.

A slow smile picked up the corners of his mouth. "To offer empty sympathy to one full of grief is to offer nothing. Mr. Stephen wouldn't insult his friend's daughter with pity—or charity."

"I guess I just didn't think. . . ."

"Why should you?" Tsiang asked. "Ten years have passed since you last saw Mr. Stephen. The acquaintance of one summer doesn't make a year of friendship."

His words were meant to reassure me. Instead they reminded me how little I knew the man I was to work for, in whose house I was expected to spend at least half a year. I concealed my lack of confidence by turning my attention to
the boxes of books. "I didn’t realize the extent of . . . I hope I can complete the job in six months."

Tsiang shrugged. "Time is not important. Proper arrangements will be made if you need a longer period to catalogue the collection. You will have help, of course." His voice lost its hospitality and took on a tone of measured neutrality. "Mr. Stephen has arranged to have a typist for you, a girl from the village. Her name is Lily McGurney. She has already done some work in the gallery."

I waited for him to go on. Instead he clamped his lips shut. I got the impression that Tsiang didn’t like Lily McGurney but, as a good servant, he wasn’t going to say so.

He directed an apologetic smile at me. "I haven’t showed you your quarters. They are just above the library. You may reach them from the main stairway in the hall or this way."

He led me past the desk and then to the left through one of the packing box aisles. At its end was an airy swing of staircase.

We climbed it and Tsiang opened the door at its head. I walked through it and halfway into the room before its beauty stopped me. It was as though whoever had decorated the room had managed to trap and hold spring within four walls.

"This is the sitting room," Tsiang told me. "The door at the far left leads to the bedroom and bath. The door on your near left . . ." His voice broke off as though a gag had been slapped over his mouth. The geniality of his face changed into the impassiveness that only an Oriental can achieve. Anger flickered in his eyes.

I turned to find its cause. A young girl was standing in the near lefthand doorway. She was out of breath. Determination and something close to fear filled her soft brown eyes. "I’m Lily McGurney," she said breathlessly, "and you’re Ruth Carson, the librarian, aren’t you?"

I was too startled to do more than nod.

"Mr. Bonner says I’m to do the typing for you. He said I was to show you the house too. . . ."

Tsiang snapped, "Mr. Stephen left no instructions with me. . . ."

"So he forgot. Maybe he doesn’t tell you everything."
I wondered whether her manner stemmed from youth or deliberate rudeness. If she often treated Tsiang this way, I could understand why he didn’t like her.

Tsiang almost glared at Lily. She met his eyes with defiance. A sliver of smile colder than new-formed ice touched Tsiang’s lips. “It is true, Miss McGurney, that I do not know everything about Mr. Stephen. Why don’t you show Miss Carson the gallery? She hasn’t seen that yet. Please see that you are both in the drawing room when Mr. Stephen arrives.”

If I had been Lily, I would have beat a fast retreat. Tsiang’s anger was intense though controlled. But I wasn’t Lily McGurney. She didn’t even seem to notice him. “All right,” she said.

Tsiang bowed toward me with dignity and left the room without another glance at Lily.

She watched him go with victorious eyes. I studied her curiously. On a city street I’d never have looked at her twice. She couldn’t have been more than eighteen years old and had obviously worked hard to achieve the sulky prettiness that is currently fashionable. Against the gentle beauty of the sitting room, her tight skirt and sweater, her blatant make-up appeared tawdry. I felt almost sorry for her.

She faced me. “My father says it’s Mr. Bonner’s fault. He says servants should know their place. He says that if Mr. Bonner didn’t treat those heathens like they were his family . . .”

“Heathens!” I echoed blankly.

“All them Chinese—Tsiang’s family—that work for Mr. Bonner, they’re heathens. My father says so. They give me the creeps. I don’t even like to talk about them. Come on, I’ll show you the gallery now.” She turned to go.

“Just a minute, Lily.” She stopped short. “Are you sure you’re doing the right thing? Mr. Bonner might not like . . .”

Her voice cut across mine. “He’ll be mad for awhile.” She said, and smiled almost slyly. “But he feels sorry for me. He’ll get over it.”

The calculation of her reply surprised me. My reaction must have showed on my face because she said quickly, humbly, “Of course, if you don’t want me to show you . . .”
"I just didn’t want you to get into any trouble on my account,” I told her, reminding myself she was little more than a child.

Her smile was confident. The nervousness that had been in her eyes glided away. “Don’t worry about that,” she said. “I’m pretty good at getting out of trouble.” Her expression altered again, curiosity replacing confidence. “Do you think you’ll ever get all those books unpacked?” she asked.

I smiled at her. “Unpacked and catalogued,” I assured her. “Will there be much typing to do?”

“More than you’d think,” I told her.

“Good,” she said. “I’ve almost finished the typing for the gallery. I was afraid I might have to go back to work in my father’s store.”

“Hadn’t we better take a look at the gallery now?” I asked.

“Oh sure, come on.” I followed her out of the room and down the semi-curve of the tiled stairway that led to the ground floor.

“Have you and your father been on Coronet Island long?” I asked her. “I don’t think you were here ten years ago.”

“I should say not!” Lily told me as she reached the hall below. “And I wish we weren’t here now. My father bought the store and moved out from the Prairies two years ago. He thinks it’s great. But I’ll tell you one thing—I’m not going to stay here all my life.”

We were walking along the hall past the library. “I suppose you’d like to go to Vancouver . . .” I began.

“I’m going all right. My father wouldn’t let me go before, but pretty soon he won’t be able to stop me.” Her vehemence was startling as she repeated, “He just won’t be able to stop me!”

I found the smug, almost cruel, satisfaction on her face distasteful and wondered how on earth Stephen Bonner had ever managed to feel sorry for her.

She gestured me through an archway and followed me closely as I worked my way around a devil screen made of intricately carved jade panels. She waved one of her square, brown hands incongruously tipped by long, crimson fingernails. “This is the gallery. I work here.”

I didn’t need Lily’s statement to know it was the gallery.
The serenity and beauty of the Chinese paintings which lined the wall had caught my breath in my throat.

Lily brushed past me. She touched a small typed notice beside the nearest painting. It said, “Mice and bamboo. By Lin Liang.”

“Mr. Bonner says I type very well,” Lily told me. “Do you think so?”

Her face was eager and childlike. Desperately I looked from the beauty of the picture to the prosaic notice. “The typing is very neat,” I said.

“I haven’t had any lessons. The school here doesn’t teach typing.”

“You’ve done very well,” I assured her. “You’ll find typing catalogue cards a little more work, but I don’t think you’ll have any trouble.”

“I don’t mind work.” She was indifferent. “But there’re lots more pictures, better ones. These are all just Chinese stuff.”

I smothered a protest because I knew it would be futile. What Lily so off-handedly referred to as “stuff” was a collection of Chinese paintings that rivaled any I had ever seen in museums. It was large and it was fine. And it made the picture I had carried in my mind of Stephen Bonner seem more inaccurate than ever. Had this “legend of Canadian finance” who had built Chinois with its glorious gardens and quietly magnificent architecture, who had collected these paintings, ever really taken time so long ago to show me the fine points of salt water fishing and sailing? It seemed almost impossible. Anxiety about meeting him again began to gnaw at the edge of my mind.

But Lily was not satisfied to leave me to my thoughts. She was already at the far end of the room. “Come on,” she demanded.

I joined her in the wide archway where she stood. We walked through it and into a second room. Here the pure colors of the Italian Renaissance bloomed on the wall. Serene browed madonnas looked at us without curiosity and proud faced cavaliers gazed at us insolently. Lily stalked by them without a glance.

Suddenly she stopped. I looked at the picture that had arrested her progress and caught my breath. It was obviously
only a portion of a larger picture, but this remaining fragment was tremendous. If Michelangelo hadn’t painted it, one of his best imitators had. A figure—half man, half angel—looked down at us. The painted creature was leaning almost lazily on a flaming sword in the midst of a golden haze.

I looked from the picture to Lily. Her face had been transformed. The changeable young girl who had been with me had vanished entirely. In her place was a woman, passionate, adoring. Of all the faces she had shown me during my short acquaintance with her, this was the most unnerving.

“Isn’t he wonderful!” Lily breathed.

I looked back at the picture on the wall. The cruelty of the painted creature’s mouth was balanced by the melancholy gaze of his eyes. “It’s one of the most magnificent paintings I’ve ever seen,” I admitted.

“Painting!” Lily looked at me with pitying scorn. “You are old, aren’t you?”

“Twenty-seven,” I said dryly.

She looked at me intently as though seeking signs of imminent disintegration.

“Well,” she admitted, “you don’t look bad—for someone who’s nearly thirty.”

“Thank you,” I said, and knew she missed the irony in my voice.

The drowsy buzz of an airplane intruded into the quiet of the gallery. Lily ran to one of the large north windows and looked up. Then she faced me. “It’s Mr. Bonner’s plane!” Fear filled her eyes now and spilled over onto her face.

I felt more impatient than sympathetic. “Lily, if you knew Mr. Bonner was going to be angry, if you’re afraid of him, you shouldn’t have . . .”

“Afraid of Mr. Bonner?” She smiled and drove the fear back into her eyes. “Only if he tells my father.”

I wanted to say something and couldn’t. I was unable to understand Lily’s feeling toward her father. My own father had been so wonderful. It hurt to have Lily talk about hers as she did. And I pitied her. I tried to imagine what it would have been like to have a parent like Lily’s. I couldn’t. Mine had both been . . . Grief knotted my stomach. Mine were two months dead.
“But never mind that,” Lily said. “I’d better take you to the drawing room. That was what that sneaky old Chinaman said I was to do.”

She grabbed my hand and yanked me out of the past. “Hurry up!”

Lily hurried me all right. Her headlong pace made me feel a little like Alice trying to keep up with the Red Queen. When we arrived in the drawing room she dropped my hand and let me lean against a chair. I looked out of the great picture windows that marched along the southwest wall of the room. In the distance, the Strait of Georgia danced in the sun. An amphibious plane had just come to rest on the beach in the bay below Chinois.

Lily stood beside me, her eyes never leaving the plane below. The pilot got out first. Then two men joined him. They were both dark as I remembered Stephen being but one was taller than the other. I couldn’t decide which was my employer. It had been ten years. Suppose I couldn’t even recognize Stephen?

“You know Mr. Bonner, don’t you, Miss Carson?” Lily asked.

“A long time ago,” I replied. “My father was a friend of his.”

“He’s funny,” Lily said nervously.

I stared at her. “Funny” was the one word I would never have applied to the Stephen Bonner I remembered.

“How do you mean?” I demanded.

She met my eyes defiantly. “Well, for instance, this house. Why does he want to live here when he could live anywhere? They say it’s because his wife drowned that he moved here. Why didn’t he go someplace really big like Toronto? And then giving it a foreign name, Chinois. My father says that’s French for heathen. . . .”

“Lily!” The reproof in my voice didn’t stop her.

“In fact, I don’t care how much money he’s got—I say he’s a nut.”

That was about all I could take. “Whatever Stephen Bonner may be, Lily, he is not a nut.”

“You haven’t seen him in years,” she insinuated with a wise little smile.
Only the sound of a distant door opening and closing and the voices that came unintelligibly into the drawing room stopped the words of protest that rose to my lips.

“Well, he’s here,” Lily said with nervous resignation. “As soon as he’s checked with Tsiang, he’ll be in. Him and those heathens—he treats them better than my father treats me.”

I didn’t have time to tell her I thought Stephen might have more reason to be nice to his servants than Lily’s father had to be nice to her. I might have, if the two men from the plane hadn’t walked into the drawing room just then. But the two men did walk in, and I forgot Lily.

I needn’t have worried about recognizing Stephen Bonner. He was the shorter of the two men but he was by far the most commanding. Dark, strong, blocky, he dominated the room easily as soon as he entered. I didn’t know the man who came in with him, but beside Stephen he looked insubstantial.

Recognizing Stephen should have brought me a sense of relief. It didn’t. The years had changed him; ten years ago his face had been quick and warm. Now it was masked by the kind of detachment that comes with the habit of command. Ten years ago I’d had a harmless, enjoyable crush on him. Now I felt an animal stir deep inside me. I didn’t enjoy it—nor did I think it was harmless.

I tried to escape from it by looking at Lily. That didn’t help. Naked fear started out of her brown eyes, thinned her sulky mouth, slimmed her full face.

I thought at first that she had been lying all along, that she was afraid of Stephen after all. Then I noticed that her eyes strayed over both of the men facing her. I wondered which of the two she really did fear.
Stephen ignored Lily. He walked toward me, hands held out in welcome. He had strong features, more compelling than handsome. His complexion was swarthy and his nose was large and arrogant. "Ruth Carson," he said in the kind of voice one uses when addressing a favorite child. I expected him to smile. Instead his hands dropped to his sides, his sea green eyes widened and his heavy, well shaped lips tightened.

I throttled an impulse to back away from his unexpected intensity. To my relief, his expression altered immediately. An apologetic eagerness entered his eyes. The interesting harshness of his voice took on a tone of groping sympathy. "When I heard about Frank and Helen's accident, I wanted to do more than tell you I was sorry. . . . Your parents meant a great deal to me. I know I can't understand what their loss has meant to you. I . . ." His voice died under an apparent awareness of the futility of words. The resultant silence seemed to make him uneasy. His voice thrust against it with impatience. "Oh, hell, there was a job to be done here. I thought you might like to get away from Seattle." Uneasy silence again. He flung his hands apart. "I couldn't think of anything else to do for you."

His voice, the direct gaze of his eyes had an impact of immediate intimacy that set the two of us apart from the others in the room. For the first time, someone's sympathy actually diminished the grief inside me. I groped for words to express my gratitude. His understanding should have made it easy, but the intimacy he had established between us had plunged me into self-consciousness. I stumbled around mentally and finally managed to murmur with complete inadequacy, "You've done more than enough. Chinois is perfect. . . ."

"Nothing's perfect," he interrupted with startling abruptness. The intimacy between us snapped. Detachment slid back over his face like a mask. His voice was no more than
polite as he said, "I'd like to introduce you to my secretary, Matthew Kelleher." He gestured toward the taller, younger man behind him. "Matthew, this is Ruth Carson, the librarian I told you about. I don't think you met her when she was on the island before."

He waited while Matthew and I murmured polite acknowledgments. Then he said, "Matthew, will you ring for Tsiang so he'll know we're ready for cocktails? Ruth, you will join us in a drink, won't you?"

I nodded.

"Good. I'll be with you in a moment." For the first time he gave his attention to Lily. He said nothing, merely surveyed her with distant objectivity. I waited for her fear to show itself. It didn't. She revealed only condescending patience.

"Your father's come for you, Lily," Stephen said at last.

That brought the fear into her eyes. "You didn't tell him I wasn't supposed to . . ."

"No, I didn't."

Confidence displaced fear. "Then why didn't you tell him Matthew can bring me home?" She sounded faintly contemptuous, if not of Stephen, of her father. I wondered just how many poses she could assume at will.

Stephen ignored her question. "I didn't tell him you'd lied—this time." Her face flushed. "I did tell him that you won't be needed here tomorrow, so don't make up another story." Stephen's voice had remained impersonal and patient. But it was cold and cutting when he spoke again. "However, before you leave this house tonight you are to apologize to Tsiang, and you're to do it nicely. And, Lily . . ."

"Yes?"

"If you ever disobey my orders again, you won't come back here."

Lily's response was defensive rather than fearful. "Well, it wasn't right. My father said so. Tsiang's just a—"

The sudden flare of anger in Stephen's eyes arrested the word Lily had planned to use. A soft, pathetic, pleading look slipped over her face.

Her chameleon-like ability to change her mood to suit her purpose made me uneasy. If I believed it was deliberate, then I was crediting a teen-aged girl with an almost devil-
ish ability for dissimulation. It couldn't be possible—and yet .

"I'm awful sorry, Mr. Bonner," Lily was saying, her voice contrite. "Really I am. I won't do it again. Honest!"

Without warning she scuttled past him. In the archway, she paused and looked at his back. Her sulkily pretty face went ugly. I named her expression with disbelief. It was hate.

Matthew moved away from the service bell. For the briefest moment he met Lily's eyes and her expression altered again. Then she ran away. But I would have sworn that when Matthew looked at her, fear had washed over her face again.

Lily's departure left a vacuum of silence behind. Stephen was looking at me with such quiet steadiness that I felt uncomfortable. Matthew broke the silence. "I think your experiment was a mistake."

"So it would seem," Stephen murmured absently. "Transplanting trouble doesn't appear to eliminate it, does it?" His eyes never left my face. They looked troubled. With an almost visible effort of will he managed to collect himself.

He smiled. And that smile drove the detachment from his face as sun drives away the rain. It made his face extraordinarily attractive. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Ruth, sit down. I had no idea I'd kept you standing."

I sat down obediently.

"I'm sorry about Lily."

"Please don't be," I protested. "Tsiang had almost finished showing me the house before she came. She probably meant well."

"That's not the point," Stephen said firmly. "She knew she wasn't supposed to be here today. I like to have my instructions respected. And my servants." He paused. "I hope your flight was satisfactory."

"It was wonderful," I told him honestly. "I never had a plane all to myself before—" I stopped. I wasn't sure what to call him. He was so much younger than I'd expected, that formality was going to sound stuffy. I used it anyway. "—Mr. Bonner." It sounded worse than stuffy—it sounded stilted.

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“When you were seventeen you called me ‘Stephen’ at least once. Or have you forgotten that kiss I gave you?”

The blood that rushed to my cheeks betrayed my memory more clearly than words.

Stephen grinned. “I hope you know how to avoid a sailboat’s boom now. It was quite a job—fishing you out of the Strait. But since I did—even if it was a long time ago—couldn’t you call me ‘Stephen’ now?”

“I’ll try—Stephen.” I was beginning to realize what a difference eight years can make when one is seventeen—how little difference eight years makes when one is twenty-seven. When I’d met Stephen the first time he had seemed old, now he seemed almost my contemporary.

“That’s better. I hope your suite is all right.”

“It’s lovely—springtime inside four walls.”

The compliment brought no smile to his lips. Instead he moved restlessly and said, with something close to apology, “I’m afraid I didn’t remember you well enough to be sure—you were a kid then—and now . . .” His voice dropped into a kind of confusion.

As though to deny his uneasiness he turned to Matthew, who was standing behind us watching. His face was almost puzzled. Stephen said, “Come and join us, Matt,” and gestured him to the chair next to mine.

Matt fumbled in his pocket for a pack of cigarettes and held it out to me. I took one. “This is the first time you’ve seen Chinois, isn’t it?” he asked as he lit my cigarette. I nodded. “Do you think you’ll like working here?” The expression in his pleasant, melancholy eyes was intent.

I weighed my answer carefully. “I think so. First of all, there’s a real job to do. It’s going to keep me busy, and that’s what I need, now.” I tried to remove the grief from my tone. “And, secondly, there’s Chinois. It’s like something from an old Chinese fairy tale! I can’t imagine being anything but happy while I’m here.”

“Adam and Eve contrived to be unhappy in Paradise,” Stephen interjected. The cynicism in his voice focused our attention on him. He met my protesting eyes, “But I hope you’re right.”

Matt looked puzzled again. Then he shrugged. “I don’t
get your Bible lesson, Stephen, but I do understand that Tsiang’s brought the drinks.”

Matt was right. The Chinese butler had come into the room as quietly as a shadow. He arranged a silver tray loaded with bottles and glasses on an ebony table in front of the davenport. Then he glided out.

Stephen went over to the table. “What will you have?” he asked me.

“Scotch and water.”

“The usual for you, Matt?”

Matt nodded.

Stephen began to fix the drinks. Matt flicked ash from his cigarette. He glanced uneasily at Stephen and then at me. He cleared his throat. Finally he launched a social amenity, “I guess Chinois is the biggest change you’ll find on Coronet Island.”

“Do you really think ten years have touched Coronet Island so little, Mr. Kelleher?” I asked lightly.

“Matt,” he insisted with a quick smile.

“Matt,” I agreed.

He seemed to be considering my question. “Maybe there are changes and I haven’t noticed them—living here, you know, I may miss things you’ll see. There are fewer people living in Halibut Bay. The fishing hasn’t been too good and more jobs have opened up on the mainland since you were here. But that isn’t the kind of change that really shows because all of us old original settlers are still here—even Miss Danby.”

“She’s alive!” It was incredible. My family had roomed at her home the summer we’d spent on the island because Stephen’s fishing lodge had been too small for guests. I’d thought she was older than creation then.

“Very much alive,” Matt said with emphasis. “A little bit nutty maybe . . .”

“Eccentric,” Stephen corrected, “and she was always that. You’ll find her just about the way you remember, Ruth. Matt is a Kelleher of Kelleher Castle—and you know about their feud with Miss Danby.”

I stared at Matt. A Castle Kelleher working for a living? Ten years had changed Coronet Island more than Matt
would admit. The natives used to say that God made appointments to talk with the Kellehers. Now I was sitting across from one.

"We'd be happy to forget if she'd forgive—you know that, Stephen," Matt defended.

"You know how I feel about it," Stephen said, "so let's drop the subject." Matt took the reproof. Stephen brought drinks to us. He returned to the table, picked up his own glass and held it out. Matt and I followed suit.

"To Ruth," Stephen said, "who grew up to be beautiful." He and Matt drank. When Stephen lowered his eyes I saw they were full of resentment.

His compliment I had taken for pleasant flattery, but his expression aroused a kind of confusion in me. Why should he resent me? I had only just arrived, at his invitation. Now I realized that whenever he looked at me, something inside me responded to him impulsively, wanted to reach out to him. I didn't like it. I was no longer a seventeen-year-old girl with a silly crush.

I took a big drink from my glass. It eased the tension within me. When I met Stephen's eyes I was calmer. "Was your business in Vancouver successful?" I asked.

"It was damn successful," Matt answered for him. Somehow he made it sound like a criticism.

Stephen didn't bother to veil his annoyance. "I can answer questions for myself."

Matt flushed. "Sorry," he mumbled and took refuge in his drink.

Stephen sat down on the davenport. He twisted his glass in his hand, glanced at Matt once more and then turned to me. "I shouldn't have snapped at Matt," he told me. "He's right. It was a very successful trip. I managed to complete a merger I've been working. . . . What is it, Tsiang?"

Even I hadn't missed the butler's entrance this time. He was disturbed about something and he had given up his quiet glide for the sake of speed. Stephen was looking at him with questioning attention.

"Albion Kelleher is outside, Mr. Stephen. He wishes to see you." Tsiang's voice was hesitant, as though he'd brought bad news.
I noticed that Matt’s face was flushing. “Look,” he said to Stephen, “I’ll see him. He’s got no right . . .”

Stephen studied the drink in his glass. “I wish I were sure of that,” he murmured almost to himself. “Show him in, Tsiang,” he said with resignation. As the butler left, he turned to Matt and said almost soothingly, “We don’t know what he wants, Matt.”

“ Trouble.” Matt jerked the word out of himself. “Trouble—that’s all he ever wants. Or money.” He took a large drink from his glass and then fixed his eyes on the rug.

Stephen said nothing. He had spoken more softly than Matt, but a bitter look of command slipped onto his face, putting a cold glitter into his eyes, making him a stranger to me. I shivered and wondered uneasily if I were ever going to be able to like him.

My mind made a shocking correction—was I ever going to be able to dislike him?

III

Time seemed to hesitate while the three of us waited for Albion Kelleher. I may have wondered how he was related to Matt, but I’m not sure I did. I do remember that Matt finished his drink at a gulp and kept twisting the empty glass in his hand. Stephen didn’t move, but some of the glitter left his eyes, to be replaced by a kind of doubtful resignation.

The next moment Albion Kelleher was in the room. It was like the sun coming out. Beside Stephen’s stocky, dark strength he looked like a candle flame. His clear, pale blue eyes had wrinkles of laughter at their corners. His features had the regularity of a Greek statue’s with none of a statue’s coldness. I found myself smiling at him. His answering smile
was brilliant and personal, without being intimate. I might be
doubtful about whether or not I liked Stephen or Matt, but
I had no such doubts about Albion. His cheerful hand-
someness enjoined one to like him. And there was such a
dramatic quality to his presence that he was able to dominate
the room simply by standing in the archway.

I managed to take my eyes away from him long enough to
glance at Stephen. His face showed nothing but controlled
detachment, his eyes questioning doubt. But he was holding
his glass so tightly his knuckles were white. He made no
effort to greet his guest. Beside me, Matt had become tense.

"You're letting me down, Stephen," Albion chided. "The
one thing I've consistently admired about you is your good
manners. Aren't you going to offer me a drink and introduce
me to the very handsome young lady visiting you?" Albion
favored me with a look of restrained admiration.

Stephen didn't see it. He hadn't bothered to look at his
uninvited guest. "I'm never at my best when I'm taken by
surprise—but then I think you know that." Stephen's words
must have had some significance I couldn't understand be-
cause some of the warmth left Albion's face. Stephen's voice
continued after only a slight pause, "Ruth, may I introduce
Matt's brother, Albion? Albion, this is my librarian, Ruth
Carson. She just arrived this afternoon."

"How do you do," Albion said. He turned to his brother
and said, "Remind me to visit a library some time soon, Matt.
I had no idea how librarians had changed."

As he spoke to his brother, I had a feeling that I had seen
Albion Kelleher before. And that puzzled me. I had certainly
never been introduced to him because I would have remem-
bered his name. It seemed unlikely that he had ever been in
the Art Department of the Seattle Public Library where I
had worked for the past three years. But somewhere, some-
place, I had seen him before. Not only that, but when I'd
seen him—there had been fear. . .

The uncomfortable awareness that he was looking at me,
waiting for me to say something blocked my groping mind.
I managed, "How do you do, Mr. Kelleher." I hesitated, then
blurted out what was uppermost in my mind, "Have we
met before?"
He smiled at me. "That's what I'm supposed to say, you know. As a matter of fact, I'm sure we haven't. I always remember blondes with soft, aristocratic faces. They're my favorite kind."

"Thank you," I murmured, a little uncomfortable at being the recipient of so many compliments in so short a time, but unshaken in my belief that I had seen him before. I consoled myself with the thought that I would remember where and when, sooner or later.

Albion's gaze had left me and was resting on Stephen with amusement. "Aren't you going to offer me a drink, Stephen? I'd like one."


Albion shrugged. He walked away from the archway for the first time. He went over to the table in front of Stephen and poured himself a good, stiff Scotch. He held his glass out toward Stephen mockingly, then he took a drink.

Now that he was closer to me, I could see that he was Matt's older brother. I thought Matt about my own age. Albion was no more than three or four years younger than Stephen.

Matt had relaxed a little since Stephen had introduced Albion to me. He seemed to be viewing his brother with more suspicion than alarm. Now he leaned forward and asked, "Why the performance?"

Albion swung toward him. "That's a rather poor choice of words isn't it?" he demanded. "Miss Carson, Ruth, may get the wrong impression about me. I'm not an actor."

I wondered why he bothered to protest. Despite his compliments, he really couldn't care too much what kind of an impression he made on me.

Anger flared in Matt's eyes. "It's a damn accurate choice of words and you know it!" Suddenly Matt slumped back into his chair. "Sometimes I wonder why you didn't take up play writing—you like scenes so much."

"Stephen, would you say that I'm making a scene?" Albion asked pointedly.

Stephen regarded him with careful neutrality. "Not yet. But I would like to know why you came here tonight." He turned from Albion to Matt. "Another drink?"
"No—yes," Matt said nervously. "Thanks." He got up and carried his glass over to the table. Stephen poured him a light drink.

"See," Albion told his brother, "that's the way it's done, Matt. Stephen knows how to carry these things off. He's mastered the gentle insult and the tension-breaking gesture. You'll learn too, in time."

"How about you, Ruth?" Stephen asked.

I nodded. He took my glass, refilled it and returned it to me. Then, as he went back toward his seat on the davenport, he stopped and met Albion's mocking blue eyes. "Very good, Stephen. You do know where to put the knife, don't you, old boy? As a matter of fact, I come bearing glad tidings." He waited for some response but didn't get any. Matt was looking at him with open doubt; Stephen seemed to be reserving judgment.

Albion slouched gracefully into a nearby chair. "Make a long story short, eh? Well, I don't mind if I do. The fact is, I'm about to pay off the mortgage on Kelleher Castle. Rewrite the history of the Kelleher family. Instead of reading from remittance to pittance, it'll read—"

"Now you're making a scene." Stephen gave up his neutral pose. There was more disdain than doubt in his eyes now. Less mercy and more mockery in his smile.

Albion's face blurred under the impact of passionate emotion. It froze in his blue eyes; it made his finely sculptured mouth look cruel. It could have been anger. I thought it was hate. It disappeared as quickly as it had come.

"Very well, I'll stick to facts. I am going to pay off the mortgage on the Castle. And furthermore, Stephen, I'm going to do it with the boat you thought I was a damn fool to build. The Pride is going to see me though after all."

"How?" Matt's demand was blunt. "We know you can't fish her. There isn't a crew of men who'd work for you again. And if you can't fish her, how can you get enough money for the mortgage?" He hesitated and then made a bitter
addition, "There wouldn't be a mortgage to pay off if it weren't for that damn boat of yours."

Albion was amused. "I wouldn't try to fish the Pride again if my life depended on it. I won't be condescended to by salt water peasants—and that's all fishermen are. I've chartered the Pride."

Matt looked at him levelly. "Have you? Well, who would spend enough on one charter to retire the mortgage?"

Albion met his eyes. His handsome face was mysterious as he replied, "I can't tell you."
"But believe me, Matt, I'm not exaggerating the fee."

"I wish I believed you," Matt replied, "but it's too good to be true." He looked away from Albion. "I'm just glad that Dad can't see how you've treated the property he was so careful to leave you."

Albion laughed sharply, surprisingly. "Poor Matt," he said. "Ever since Father died you've cherished the idea he really wanted to turn the Castle into a hotel and that I willfully went against his wishes." He drank the rest of his drink and turned abruptly to Stephen. "Don't you think it's about time you tell him, Stephen? Or does your money give you immunity from telling the truth?"

"I'm not sure what you mean," Stephen said.

Albion leaned forward. "I mean this, Stephen. It never was Father's idea to turn the Castle into a hotel. It was yours. Your idea and your money—that's what it was."

"When your father's investments failed, it was the only thing I could think of. But surely, Matt, you knew that?"

Matt was looking from his brother to Stephen with a certain amount of confusion. "I didn't," he said in a low voice.

Albion smiled at him. "Of course, you didn't. Father was too proud to tell you. He hated the whole idea. Can you imagine him enjoying the sight of a lot of damn tourists tramping across his grounds? It was Stephen's idea all right. Good old Stephen! Father accepted the offer because he was desperate—not because he liked it." Albion set his glass down on the table beside his chair. "But where was good old Stephen when I needed money for the Pride? I had to hock Kelleher Castle to build that boat. Good old Stephen was willing to make me into an inn-keeper, but he wouldn't
turn me into a fisherman. I'd had as much experience at the one as the other, so just what was the difference, Stephen? It escapes me."

Stephen met Albion's goading challenge with an expression that had gone beyond command to cruelty. "The difference was that I made the first offer to your father. I had no desire then—I have none now—to turn you into anything." He stood up and walked over to the picture windows. The light of the sunset made him a black silhouette against the great west window, strong, but alone and somehow vulnerable. I dismissed the thought as silly. How could Stephen Bonner ever be vulnerable?

With Albion it was different. Stephen's words had been a vital thrust at him. His face had been haughty, now it was close to humble, and contrition showed in his eyes.

Before he could speak, Stephen turned to face him once more. He sounded tired. "I'm glad you've got a charter, Albion. I hope it will solve all your problems. You may be right about me. I may be wrong about you. There's just one thing. . . ."

The flaming light of the setting sun fell blindingly across Albion's face. My memory stirred. I almost knew where I'd seen him before. Then he spoke and broke the thread of memory, "And that is?"

I was reminded of duelists as the two men faced each other. Their weapons were only words, but Stephen's had struck home. Now he had only to administer the coup de grâce. His voice was even, without inflection as it delivered the next thrust. "Smuggling sounds romantic—but when you come right down to it, it's still illegal."

His aim had been deadly. Albion's face seemed to draw in on itself, revealing an unexpected weakness that was at once intangible and obvious. All the spirit died away from his eyes. Then anger swept over him, burning like a flame on his fine features. "Can you really afford to be so detached on top of your money mountain? Aren't you afraid you might fall?" Albion's voice was sharp, honed. He had risen and was standing tensely beside his chair.

"I don't understand. . . ."

"Don't you?" Albion's anger trembled in his voice. "What
do you think Halibut Bay said when you brought Lily McGurney up here to work? You and Matt and Lily under one roof . . ."

"You know Lily works here only during the day. I made the arrangement with her father and you must have a pretty good idea of why it was made!" Stephen's voice was hard.

"McGurney wouldn't be the first sanctimonious old goat who was willing to sell his principles." Albion was beyond reason. His anger had engulfed him. "He'd do almost anything for money . . . ."

Stephen strode across the room. He pressed the service bell. "I've called Tsiang," he told Albion. "He'll show you out—or put you out if necessary."

"Do you really think that will help, Stephen?" The anger in Albion's voice no longer shook, it had steadied into strength. "Having your servants tidy up after you? How convenient! Ring a bell and have your mistakes erased—by someone else."

"For God's sake, Albion . . ." Matt pleaded.

"You're not asking for God's sake," Albion retorted without bothering to glance at his brother. "You're asking for Stephen's. Both you and he seemed to confuse him with the Creator. But he's not, you know." The steady anger in his eyes aimed itself at Stephen. "If you had been, your late wife would still be alive, wouldn't she, Stephen? God doesn't revenge himself on innocents."

"That's enough!" Stephen's voice was brutal.

An unexpected rush of laughter escaped from Albion. It was empty of everything but anger and disdain. "Emotion, Stephen? I thought you saved that for women. First for Maude, then for Lily and now for Ruth. Or do you insist that you brought her here to catalogue books. What a waste of—"

Anger and humiliation burnt on my cheeks. No matter what Stephen might have done to him in the past, Albion had no right to say a thing like that of me.

Albion said nothing more. Stephen's dark strength shot across the room. The fist he threw to Albion Kelleher's jaw connected with a deadly solidity. Albion spun half around,
reached futilely for support, hit the floor and skidded across the glowing Chinese rug for a short distance.

Stephen stood over him silently, his fists still clenched. "If I hear that you've repeated that smut on this island or anywhere else in British Columbia, I'll beat you within an inch of your life. Now get out!"

No one moved. Albion lay stunned at Stephen's feet, his fingers working uselessly in the deep pile of the rug. I was almost as stunned as he. Never in my whole life had I seen a grown man really hit another. I tried to tell myself I was shocked, but I couldn't. Inside me the animal stirring of satisfaction was too strong. I was glad Stephen had hit Albion for me. Matt stared at Stephen, his face haggard in the growing dusk. Stephen himself stood stiffly, his eyes burning with anger.

Albion tried to get up. His first effort failed and he lay helpless on the floor. The anger which had given him strength had vanished with Stephen's blow. It left behind the same intangible weakness Stephen's words had revealed earlier. His head moved and his defeated eyes met mine. Then shame turned them away. "I'm sorry, Ruth—Miss Carson. I—I was so angry, I... Forgive..."

I couldn't say anything. Forgiveness wasn't coming easily to me.

He struggled to his knees. One hand groped up the leg of the ebony cocktail table, while the other braced itself on the top. Finally he stood unsteadily. When he spoke, his voice was so low that only the absolute silence in the room made it audible. "Stephen, whether you believe me or not, I'm sorry for what I said about Ruth." Humility suited him better than anger; it emphasized the bright nature that anger obscured. His head came up, his blue eyes met Stephen's green ones. "But I'm not sorry for the other things I said. I just can't forget the past as easily as you can."

"Get him out of here, Matt."

Only Albion moved; he took a jerky backward step away from Stephen, as if he had been struck again.

"I said," Stephen repeated, his voice ugly, "get him out of here before I kill him."

Matt moved then. He half shoved, half dragged Albion
toward the door. Tsiang glided from the hall and helped Matt with his brother.

Stephen didn’t move. His hands were still tight fists. Through the dusk, I could see a nerve jumping in his temple.

I knew I had to do something to ease the tension, and it had to be exactly the right thing. I flicked on the table lamp beside my chair. Stephen didn’t even blink in its soft light. I looked around desperately. I saw the decanters on the table behind Stephen and I walked over to them.

My hands weren’t steady, but I managed to pour some rye into a glass. I carried it to Stephen and shoved it roughly at one of his fists. “Drink it,” I said, angry at the nervous tremor that flawed my voice.

The nerve in his temple jumped again. Otherwise he didn’t move.

“Drink it!” Seconds slid by and then, slowly, Stephen’s fists relaxed. He took the glass from me and gulped down the liquor. He set the glass carefully on the table.

His face became calmer. But there was still something loose behind his eyes that was wild and wanted to be free. Whatever it was seemed to strike out at me.

I took a step away from him. He turned with my movement, his commanding eyes holding me where I stood.

He reached out to me. His hands rested gently against my arms. I could feel their warmth through my jacket’s sleeves. His fingers pressed more firmly against me as his hands moved toward my shoulders. I stiffened. His hands convulsed against my upper arms as though the entire strength of his body had entered them. An unbearable spasm of pain rushed through me. It escaped my lips in a thin scream.

The sound of my voice uncoiled his fingers. His hands flung themselves away from me. “Get out,” he yelled. “For God’s sake, get out!”

I staggered away from him. Then I ran. Fear and pain came with me. Somehow I reached my own suite. I closed the door behind me and locked it. Throwing myself down on the davenport in my sitting room, I wept.
I don't remember clearly the rest of the evening. I do know a maid, Mei Ling, brought a light supper to my room. I tried to eat it because I knew I should. But the tray was practically untouched when I put it outside my door and locked myself in again.

One thought filled my mind, one desire overwhelmed me. Escape. I wanted to get away from Coronet Island. I didn't care where, just so it was away.

Once I almost left my suite to search for Stephen. I intended to demand that he send me home immediately. Not tomorrow. Now! But when I stood up, the movement stirred pain to new life in my arms. I decided tomorrow would be better. By that time, Stephen must have regained possession of himself.

I made myself go to bed, but I couldn't make myself go to sleep for I was kept awake by the gradual approach of a storm that came sweeping down the Strait. I was lulled at first by the drowsy sound of the wind. But it soon grew in violence. The darkness outside became alive with sound. My windows shuddered under the wind and crackled with bursting raindrops. When I did finally doze, I plunged over the edge of a nightmare from which I couldn't escape.

When morning came it brought only the relief of pale, silvery light and left me with the half-remembered terror of my dream. The storm had grown during the night. Chinois shuddered and groaned under almost continuous buffeting of wind. Raindrops flung themselves angrily to death against my windows.

Storm or no storm, I was determined to leave Chinois. I got out of bed, ignoring the unrested weariness of my body. I sought refreshment in a shower. The warm water sluiced over me soothingly—until I saw the broad bruises on my
upperarms. A wretched feeling of violation engulfed me, mixed with shame, disgust, anger and, worst of all, excitement.

Stepping out of the shower, I dried myself haphazardly and went back into the bedroom. I grabbed some clothes and put them on, careful to pick a blouse with long sleeves. At least, during the day, I'd hide the marks Stephen had left on me.

My arms ached as I braided my blonde hair and fastened it into a coronet on my head. I kept saying to myself, "I've got to get away. I've got to leave. I've got to!"

A violent gust of wind flung itself against the window. I glanced outside. In the distance, the Strait of Georgia was humped in wild waves; closer to me, trees bent like grass under the wind. There were only two ways off Coronet Island, by air and by water. The storm outside made both impossible. I was trapped. I had to leave—but I couldn't.

A knock sounded crisply at my sitting room door. I went out of the bedroom and closed the door behind me. I leaned against it. The knock sounded again. I managed to say, "Who's there?"

"Mei Ling. I have your breakfast."

I hurried to unlock the door. She walked past me with a tray in her hands. I watched her lay my breakfast out on the table beside my sitting room's north window.

"Please," she begged softly, "you eat your breakfast. Last night you have not touched your supper. My father is much worried."

"Your father?"

"Tsiang," she said.

"I'm sorry I worried him."

She looked at me with mild surprise. "He is sorry you did not eat your dinner. But he is worried about Mr. Stephen."

Of course, I thought, briefly savoring self-pity, who would bother to worry about me? Certainly not Stephen's servants.

I went over to the table and sat down. I knew the girl hadn't moved. I tried to ignore her and began to eat methodically.

"Mr. Stephen is gone."

I almost choked on a piece of toast as I turned to face
her. "Gone!" I remembered too clearly Stephen's face as he said, "Get him out of here before I kill him." Fear knotted my stomach.

"Last night, before the storm, he took the sailboat. He has not come back."

The relief I might have felt at the certainty that Stephen had not gone to carry out his threat to Albion aborted, as a vicious gust of wind set the windows next to me chattering. Why had he gone at all?

"My father says he never saw Mr. Stephen as upset as he was last night—not even when his wife died was he so upset."

My mind gripped her last phrase. I remembered the allusions Albion had made about Stephen's wife. "Mrs. Bonner was drowned in a sailing accident, wasn't she?" I murmured more to myself than to the maid.

Mei Ling looked stricken and tears trembled in her eyes as she nodded. "We were not with Mr. Stephen then. His wife didn't... That is, we lived here at the old lodge, my family and I. It was outside Vancouver Harbor that Mrs. Bonner had her..." Mei Ling dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

I was sorry I had mentioned Stephen's wife, sorrier that Albion's veiled allusions had brought her to my mind. But I was sure Mei Ling and her family had somehow connected Stephen's abrupt departure with his wife's death. I made a futile effort to reassure Mei Ling. "No matter how upset Stephen may have been, he isn't suicide prone. And he is a very good sailor."

"Of course," Mei Ling agreed. "If you will excuse me, I will do your bedroom now." Politeness didn't conceal her conviction that I didn't know what I was talking about.

I turned back to my breakfast after she left me. I made one attempt to eat and then shoved the food away. Mei Ling wasn't the only person who had found my words of comfort empty. I didn't believe them myself. What had Lily said when I'd objected to her calling Stephen a nut? You haven't seen him for years. Well, she was right. I hadn't. I no longer knew him. I couldn't say what he was prone to. I could only be afraid for him out in the storm.
And that wasn't going to get me anywhere. I should do something, anything. There were boxes and boxes of books to be unpacked. Very well, I'd unpack them. That would keep me busy, keep me from thinking.

I stuck my head into the bedroom which Mei Ling was energetically putting in order and told her I'd be in the library if anyone wanted me. Then I descended the staircase that led directly from my suite to the library below.

I threaded my way carefully through the passages between the stacks of boxed books and stood beside the desk that was to have been mine. I looked at the few professional books I had brought with me. The Winchell, the A.L.A. and the Library of Congress Rules for cataloguing books, my Dewey. All of them suddenly looked as foreign to me as though they had been written in Chinese.

Yesterday this room and its contents which I could only guess at had seemed like a dream come true. Last night's violence, today's fear made it impossible for me to recapture that dream now. Suddenly I banged one of my books on the sandalwood desk top. It made my arm hurt. Why couldn't I just hate Stephen and be done with it? He was violent, perhaps mad. Why did that little animal that lived inside me preen and purr with pleasure when I remembered Stephen defending me last night? Why couldn't that animal be as sane as I was and understand that I had to leave?

"Temper, temper!" a voice chided.

I looked up. Matt stood in the main entrance of the library. He was smiling at me, but his face looked tired.

I put the book back on the pile. "Good morning."

Matt hesitated self-consciously and then blurted out, "About last night—"

"Let's not talk about it."

"Won't you accept Albion's apology?"

My answer was feeble. "I—can't."

Matt's expression was first pleading, then defensive. "You don't understand Albion."

I sat down in the desk chair. "I guess not," I admitted with indifference.

Matt found that encouraging. He came into the room and sat down on a packing case in front of the desk. "A couple of
years ago Albion wouldn’t have acted like that,” Matt explained. “Our father was still alive then and Albion was—pretty swell.” He looked down at the soft, golden brown tiles on the library floor. “I guess it’s because there isn’t any money now. I guess he’s just not used to being poor. But he didn’t mean to hurt you last night. He meant to hurt Stephen.”

“Why?” I asked. “If Albion had a good reason, I might accept his apology.”

Matt’s eyes brushed across mine uneasily. He transferred a bunch of newspaper clippings he held from one hand to the other. “I’m sorry.” He was suddenly very formal. “I can’t tell you. Ask Stephen, or Albion. It’s not my battle. I try not to be involved.”

I felt a sudden surge of pity for him. It wasn’t his battle, but he had been caught on the field between his brother and his friend. It seemed to me it must be a miserable position to hold. “I’m sorry, Matt. I didn’t mean to pry. Perhaps I will ask Albion.”

“Then you’re going to stay?” He looked eager and a little surprised.

“I’ll settle that with Stephen.”

Matt flipped through the clippings he held. “Sure. You’d have to talk it over with Stephen. I hope you do stay.” He paused. “But I thought after last night . . . I was afraid, well, Stephen . . .” His face flushed. What he had thought was all too clear. “Say, will it bother you if I file these clippings?”

The change of subject was clumsy but kind. “Of course not,” I told him. “What are they?”

Matt looked relieved to be back on safer ground as he replied, “Part of my secretarial duties. Stephen keeps a clipping file on books and art.” He walked around the desk to keep from disturbing some of the stacked book boxes. He worked his way over to one of the crimson lacquer file cabinets beside the French doors.

“You don’t have many there,” I commented.

Matt set the clippings on top of the cabinet and pulled out a drawer. “No. These deal with stolen works of art. There
never are many. I collect them until I have enough to make a job."

"Is Stephen particularly interested in stolen works of art?" I asked lightly.

"He sure is! Especially since that Michelangelo-type painting of his was stolen." He leafed through file folders.

"I didn't know it had been. When did it happen?"

Matt put a clipping into one of the files before he looked up. "I don't remember exactly. It was before I worked for him. But it was just after Maude, his wife, died, so it must be about three years ago."

"Did the police have any trouble getting it back?"

Matt was busy with another file. He put one of the clippings in it and shoved it back in the drawer. "You know, it's funny but I don't think the police had anything to do with it. From what Stephen said, I'd guess the insurance company made a deal with the thief." He had another clipping in his hand. He seemed to be giving it more attention than he had the others.

"What's that one about?" I asked. "Someone steal the Mona Lisa again?"

Matt grinned and held it out to me, "No, but Stephen was sore when I showed it to him yesterday."

I took the clipping and read it. I gasped. "El Greco's St. Michael in Africa!"

"You know it?"

"It was the first original El Greco I ever saw," I said. I read the clipping again. It seemed impossible that such a famous painting could have been stolen from the Kohner Gallery in San Francisco. "Frame and all," I murmured.

"Stephen couldn't believe it," Matt told me. "He's got a thing about that picture. Whenever he's in San Francisco, he spends as much time at the Gallery as he can, just to look at that El Greco." Matt grinned, "If I didn't know him better, I'd say he'd had it stolen himself." I laughed and handed the clipping back.

I thought I was doing a pretty good job of not worrying about Stephen and the storm, but as Matt turned back to his filing, I noticed that my hand had been quivering. I grabbed one of the books on the desk. My eyes moved over
the words. I never saw them. I saw a small sailboat—a big storm.

"Coffee break?" Matt had left the filing cabinet. He was walking toward the service bell by the main door. "All I have to do is ask Tsiang and, presto, a tray," he told me.

"No, please," I said. I was too tense for coffee.

Matt stood where he was. He looked at me searchingly. "I guess last night really upset you, eh?"

I shook my head. "It's just that Stephen's out in this storm in the sailboat." My voice almost failed me.

Matt grinned at me. "The things women worry about," he chided.

The wind picked that moment to strike the tall, double windows behind me. Its crescendo stabbed at me.

Matt's melancholy eyes became concerned. He walked over to me and awkwardly placed a hand on my shoulder. "I didn't mean to make fun of you," he apologized. "It's just that there's nothing to be worried about. Chances are Stephen headed for the nearest shelter as soon as he knew the storm meant business. If he didn't, he'll stand out to sea. Nothing will happen to him. He's the second best sailor in British Columbia."

I wasn't comforted. My hands clenched and unclenched themselves.

"Look, Miss Carson—Ruth—there are plenty of little bays right around here. Stephen's all right. He knows these waters like the back of his hand." He looked at me impatiently. "You don't see me worrying about Albion, do you?"

"What has that got to do with it?" I demanded.

"Albion's out in the storm too."

"You mean he left on his charter last night?" I asked with surprise.

"That's right. If I'm not worried about him, why should you worry about Stephen? Albion's my brother, the only family I've got. According to what I've heard, you haven't seen Stephen in years. What's he to you that you've got to worry yourself sick about him?"

Perhaps Matt meant to make me angry. He succeeded. I struck back. "I got the impression that Albion's boat—the
Pride, isn’t it?—was somewhat larger than Stephen’s sailboat.

“Forty-five feet with twin Mercedes Diesels,” Matt agreed as he seated himself on the packing box again. “But I still tell you that you don’t need to worry about Stephen. You’ll see.”

“I hope so.” I tried for biting sarcasm, but succeeded with pathos. Annoyance drove me to answer Matt’s question with defiance. “And Stephen’s nothing to me. He was a good friend of my father’s. He tried to help me . . .” My voice lacked conviction.

Matt didn’t notice. He picked up my last phrase. “Stephen’s always trying to help someone. It never works out very well for him—or anyone else.” His bitterness was surprising.

“It seems to have worked out all right for you,” I countered. “He’s given you a good job.”

“I suppose that’s what it looks like.” He brought a clenched hand down on his knee. “Damn it! You don’t understand. I’m no more Stephen’s real secretary than I’m a millionaire. Oh, he keeps me busy enough with little jobs: seeing that Lily has lots of signs to type for the art gallery, keeping books on the current acquisitions, making polite conversation with his guests.” Matt stopped talking and tried to control his resentment. “Stephen’s real secretary is sixty years old and her name is Miss Pepper. She manages his Vancouver office and there’s nothing she doesn’t know about Canadian finance. All I am is a reasonably attractive hired guest.”

Matt’s outburst, the bitterness that twisted his face, startled me. I found myself saying, “But if you don’t like working for Stephen, why on earth do you stay?”

Misery replaced bitterness in his face. “Because Stephen’s given me the ideal occupation. I didn’t have a useful education like yours. I can’t catalogue books, do drafting, tot up accounts.”

I resisted the temptation to tell Matt that now he was making a scene. For that was exactly what he was doing—and enjoying. I studied his face and realized that Albion need not have been the Kelleher I’d seen before. It could have been Matt just as well. But what did it matter? As soon
as Stephen got back, I'd be leaving Chinois. I'd never see either Kelleher again so where I might have seen one before didn't matter. I just wished he'd stop his orgy of self-revelation.

My distaste must have showed. His voice dwindled away and finally he shrugged. "Stephen's helped me all right—to be useless. He helped my father too, and all that accomplished was I almost hated my brother for the past couple of years.

A great help that was! And when Stephen didn't succeed in making the Castle into a hotel, he offered to buy it."

“What was wrong with that?” I asked.

“Nothing,” Matthew said bitingly. *There is never anything 'wrong' with what Stephen does. It's just that it never comes out 'right.'* I guess you wouldn't understand how Albion and I feel about the Castle. It was built about the time British Columbia became a province by the first Kelleher to come to Canada. There've been Kellehers there ever since. When Father died, Stephen knew his affairs were in bad shape, so he offered to buy the Castle. He really did want to help us. And he made the effort when he had every right to be concerned only with his own affairs—Maude had died just a few months before. It was very generous. But he wouldn't take 'no' for an answer—not until he and Albion had a really good row."

"Is that what makes them enemies?"

Matt met my eyes with reluctance. The bitterness in his face weakened and died. He spread his hands. "I told you that wasn't my battle." He looked defenseless but somehow pity didn't enter my mind as I watched him.

"I'm sorry," he said in a low voice, "I shouldn't talk this way. Stephen has tried to help me. And I'm not really ungrateful. It's just that he has so much that there's nothing I can give back to him in return."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "your company is good enough. Stephen must be a lonely man."

I thought Matt was going to object. He bowed his head instead. "Maybe you're right," he mumbled. Silence lay between us like a barrier. The noise of the storm beat against it.

Matthew sighed and glanced at me with apology. "I wish
Miss Danby had never sold Stephen this land. He couldn't have built Chinois on the small property the old lodge stood on. But she did. When she heard Albion and I had refused to sell, she approached Stephen with her own proposition. He took her up on it.”

“What shouldn’t he have built Chinois?” I asked shortly.

“Don’t tell me the Kelleher feelings are hurt because Chinois outshines the Castle.” I made no effort to disguise my sarcasm.

“Part of it probably is jealousy,” Matt admitted. “Until Stephen came to Coronet Island in the late thirties we Kellehers did have everything pretty much our own way, despite Miss Danby’s interference. But that’s not what I mean—it’s too childish. The thing is—if Stephen had never come here to live, last night wouldn’t have happened and—lots of other things.”

“Like Stephen being out in this storm,” I suggested evenly. “Apparently that scene last night upset him more than it upset you or Albion.

Matthew stared at me with a peculiar expression of surprise. “You think that threatening Albion . . .” He smiled almost sadly. “Aren’t you being naïve?”

I was puzzled. Then I remembered Stephen’s hands moving so gently, so caressingly over my arms just before I found out how strong they really were. Blood rushed to my face. “Surely you don’t think . . .”

I didn’t learn what Matthew thought. A stranger almost literally flung himself into the library. He was a middle-aged man. His body and face were taut with something near desperation. His features were all rather flat, as though drawn on weathered paper instead of being made of skin and bone, but his eyes were piercing and full of agony. He ignored me completely as he stalked over to Matthew. “The heathen said you’d be here. You got to help me, Mr. Kelleher. You got to.” He reached out and grasped Matthew’s shoulders with hard, brown hands.

Illogical conviction that he had come to tell us something had happened to Stephen swept over me with such force that I found myself leaning my whole weight on the desk for support.
Matthew shook the man's hands away from his shoulders. Distaste touched his face. "What's wrong, McGurney?"

"The devil has claimed his own." McGurney spoke like an oracle.

I breathed again. This was Lily McGurney's father. But he could have come about Stephen... .

Matthew shrugged unsympathetically. "Look, McGurney, if you want my help, you'll have to tell me what it's all about."

McGurney's hands hung listlessly by his sides. I wanted to shake words out of him. If he'd come about Stephen, why didn't he say so? When he finally spoke, his voice was no longer keeningly prophetic. It was worn. "It's Lily. She's gone. I got to find her. That heathen says Mr Bonner ain't here—so I came to you for help." He reached out toward Matthew pleadingly.

"What do you mean, gone?" Matthew demanded.

"She ain't home, that's what I mean. Last time I saw her was when I sent her to bed, but she didn't sleep in her bed. No one's seen her since last night when she was at the dock watching your brother fuel his boat. I got her out of there. Took her home. Sent her to her room with the fear of God in her." Satisfaction at that accomplishment glutted McGurney's voice. "Now the devil's claimed his own. Will you help get her back?"

Matt stood up. "Did you beat her up again?" Anger hardened his voice.

"She must learn to fear the Lord."

Matt controlled his obvious desire to strike the man in front of him. His voice was tight as he said. "I'll help you, McGurney—for Lily's sake. After we've found her perhaps I'll be able to teach you something about fearing God—and man." The two men glared at one another.

I suddenly remembered what Lily had said about going to Vancouver and her father not being able to stop her. I almost blurted the story out but stopped myself. For Lily's sake, I hoped she succeeded.

"Ruth, if Stephen gets back before we've found Lily, tell him what I'm doing, eh?"

I nodded at Matthew.
The two men left.

If Matt came back without finding Lily, then I could tell him what she’d said about going to Vancouver. He had a right to know. I was sure his anger had been caused because he loved Lily. I was glad someone loved her. I knew now why she had talked about her father as she had. I thought Mr. McGurney repulsive.

V

After Matt and McGurney left, I went in the library and unloaded books from the boxes and put them on the empty shelves. It was a senseless occupation, but it kept me busy.

Mei Ling brought my lunch. To my questions she replied that Stephen had not come back and Tsiang had heard no news of him. She left me alone again. I ate because it was something different to do. I put the empty dishes on the tray, put the tray in the hall, and went back to the box of books.

Outside, the storm settled into a sullen, dying anger. Neither Matthew nor Mr. McGurney returned from their search for Lily. Stephen’s absence was a chronic ache of fear inside me. Confused, unpleasant thoughts darted around my mind like rats, gnawing away at my very slight composure.

I thought of the battle between Stephen and Albion which had driven Stephen to match himself against the storm outside. I thought of Matt trapped on the field between his brother and Stephen. I thought of poor Lily McGurney huddled miserably in the storm, fearing her father’s righteous anger. I hoped she was walking down the streets of Vancouver instead. Last, but not least, I thought self-pity-
ingly of myself, trapped on Coronet Island by the uncaring elements.

I gave up thinking and reached into the box for another book. It was empty. I almost opened another box before it occurred to me that the books should be catalogued as they were unpacked. Whoever came to catalogue Stephen's library after I left wouldn't thank me for messing things up.

I regarded the group of books I had already placed on the shelf. They made a pathetic island in the middle of shelving that stretched from floor to ceiling on three sides of the room. I started to take them down one by one. They were a strange mixture. There was a first edition of that peculiar novel, *St. Elmo*. There was a copy of Sansom's *The Western World and Japan*. I noticed that Stephen had penciled in marginal notes. His handwriting was bold and unmistakable. I wasn't surprised to discover his knowledge of the Orient was penetrating. The third book I took down startled me. It was quite rare, a first edition of *Pauline* by Robert Browning. I treated it with respect. I remembered the furoir that had followed when a copy of the same book had been stolen from the Hartley Grant collection in Vancouver. Idly I started to close the book, then decided to see what kind of book plate Stephen used. I looked inside the cover.

I wasn't surprised to discover that Stephen's book plate was an elegant arrangement of Chinese characters, long and narrow. It had been carelessly pasted in. I looked beneath its loose edge and saw a second plate. It was a gothic twining of the letters HG within a shield.

I looked at it for a long time. Then I dropped Stephen's book plate back over it. I don't think I realized till then how deeply my parents' death had touched my life. Normally, I'd have known when Hartley Grant had got the book back, when he'd sold it to Stephen, even the price Stephen had paid for it. Keeping tabs on the west coast's antiquarian book trade was at once my hobby and my pride. If my state of mind had been healthier, I don't suppose my ignorance about the book would have made any difference. With Stephen still gone, Lily missing, myself trapped, *Pauline* was the finishing touch to a disastrous day. I thrust the book
back onto the shelf. What I needed was fresh air. I also needed to get away from books and Chinois.

I went to my suite and got my raincoat out of the closet. Tying a scarf about my head, I went back down to the library and through the doors that led to the gardens. I had expected that the peonies and roses drooping with rain, battered by the wind, would somehow soothe me.

But it wasn't to the storm-swept beauty of the gardens that I responded. It was to the wild weather that attacked me as soon as I stepped outside. There was a fierce pleasure in fighting the wind, in feeling the raindrops break against my face as they pelted earthward. Now I had something to fight against. I was no longer trapped. I embraced the storm. I ran into it.

At last I had to stop and catch my breath, then I went on. I don't know exactly when I entered the woods that lay between Chinois and Lighthouse Point. At first I took no notice of the branches that snapped at my eyes. I fought the undergrowth with the same fierce satisfaction I had fought the storm. But at last I was winded and I sank down on a rotting log.

Finally I got my breath and looked around me. The woods were verdant with early summer. The green of sword fern stretched spottily away between silver alders and scattered firs whose branches overhead fretted against the storm. Rain fell doubly hard from the leaves and splatted softly on the decaying floor of the forest. The light was grayly submarine in the aging afternoon.

The dripping forest that surrounded me was rather ghostly, but the fresh, damp smells in it were refreshing. Peace of mind oozed back as I looked at sodden mosses. I put my back against the silvery trunk of an alder tree and for the first time in twenty-four hours relaxed.

I sat there for a long time simply savoring self-possession. It dawned on me that despite my raincoat I was soaked through. I decided that I might as well go back to Chinois. I stood up and shook myself. Then I realized I had no idea of the direction I should take. I was lost.

Suddenly I smiled at my confusion. This woods couldn't
be very big. It really didn't matter which way I went. I'd soon get out of it and be able to get my bearings.

I started off. Now that I was being careful as I walked, I seemed to blunder more. I found holes and slapping branches in quantities which certainly hadn't existed on my way into the woods. I began to shiver. Each bush I brushed up against sent a fresh supply of water cascading over me.

Just when I was beginning to think I had underestimated the extent of the woods I forced my way through an especially tangled thicket of young cedars and found myself on the edge of a wild, overgrown garden. Ahead of me, its peeling pink paint sinister in the wet gray light of the stormy day, stood a gaunt, old house. Behind it Lighthouse Point ran out into the watery anger of the Strait.

Now I knew where I was. I had arrived at Miss Danby's. The funny old house showed no lights. But, at first sight, it was comforting nonetheless.

I made my way carefully up the almost obliterated garden path toward the house. Rain-soaked humps of rhododendron moved restlessly under the storm wind. Lavender, gnarled and old, crept out over the pathway. An arm of climbing rose gone wild clawed the back of my hand as I tried to protect my eyes.

The house, gabled and betowered, was almost menacing as I came closer to it. Its veranda, sagging with age, looked like a dark, gaping mouth in the fading afternoon.

"Girl! You there, girl," a thin, papery voice demanded. "Come here where I can see you."

The voice was thinner, more tenuous than it had been ten years ago, but it was no less imperious—it could only belong to Miss Danby, daughter of the Admiral. In a way, I was relieved as I went to the veranda from which the voice had spoken. Not only did I have an excuse to stay away from Chinois a little longer, but it would never have done to leave Coronet Island without visiting Miss Danby.

"There, stand right there," the voice instructed, stopping me at the foot of the decaying wooden steps that led up to the porch itself.

I looked up. At first I could see nothing. Then my eyes adjusted to the dull light beneath the veranda roof and I
saw Miss Danby. She seemed less substantial than I remembered, as if age were fading her away rather than shrinking her. She was wearing a long, black taffeta dress. It suggested another era without being characteristic of any period. The years had pushed her eyes so far into their sockets, that only shadows seemed to look down on me.

“How are you, Miss Danby?”

“Speak up, girl,” Miss Danby fluted loudly.

“I’m Ruth Carson, Miss Danby,” I said, raising my voice.

“Perhaps you remember me. My family boarded . . .”

“That’s good,” she interrupted. “Thought you might have come to spy on the Admiral. They came again last night, you know. Stephen said they wouldn’t come back, but they came last night. I saw their boat. It was white.”

A stab of pity so strong it made my heart leap passed through me. Nothing that had been said about Miss Danby last night had prepared me for this. She had been eccentric when I knew her, but that her crisp, incisive mind should slip into senility was the kind of ludicrous tragedy time always seems to enjoy dealing out to humanity.

As though she read my feelings on my face, she gave a sudden little bark of laughter. “Remember you well,” she said. “Spent the summer trailing after Stephen Bonner.” She barked laughter again. “Crush does a young girl good. You come in and have a cup of tea. It’s a poor day to come calling, but it’s kind. Come in. Come in!”

I was disconcerted. Here was the Miss Danby I remembered. And even in the dimness of light under the veranda roof I could see that her face was warm with eagerness.

“Thank you,” I said, “I’d like a cup of tea.”

I mounted the sagging steps and followed her across the porch and into the house. Musty air, dry and old, seeped into my lungs. It was as though the house had saved air from all the years of its existence. Gloom pressed down the wide, dark staircase, but it didn’t touch Miss Danby as she turned to her right into what had been the dining room when we had stayed with her.

“Mind the furniture,” Miss Danby called back to me. It was a well-timed warning. I almost ran into an enormous Victorian clothes press as I entered the room. She led me
through a corridor whose walls were composed of Morris chairs, bedsteads, dressers, hulking highboys.

"The roof leaks," Miss Danby explained. "Had to have all the furniture brought downstairs. The Admiral wouldn't have wanted it ruined."

We were approaching a doorway through which golden light crept cautiously. She stopped just inside the doorway and turned to me. "Of course you know about the Admiral. It's all right for you to know. But we didn't want everyone... I don't know how the Kellehers could have been so heartless. It was an accident; the Admiral didn't mean to lose his ship and kill his men. They said he did it on purpose—even the navy said it. But you mustn't believe them."

"I don't," I assured her. I knew what she was talking about. One couldn't have boarded with Miss Danby and have remained in ignorance. Her father, Captain Danby of the British Royal Navy, had had the misfortune to miss a channel marker in thick fog. He had struck a rock full speed ahead, lost his ship and almost half his men. He had been cashiered and had taken his shame and his daughter into exile with him in British Columbia. They had made a decent life for themselves, Miss Danby considerately giving her father promotions in rank as the years went by. Then love had wrecked the whole thing. A Kelleher who would, I suppose, have been Matt's grandfather, proposed to Miss Danby. She didn't want to marry him and when she turned him down he had raked up the old scandal for spite. The Admiral barely survived the revelation and Miss Danby had never forgiven the Kellehers. In her own quiet way, she had carried on a feud with the family ever since.

"Of course you don't," she agreed as her shadowy eyes searched my face. "I'm an old woman and my mind wanders. Now come into the light where I can see you."

We stepped into a lighted room. It had been the kitchen when I had stayed there. Now it was obviously Miss Danby's living quarters as well. A prim, little four-poster bed covered with a clean patchwork quilt stood against one wall. A clothes press was next to it. An assortment of chairs, their upholstery thin and worn, crouched in the shadows, reminders of past elegance. On a round table covered by a
dark green, fringed cloth stood a kerosene lamp casting its golden glow on the well-rubbed finish of the wooden chairs by the table. A wood stove threw warmth into the room and a bulbous tea kettle steamed contentedly on top of it.

"Take off your coat and sit down, my dear."

I did as I was bid. I laid the soaking trenchcoat over one of the crouching chairs. The warmth of the room felt good.

Miss Danby's taffeta dress rustled softly as she made tea. My eyes grew large as I took in the silver tea service she intended to use. It had always stood in state on the buffet when I had been there before. "May I help?" I asked.

"Oh, no," she said with papery cheerfulness. "I entertain so seldom anymore it's a pleasure to me. Stephen visits me now and again. Of course, entertaining is more difficult than it used to be—servants are so hard to keep."

I was surprised to see how easily she carried the silver tray with its burden of steaming, full teapot, cream, sugar, delicate cups and a plate of cookies.

"Do sit down, dear." I took one of the wooden chairs by the table. "Stephen told me about your parents." For a moment a spark flared up in her sunken old eyes. "Milk and sugar?" she chirped unexpectedly.

"Neither, thank you," I replied, wondering if her mind had strayed again.

She picked up the heavy, gleaming teapot and began to pour a cup of tea with polite deliberation. "I'm sorry—for you, Ruth. I daresay you must miss them." She handed the cup of tea across to me and the ghost of a wistful smile flew across her face. "When one has lived as long as I have—and I think it's too long myself—one knows the dead don't mourn the living. Only the living mourn the dead."

She paused and curiosity creased her face. "But what brought you back to Coronet Island?"

I told her about working for Stephen as a librarian.

"Of course. He told me. But I forgot—so bad of me."

I started to tell her that I had no intention of staying, but something made me stop.

She sipped her own cup of tea and looked thoughtful. "So nice for Stephen. Much better than Kellehers." A kind
of anger entered her faded, sunken blue eyes. "Frauds, all of them. Remittance men, indeed. Their grandfather—he had the gall to propose to me, you know—was nothing but a retired tradesman from Liverpool. The Admiral knew that right away."

Last night's events, today's fears were too fresh in my mind to make me want to talk about the Kellehers or Stephen. I asked a question which I knew must change the subject. "Who was spying on the Admiral last night?"

Her face became distraught. "I don't know." She rubbed her gnarled old hands together. "A boat came in. I think someone got off—maybe more than one. The Admiral's dead now. Why can't they let him alone?" She looked at me desperately. "You will tell Stephen that they've come back. He told me they'd never do it again."

"Of course," I agreed and wished I'd never asked my question. Age apparently had made her violently protective toward the Admiral's memory. I wondered if she might not have imagined the whole thing.

As though she read my mind, she snapped, "There was a boat. White. I think some people got off of it and then back onto it. It went away. I checked the Admiral's monument. At least they didn't touch it. May have been afraid. But you tell Stephen."

"I will," I promised.

As we drank our tea, I don't think her eyes ever left my face. "I'm not surprised," she said suddenly.

I didn't follow her. "You're not surprised that they came to spy on the Admiral?"

"That, yes. That surprised me," she said. "No, I'm not surprised you grew up to be a beauty. I told your mother you had good bones..."

I could feel my face flush. I started to protest automatically.

Her papery laughter cut across my words. "You're not like a picture. No, not at all. But there's beauty that's skin deep and beauty that's bone deep. You've got the second kind. It's not currently popular, but it doesn't date."

I set down my empty tea cup. "Thank you."

"Now you must go," she told me. "Stephen will worry
about you. It's been so long since he's had anybody to worry about. And when he did—Maude . . .” She spread her hands futilely. Then she collected herself and began again. “He shouldn't waste his time on the Kellehers, or the McGurneys. I'm glad he has you now.”

I decided that she didn't understand what I was doing at Chinois. I would have explained again, but she looked so happy at the prospect her mind had invented that I didn't.

“And don't forget to tell Stephen they were here again last night. He must stop it, once and for all.”

She stood up. I was dismissed. She led me back through the furniture-filled dining room. Skittering noises of small animal feet scurried away from us into the creaking gloom of the old house. Miss Danby didn't seem to hear.

We stood on the veranda again. The storm picked at us with its dying breath. She touched my damp coat sleeve with her dry hand. “Take the path back to Chinois, my dear. You'll find it begins down there by the Admiral's grave.” I looked north toward the white marble needle beside False Bay, below Miss Danby's house. “You shouldn't have come through the woods on a day like this. Stephen should have told you where the path was.”

“He must have forgotten,” I murmured. “Thank you very much for the tea, Miss Danby. I don't know what I'd have done without it.” My last phrase was the truth. Tea with Miss Danby had given me the detachment I needed to return to Chinois.

“Got a chill, I daresay,” she told me and then went on, “come again, Ruth. I like to look at a pretty woman and remember when I was one.”

“I'd like to come again,” I said without adding that I wouldn't. I was going to leave Coronet Island as quickly as I could. I'd tell Stephen today—and then the warmth of the tea vanished under the memory that there was no Stephen to tell.

“Is something wrong, Ruth?”

“No. No. But you're right; I must get back to Chinois. Thank you again for the tea and—good-bye.”

Her dry hand shot out and touched mine like time itself.
“Tell Stephen they must not come again. I will not have the Admiral disturbed.”

“I’ll tell him,” I promised from the foot of the steps. I turned and, without looking back, I hurried toward the Admiral’s monument.

Out of respect for Miss Danby, I stopped by the monument and read its inscription: *Albert Magnus Danby, 1849-1913. He paid for his mistake. Now let him rest in peace.* I sighed before I turned back to Chinois.

I had no trouble finding the path. When it dipped into the forest, the day was already dead in the shadows of the trees. Rain had ceased to fall, but the leaves still dropped water from their surfaces like tears falling from the moaning wind overhead.

The last of the warmth from Miss Danby’s kitchen and her tea and her wise, shadowy eyes left me. The dampness of my clothes turned clammy. I started to shiver. I trotted to keep warm. And suddenly I fell.

I couldn’t imagine what I might have stumbled over. It had been too yielding to be a tree or branch. I stood up and turned around. I could see the thing lying behind me on the path. I went over to it. The damp gray light touched it horribly. I made a sound that was neither scream nor sob.

I had found Lily McGurney—what there was left of her. I seemed to see with ghastly clarity: her damp hair lying like sea weed on the path, her staring eyes, the bloody, broken back of her head. Compulsively I touched one of her outflung hands. It was cold and stiff...

I staggered away from Lily’s body. Panic grabbed me and shook me. I bolted toward Chinois. As I ran, I cried Stephen’s name desperately into the teeth of the dying wind.
Finally I could call no more. My breath came and went painfully and yet the terror behind me drove my faltering feet onward. At last I was through the woods and into the carefully tended gardens. I ran unsteadily toward the lights of the house.

The last slope leading from the garden to Chinois was almost too much for me. I pulled myself forward with the help of shrubs growing beside the path. I could hear my pounding heart beating more clearly than the falling wind.

I reached the double glass doors that led back into the library. I pushed them open with an effort and leaned heavily against the doors' embrasure. It was only then I remembered Stephen was gone. I needed him and he was gone. I was too tired to cry, too exhausted to move.

"Where the devil have you been?"

My head jerked up and around of its own volition. Stephen was standing behind the desk. He held an open book in his hand. He was wearing a dark gray silk dressing gown over slacks and a shirt. His face was pale. His eyes had dark smudges of shadow under them and they were burning with a lively anger.

The flood of relief and gratitude I felt for his being there right then almost made me dizzy. I tried to speak, but my breathing was still beyond my control. I tried again. "Lily!"

Stephen flung his book down and came over to me. "Matt and McGurney are looking for her. I have most of the servants helping them. I don't give a damn about Lily; what I want to know is where you've been all afternoon." He frowned as his eyes swept over me. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "You're wet through. And what have you been racing, the wind?"

I put a hand out toward him and tried to talk again. "Lily's dead," I said.

Stephen stared at me, speechlessly. My heart had slowed its beat. I could breathe without pain.
“I think she’s been murdered.” Once my story was started, my voice gained strength, and I told him what had happened, from tea with Miss Danby to my discovery of Lily’s body on the path. “Her head is . . .” I faltered, balking at the memory. “I felt her hand. It was cold and stiff. She’s been dead a long time. She’s been dead in the storm, the wind and the rain.”

Stephen struck my cheek sharply. My rising voice, the horror I was reliving died under the shock of the blow. I raised my hand to my smarting cheek.

“Hysterics won’t do any good,” Stephen told me flatly.

Anger rose in my throat and freed me from panic. Lily was dead. And he had to take time to hit me! I thought he was hateful. Violent and hateful! “Neither will hitting me.”

“My sarcasm was vicious. That’s better,” Stephen approved. “I don’t care how angry you get. Now go upstairs. Take a hot shower and change your clothes. I don’t want you to get pneumonia because some damn fool killed Lily McGurney.”

“She’s dead! Can’t you understand that?” I shouted at him. “Haven’t you any compassion at all? That poor girl—”

“Shut up and do what I told you. You can call me names afterwards.” He looked at me levelly. “And remember that no amount of compassion is going to do Lily any good now.”

I drooped under his logic, resenting, at the same time, the detachment with which he seemed to view the situation. “I think you’re the most, the most—”

He took hold of my shoulders and propelled me in the direction of the stairway to my suite. “You get up those stairs and get yourself warm and dry. Do it now!”

He released me and I stumbled up the stairs. On the landing, I turned to look at him. He was going out of the library door. “Where are you going?” I demanded.

“To find McGurney. To set a guard over the body. To notify the Mounties. Where did you think I was going?” He didn’t wait for me to reply.

I opened the door to my suite wearily. An emotional numbness stole over me. It was a relief to feel nothing but exhaustion.
I went through the process of undressing and getting into the shower. The hot water washed over me. I hardly noticed it. I felt I was outside my own body, watching it shower. I didn't even wince when I rubbed the bruises on my left arm with the washcloth.

I stepped out of the shower. Mei Ling was waiting for me with a large, soft towel. I wasn't startled. I was simply grateful for her presence. After she had got me dry, she reached behind her and handed me my gray nylon tricot pajamas. I got into them. Then she held a quilted Chinese robe for me. It wasn't mine. I'd seen a pale imitation of it once in San Francisco. I knew it was a mandarin's winter robe. The amethyst brocade was soft and warm against my arms.

I followed Mei Ling into my bedroom. She picked up a glass from the night table and handed it to me. "Mr. Stephen said you were to drink it."

I drank it. I didn't ask what it was. If it had been strychnine, I'd have drunk it. It was brandy. I coughed and choked. Warm anesthetic fingers reached out and soothed my shivering body.

"Sit down," Mei Ling said. "I will brush your hair dry."

"Could I have some more brandy?"

Mei Ling obediently poured a little in the bottom of the glass. "Sip it," she instructed.

I sipped it sitting on the bench in front of the vanity. She brushed my hair. I almost lost touch with reality. Death was a dream, old Miss Danby a figment of my imagination. The warmth of the brandy and the regular strokes of the brush were the only realities.

Time had lost its meaning. I was content to sit and let life wash by me.

Mei Ling's voice sounded distant as she said, "There. A bit of lipstick and you will look quite nice."

I didn't move.

"Will you not put on lipstick?" she asked.

Obediently I swung around on the bench so I faced the mirror, and set the now empty brandy glass on top of the vanity. I leaned forward and studied my reflection in the mirror. A face looked back at me. I stared at it, as I might
at the face of a stranger. Above the face, pale blond hair had been twisted smoothly around the head and fastened with a jeweled comb I'd never seen before. One cheek seemed to have a patch of dirt on it. Automatically, I raised a hand toward it. The stranger in the glass imitated me. I touched my cheek. The reflection touched the patch of dirt. I winced and the eyes in the mirror echoed my pain. It was my face. The dark splotch was a bruise from Stephen’s remedy for hysterics.

"Your lipstick," Mei Ling said. She held the open, golden tube toward me.

I took it and started to put it on my lips. My hands weren't steady. Mei Ling plucked the tube from my shaking fingers and rouged my lips. I looked back at the mirror. The rosy lips were foolishly gay.

"Mr. Stephen said you were to take dinner in his study."

I let her lead me away. We went through the upper hallway. The glowing bronzy black tile that covered it hardly heralded the passing of our slippered feet.

Mei Ling held a door for me and I stepped into a comfortable room, generously proportioned but small enough to be hospitable. A fireplace held a smile of fire. Impulsively, exercising my first volition since Stephen had led me to the stairway, I went over to it and held my hands to its warmth.

I heard the gentle click of dishes behind me. I was about to protest that I didn’t want dinner, when the savory smell of food reached me. Suddenly I was hungry; I was starving. I was ashamed of being hungry but I turned eagerly toward the table.

A simple meal had been prepared: clear soup, poached chicken with a few vegetables, peaches in syrup for dessert, and a pot of tea. "Will you eat now?" Mei Ling asked.

I took the chair she held for me and I began to eat.

"Do you wish me to stay?" Mei Ling asked.

I thought it over as though it were the most important question in the world. Finally I said, "No. But I want to thank you very much for all you’ve done. You’ve been very kind."

She inclined her head briefly and glided away.

I made a lengthy business of eating the simple meal. I
savored each mouthful. Somehow making a ceremony of dinner prevented me from thinking of the events that had preceded it.

After I had sipped some tea, I lit a cigarette. I deliberately tried not to remember, but I didn’t succeed very well. I wanted to banish the vision of Lily’s body from my mind. Somehow making a ceremony of dinner prevented me from thinking of the events that had preceded it. After I had sipped some tea, I lit a cigarette. I deliberately tried not to remember, but I didn’t succeed very well. I wanted to banish the vision of Lily’s body from my mind. Somehow making a ceremony of dinner prevented me from thinking of the events that had preceded it.

Actually, I heard him before I saw him. “I’m sorry, McGurney,” Stephen was saying from somewhere near the main staircase. “I have to follow the instructions the RCMP gave me. A guard will be kept over Lily all night, but I cannot move her.”

McGurney’s harsh voice protested, “It ain’t right, them heathens of yours watching Lily all night. I won’t have it!”

“You know that ain’t possible,” McGurney protested. “The men are out fishing. Barring Matt Kelleher and your pilot, Christiansen, you and me are about the only able-bodied fellers on the island.”

“You have my permission to ask Matt and Christiansen,” Stephen said coldly. The door to the study opened and he stood in it with his back to me. McGurney stood facing him. His eyes were dull, his face old.

“Look, McGurney, I’ve done all I can. The RCMP will be here tomorrow morning. I’m tired of your consigning Lily to the devil. I don’t think it’s God’s vengeance that broke her head. I think it was human passion.” Stephen paused. Then he said, “And I think if you’d shown a little of the Christianity you preach, Lily wouldn’t be dead now. She’d be in Vancouver, working and happy.”

McGurney flicked a resentful glance at Stephen. Then his eyes swung away. Suddenly he saw me and his eyes ran over my face with astonishment. He stepped back looking queerly satisfied. “The words Nathan spoke to King David
are true,” he pronounced. “’The rich man will take the lamb of the poor man. . . .’”

“Don’t bring your foul-minded fanaticism into my house,” Stephen ordered. “Make whatever arrangements you think suitable about a guard for Lily. My household will do everything it can to help you but I will not be insulted in return.”

He stopped talking and I had the impression he was studying McGurney. “Perhaps you haven’t met Miss Carson,” Stephen said more gently. “Ruth Carson, my librarian. Mr. McGurney, Lily’s father. Miss Carson found Lily’s body. It was quite a shock. I had her stay here while I made arrangements with you. I thought she might be more comfortable.”

McGurney and I looked at one another. It was impossible to tell whether or not he was mollified by Stephen’s words. He muttered, “How do you do.”

I said, “I’m sorry we have to meet under these circumstances. I saw you earlier today, but I think Mr. Kelleher was anxious to help you and forgot to introduce us.” I hesitated and then added what I must, “I’m terribly sorry about Lily. The RCMP will find out who . . .” My voice died. I’d had two months to learn how futile words of sympathy from friends were. Words from a stranger could only be a formality.

McGurney, however, seemed to respond to them to a degree. The look of accusation died away and he looked uncomfortable. Suddenly he blurted out to Stephen, “Your servants can stay. It don’t make no difference now, I guess. Don’t seem to be anything more to do until the Mounties come. Might as well go.” But he didn’t. He shuffled his feet. “I want to thank you, Mr. Bonner, for all you done. I guess I’m upset. Didn’t mean no offense.”

“Forget it,” Stephen said. “Have Matt drive you back to the village. He can stay with you the night.”

McGurney bowed his head. “He won’t. I guess I was wrong about him, Mr. Bonner. I thought he was just leading Lily on. Seems like he was pretty fond of her—anyway he—he blames me. . . .” Stephen said nothing.

McGurney’s voice was low when he spoke again. “Even
if he had a mind to stay with me, he couldn’t. He’s expecting Albion back from his charter tonight. Has to wait for him.”

Stephen’s face showed surprise. “So soon? I thought . . . Well, why don’t you stay with the Christiansens tonight? They’ll be glad to have you.”

“I know,” McGurney agreed. “But I guess I’ll just go home. Might as well start getting used to being alone. Good night, Miss Carson. Good night, Mr. Bonner.” He shuffled away.

Stephen and I said good night to his back. Stephen stepped away from the door and walked over to the chair across the table from me. He sank into it. His face looked worn and tired. “Tsiang’s bringing my dinner up here. Will you stay with me while I eat it?”

“Of course.”

He leaned back in his chair then and closed his eyes. Somehow it wasn’t strange to sit there with him. I discovered that I had relaxed. Dinner seemed to have restored me to everyday life. I felt guilty because my terror had receded.

Tsiang arrived with Stephen’s dinner. He touched Stephen’s shoulder lightly and went away.

Stephen opened his eyes and leaned forward toward the table. He ate hungrily, without attending to me. At last he poured a cup of tea and looked up at me. “Makes one feel guilty to enjoy eating so much, under the circumstances, doesn’t it?”

I nodded.

“Ruth, I would never have invited you to Coronet Island if I’d known what a mess I was going to get you into. . . .”

“Don’t be silly,” I said quickly. “I’m not in a mess. It’s poor Lily.”

“Nonsense,” he exclaimed. “Lily’s dead. Nothing can hurt her now. But I wonder if you realize how this is going to hurt you?”

“You’ll get a lot of newspaper publicity, I suppose,” I reflected aloud.

“I don’t care what the newspapers say about me. It’s what they’re going to say about you.”

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"Me!" I exclaimed. "What on earth can they say about me except that I found the body."

He cocked a quizzical eyebrow at me. "I knocked a man down for saying it last night. I cut McGurney off before he could say it. I don't know you very well, Ruth, but I don't think you're so innocent that you don't see what I'm getting at. I think you're deliberately avoiding it."

"I'm not avoiding it," I told him. "I simply don't believe it. It's not logical or sensible."

"Do you believe that human behavior has anything to do with logic or sense? Do you think Lily McGurney's death is sensible and logical?" His eyes challenged me angrily.

"Of course not. Lily's death is extraordinary—it's not in the normal course of human behavior. It has nothing to do with us—with the relationship between us."

"Except that that might be extraordinary too," Stephen suggested.

I refused to meet his eyes. "It should be perfectly obvious that I'm not the kind of woman who's going to make a man like you lose his head."

Stephen got to his feet. He stood over me, his eyes glittering. "You haven't seen me in ten years. What would you know about the kind of woman who would make me lose my head."

I pushed myself back into my chair. "Nothing."

"Remember that. Take time to get acquainted with me before you decide to dislike me."

"I don't dislike you." The disdain in his eyes was undisguised. I had to do much better if I wanted to convince him. I studied the table in front of me with great attention and risked being honest. "I want to. I can't."

He gave a short, harsh laugh. "Good."

I still wouldn't look at him. I was aware that he had sat down again. He made no effort to break the tense silence between us. At first I couldn't. Then I had to. "Where did you go last night?"

"North on the Strait. I ran into the storm, turned back too late and had to take the nearest shelter I could reach. I spent the night inside Deadman Reef. Appropriate, wasn't it?"
"How could you shelter in a Reef? I thought one stayed away from them in a boat, especially during a storm."

"One does," Stephen agreed. "But Deadman Reef isn’t a reef. It’s a rocky island with a deep, safe moorage in its center."

"Oh," I said, "Tsiang was awfully worried about you. You should have told someone where you were going."

His harsh laugh derided my words. "Do you think I knew where I was going when I left here last night, Ruth?"

I shook my head. I made an effort to ease the pain I saw in his eyes. "Stephen, I’m so glad you got back all right. I was so worried, so scared."

"Poor Ruth," he said with ironic affection. "You should go to bed, you know. You’ve had a bad day."

"I don’t think I could sleep."

"Nonsense. You probably didn’t think you could eat but you did. Now I’m telling you to go to bed. Come on, I’ll take you to your room."

He got up and gave me his hand. It was the first time he had touched me gently, kindly. My physical reaction was electric. It shocked me. I don’t believe in love at first sight. Even if I had, I wasn’t simple enough to believe the attraction I felt for Stephen had anything to do with love. I pulled my hand away and pressed it to my side.

"Is something wrong?" Stephen asked with concern.

I stood up. "No," was all I managed to say.

He took hold of my shoulders with gentle firmness. "Look at me, Ruth."

I obeyed.

His face was alive with warmth. "Look, we’re going to be under the same roof at least until this murder investigation is ended. If we avoid one another, it will only confirm what some people already think."

I didn’t answer.

"You don’t realize how serious the situation is. Ruth, I think Lily McGurney was involved in a love affair. Her father wasn’t simply imagining things."

"Not with you!"

He grinned at me, "God, no! She was just a child."

"Then who?"
“How the hell should I know! It wasn’t any of my business.”
“Well, I don’t see . . .”
Stephen was impatient. “Ruth, think!”
I thought. Stephen obviously meant that his name might be linked with Lily’s. If I tried to avoid him, it would look as if I thought so too. “On the other hand,” I said none too steadily, “if we see too much of each other, that will confirm what some people already think.”
He dropped his hands from my shoulders. His grin was rueful this time. “You’re right, Ruth, of course.” Unexpectedly he shrugged. “Be that as it may, I’m still going to take you to your door. It’s time you were in bed. Tomorrow you’re going to have to talk to the RCMP.”

VII

I WENT TO bed almost as soon as Stephen had delivered me to my door. And I fell asleep.
I woke once during the night. I came directly from sleep to full wakefulness. I had no memory of what had awakened me, but I felt alarmed. I sat in my bed watching the moonlight fall in silver bars on the pale rug in my bedroom. Outside the storm had died and only a lulling breeze murmured through the trees. I listened in vain for any sound that might have wakened me. I heard nothing but the noises of a sleeping house. Finally I managed to go to sleep again.
When I next awoke it was to find morning dancing brightly through the room. I lay in bed drowsily, looking at the sun now and again through half opened eyes. I heard the click, click of dishes in the next room and decided Mei Ling was laying out my breakfast. The aroma of coffee confirmed my deduction.
And then the events of the day before crashed into my mind. I fought them away. But I couldn’t banish the specter of Lily’s body on that storm-sodden path, nor the fading figure of Miss Danby, nor the memory of McGurney’s inarticulate grief. Most uncomfortably, I realized that what I could banish least of all was the uneasy intimacy I had shared with Stephen last night.

Somehow, suddenly, the clear June sunlight seemed less welcome than when I’d first awakened. My hand crept to my cheek. I could not tell whether or not I minded the pain of the bruise there.

I told myself I was being morbid. It was high time I got up. I put my feet into the slippers Mei Ling had brought me the night before. The amethyst mandarin robe that lay over the chaise lounge held my gaze.

“Are you going to sit there all day staring at that robe?” Stephen’s voice was amused.

I started and turned toward his voice. He was leaning against the doorway of my bedroom as though he had a perfect right to be there. Momentary resentment flushed my cheeks and then receded as I observed him more closely.

He looked tired, despite the cheerfulness of his voice. There were still shadows under his eyes and, though he made his mouth smile at me, I thought he did so with effort rather than spontaneity. I felt a tug of sympathy. It was so far the gentlest reaction I’d had to Stephen. Somehow it made me feel more at ease.

“Good morning,” I said. “Did Mei Ling bring my breakfast?”

“No.” He watched me with a peculiar kind of intensity.

“But I heard dishes.”

“I brought our breakfast.”

“But last night, I thought we agreed—”

“I don’t remember agreeing to anything,” he said in a neutral tone of voice. “Look, I’ve been with the RCMP since early morning. I’m hungry and I’m not too happy. And I damn well don’t want to have breakfast alone but I will if you insist.”

I stood up, no doubt looking like a typical spinster in my chaste, gray pajamas, and started toward the bathroom. At
the door I turned. “Do you always get your way?” I asked curiously.

“Almost always.” The words were followed by one of those peculiarly attractive smiles that brightened his face like sunlight.

I went into the bathroom and banged the door. I washed with furious rapidity, then fixed my hair. I knew I was taking more time over it than I usually did. Vanity, all is vanity, I thought. Keep this up, old girl, and the RCMP constables will think the worst. But when I finally finished, I had to admit that the result was satisfactory. I didn’t ask myself what it was satisfactory for.

I glanced into the mirror once more before I went to join Stephen. The bruise on my cheek had faded to a shadow. But I got a shock when I looked at the bruises on my arms. They were dark and tender. The sight of them made me wince and feel a wave of disgust. I had taken fifteen minutes to fix my hair to be attractive for a man who had subjected me to more deliberate physical violence than I had suffered in a whole lifetime.

I wasn’t in a happy frame of mind when I stepped into my bedroom. I didn’t enjoy knowing that I had preened myself for a man I should have disliked, the day after finding the body of a girl who shouldn’t have died.

Stephen was holding that lovely amethyst robe in his hands. He studied me and the expectant look in his eyes faded. He laid down the robe and came toward me. He stood in front of me and I felt again that he was curiously vulnerable—just as he had been that night in the drawing room.

He brushed a hand over the bruise on my left arm. The touch was so light that only a whisper of pain ran along my nerves. His hand fell away. “There are some things that make apologies useless,” he said. Then he turned and walked away.

I watched him go. Everything I had ever been taught about right and wrong, all my powers of reason told me that I should let him go. Something else—perhaps that little animal inside me—told me that if he went now, he wouldn’t come back.

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“Stephen, I don’t want to eat breakfast alone either.”

He didn’t turn back to me at once. When he did, he didn’t smile. He walked over to the chaise longue and picked up the robe again. He held it silently. I slipped into it. He fastened the buttons clumsily. I didn’t try to help him.

“This was never my wife’s.” His voice was abrupt. “She disliked anything Chinese. So I stored all my Chinese things away, even Tsiang.”

He took my arm and led me into the sitting room, seating me at the table by the window. He lifted the lids from plates of scrambled eggs and ham.

“I was brought up in China, you know.” He touched my hand. “Look, aren’t you going to eat?”

“I’m sorry.” I picked up my fork and tried the eggs. I discovered after the first bite that they were good and I was hungry. “Miss Danby told Mother and me all about your life in China. She didn’t approve of it.”

Stephen grinned. “No. Being brought up in China is the kind of thing Miss Danby thinks should not be done. My father sent me home in 1939.” Sadness touched Stephen’s face with an unexpected softness. “Like my mother, he never lived to come back to Canada himself.”

It occurred to me that Stephen was recounting his youth to keep my mind off what had happened and what I had to look forward to. I ate quietly while he continued his story.

“Tsiang and his family cared for me while I grew up. They’ve become my family rather than my servants. It seems strange now that anyone could have come between us—my wife, Maude, did. If I had been deeply in love with her, I suppose I wouldn’t have stood for it. . . .”

“But I thought you were. My parents always said—”

Stephen laughed without amusement. “Both of us worked hard at creating that impression. At first I think we wanted to believe it ourselves. Later, it became a habit.”

“But why?”

“Business reasons.” Stephen’s voice was hard, deriding himself. “I’m glad you didn’t see me when I married Maude. When you met me I was still . . . Later I became ambitious. I tried to turn myself into a ruthless, efficient money-making machine. I succeeded. Eventually it occurred to me that a
wife would be of great assistance to me. I looked around cold-bloodedly. Maude was going with Albion at the time. I regretted it, thinking she was wasted on him. She seemed to be the ideal person for me to marry. She was extremely good looking, she had the proper kind of background, the proper temperament—meaning none. When she gave me to understand that my money interested her a great deal more than Albion's charm—I made a bargain with her. It meant locking my youth away—for convenience. . . .” Bitterness choked his voice into silence. He wouldn't meet my eyes.

“You don't have to tell me about Maude. I'm not even sure I want to know. . . .”

“Would you prefer that I had loved her to distraction?” he demanded with cruel sarcasm.

“It's really none of my business!”

“Very well,” he said sharply, “we'll drop it. Finish your breakfast.”

We ate silently, not looking at one another. The silence became more and more uncomfortable. Finally I decided to put an end to it. “You said you'd spent the morning with the RCMP?”

“Quite a morning. First I arranged quarters for them in the guest house by the pier. Then they launched their investigation. I answered questions by the hour, and I feel they didn't believe any of my answers, but I guess that's normal.”

“Is that what you were unhappy about?” I asked as I poured our coffee.

“No.” He met my eyes. “Matt quit.”

“Why?” I exclaimed.

Stephen added cream to his coffee and stirred it slowly, watching the two liquids blend together. “I don't know. I expected him to be at the Castle waiting for Albion. Instead he was here when I got up this morning. He would hardly speak to me. He'd already talked to the Mounties when I came down.” Stephen held out a cigarette case and, after I had helped myself, took one. He lit the cigarettes and sat back. He looked idly out of the window. “Last night I told Tsiang to call me as soon as the Mounties arrived. Matt told Tsiang I had countermanded that order—he lied.”

“But why?”
Stephen shrugged. "I don't know. Matt either couldn't or wouldn't give me an answer."

"I shouldn't think Matt's quitting would make you unhappy," I ventured.

"It doesn't. It's the way he acted when he left and the time he chose to leave."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that Matthew might not entirely appreciate—"

Stephen laughed shortly. "Whatever I've done for Matthew has been done because I liked his father. I thought I might save Matt from making some of the same mistakes Albion—well, never mind. I like Matt well enough. I don't like his brother."

"Why?" Matt had told me to ask Stephen. Well, I had asked—and Stephen ignored my question. He made the silence between us as uncomfortable as he could manage.

"I take it that you don't want to talk about it."

"That's right." Detachment sealed itself over his face.

I tried another tack. "I've been trying to think if I might have seen Albion before. . . ."

"If you've ever seen a drawing room comedy, you've seen someone like him," Stephen commented with distaste.

His observation was true enough. Albion could be type cast as the hero of any sophisticated farce. However, I didn't believe that was why he had seemed familiar. I'd had a similar feeling about Matt. But I knew that, as far as Stephen was concerned, Albion was no longer a suitable subject for conversation. Sooner or later I'd recall where, when and which Kelleher.

I suddenly remembered there was something I had to tell Stephen. I cast about it my mind for it.

"Is something wrong?" Stephen asked.

"No. It's just that I was supposed to tell you something and I can't remember what it was. If I could just think." That's right! Miss Danby.

I told Stephen what she had said about the boat. "What did she mean about 'them' spying on the Admiral and you making 'them' stop?"

Stephen frowned. "It was a nasty piece of adolescent humor. A few boys from the village took a boat over to False
Bay and had themselves a time. They scattered beer bottles around and made a general mess. Then they wrote rude remarks about the Admiral on his grave marker. Miss Danby was upset. She’s all alone and old and the Admiral’s memory—such as it is—means a lot to her. That was a year or so ago. I had a talk with the boys and it’s never happened again. I can’t understand why they’d pick last night to start in again.” He paused. “Ruth, did she say anything about the size of the boat?”

I shook my head. “All she seemed to know was that it was white.”

Conjecture furrowed Stephen’s forehead. “It almost had to be local people. Generally a boat of any size or draft can’t use False Bay—the water’s too shallow. But last night’s tide was high enough to allow a fairly large boat to come in—if the skipper knew the place. I don’t understand it.”

“Could she have made it up?” I asked. “She seems, well, sometimes kind of—”

“She’s not! Oh, she forgets things now and again. She’s not as young as she was. I’m afraid that the years have made the Admiral’s memory into something of an obsession. But aside from that, she’s clear minded—to the point of being a bit of an operator in fact.”

I refilled Stephen’s coffee cup. “Well,” I said, trying for a more cheerful note, “you’ve seen the Mounties, but I haven’t. You don’t seem to want to talk about what they’re up to—but will they put me through a third degree?”

“Of course not. They will want to see you. As for what they’re up to—they’re making a very thorough investigation of a murder.” He hesitated. “Ruth, promise me one thing.”

“Yes?”

“Tell them the truth. No matter what they ask you, tell them the truth.”

I met his eyes. The same intense feeling of physical attraction I had felt the night before ran through me. I looked away. “What else would I tell them?”

Stephen shoved his chair back and stood up. He rubbed a hand over his close-cropped, black hair. “I don’t know. I do know a lot of lies are going to be told. I don’t want you to be one of the people who tell them!”
I stared at him. "What are you talking about!"
"I don't know. If I did . . ." He clenched his hands.
I went over to him and touched his right arm with my hand. "Stephen, no one is going to think you had anything to do with Lily's murder."
He shook my hand away. "Aren't they?"
"Why should they?" I demanded. He rubbed a hand across his eyes. "I don't know that either." His hand dropped and that wildness that sometimes swam behind his eyes and seemed to reach out to me was there again. His voice was low, almost thick, when he spoke again. "Ruth, no matter what happens I want you to know that—as God is my witness—I did not kill that girl."
"I didn't think you had." My voice was stiff.
He reached out for me and pulled me close to him. His grasp was firm but strangely gentle. He buried his head in my hair. "Oh, Ruth, Ruth." His hands slipped down the back of the mandarin coat. One of them left my back and tipped my head upward so I looked at him.
I suppose I shall never forget his face as I saw it in that moment. The presence behind his eyes had slipped out to freedom. It burned there. I couldn't have escaped from it if I had wanted to—and I didn't want to. I raised my lips toward his.
I don't know how long our kiss lasted. I do know that while it did the two of us were in a world so completely our own that we didn't hear the repeated knocks at my door.
At length our lips drew apart. Our eyes held us together for a few moments more and then a polite, "I beg your pardon," whirled us apart as though we had been struck by a gust of wind from yesterday's storm.
We turned toward the voice. An impassive, immaculately-uniformed Mountie was looking at us.
I could feel the blood hot in my cheeks. Even Stephen's face flushed.
"I'm Constable Johns, Mr. Bonner. You met me briefly this morning. I'd like to talk with Miss Carson, if it's convenient." Constable Johns gestured and another Mountie joined him. "This is Constable Lane, Miss Carson. He'll take notes on our conversation."
Constable Johns' clear blue eyes left my face before I could collect myself enough to acknowledge the introduc-
tions. He turned his attention to Stephen. "I think Sergeant McKee would like to see you downstairs, Mr. Bonner. I believe he wants your permission to search this house."

AFTER STEPHEN left, Constable Johns gestured me to a chair facing the windows. He sat on the couch facing me. Con-
stable Lane took a chair at the table and flipped open a stenographic notebook.

"Miss Carson," Constable Johns said in an even, not un-
pleasant voice, "we've been told you discovered Miss Mc-
Gurney's body. I wonder if you'd tell me about it."

The light from the window fell like a curtain between us. I tried to speak and failed.

"I know it's unpleasant to talk about, but we must have your story, Miss Carson."

I cleared my throat, fumbled for a cigarette, found none, and took one which Constable Johns offered me. He lit it, and I began to tell him about finding Lily's body. I kept the account short. I was surprised that I was able to tell the story with such detachment. Then I noticed that my hands were shaking.

When I had finished, Constable Johns said, "Thank you, Miss Carson. Now I wonder if you'd answer a few more questions for me?"

I nodded.

"Thank you. Now, is it correct that you arrived here Wednesday afternoon, just after two o'clock?"

"Yes."

"I understand that you flew here in a chartered plane?"
nodded. "Why, Miss Carson? I should have thought Mr. Bonner would have sent his own plane for you."

"Business made it necessary for him to use his plane. He arranged the charter flight instead. He notified me of the change in plans by phone."

"I see. Then Mr. Bonner wasn't here to meet you when you arrived?"

"That's right."

"Did you think that unusual?" Constable Johns inquired.

Irritation I knew to be unreasonable rose within me. I controlled it. "I hadn't seen Mr. Bonner in ten years. I came here to take a job. I had no reason to expect Mr. Bonner to meet the planes of his employees."

"Yes. You are here to catalogue his library, aren't you? Couldn't Mr. Bonner find a librarian in Canada who was capable of doing that?" The bland neutrality of the Constable's voice was worse than undisguised doubt.

I tried to keep my voice as even as his own. "I'm sure Mr. Bonner could have hired a Canadian. He hired me out of generosity."

"Oh?"

"As Mr. Bonner must have told you himself," I said, not bothering to control my irritation, "I just lost my parents in an automobile accident. He was a friend of my father's. He thought a change of scene might do me good. That's why he hired me."

"You didn't see Mr. Bonner personally before you arrived here?"

"No."

"How were arrangements for your job made then, Miss Carson?"

One kiss, I thought bitterly, made every statement I uttered sound more and more like equivocation. "By letter and by phone."

"Do you have the letters with you?"

I nodded.

"Please keep them available. Who did meet you when you arrived at Chinois, Miss Carson?"

The change of subject caught me by surprise, made me hesitate before I answered. "Tsiang, Mr. Bonner's butler."
“You knew him?”
“Yes.”
“What happened after that, Miss Carson?”
“Tsing showed me over the house. We spent some time in the library where I was to work. Then Tsing showed me this suite which is to be mine while I am here. Right after that Lily McGurney arrived. She showed me the gallery. While we were in the middle of looking at it, Mr. Bonner returned.”

“What was your reaction to Miss McGurney?”
“I beg your pardon,” I said, startled by the question.
“What kind of a person did she seem to you—likable, unlikable—that sort of thing?”
Stephen’s plea to tell the truth echoed in my mind. I put out my cigarette to cover my hesitation. “I thought she was young and rather pretty. She seemed to take pride in her work.”

“Was she the kind of person you expected to find working for Mr. Bonner?” The Constable’s voice was harder than it had been.
“No,” I admitted, then added quickly, “but from later conversation I inferred there were good reasons for Mr. Bonner—”

“Would you say that Mr. Bonner employed her out of the same kind of generosity he extended to you?” There was a careful lack of implication in the Constable’s voice.
I told myself, quelling the anger inside me, that the Constable was only doing his job. “I suppose one could say that.”

“Actually, Miss Carson, you have no real knowledge of how Miss McGurney came to be employed by Mr. Bonner, do you?”
I shook my head.
“Was the butler pleased when Miss McGurney arrived? Did you get the impression he was waiting for her?”
“No.”
“Do you know whether Miss McGurney was supposed to be here?”
“I know she wasn’t.”
“How, Miss Carson?”
"She told me herself."
"She told you she had deliberately disobeyed Mr. Bonner's instructions? Did she tell you why?"
"Yes, she did. She had some idea—apparently she got it from her father—that it was wrong for me to be met by a Chinese butler."
"Do you think the butler was aware of her attitude?"
"I don't—" I stopped. If Tsiang's anger at Lily was as old as I had thought it, the Mounties would hear of it sooner or later. "Yes," I finished awkwardly.
"After Mr. Bonner arrived, what was his reaction to Miss McGurney's presence?"
"He told her her father was waiting for her."
"You mean he took no notice of the fact that she was here against his express orders?"
"Of course not. He reproved her."
"Isn't it true, Miss Carson, that he more than reproved her. That he was, in fact, angry. That he stipulated she was to apologize to his butler if she wanted to continue working for him?" The Constable's voice was incisive, goading.
I didn't try to keep my anger down this time. "I would say that Mr. Bonner resented the slight to Tsiang. That he was concerned that Lily should respect his servants as he did. He made his point. Lily said she wouldn't do it again."
"And that was all?"
I remembered the ugly, hating look on Lily's face as she had left the drawing room.
"I said, was that all the reaction she had, Miss Carson?" Constable Johns' quiet voice took on an unexpected hardness.
"I don't think she liked being reprimanded," I admitted.
"That was the last you saw of Miss McGurney until you found her body?"
I nodded.
"Later that evening Albion and Matthew Kelleher, Mr. Bonner and you had cocktails?"
"That's correct."
"Mr. Bonner and Albion Kelleher quarreled, didn't they?"
"Yes."
"What was that quarrel about?"
Why on earth did he have to rake up that night, I won-
dered. It certainly didn’t have anything to do with Lily’s death. If I’d found Albion’s body...

“Miss Carson, what was that quarrel about?” Constable Johns demanded.


I glared directly at him. “All right, it was about me.”

“Mr. Bonner struck Mr. Kelleher, didn’t he?” I nodded.

“Is it not also true that Mr. Bonner threatened Mr. Kelleher’s—Albion Kelleher’s—life?” I nodded.

“Mr. Kelleher and his brother left the house after that?” I nodded.

“What happened after they left?” Constable Johns asked with detachment.

I knotted my hands together. “Mr. Bonner was very upset,” I said tonelessly. “I gave him a drink. Then I left him and came to my suite.”

“You didn’t see Mr. Bonner or anyone else during the rest of the night?”

“Only the servant, Mei Ling, who brought my dinner.”

“Had you ever met either of the Kellehers before?” I hesitated. “I’m not sure,” I said slowly. “I keep having the feeling that, at one time or another, I’ve seen one or both of them before, but I’m not really sure.”

“But, to the best of your knowledge, excluding Mr. Bonner, his butler and Miss Danby, you had never met any of the people you were introduced to here on Coronet Island before?”

“To the best of my knowledge.”

“Why did you go out in yesterday’s storm, Miss Carson? Before you found Miss McGurney’s body?” The goading note had left his voice.

I phrased my answer carefully. “I was worried about Mr. Bonner’s continued absence. I thought it might help to get some fresh air.”

“You knew Miss McGurney was missing but you weren’t looking for her?”

“No.” I hesitated, and then added, “She told me she
hoped to go to Vancouver in the near future. I thought perhaps that was what she had done."

"How did you think she'd get there, Miss Carson? The mail boat doesn't call until Monday."

The Constable's factual detachment intimidated me. I lowered my head. "I didn't know that."

"I see. Well, how was it that you didn't find Miss McGurney's body on your way to Miss Danby's instead of on your way back?"

"Because I went through the woods. I didn't know about the path until after I'd had tea with Miss Danby."

"Wasn't that difficult, going through the woods?"

"Of course it was," I snapped. "But I wish I'd never come back by the path. I wouldn't have found Lily's body, I wouldn't . . ." I fought my voice under control as I met the Constable's eyes. "Why did I find Lily's body anyway? Matthew Kelleher and Mr. McGurney had been looking for her for hours. Why didn't they find it?" Let him answer that, I thought.

The Constable answered without hesitation. "Lily McGurney was scared to death of Miss Danby. It never occurred to either Matthew Kelleher or Mr. McGurney that she'd go anywhere near Miss Danby."

His tone of voice was chastening. "Oh," I murmured. "That will be all for now, Miss Carson. You'll be staying here until our investigation is over?"

"Of course." Where else did he think I'd go?

"I wonder if you'd mind waiting in the drawing room. We'll be searching the house. I think you'll find it pleasanter to be out of your rooms when they're gone over. That's up to you, of course." Constable Johns remained neutral.

"I don't mind waiting in the drawing room," I said wearily. I stood up.

"Oh, Miss Carson . . ."

I waited.

"You're absolutely sure you haven't seen Mr. Bonner in ten years."

"Absolutely sure," I affirmed. I wanted to add, "That kiss doesn't mean what you think it does," but I didn't.

I walked through the upper hall to the sweeping main
stairway. I descended it slowly. I knew what Stephen meant about feeling the Mounties didn’t believe a word he’d said. I felt the same way. But how could Constable Johns believe me—that kiss had hardly been an affair of mere friendship. Somehow, I was past caring what anyone thought. I dragged into the drawing room, sat down on the large couch facing the fireplace wall and stared at the ashes in the fireplace without seeing them.

“Well,” Stephen’s voice said peremptorily.

I turned toward the sound of his voice. He was slumped in a chair half turned away from the davenport. I couldn’t have seen him when I came in.

“I don’t think they believed anything I said either,” I told him. My voice sounded dull in my own ears.

“You look lovely in that robe,” Stephen told me.

I took a sudden interest in the ashes again. “Why are they searching the house, Stephen?”

“Because they say Lily wasn’t killed on the path.”

“They can’t think she was killed at Chinois!”

Stephen’s voice was flat. “They told me Chinois was only one of a number of places they will check. They came prepared though,” he observed with some bitterness. “They had a search warrant.”

“What did they do with Lily?”

“They flew her body out for an autopsy,” Stephen told me.

“Oh.”

We shared a dead silence. There was no comfort in it. The intimacy between us had vanished. We were two people sitting in a house that was being searched to find the place where murder had been done. I shivered.

Stephen got to his feet. He strode to the window overlooking the passage between Coronet and Vancouver Islands. The June sunlight failed to give his face the slightest warmth.

“Ruth, will you for God’s sake forgive me?”

“What for?” I asked.

There was no pride in his voice as he tried to explain. Humble apology softened his words. “I’m not a child. You were right about what you said last night—I should have stayed away from you. And I knew you were right. . . . It was pure selfishness that brought me to you this morning. I
wasn't thinking of you—what might happen between us. I was only looking for some way to ease my own self-pity. The mess was bad enough before. Now . . ." his voice trailed away.

I wanted to comfort him, but I couldn't think of how to do it. "It doesn't matter," I murmured.

"It does matter! McGurney saw you in my room, and the Constable saw me kiss you. They're going to think . . ."

"I don't care what they think."

Stephen moved away from the window reluctantly. He approached me. Against the sunlight his body was only a dark, moving shape. There was something menacing about it.

He touched my hair gently as he reached me. "You should care," he said, as if to himself. "We both should care. But I can't seem to keep my hands off you, Ruth. I'll try. God knows I'll try. But I can't—don't want to—help myself." His voice fell away and he sat down beside me. He slipped his arm around my shoulders and pulled me over to rest against him. His hand caressed my hair. "I've never felt this way in my life," he said.

"It's not," I admitted with difficulty, "a very nice way to feel."

"Isn't it?" His voice had a peculiar inflection. He dropped his hand away from my hair and let it fall to my arm. His fingers pressed against the bruise there.

The realization that he was doing it deliberately shocked me more than the sudden rush of pain. I should have pushed him away, but I was no longer able to do what I should. We both were immobile for a moment, and then his other hand grasped my chin and forced me to turn to look at him. That passion behind his eyes was free and burning again.

"Do you still like me, Ruth?" he demanded. "Can you take any pleasure in the pain I'm causing?" His voice dropped lower, became almost tortured. "What do you know about me, Ruth? What do you know?" he repeated thickly. "I didn't mean to hurt you that night. But if I hadn't—I'd have . . . God help me, pain is all I've caused you since you've been here."

His hand fell away from my arm. He yanked his own arm
from behind me and dropped his head into his hands. Nervous tension made his fingers white against his swarthy forehead. His breathing was ragged.

A dull throb remained in my arm from the pressure of his fingers. I shuddered. He was right. What did I know about him? And what difference did it make? I was committed to something I couldn’t explain, something so powerful that it even made pain, when it came from Stephen, pleasurable.

“Stephen, oh, Stephen.” I took his tense fingers in my hand. My touch seemed to relax him. I groped for words. “It won’t—can’t—stay like this. We aren’t like this. We’re not either of us something out of a cheap novel . . .” My voice failed me; my mind failed me.

Slowly Stephen’s hands closed over mine. They were warm and gentle and comforting now; mine had turned cold.

We were still sitting that way when a Mountie I hadn’t seen before came into the room. He was an older man with the habit of authority clear on his face. He was followed by a constable who carried a large framed picture.

Stephen looked up. “Can we do something? I don’t think you’ve met Miss Carson, Sergeant. Ruth, this is Sergeant McKee.” His introduction was automatic, containing no warmth.

Sergeant McKee and I exchanged nods. “You’ll probably be happy to know, Mr. Bonner,” the Sergeant said, “that as far as we can determine, Lily McGurney was not killed in your house.”

I gave a small sigh of relief, but Stephen remained uneasy, almost wary.

The constable had set the picture down on the edge of its frame, facing it away from Stephen and me. McKee gestured toward it. “Mr. Bonner, I’d appreciate it if you’d identify this picture and tell me where you got it, if you can.”

The constable silently turned the picture to face us. I felt Stephen’s body tense beside mine and then sag back against the couch. I gasped when I saw the picture. I turned to look at Stephen. I needed some reassurance from him, some sign. . . . His face revealed despairing resignation. The blood drained away from my cheeks.

“Well, Mr. Bonner?” McKee demanded.
"The picture is St. Michael in Africa by El Greco," Stephen said thinly. "It was stolen from the Kohner Gallery in San Francisco about a month ago."

My hand slipped out of Stephen's. His voice went on, but I didn't hear it. I was seeing a clumsily pasted-in book plate which didn't really cover the one under it. I was thinking of a book that had been stolen and which I didn't think had been recovered. I was remembering Matt saying lightly if he hadn't known better he'd think Stephen had arranged the theft of this El Greco. And this morning Matt had quit. Because he had known better? A sound that was between a sob and a groan escaped from me. Stephen touched my hand. I pulled mine away and ran.

IX

Somehow I got to my suite. I went into the bedroom and grabbed some clothes. I locked myself in the bathroom and dressed.

Coming out, I tried to collect my thoughts but they had gone wild. I wouldn't believe that Stephen had stolen that painting. And yet, could I believe anything else? Right now there was a book in the library I knew had been stolen.

I paced up and down in my sitting room. I lit a cigarette and put it out. I lit another. The thing to do was go to Sergeant McKee with my story. I must tell him all about the Pauline no matter how damming it was for Stephen. It was my duty to do so. If Stephen were innocent, my story would do him no harm. If he were guilty . . .

"I can't," I said aloud. I had to talk to Stephen first. I had to give him a chance to explain. Explain what? I asked myself. How he stole the Pauline and the St. Michael? He didn't! He didn't! I protested.
None of it made sense to me. Least of all the presence of the stolen El Greco and the stolen Browning. I wondered if it would help me to get away from the house. I hadn't the courage to seek Stephen right now. Even if I had, I was sure he'd be tied up with Sergeant McKee.

All right, I'd go for a walk. Somehow I didn't want to face Miss Danby's wise eyes. I'd have to go the other way, along the east side of the island. Perhaps I'd find a walk along the beach comforting.

I slipped into a sweater and went downstairs to the library and out through the glass doors. I turned east along the graveled path. I tried to make myself appreciate the flowers that edged it but somehow I couldn't see them clearly. When I came to the corner of the house, I had to turn to my right and walk along the servant's wing for a short distance before I came to the path that led down to the beach. Before I started my descent I gazed down at the bay. Stephen's plane and his three boats, were as they had been. But behind the sailboat was the businesslike craft of the RCMP.

I walked down to the beach. The tide was out and the wet sand was firm under my feet. The sea air was fresh and the gentle June breeze carried no memory of storm.

I turned north and walked toward a rocky headland. My feet were without purpose. I didn't stop to look for shells and colored pebbles as I had always done before when walking on the beach. I just walked. The sun seemed to cast no warmth on me. I huddled miserably inside my green cardigan and tried to hide from the day.

I rounded the headland. Was it possible, I asked myself, that Stephen had had the painting stolen? Matt had told me he liked it very much. With Stephen's money, he could have hired someone to steal it. He could have got the Pauline in the same way. One read of collectors who would stop at nothing to secure something they wanted. Stephen could be one of them. Perhaps his money and the power it brought him made him think he was beyond the law. Perhaps he believed it was all right to take anything he wanted, any way he could get it. Perhaps I had been wrong that night after he and Albion fought. I had thought he had held on to me so he wouldn't go after Albion. That needn't have been his.
intention at all. My mind sickened and veered away from the other possibility without conviction. I remembered with too much clarity the pleasure he had taken—I had taken—in that cruel grasp of his hand just minutes ago in the drawing room.

I leaned against a great rock by the water's edge. I didn't pay any attention to the damp seaweed clinging to it. All the things I'd just been thinking were possible. But I didn't believe them. No matter how ruthless or greedy Stephen might be, he wasn't stupid. If he had arranged the theft of the book or the picture, he wouldn't have left them around so casually. And if I hadn't yielded to panic the moment I saw that picture, I'd probably have the explanation now. I'd been a fool for running.

Suddenly, a realization swept over me that shook me almost physically. I didn't care whether Stephen had arranged the thefts or not. It made no difference to me that he had moments of what appeared to be complete instability. I just didn't care. I no longer belonged to myself. I had known him less than two days—and my future was his—if he wanted it.

I was emotionally worn when I pushed away from the rock. I kept walking. I worked my way inland from the short peninsula I'd rounded and found myself on the edge of an oval, rocky bay. In its center, a boat rode proudly. Built like a fishing boat, carrying trolling poles, but for all that more of a yacht than anything else, the boat's white paint shone in the June sun. I made out her name on the bow—Pride.

So Albion was back. I looked up then, above the bay. My eyes followed a broad pathway through a garden which was just falling into a kind of gracious decay. Then I saw Kelleher Castle. It was built of native stone and sat proudly there on the hill. There was a mute strength about it, with its windows, eyes blank and staring at the bay, that moved me. And yet it was not a happy looking place. The windows were too deeply recessed, the porch too broad and shadowy. It seemed strange that Matt and Albion should have been children in it. It wasn't a house that looked as if it would harbor children gladly.
A voice hailed me. "Ruth?"
I looked to my left. High up on the bank coming around a tangle of rhododendron was Matt. I waved.

He scrambled toward the path and came down it toward me. He smiled at me as he came closer. "What brings you here?" he asked. Without pausing long enough for me to answer, his voice tumbled on, "It's too awful to think about . . . I mean it must have been a shock finding Lily."

"It was pretty bad," I admitted. I searched his face. "Why did you quit, Matt?"
He flushed and looked away from me. "Don't you know?"
"No," I said and added, "Neither does Stephen."
"Doesn't he?" Matt was derisive. "Of course, he wouldn't tell you why."
"Tell me what?" I asked. "I don't understand . . . ."
Matt spoke over my voice, "Stephen is the kind of person that's hard to resist. His will is so much stronger than most people's. He can almost force you to do what he wants. I ought to know . . . ." He caught my eyes and grinned a little crookedly. The grin faded as abruptly as it had come. "Have they found the picture yet?"

My eyes widened. I caught my breath. I couldn't even pretend to misunderstand him. "You did find it, then," I muttered.

"This morning."
"How?" Numb as I was, I had to know.
"Because I was looking for it. I didn't really think it was there, but I had to be sure." He avoided my eyes doggedly.

Inside me something began to shake. It was an effort to speak. "Why were you looking for it, Matt? You must have had a reason. Yesterday you joked about—"

"I thought it was funny then. This morning—" His mouth twisted cruelly, bitterly. He raised his eyes to mine. "I was looking for it because last night—after I'd heard about Lily," his voice almost failed. Lily had one really stricken mourner. "I heard something else. It was about the picture. I didn't believe it. But I had to be sure."

"What did you hear?" I demanded. "Who told you?"
Matt's eyes glided away from mine. "It's not my story. Anyway, it doesn't matter," Matt mumbled, "because it was
there. In the closet, where pictures that aren’t hung are stored. What colossal nerve he has!"

“You really believe Stephen had it stolen, then?”

“I went to Chinois this morning refusing to believe it. I got there before the servants were up and found the picture. When Stephen came down, I couldn’t face him. I talked to Sergeant McKee, though. After that I managed to tell Stephen I was through—I was sure he’d understand.”

“And did he?” I was surprised at the ice in my voice.

“How could I ask him?” Matt’s eyes were pleading for understanding.

“Did you tell the Mounties about the picture?”

Matt’s mouth curved into a grim smile. “I knew they’d find it. I didn’t help them do their job.”

I fought the unsteadiness inside me. I clung stubbornly to the idea that Stephen wouldn’t have been fool enough to hide the picture in so obvious a place. The idea slid away. He could have hoped that Sergeant McKee wouldn’t know one painting from another. By putting the stolen painting in with a number of others he might have hoped it would be overlooked.

Matt took my arm. “You look beat. Come on up to the house and rest. When you feel better, we’ll have a bite of lunch.”

I let him lead me up the path toward the house. We walked through the melancholy charm of a garden going wild. The closer we came to Kelleher Castle the more hospitable it seemed. It lost its masked look and became a house. The windows hidden by the shadows of the deep veranda came into focus. Some geraniums in pots brightened the sides of the steps. The Castle was declining, but it was doing it gracefully. Stephen had been right. It would have made a splendid hotel.

“It’s too bad,” I said impulsively, “that Albion refused to have the place converted into a resort.”

Matt’s laugh was short and sharp. “I used to think so—I guess because Stephen wanted me to. I had visions of myself as a gracious innkeeper type. But now that I’ve thought it over—well, I don’t think I’d like a lot of tourists tramping over my house either.” He held the door open for me.
I went past him in the hallway. I thought, as I stepped inside, that Matt had merely changed one “master” for another. If, at one time, he had echoed Stephen, just as surely he was now echoing his brother.

“What are you going to do now you’ve no job?” I asked following Matt through a great, beamed, sunlit dining room. He held the swinging service door at the other end open for me.

“Help Albion with the Pride, I suppose. And hope we can hang onto the house.” He shrugged. “There doesn’t seem to be anything else to do.”

We were in an enormous kitchen. There was enough room for an army of cooks, but every one of them would have cursed its inconvenience. The room had been built with no consideration for its function or of the people who might work in it.

I sat at the wooden table in the center of the kitchen. Matt went over to one of the cupboards and got out a loaf of bread and some cheese. He began to make sandwiches.

“Hey, Matt,” a voice called through the door, “where are you? I’m ready for some breakfast.”

I stiffened. I hadn’t bargained on seeing Albion.

“In here,” Matt called back.

Albion pushed through the swinging door. He looked cheerful and sunny. He saw me and the cheerfulness went out of his face. Shame flickered in his pale blue eyes. He stood uncertainly, as if waiting for me to protest his presence.

I hesitated. The light of day was Albion’s natural element. Sunlight touched the close-clipped blond hair on his head with glittering light. His face became more expressive. I relented. I couldn’t help it. The insult Albion had directed at me when he was uncontrollably angry was so slight compared to the violence that lay between Stephen and myself, that holding a grudge against Albion seemed completely illogical.

“I came to tell you that I’d decided to accept your apology,” I said, hoping the white lie was convincing.

Albion relaxed a little. Something about the set of his lips began to pull at my memory again. I glanced from him to
Matt. And I still couldn’t decide which of them I’d seen before.

"I’m glad you feel you can—accept my apology. I was thoroughly out of line."

"Let’s, please, forget it," I said with hurried insistence. "So much has happened since."

Sympathy lit his eyes. "And none of it has been very nice for you, has it, Ruth?"

I shook my head.

"Maybe the three of us could pretend that none of it happened. The insult, Lily. . . . Maybe while we eat we could make believe that everything’s all right." Albion didn’t sound confident.

"It’s worth a try." I wished it could be more than that.

"Okay. We’ll try." Albion got a frying pan out of a cupboard below the counter. He took it over to the great crouching woodstove in the far corner of the kitchen.

"I let the fire go out," Matt told him.

"Well, make it three cheese sandwiches then," Albion said agreeably.

Matt obeyed. He brought the sandwiches to the table, then plates for each of us. He went back to the cupboard, got down some glasses and filled them from a pitcher of milk. Then he carried them over to the table.

"It’s not much," he apologized, "but it’s all that’s handy."

"It’s fine," I assured him.

Albion joined us and we ate without speaking. Our pretending was pretty weak.

When we’d finished, Matt handed around cigarettes.

"Did you tell her, Matt?" Albion asked suddenly.

"About the picture?" Matt nodded. "I told her."

"All of it?" Albion pursued.

"Of course not," Matt snapped.

"Don’t you think we ought to?"

Matt turned sulky and didn’t answer.

Albion faced me. His expression was grave. He was through pretending. "Ruth, I’ve got to tell you a few things, and you’ve got to listen to me. It may save your life."

I felt apprehensive. There was no doubting Albion’s sincerity.
He leaned closer to me. “First, that scene the night before last was partly phony.”

“Phony. . . .”

Albion’s voice was earnest. “Please don’t interrupt, Ruth. Just listen. This isn’t easy for me to tell.” He paused as though he were waiting for the courage to continue. “I’m leaving the past out. The past is between Stephen and me. But the present is hurting all of us. The truth is Stephen asked me to come over that night.” I stared at him in astonishment. Albion’s face was expressionless. “I’m not surprised that you find it hard to believe, Ruth. But it’s true. I had gone to Stephen for help, financial help, a couple of weeks ago. I had to force myself to do it—because of—well, never mind. But it was either that, or lose the Castle. I went to Stephen. He turned me down—then. A few days later he relented. He made me a proposition. If I took him up on it, he’d pay the mortgage in full. If I turned him down, I could . . . Maybe the Castle means too much to me, but I agreed to do what he wanted—and ask no questions.”

“You mean Stephen was your charter customer!” Albion just looked at me significantly. “Stephen asked me to meet a freighter in the Strait. I was to pick up a package from the ship and bring it here. Then Matt was to put the package in the picture closet in the gallery.”

I fought against hearing his words. I tried to defend myself against them. “But why was that scene at Chinois necessary? Why . . . ”

“It got out of hand,” Albion said quickly. “I was merely supposed to tell my story about the charter. Stephen had to overdo his end of it and—as I said the past lies between us. I lost my temper and I struck out to hurt. You were an innocent bystander, Ruth. I meant only to hurt Stephen.”

“Did you know what you were going to pick up?” I wondered why I thought that would make any difference.

“We were never supposed to know,” Matt’s voice bordered on shrillness. “But after Lily, I had to know. I looked. That’s why I quit.”

Albion said nothing. His eyes never moved from my face. I found myself staring at his lips again. They were unyield-
ing, almost cruel. Whatever battle Stephen and Albion shared in the past had been bitter. My memory stirred once more—where had I seen him before?—and was defeated anew.

I couldn't doubt that Albion had picked up the painting as he said, that Matt had taken it to Chinois. But Stephen? Yet, if Stephen hadn't been involved, why had the painting been taken to Chinois at all? I stubbed out the cigarette that had smouldered to ash without my noticing. But would Stephen have left the picture where it was sure to be found? I wilted inside before my own earlier logic.

"You don't have to believe me, Ruth, if you don't want to," Albion told me. "But remember what happened to Lily."

"What do you mean?"

"I think she got in Stephen's way at least twice. She must have found out about the El Greco. The picture itself would have meant nothing to her. But knowing how Stephen got it would have given her power over him. Lily wouldn't have hesitated to use that power—she could be quite ruthless. . . ."

Matthew looked up protestingly.

"Don't say it, Matt. You and I have always disagreed about Lily's basic character. I say she was able and willing to sacrifice anyone or anything to gain her ends. The El Greco alone wouldn't have been enough to goad Stephen into killing her. With his money he could have reached another solution easily—if expensively. But there was another reason, Ruth. You."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Stephen wants you, and I'm sure he knows you can't be bought."

I pushed back my chair. "I won't listen—"

Albion grabbed my hand and held me where I was. "You must! I'm telling you, Ruth, that Lily was Stephen's mistress, that she had been for a long time. That when Stephen laughed at her threats about the picture and probably offered her money, she threatened to go to you—and he killed her."

"I don't believe you! I don't believe you!"

"Don't or won't, Ruth? Lily told you she was going to Vancouver, didn't she?"
I nodded. “Well, who but Stephen could have sent her? Matt? Me? We haven’t the money—even assuming we had the inclination.”

I was incapable of arguing. “Why don’t you go to the police.” My voice was dull, reflecting something inside me that was close to despair.

Albion’s blue eyes widened with surprise. “Don’t be a fool. I’m an accessory to the theft.” “But this is murder.” “I’m not noble. I helped Stephen commit a crime and I have no intention of paying for my part of it. I sold my honor for this house, and it means more to me than a slut like Lily McGurney.”

“Shut up,” Matt yelled. “She’s dead. Leave her alone.” “I’m sorry, Matt.” Albion looked at his brother with pity in his eyes. “I’ll honor your illusion.”

The two brothers stared at one another. I was closer to believing Albion than ever before. I not only was losing my ability to combat his reasoning; I believed that Albion would sell his soul for Kelleher Castle. So would Matt for that matter.

“If you won’t tell the police,” I said quietly, “I’ll have to.” Albion transferred his pity from Matt to me. “Tell them. I’ll deny the whole story.”

“I don’t care.” I stood up. “Someone killed Lily McGurney.”

“I should think that deep down you’d be a little bit glad she was dead. Wasn’t she in your way too, Ruth?”

I regarded Albion with disgusted surprise. “If she was, I didn’t know it until now. I wouldn’t want anyone—not even Stephen—at the expense of someone else’s life.”

Albion’s smile was mocking. “I envy Stephen. He inspires loyalty. Even now you’re not convinced about him, are you, Ruth? If it hadn’t been for Stephen’s admission the other night that turning the Castle into a hotel was his idea, not my father’s, Matt wouldn’t have believed me either.” Albion looked over my head. His eyes reflected a ghost of the hatred I had seen on his face that night in the drawing
room. “I may be the only person who really knows how much loyalty to Stephen costs. I could tell you—”

“Then why don’t you?” I interrupted.

Matt leaned toward his brother. “Tell us, Albion. I’ve always wondered why you hated him, although I could understand why he might hate you.”

Albion glanced away from the challenge in Matt’s eyes and faced me. “Ruth, I’ve got to warn you that you may not want to hear—”

“It couldn’t be worse than what you’ve already said,” I told him.

“You both know Stephen’s wife drowned. Matt knows I was with her when it happened.”

I sat down again. My eyes never left Albion’s face. The agony of memory had drained it of color. He looked more like a Greek statue than ever. “You wouldn’t have known that, Ruth. Stephen was able to keep it out of the papers to spare my feelings.” Albion snorted. “My feelings! I didn’t have any again for a long time after it happened.” He fell into silence which lasted for minutes before he managed to go on. “I introduced Maude to Stephen. That’s the worst part of it. I wanted her to know my friends. He dazzled her. Oh, I assure you, Ruth, Stephen doesn’t have much trouble dazzling women. They married. I was even best man. And then it began—the hell. Stephen has a streak of cruelty and he used it on Maude. She tried to take it. But it was too much for her. She turned to me. We realized finally that we couldn’t go on apart from one another. Maude asked Stephen for a divorce.” Albion hesitated momentarily. “That day when we were sailing, she told me he had refused. She was at the tiller. Suddenly she turned to me and said, ‘I can’t go on this way.’ She threw the tiller over—the boat jibed, then swamped. I tried not to save myself, but in the end, instinct was too strong for me. I held onto the boat and was rescued. Maude’s body was recovered two days later.” He stopped speaking and the silence that hung over the kitchen had a tactile quality about it. “Do you wonder why I hate Stephen, Ruth?”

“No,” I said. Then I added without conscious volition, “And I don’t wonder that he hates you.”
Albion's smile was sad. "I'm sorry for you, Ruth."
Matt shoved back his chair. "Leave her alone!" He turned and walked out of the room.
Albion's sympathetic eyes followed him. "He believes me now, but he doesn't want to. As I said before, I envy Stephen." His blue eyes were almost opaque as he met mine, "Well, Ruth?"  
"I'm going to tell the police what you said about the picture," I told him.
"What about the rest of it?" Albion asked.
I held his eyes as long as I could. "I don't know. I just don't know."
"If you tell the police, you'll incriminate Stephen, you know."
Somewhere inside me I found a reserve of strength from which to answer him. "If I don't tell the police, I shall never know whether he's incriminated or not. I'll only know what you've told me."

X

I slammed the Castle's kitchen door behind me, before Albion's victorious glance could drain my words of their confidence. I started back toward Chinois. Then I changed my mind, and circled around the Castle to where I had seen a rutted road leading west toward Halibut Bay.
I knew I should go back to Chinois. I should tell Stephen what Albion had said. I should listen to whatever explanation or denial he cared to give. But I couldn't do it. My emotions were like a plant from a temperate climate, suddenly moved to the tropics—there were too many thin shoots growing too fast under too hot a sun. I had to escape from the hothouse atmosphere for a little while. I needed the company of
strangers, the contact with normal, everyday life that a little town could give. I had to know that children still played in the sunlight, that women swept floors and waited for their men to come home from the sea, that one could still drink a glass of beer in a licensed premises. I needed to rest my mind against familiar things.

I climbed away from the Castle rapidly. I was glad when the last gable of its red tiled roof disappeared behind the brow of the hill. The distance I put between Albion and myself had the deceptive effect of weakening his logic.

I repeated Stephen’s words, “The only thing I know is that a lot of lies are going to be told.” Momentarily they brought assurance that Albion had been telling some of those lies Stephen had expected. Albion admitted he hated Stephen. He had even told me why. But need it have been the truth?

I stopped walking. I leaned against a fence post beside the road. I hardly noticed the wild roses which embraced the barbed wire of the fence or the lazy songs of the birds.

Why would Albion lie? I couldn’t doubt he’d brought the El Greco to Coronet Island. Albion wasn’t the kind of person who would incriminate himself unnecessarily. And if Stephen had actually paid him to transport it, the Mounties could prove it easily. They had only to check on how the mortgage on the Castle had been paid—if it had.

Accept Albion’s part in the theft of the picture then. Reserve judgment on Stephen’s until the Mounties could prove or disprove it.

But what about Albion’s story concerning Maude. He couldn’t have counterfeited the agony his eyes had shown as he told the story—or could he? In the light of what Stephen had told me about Maude—was it plausible he would have refused her a divorce? I moved restlessly against the post. I winced as my bruised arm pressed against its sharp edge. *Stephen has a streak of cruelty. . . .* Remembering Albion’s bald statement chilled my mind. I couldn’t deny its truth. I could prove it.

I started walking again. I tried not to think, but I couldn’t help it. I had to face Albion’s circumstantial evidence against Stephen. And there was nothing to face. *Ruth, no matter what happens I want you to know that—as God is my*
witness—I didn’t kill that girl. I remembered Stephen’s voice when he said that. I remembered the naked honesty of his face. I believed him. No matter what Albion said or thought, I didn’t—couldn’t—believe Stephen had killed. Not Lily McGurney. If it had been Albion in the path, however . . .

My mind slipped adroitly around the thought and onto something else. Did Albion really believe Stephen was a murderer? It was quite possible. Hate as deep as his would make it possible to believe anything of its object. But supposing he didn’t believe it? Suppose he had deliberately distorted the facts to suit his own ends? What ends was Albion seeking to reach?

He couldn’t have killed Lily because he’d left on his boat early in the evening. So he wasn’t accusing Stephen to protect himself. But could it be to protect someone else? Next to the Castle, what did Albion love most of all? His brother, of course. I denied the possibility. Matt had loved Lily. I was sure of that. His anger at Albion’s slighting remarks about her had been immediate and real.

My mind swayed under the knowledge that Lily had intended to leave Coronet Island to go to Vancouver. That would have taken her away from Matt. Both Stephen and Albion were convinced Lily had been having a love affair. But if not with either of them, with whom? Stephen’s own words had convinced me it hadn’t been with him, despite Albion’s disagreement. Albion’s character made it impossible for him to have been involved with her—Lily would have been another salt-water peasant to him and he wouldn’t stoop to that as a matter of pride.

But what about Matt? He loved her. Had she perhaps met him somewhere and tormented him with the fact of her secret affair, or with the fact of her leaving him behind on Coronet Island? Gentler men had been driven into a murderous rage. Matt had been alone that evening, and Lily was killed at . . . I suddenly realized I had no idea just when Lily died. Matt . . . ?

I wondered if I might not be too eager to accuse Matt because I wanted to whitewash Stephen. I had so little information to go on. Wasn’t I grasping at the same kind of
straws as Albion did? And what made me think I could replace the RCMP singlehandedly anyway?

I continued to descend the hill. The rough road curved. At its foot I could see the town of Halibut Bay.

It wasn’t much of a town, but it was a welcome sight to me. There was a dock jutting out into the bay. Only a few outboard boats were moored there now—the fishing fleet was out. The business district consisted of two buildings, the hotel and McGurney’s store. Several houses ran away from the water and up the hill. The sounds of children playing brought sudden comfort to me.

I walked eagerly down the hill. Away from the world of great houses, the wealthy, the once wealthy, back again in the world I had always inhabited. This was where I belonged. When I thought of servants I thought in terms of a weekly cleaning woman, not Stephen’s numerous, quiet Chinese. What had made me accept the dream of marriage between Stephen and myself? We came from different worlds. The idea of marriage was absurd. . . .

I stopped just short of the hotel. I stood staring at the sparkling restless water of Halibut Bay. I faced the truth. I’d never really thought of marrying Stephen. I’d thought of . . . I tried to protest. I’m not an unconventional person, though I’d had the predictable brush with bohemianism in college. I’d found it tedious and sordid. As far as I was concerned, the moral conventions of society existed as much for the protection of its members as to perpetuate tradition. I didn’t imagine there was any security, much less happiness, in love affairs. And yet, where Stephen was concerned, I had unhesitatingly entertained the idea. . . .

My thoughts were interrupted when a man, who had walked to meet me from the veranda of the ramshackle hotel, stopped me and said, “Miss Carson?”

“Yes.” He was a stranger, about forty years old. He had a tired face. He was wearing a neat business suit and a startling checked vest.

“Miss Carson,” he said, speaking in a rapid, quiet voice, “I’m Larson of the Vancouver Times. Like to have an interview with you.”

While I tried to digest what he had said, two more men
came out of the hotel. They hurried toward us. "A newspaper reporter?" I asked.

"That's right," he agreed.

"Miss Carson . . ." The two other men were at my side. One of them had spoken. I turned to face him. I was astonished to find myself looking at a camera. There was a click.

The third man had an open, inviting face. "I wouldn't talk to either of these two vultures if I were you," he said. "I'm Henry, Victoria Record. Larson's sure to misquote you. Give me an exclusive interview and I'll see you get every consideration . . . ."

The man with the camera grinned. "They're trying to confuse you," he told me. "I'm Simms, Vancouver News. The News is always first and most reliable. Now that you've allowed me to take your picture, let me do the story to go with it. We'll pay you highest rates . . . ."

My mind was spinning. I wondered how I could have been so foolish. Stephen and I had both realized the night before that the newspapers would soon be bothering us. If I'd tried I couldn't have done anything more idiotic than come to Halibut Bay. Stephen could control them at Chinois. They would have seen no reason to go to the Castle—yet. But I had to walk into their midst!

"I've nothing to say."

Simms was first to protest. "Come on, Miss Carson, you're news. The public wants to know."

"Then let them find out from someone else," I snapped.

"Now, now," Henry said warmly, "it'll be much better to give us the story in your own words. Not that I'd misrepresent you, but these two have no ethics at all."

"Who do you think killed Lily McGurney?" Larson demanded.

I backed away from them toward the middle of the street. They followed. I had a nightmare vision of my picture sprawled across front pages beneath lurid headlines.

"How long have you known Stephen Bonner?" Henry asked.

"Did you really come here to work for Mr. Bonner, in his library?" Simms wanted to know.
“Did you meet Lily McGurney before she died?” Larson cut in.

“What was Stephen Bonner’s motive for killing Lily McGurney?” Henry demanded.

I stopped abruptly. “Mr. Bonner had nothing to do with killing Lily McGurney.”

“How do you know?” Henry retorted.

The three men fell into a victorious, waiting silence. Sick knowledge that I shouldn’t have allowed myself to be goaded into speaking congealed in my stomach. I turned away from them and ran the rest of the way across the street.

They came after me. One of them, I think it was Henry, put his hand on my arm. “How can you be so sure Mr. Bonner didn’t kill Lily McGurney?”

“Do you know of your own personal knowledge where Mr. Bonner was at the time of the murder, Miss Carson?” Simms inquired.

I didn’t say anything. I walked doggedly up the street toward McGurney’s store.

“Can you give Mr. Bonner an alibi for the time of the murder?” Larson asked with gentle insinuation.

“Leave me alone.”

“Oh no, Miss Carson,” Larson told me agreeably. “We can’t. You’re news. Why don’t you cooperate with us? You may need a good press.”

I shouldn’t have lost my temper, but I couldn’t help it. It wasn’t bad enough that I’d started the morning off with the turbulent emotions Stephen had stirred up in me, that the enigma of the stolen Pauline and the El Greco was an ugly cause of doubt inside me, that Albion had almost managed to undermine my faith in Stephen—now I had to have reporters!

I turned on them. “Put whatever you want in your papers. I can’t stop you. Make all the insinuations the libel laws permit. Why should you care?” I could feel angry tears begin to ooze out of the corners of my eyes. “Forget that I’m a human being. Anything in the name of news. . . .” I tried to wipe my eyes dry with the back of my hand. I turned away from the reporters to hide my vulnerable anger, my
futile tears. I collided with Mr. McGurney. "Please let me by," I said.

He didn't move. His eyes burned with inner fire. "Jezebell!"
I tried to walk around him. His hand sprang out at me. It closed on my sweatered arm, pressed down on the bruise there. I winced.

"The wages of sin is death," he told me.
"Let go of me." Anger made my voice shake.
He freed me with a little shove, so that I almost lost my balance. One of the newspapermen caught me. I got the impression he was almost as taken aback by McGurney's attack as I.

But McGurney wasn't through with me. "I know what went on. Sin is everywhere. Mr. Kelleher and I ain't fools." His eyes shone with self-righteousness. Then, without warning, his face crumpled. "And I let her go," he said to himself. "I let her go because I was afraid she'd get in trouble here. Her eyes were bold. Bonner's eyes were honest—honest as the serpent's in Eden. He said he'd see she came to no harm. No harm!" He laughed. "But he'll pay and so will you, Jezebel! Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord."

"What are you bellowing about, Ezekiel?" a thin, papery voice demanded.
Miss Danby stood in the middle of the street. She was wearing another old-fashioned, ankle-length dress of rusty taffeta. A fur tippet in surprisingly good condition covered her shrunken shoulders. Her infinitely wrinkled face was militant, her eyes commanded the scene competently as she leaned forward against the support of a heavy cane.

McGurney's shoulders drooped.
"I came to tell you," Miss Danby continued, taking no notice of the newspapermen, "how sorry I am about what happened to Lily. It is too bad, Ezekiel, that you didn't let her take that job in Vancouver. But it's too late for regrets now."

The reporter, Henry, advanced on Miss Danby. "What job, ma'am?" he asked with nice respect.
She regarded him curiously. Her time-shadowed eyes measured him against the past and found him wanting. She
gazed at each of the remaining two reporters. Then she turned to me. “Who are these men, my dear?”

“Newspaper reporters,” I muttered.

“Speak up, Ruth. I can’t hear you.”

“Reporters, newspapermen,” I said loudly.

Miss Danby studied them with increasing detachment. “Journalists!” Evident distaste turned the single word into the ultimate insult.

The three men stared at her. She advanced toward them. “Have you been annoying Miss Carson?” she demanded.

None of them answered. None of them met her eyes. I tried to slip away while she had them cornered.

Miss Danby wasn’t having that. “I want you to take tea with me, Ruth.” It wasn’t an invitation—it was an order. I stayed where I was.

“We were only,” Henry said with an effort at defense, “trying to get Miss Carson’s story.”

Miss Danby looked him up and down. She made no attempt to disguise her scorn. “I daresay, I cannot think that Mr. Bonner will be pleased about that.”

Simms pounced on the opening he thought he saw. His expression, his voice showed that no frail old lady was going to intimidate him for long. “You admit then that Mr. Bonner is—interested in Miss Carson?”

“It would be most unnatural,” Miss Danby said with quiet reproof, “if Mr. Bonner were not interested in his fiancée.”

Henry stepped toward her. “You mean Miss Carson and Mr. Bonner are engaged?”

If she startled the reporters, she stunned me. Her calm lie was bigger than anything the newspapermen would have dared invent.

“Did you not understand me?” she asked Henry as though he weren’t quite bright. She didn’t wait for an answer. “If you’ll give me your arm, Ruth?”

I didn’t dare protest or disobey in front of the three reporters. I gave her my arm. We made a silent, slow retreat up the street. The men made no effort to follow us.

I didn’t trust myself to say anything until we were well out of Halibut Bay. Miss Danby seemed to feel no need for conversation. We were on a well kept path going in the
direction of her house before she spoke. "Stephen has the path kept up for me. And he insists on patching the roof. I suppose I shall let him. The Admiral never approved of false pride..."

Not a word of explanation regarding the whopper she’d told. Had she conveniently “forgotten” it? Well, I hadn’t. "Miss Danby, Stephen and I are not engaged..."

"I daresay you’re not. Young people today are terribly careless."

"But, Miss Danby—"

"It was quite the best thing to say under the circumstances. The newspapermen will be satisfied with the story. It will also prevent them from mauling your reputation."

"But Stephen—"

"I am convinced Stephen would not wish you to be exposed to scandal on his account. A certain amount of notoriety is unavoidable now, but it can be kept to a minimum."

She thrust her cane forward with determination. "In my day, people exercised a good deal more circumspection in their behavior. Keeping up appearances is more civilized and less hypocritical than you poor, brash, modern young people think."

XI

Miss Danby’s firm belief that life was a game, played by rules she understood, was apparently unshakable. Murder was a reef on which she did not intend to go aground. Her course was set and, unlike her father, she never missed a channel marker. Why should she? She laid them out as she went.

I yielded to the knowledge that all further attempts at
protest would be useless. She ushered me into her house with ceremony. The dusty windows diffused the afternoon sunlight so it touched the shoals of furniture with mellow revelation. If I had been an antique dealer, I should have gone mad amidst that embarrassment of riches. I saw chairs I was sure were Hepplewhite and a table that bore the unmistakable mark of Sheraton.

Miss Danby had no time to waste on furniture. She led me directly to the kitchen. She removed her fur tippet and laid it away meticulously in the clothes press. She gestured me to her only armchair. Then she approached the great, black woodstove and, using the handle, shook the fire box. She lifted the front lid and stuck in several pieces of wood. Moments later a crisp crackling testified to the fact that she knew how to bank a fire.

She didn’t bother to speak to me. She had asked me to tea and she set about fulfilling her invitation. Occasionally her eyes swept my face with their time-shadows. But they never rested on me long enough to make me uncomfortable.

Finally she brought the tea tray. Its silver shone brilliantly in the light from the south-facing window. Miss Danby poured my tea into one of the two Belleek cups on the tray. She remembered I didn’t take milk or sugar. She offered me a biscuit and then took one herself. Her eyes darted at my face while she nibbled on it.

Her attitude prevented any conversation I might have been able to make. When we had finished our first cup of tea, Miss Danby poured us fresh ones, cleared her throat and said politely, “You may smoke, if you wish.”

I lit a cigarette and took some comfort from its smoke.

“It is a habit of which I have never approved. The Admiral thought it extremely fast.” She offered me another biscuit which I declined.

She ate a second with relish. “What prompted Stephen to let you go to Halibut Bay? He’s not a fool. He cannot have wanted you bothered by journalists.”

I didn’t answer her. I had almost managed to slip the weight of Albion’s accusations from my mind. I didn’t want to face them again nor did I want to transfer them to Miss Danby.
"Speak up, girl," Miss Danby admonished with elderly ferocity.

I spoke up. There seemed to be nothing else I could do in the face of Miss Danby’s determination to get to the bottom of things. Under the quiet, patient wisdom of her steady gaze I began to speak. But I didn’t tell her everything. I had no desire to cause her unnecessary pain. I stuck to Albion’s story about the picture. I didn’t add his information about Maude nor his belief that Stephen had killed Lily.

"Am I to understand," Miss Danby demanded when I’d finished, "that you’ve given Stephen no opportunity to explain?" Her dagger stare of reproach struck me vitally.

"I haven’t had time," I stammered. "I haven’t seen Stephen since—"

"So that’s why you looked so whey-witted in front of those journalists!" She regarded me with something between astonishment and disgust. "Young people today have so little fortitude. So little sense of reality—always thinking the world is humane. When they find it isn’t, they try to hide, try to shift the responsibility, run. . . ." Undisguised disdain showed in her face. "The world isn’t humane and it never was—never will be. When it turns on one, there should be no surprise." Her eyes turned toward the past again. When she next spoke, her voice was gentler. "The Admiral wasn’t surprised, and the world hurt him a great deal more than it will ever hurt you."

She remained in the past for a few long minutes. Then censure tightened her lips and she snapped back to me. "It is impossible to run away from reality. You should have asked Stephen about that picture immediately, although why you should believe Albion Kelleher and doubt Stephen I do not pretend to understand."

I answered before I thought. "There’s a book I know to have been stolen, in Stephen’s library. . . ."

"Do you know that Stephen stole it?" she asked quickly.

I shook my head.

"Have you asked him about it?"

"Yesterday, when I found it, I didn’t think it was important." I paused and then added in my defense, "Besides I couldn’t ask him. He was out in his sailboat."
Miss Danby flared up. "In yesterday's storm?" she demanded. I nodded. Exasperation flooded her face. "It seems to me, Ruth, you'd have done better to worry about Stephen then some fool book. He could have been drowned, you know."

I flared back. "I did worry. I worried more about him than I did about finding Lily's body. I didn't think a thing about the book until after the picture—and Albion . . ."

Miss Danby wasn't mollified. "There can be no excuse for your behavior. Nor for Stephen's. What drove him into that storm? Don't tell me," she added quickly. "Two fools are not better than one."

She got up and shook the stove's firebox. I had the decided impression she would have preferred shaking me. She came back and sat down. "Did the Kellehers have anything to do with Stephen's idiotic behavior? They certainly seem to have had an unfortunate effect on yours."

"I suppose they did," I admitted.

"Thought as much. No good ever came from a Kelleher. Scandal mongers, all of them. I have never understood why Stephen had the misplaced generosity to employ Matthew. Bound to have unpleasant consequences. Considering how Matthew and that McGurney chit were carrying on." She gave way to exasperation again, "And there was another mistake Stephen insisted on making. That girl! No harm in her—until the Kellehers got a hold of her. But after that—not a nice girl, sly."

"Miss Danby," I blurted, "are you certain about Lily and the Kellehers—"

"I don't gossip," Miss Danby said sharply. "I have given you my opinion. That is as far as I shall go."

She didn't have to go any further. My mind was racing forward along the road she had indicated. My earlier suspicions regarding Matthew began to crystallize.

Miss Danby interrupted the process. "There is no reason to credit anything Albion Kelleher says either. Liar, that one. Poseur—"

She stopped talking abruptly and searched my face with her keen, old eyes. Perhaps I showed how much I would
have given to disbelieve anything and everything Albion said, how little I could deny what he'd told me.

She shook her head. "Can't say Stephen made a better choice the second time than the first. You've no confidence in him."

"Miss Danby, you've got to understand. I just work for Stephen. We're not engaged. You made up that story for the newspapermen. . . ."

"I am not an old fool!" Miss Danby retorted. The past glided up beside her again. "Stephen's first wife was pretty and calculating. Should never have married her. Man wins a wife, he doesn't buy one. Stephen sacrificed his own peace of mind for convenience."

"Stephen agrees with you now. Albion—"

"Albion Kelleher doesn't know anything about Stephen's marriage. Daresay he thought he did. Never could get it through his head that even Maude might prefer a man to a fancy dan. I'll say this for Maude; she was a flirt but she wasn't unfaithful. She made a bargain with Stephen and she kept it. If Albion Kelleher told you any different, he's a liar." She regarded the figments of the past balefully. "Wouldn't be surprised but what Albion turned that boat over deliberately because Maude refused his attentions."

She startled me into saying, "Albion loved her—he told me so. He—he wanted to die in that accident himself. . . ."

"You'll notice that he didn't—more's the pity," Miss Danby snapped. "Touching, your confidence in Albion Kelleher. If you'd had as much in Stephen you never would have got mixed up with those reporters. You'd have been at Chinois asking him for an explanation." She glowered at me, the multitude of wrinkles on her face folding up in anger.

My face reddened under the truth of her remarks.

"Of course, Stephen will have to give you an explanation which you find satisfactory. Must be something to what Albion says. He wouldn't admit he'd helped commit a crime if he thought he might be brought to book for it."

I thought Miss Danby looked tired. I was about to take my leave when she spoke again. "Stephen has great ability in some respects. I've been told he has a genius for business—whatever that may mean. I know that he has a broad and
deep appreciation of art and literature. But he is unable to
deal with emotion in any form when it touches him. He
fights against it, then lets it overwhelm him. Unfortunate,
very unfortunate.” She regarded me closely, as though to
determine whether I was already aware of what she had
just told me.

“I wouldn’t know. I’m barely acquainted with him.”

An appreciative smile touched her lips. “A justifiable lie.
I think too much frankness inadvisable. I have often pitied
the futile attempts of today’s young people to be honest
about emotion. In my day, we knew better. We protected
ourselves with formality. It is remarkable how much form
ceremony gives to life.” Her eyes drifted away from the
present without reluctance.

Suddenly she stood up. “You must be getting back now.
Doubtless you have upset Stephen enough for one day.
Stay away from journalists. Stay away from Mr. McGurney—
that man is too close to madness for comfort. And stay
away from the Kellehers! That’s imperative.”

She escorted me to the door. The late afternoon shadows
slipped in among the piles of furniture like dingy ghosts.
“And ask Stephen for an explanation. Very unfair to have
waited this long.”

On the sagging steps of the veranda I stopped. “Thank
you very much for the tea and—everything.”

“Did you tell Stephen about them spying on the Admiral?”
she demanded.

“Yes.”

“I thought so. They’ve not been back. Good day, Ruth.”
She slipped back inside the house, disappearing into the
darkness of the hall as though she had been absorbed into the
past.

Evening was stealing away the last warmth of the day as
I reached the path that led to Chinois. The night-heralding
songs of the birds were fluting through the forest by the time
I entered it.

I wasn’t looking forward to facing Stephen and asking for
an explanation. But Miss Danby was right. I had to, how-
ever unpleasant it might be! The more slowly I walked, the
longer I would delay that moment. I walked very slowly indeed.

I refused to think about what Stephen’s explanation would be. I wouldn’t cross that bridge until I came to it.

Instead, I indulged in the macabre pastime of trying to reassemble my theory about Matt. Once it had seemed quite convincing. In the shadow-gathering forest, it seemed less persuasive. Matt had loved Lily. One had only to watch him when her name was mentioned to know that. Even if Lily’s death had been a crime of passion—and it almost certainly had been—was it Matt’s passion? The poet may have been right when he said, “Each man kills the things he loves,” but was Matt the kind of man who would kill the girl he loved just because she was going to leave him? I was no longer convinced.

My mind veered off sharply on a new tack. What about Mr. McGurney? What had he shouted at me in the village—“Sin is everywhere. Mr. Kelleher and I ain’t fools.” Albion wouldn’t have liked Matt’s getting involved with someone he considered as contemptible as Lily. Albion might have worked on McGurney, telling him lies about Stephen and Lily—partly to protect Matt from McGurney’s fanatical anger, partly to revenge himself on Stephen. If McGurney had gotten worked up enough. . . . I sighed and concluded reluctantly that he’d have killed Stephen, not Lily. Anyway, how did I know which Mr. Kelleher he meant? I didn’t.

The more I tried to resolve the puzzle of Lily’s murder, the less sense it made. I obviously had no talent for detection. I wished I could obliterate my entire knowledge of the murder and all the violence before and after it.

When I stopped thinking about murder, I found myself thinking about Stephen. That was worse. “You have no confidence,” Miss Danby had told me. The trouble was I did have confidence in Stephen, but I was afraid it was unjustified. That was why I was dragging my feet instead of walking to Chinois without hesitation. As long as Stephen had explained nothing, I could still believe in him. But suppose his explanation—if he bothered to make one—wasn’t satisfactory? What would I have left? I shivered although I was
passing through a lake of sunshine that lay between the trees.

I looked around me, hoping to find some consolation in the beauty of the forest. Instead I found left-over terror. I was close to the spot where I'd found Lily's body. A curious dread forced my eyes to search every cranny of that spot. There were some small traces of the RCMP investigation—a marker left by the side of the path, chalk mixed in with the pebbles that topped the path. But there was nothing more.

The woods were peaceful. From amongst the trees came the murmuring noises that live in forests. One was quite loud. I turned to see what forest creature was being so careless. For just a second I saw a man, arms upraised, moving so quickly his body was blurred. Then something crashed down on my head.

When I came to, I was lying on the path. My head ached sickeningly. My body felt heavy, as though I might not be able to move it.

I opened my eyes. The world swam in front of them and then, slowly, came into focus. I saw a man's legs. My eyes traveled painfully up them, over his body and finally reached his face. I fought against seeing. It was no use.

Stephen was standing over me. His hands held a heavy tree branch. His face was as wild as it had been the night he attacked Albion. His glowing eyes stared at me unseeingly. He hefted the branch in his hand.

I screamed.

XII

The forest's gently soughing branches absorbed my scream like a blotter absorbs ink. It accomplished only one thing. Stephen's eyes focused on me. Their glow faded. In its
place came an unnerving softness that might have been taken from the forest leaves. I knew he was insane. He took a step toward me. His hands held the tree branch purposefully.

Instinct for survival made me recoil. A frown flicked across his forehead. He thrust his free hand toward me mutely. "Ruth," he said, his voice shattering on the word. The peculiar vulnerability I had seen in his face before washed over it. It was more damning than a confession.

My heart pounded painfully. Terror made me clumsy. But I managed to scramble to my feet and away from him. He came after me.

I turned and ran in a last desperate attempt to escape from madness and murder.

"You little fool," he called. "Wait, Ruth!"

I ran faster, stumbling, clutching at foliage to keep from falling.

His voice took on a domineering note. "Come back here!"

I heard him start after me. Every jolting step I took hurt my head. My heart seemed about to burst. Only terror gave me the strength to go on.

The sound of Stephen's pursuit drove me on. I saw nothing clearly. Not even the path in front of me. My feet ran from instinct alone. My senses couldn't guide them.

"Ruth, for God's sake..." his voice was a demanding scrape of sound over the noise of my running feet, and the strain inside my body. He shouted more words at me. I refused to hear.

It seemed to me I had been running forever. Breathing was like inhaling knives. Dizziness swam through my head and in back of my eyes. My hands pushed at the air in front of me. I knew my legs were going to fail. When they did...

A final surge of desperation cleared my eyes. For an aching moment, I thought I was as mad as Stephen. I had the insane idea that I was discovering Lily's body again. I saw the bloody head quite clearly. The body had the same discarded sprawl as it lay in the path. With violent repulsion I flung myself to one side. The forest underbrush embraced my falling body with its scratchy arms. Exhaustion
and pain engulfed me. I lay inert, knuckles of brush pushing into my face.

Recognition of what I had really seen seeped into my numbed mind. No specter of my imagination had filled the path. The body of Lily's father had been there. Dead.

Running feet scraped viciously at the gravel on the path, then stopped. Stephen reached me. I waited for him to strike the final blow.

Instead I heard a soft rustle of gravel, almost as though he had knelt beside McGurney. To admire his work, I thought with sickening clarity.

Gravel rustled again. Stephen's arms yanked me up from the ground and pressed me against him. The brutal strength of his embrace destroyed my last fugitive hope of escape.

His mouth pressed against the pulse in my throat, moved more gently over my neck and then found my lips. My resignation to death vanished. In the chaos of my mind I knew that Stephen was mad. But I knew, too, that what I wanted more than anything else—was a place in Stephen's arms. Was I also mad? I felt myself returning his kisses.

My response to him stilled the violence of his body with surprising suddenness. His hands gentled against me without releasing their grasp. In the silence of the forest, the rough sound of our mingled breathing was all I heard. The beating of Stephen's heart jarred against my breast. He moved a hand to my head. His fingers stirred gently, through my hair. They found the spot where he had struck me. It was just beneath my coiled, braided hair. "Thank God," he muttered. "Thank God." He gathered me to him in another fierce embrace. His lips nestled in the hair at the side of my head. "I don't think he hurt you badly," he murmured.

Bitter appreciation of his cleverness touched my mind, stiffened my body protestingly against his. He knew I had found him out, and now he hoped he might make me believe someone else had attacked me. "He?" I wished I could get the full force of my derision into one word.

"McGurney."

"Oh God!" The words broke through my lips soundlessly. "He's dead!"
Stephen shifted my body against his. The effort to make me comfortable had a shocking hypocrisy about it. He stroked the back of my neck. "He's hurt, Ruth, not dead."

"Then you must finish the job." I managed to get almost as much sarcasm as I wanted into my voice.

Stephen's hand quieted against my neck. He released me. I could feel his eyes on me. I didn't move. I wondered how one dealt with the violently insane. Perhaps he would let me go as irrationally as he had attacked me.

That hope was crushed under the renewed grip of his hands. They closed over my aching temples and forced my head into a position where I had to meet his eyes or close my own. I didn't try to avoid the violence of his gaze. I was beyond fearing it.

Impatience swept over his face. He stood up. My head jolted back against my shoulders. A wave of pain swept over me and receded. Stephen had retrieved his tree branch from the path. He slammed it down in front of me. I pulled my body back.

"Look at it, Ruth!" The order was unnecessary. I couldn't take my eyes off it. The murderous thickness of the butt end made me shiver. "If I had hit McGurney with that as I intended, he would be quite dead. Does that suggest anything to you?"

I grappled with what my eyes saw and with Stephen's cutting words. I couldn't think. I raised my eyes to Stephen's face as he stood over me. His expression was one of challenging demand untouched by compassion. I covered my eyes with my hands. I tried to remember all I could about the man I had seen coming out of the forest. I hadn't seen his face. A blur of legs, a lifted arm—no more. I took my hands from my eyes and studied the branch with attention which was no longer distorted by unreasoning fear. Its broken end showed nothing but clean, shattered wood. My eyes traveled its whole length. Even in the dim, leaf-sifted light I could see that no blood or hair clung to it anywhere.

"As you intended—"

"When I saw him standing over you—if he hadn't run, I'd have . . ." Stephen's hands knotted as memory destroyed his ability to speak.
“Then who?”
“I don’t give a damn who! I wish he’d done a better job. As it is, I suppose we’ve got to do something to help the murderous old bastard.”

Complete understanding of what had really happened evaded me. Stephen hadn’t attacked McGurney. He hadn’t struck me. McGurney had struck me. My mind gave up. I buried my head in my hands.

I heard Stephen move. I didn’t look up. The brush beside me shifted under his weight. He drew me to him again.

“Ruth, I didn’t try to kill you. No matter what you think, I didn’t. Please, oh God, please try to believe that.”

His arms tightened possessively. My thinking processes struggled against the ache in my head. Stephen’s embrace changed into a tense grasp on my shoulders. “Would you rather believe I hit you with that branch?” He half shook me.

“No. Oh no.” My hands clutched at his arms. I felt the warm firmness of his well-muscled body. Without thinking, I moved my hands up his arms, over his heavy shoulders until they were locked behind his neck. I hadn’t the strength to pull his head down to mine, but he allowed me to have that illusion. I forgot the last of my fear in that kiss. I forgot everything but Stephen. When our lips finally parted, Stephen pressed me to him once more. Then, with the greatest reluctance, he forced me away from him.

He brushed his lips across my temple. “Can you walk?” he asked. “Tell me the truth. Someone has to get help for McGurney. If you don’t feel strong enough . . .”

I wasn’t about to be left alone in that fatal woods or with McGurney, unconscious or not. Nor was I willing to be parted from Stephen. “I can walk.”

He helped me up. As I stood up dizziness and pain intensified. I leaned against Stephen’s strength as he supported me with his arm. We started down the path to Chinois.

I tried to grapple with the confusion in my mind and failed as usual. It occurred to me that Stephen might understand where I didn’t. “Stephen, why would McGurney hit me?”

“Why does a man like McGurney do anything? If Lily so
much as smiled at a man, he beat her. Why did he do that? If he imagined . . .

"He called me a 'Jezebel.'"

Stephen jerked to a stop. He pulled me around to face him. "Were you in Halibut Bay today?" he demanded.

"After I left the Castle," I admitted.

Stephen stared at me with disbelief. "Kellehers! Halibut Bay!" He ran one of his hands over his short cropped black hair. "And how many newspapermen did you see?"

"Three. But I only said you hadn't killed Lily. . . ."

"Thank you!" Stephen's sarcasm was heavy.

"They took my picture," I added in a small voice.

"That should look nice on the front pages," Stephen remarked.

"I didn't want them to," I protested. "I couldn't stop them. But Miss Danby did."

"Well, I'm glad one woman on this island has some sense left. As for you . . ." He shook his head with mock desperation.

"I'm sorry," I muttered as misery took command of me.

He pulled me up against him. "You're the dearest idiot I've ever known." He kissed my hair. "I don't give a damn what you do just so you don't get hurt." He tipped my face upward. "I would like you to answer just one question."

I waited.

"What made you go tearing off like a scalded cat this morning? Did you think I'd stolen that bloody picture?"

Albion's story came into my mind with sickening clarity. I couldn't answer.

"I see that you do," Stephen observed without surprise. He made no effort at denial. Amused sympathy lit the yielding green of his eyes. He patted my shoulder. "Poor Ruth."

He gave me the support of his arm as we began to walk again. I waited in vain for him to say more. His silence added to my confusion.

I tried to make my mind work. But pain lay in my head like fog. Even the slow pace Stephen set for us increased it with each step. As we reached the top of the hill on which Chinois stood, I lurched and, had it not been for Stephen's arm, would have fallen. He picked me up and carried me
into the library and up the stairs to my suite. He laid me on the couch, went into the bedroom, and returned with the gray satin comforter from my bed. He tucked it around me.

“Stay there until I come back. I want to talk to you.”

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“To get a doctor for you, to see McKee, to get help for McGumey.” He almost glared at me. “And I meant what I said. You stay right there!” He left me.

Either I dozed off or exhaustion and shock temporarily obliterated my sense of time. Stephen’s gentle hand on my shoulder pulled me back to the present. “Ruth?”

“I’m awake.”

He leaned over and switched on the lamp behind the couch. The soft, diffused light hurt my eyes. “How do you feel?” he asked.

The only pain I felt was localized under my braids. “Much better.”

“Sergeant McKee will be here soon. He’s using my plane to fly McGumey into Naniamo for treatment. A doctor will come back with the plane to have a look at you.”

“I don’t think I need a doctor.”

“I’m not interested in what you think—I want to know,” Stephen told me. He seated himself on the couch by my feet. “And now, dear idiot, I’m going to try to straighten out some of the crazy ideas you’ve got in your head—if you feel up to it.”

“Oh, Stephen, if you only—”

“Then you’d better let me try. I want you to tell me just where you went today, who you saw and what they said to you.”

I couldn’t look at Stephen as I told him why I’d run away. I tried to make my feelings about the picture clear. I told him that if it hadn’t been for the book I’d found and known to be stolen I wouldn’t have been so upset. He didn’t say anything. I risked a look at his face. I found more amusement and less concern than I expected. But he offered no explanation. I went on to my walk to the Castle. “Matthew asked me to lunch and then Albion came in.”
"You talked to him after what he said the other night?" Exasperated disgust gleamed in Stephen's eyes.

I could feel my face flushing. "He really was sorry. He'd have left me alone with Matthew if I'd asked him. . . ."

Stephen shrugged. "What you say to Albion is your business, of course. I— Never mind. Go on."

I hurried on to what Albion had said about the picture. I finished that part of my story and waited.

"So that's how it got here," Stephen said after a long silence. "Well, I'm glad Matt at least imagined he had a good reason for quitting."

"Is that all you've got to say?" I demanded.

"Ruth, I— Wait—will you excuse me for a minute? I want to get something." I nodded.

He got up and went down to the library. In a matter of minutes he returned and handed me a piece of paper. I took it and read it. It was a bill of sale legally transferring ownership of the Pauline from Hartley Grant to Stephen. "Oh, Stephen."

"It's not your fault you didn't know the book had been recovered. I can't offer you any proof like that about the picture. I can tell you I never arranged for its theft nor for Albion to pick it up. You'll have to believe me—or Albion. Take your choice." He waited without apparent emotion for my decision.

I suppose there was never any doubt about my answer. My body had never doubted him, even when my mind thought he meant to kill me. "I believe you, Stephen."

"Thank God." He let his face show me just how much my answer had meant to him. I reached for his hand. The strong warmth of his fingers made my heart lurch. "Ruth, you must have thought I was mad. Even I sometimes wondered—"

"But not anymore," I said, "ever."

"Not anymore—ever," he promised.

Our silence bound us closer together. "Stephen, who do you suppose Albion did get that picture for?"

"Render unto the RCMP what is the RCMP's," Stephen murmured.

"Uh-huh," I murmured. "They'll just have to check on how
Albion paid the mortgage.” Uneasiness stirred inside me. 
“But Stephen, why did he have Matt bring the picture here?”

Stephen shrugged. “My guess is that when he got back, Matt told him about Lily’s murder. He wouldn’t want the picture found at the Castle. Ergo, he made up a plausible story for Matt and—”

“But why here?”

“You seem to forget—Albion doesn’t like me.”

“I know. He told me about Maude—”

“But why here?”

“You seem to forget—Albion doesn’t like me.”

“I know. He told me about Maude—”

“Just what did Albion tell you about Maude?”

Stephen’s face took on its cast of cold command. The lazy, comfortable intimacy between us vanished.

I told him. As the last words of Albion’s story left my lips, I glanced up at Stephen. Shock splintered inside me. His mouth was edged with white, bloodless flesh. His eyes were dead, green embers in his head. It was the face of a man who has seen hell.

I put my hand out to him. He grabbed it with one of his own and held it—away from him. “Suicide,” he muttered. “Suicide!” He twisted toward me and grasped my shoulders. “Ruth, it’s not true. If Maude had ever asked me for a divorce, I’d have agreed. Under the terms of our marriage I couldn’t have done anything else.” His eyes were feverish.

“If I only knew whether the lie were Albion’s—or Maude’s.”

“What difference would it make?”

“A great deal. If Maude lied to Albion—his story’s true and she killed herself, God help me. If Albion’s lying then—he killed her.”

“What!”

Stephen relinquished his hold on my shoulders. He held his head in his hands. “The day Maude died no one had anything to gain from her death but Albion.”


Stephen met my eyes. The memory of old agony was clear on his face. “Of course, I’m not sure. I haven’t been sure for three years. That’s why—”

“You hit him the other night,” I finished for him. I’d been so sure it was for me. Disappointment cut into me like a knife—and I was ashamed.

“No!” He grasped my left hand and held it as though it
gave him strength. "That was for you. He had no right . . . It was three years of doubt that made me say I'd kill him, made me want to." He rubbed his free hand over his head as though he were wiping away cobwebs. His breathing was irregular and his eyes were still fever ridden.

But when he spoke his voice was calm, almost detached. "I was out of town for five days before Maude—died. I came home as soon as I was informed. Funny, how I felt. I hadn't been in love with Maude, but I was fond of her. And her death left my life strangely vacant. I don't think I took much interest in what was going on around me for a while. But death brings duties with it. The house had to be inventoried. When it was, one of my paintings was missing."

"The fragment after Michelangelo?"

"That's right. I thought Maude might have sent it to be cleaned or repaired or . . . But she hadn't. I suppose I'd have reported its absence to the authorities if Albion hadn't phoned." Stephen tightened his grasp on my hand. "He was just out of the hospital then. I felt sorry for the poor devil. He was broken up about Maude, kept insisting the accident was his fault. I agreed to see him as he asked." Stephen took an unsteady breath. "Bear in mind that until that day when I saw Albion, I sincerely believed Maude's death was accidental. Afterwards . . . It was one of Albion's better scenes, a dramatic confession. According to him Maude had given him the picture as a token of her love. He, in turn, had tried to sell it because his father needed the money. He'd found a buyer, a none too scrupulous collector in Calgary who didn't mind the absence of a bill of sale. But after Maude's death he couldn't bring himself to make the sacrifice. He felt honor-bound to return the picture to me. It was a touching story, admirably told. I should have believed it." Stephen stared through the walls of the room into the past. His voice died.

I waited for what seemed an eternity before he spoke again. "Perhaps it was vanity that made me doubt him. Maude had quirks I didn't like, but I was sure infidelity wasn't one of them. She'd always lived up to every requirement of our bargain. Somehow it didn't ring true that she would have given away a valuable picture to a man she
must have known would have to sell it. She could, after all, have given him cash, if she loved him and he needed it. God knows, I was in no position to object. I said as much to Albion. I said it pretty violently. I must have scared him. The next thing I knew he was all but groveling at my feet. His real confession had no grace about it, just ugly necessity and fear. He admitted he’d stolen the picture, that Maude had demanded its return, that he’d agreed to give it back to her the day they were sailing. Then the accident happened. As Albion told it, that’s why he kept insisting it was his fault. He made me sick. All I wanted was to get the picture and then get away from him."

“Oh, Stephen . . .” Words were useless.

Stephen squeezed my hand. “Never mind. It’s done now and can’t be undone.”

But it wasn’t done. I knew that. Not until Stephen’s doubts were resolved would it ever be finished. Until then—the past had a claim on him he couldn’t escape. “But what made you doubt Maude’s death was an accident, even then?” I asked still somewhat puzzled.

“Three people knew Albion was a thief. The man in Calgary, myself—and Maude.”

“But Albion didn’t try to kill you or—”

“Of course not. I never threatened to reveal what I knew about him. The man in Calgary was an accessory after the fact and wasn’t likely to betray him. But Maude? She wouldn’t have hesitated. She believed in the letter of the law.”

“That doesn’t mean he killed her.”

“No.” Stephen’s voice was lifeless. “But if he didn’t? If what he told you was true—and Maude made up the story about the divorce, then committed—Then I killed her. As surely as though I’d stabbed her.” His eyes were fevered again.

“Nonsense.” My voice was astringent. “You admitted yourself that the lie could as well be Albion’s. Let it alone, at least until you’re sure.”

He held my hand lightly against his lips and murmured, “But will I ever be sure?”

“Does it matter that much, now?” I asked.
His answer was a long time coming. "I don't know, Ruth."

"Ah, I see Miss Carson is feeling stronger," Sergeant McKee remarked from the open door to the hall.

Stephen relinquished his hold of my hand. "Yes. Quite a bit stronger."

"That's good. I'd like both of you to answer a few more questions for me. I think you know Constable Lane."

The two Mounties entered the room and took chairs facing the couch. Constable Lane turned on the overhead lights before he sat down.

"Mr. Bonner," McKee began, "I believe you said you saw McGurney strike Miss Carson."

"I didn't say that. I said I found him standing over her while she was unconscious. He ran when he saw me."

"Thank you. I wanted to be sure I understood you. Now, Miss Carson, can you confirm what Mr. Bonner says?"

"No."

"You didn't see anything before you were struck?"

"I was on the path. I heard a noise and thought it was an animal. I looked around. A man was coming out of the brush. That's all I remember until I came to and saw Mr. Bonner."

"You didn't get a clear look at the man?"

"No."

"So, as far as you know, it could have been any man on Coronet Island. Even Tsiang, Mr. Bonner's butler."

I smiled at the unlikeliness of the statement. "I suppose so."

"I wish you'd get Tsiang out of your head, Sergeant McKee," Stephen snapped.

"And I wish you'd stop thinking you can read my mind, Mr. Bonner," McKee retorted with unruffled composure. "Miss Carson, just what was the object of your flight this morning?"

I hesitated.

"Did you think Mr. Bonner had stolen the painting we showed you?"

Shame and guilt flooded my cheeks hotly. "Yes."

"Do you still think so?"

"No."
“Do you have any reason for feeling the way you do now? Did you have any reason for feeling the way you did this morning?”

I shook my head.

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Stephen burst out at me, “tell him what Albion said about the picture and be done with it!”

“Mr. Bonner, I wish you’d let me conduct my own investigation. If there is something you can tell us about the picture, Miss Carson, I’ll be happy to listen.”

I told him.

“That’s interesting,” he remarked. “And after hearing that story you no longer believe Mr. Bonner took the picture while before you heard it . . . That’s remarkable.” He glanced from Stephen to me and shook his head.

Tsiang chose that moment for gliding in. “Dinner will be served in half an hour,” he announced politely.

XIII

I sat at the dinner table with Sergeant McKee and Stephen, against Stephen’s colorfully expressed better judgment. He didn’t let me enjoy my victory over him. Stephen and McKee devoted their conversation to fishing. As Stephen must have surmised, I knew no more about fishing than he had taught me ten years before. All I could do was keep an alert, interested expression on my face and pretend I wasn’t being disciplined.

I tried to think about something that would let me enjoy the excellent food Tsiang was serving us. I couldn’t dredge up any cheerful subjects. Finally I settled for pondering over where, when and which of the Kellehers I’d seen before. That seemed safe enough. I concentrated first on trying to decide which of them I’d seen—Albion or Matthew. I didn’t
have any success. I switched to the where. I ran through the possibilities quickly. I came to the conclusion it had been on Coronet Island, but I couldn't pinpoint it more precisely. I went on to the when. No matter how much effort I exerted on that problem, I got nowhere. But wasn't it possible, even probable, that I'd found both Kellehers familiar because I'd seen them on the island ten years ago? True, I'd never been to any of the parties given at the Castle. I'd never been to the Castle at all until today. But surely Albion and Matthew had frequently left its grounds. I could have seen them dozens of times without knowing who they were. I felt let down. I'd been so sure remembering was urgent. I'd even been banking on the possibility that when I did manage to identify the time, the place, and the Kelleher, I'd know something about Lily's murder. Women's intuition! Hah!

Dinner tapered off to coffee and brandy in the drawing room. That is, Stephen and I had coffee and brandy. Sergeant McKee politely indicated he was still very much on duty and settled for coffee alone.

He studied me for some time and then remarked, "Miss Carson, I don't think you realize the trouble and worry you caused my staff and Mr. Bonner this afternoon. One pretty girl has been killed. We don't want to make it two."

"Surely you didn't think...?" I stammered.

"Yes, we did, Miss Carson—and we were right. It was you who didn't think. For your own good, I'm requesting that hereafter you leave word where you are going when you go out. I'd also suggest that you stay away from Halibut Bay until this is over. Unless, of course, you enjoy talking to newspapermen."

Stephen lessened my all too apparent discomfort by offering me a cigarette. I waited for him to hold out his cigarette case. Instead he lit the cigarette and handed it to me.

I disguised my irritation as I accepted it. Why did he insist on making gestures which over-emphasized the intimacy between us? I stole a glance at him. He was watching McKee with something akin to amusement. He knew exactly what he was doing. I shivered. I had hoped my doubts about Stephen were ended. They weren't. His attitude might have
been that of a man so innocent he had nothing to worry about. Or it might be that of a man so egocentric he didn’t believe the police could touch him.

McKee’s watchful interest in us wasn’t concealed by his superficial joviality. His smile was that of a stalking hunter as he asked Stephen, “Why didn’t you tell us you were engaged to Miss Carson instead of trying to palm us off with that librarian story?”

Stephen didn’t move. The brandy snifter he had halfway to his lips remained there. The smoke from his cigarette rose, his eyes widened. I could feel the blood leaving my face. I had forgotten to tell him about Miss Danby’s story.

His eyes dug at McKee’s face. He didn’t bother to look at me. “When did that story get out?” he asked finally, his voice just under control.

“I’m told,” McKee said pleasantly, “that it’s on all the front pages tonight. So it got out some time today. I believe Miss Carson’s picture accompanies it.”

Stephen slammed his brandy glass down on the table in front of him but laid his cigarette in the ashtray with care. He stood up and walked over to me. “What the devil prompted you to—” I crouched back in my chair. Words of explanation wilted beneath the hot anger in his eyes. “I thought,” Stephen continued, “you said you only made one fool statement to the press. Telling them I didn’t kill Lily was bad enough. This—”

“Stephen, I didn’t. Miss Danby—”. What was the use?

He stayed where he was. I wouldn’t look at him. His chuckle was so unexpected I jumped. He returned to his chair. “Tell Sergeant McKee how long we’ve been engaged, Ruth.”

I should have been grateful the challenge in his eyes was amused. I felt more like kicking him. “We’re not engaged. I was stupid enough to get myself cornered by reporters in Halibut Bay. Miss Danby rescued me with that story—she told me she thought it necessary to preserve appearances.”

“Of course, you’ll correct the newspapers, Mr. Bonner?” The irony in McKee’s voice was undisguised.

Stephen sipped his coffee with such aplomb it was difficult to believe he had been on the verge of losing his temper.
seconds before. "I never correct newspapers. And, in any case, Miss Danby is right. An engagement does preserve appearances."

McKee was benevolent. "Speaking of Miss Danby—do you really think she saw a boat in that little cove north of her house the night of the murder, Mr. Bonner?"

"There's always something in what Miss Danby says," Stephen told McKee.

The Sergeant's face turned grim. "In this case, Mr. Bonner, I have to be sure just how much. For instance, I understand that False Bay is an impossible anchorage—"

Impatience got the better of Stephen. "McKee, you know as well as I do the night Lily was killed was one of the few when the tide ran high enough in False Bay for a fairly large boat to have come in."

"The Kwan Yin, for example?" McKee asked.

"No," Stephen said with decision. "The boat would have had to be under fifty feet, and then the navigator would have had to have absolutely perfect knowledge of the bay. The entrance is narrow and it has a tricky bend."

"So you could have taken your sailboat in?"

"I could," Stephen agreed. "I didn't."

"And Albion Kelleher could have taken the Pride in?"

"He's a good navigator. The Pride is only forty-two feet long," Stephen said noncommittally.

McKee made quite a business of lighting a cigar. "Did you know Albion Kelleher accused you of killing the McGurney girl, Mr. Bonner?"

I hoped no one saw my start of surprise. I hadn't expected Albion to tell the Mounties his suspicions—he'd as much as said he wouldn't.

"Outside of the fact that he dislikes me, could he give you any motive, Sergeant McKee?" Stephen asked with quiet sarcasm.

"Was it your intention to send Miss McGurney to Vancouver?" McKee inquired without answering Stephen's question.

"No. Why?" Stephen hesitated and then added, "Before Lily came to work for me I did ask her father if he wouldn't
let her work in Vancouver. I could have given her a job there."

"We know about that, Mr. Bonner. Her father told us he refused the offer, feeling she was too young to be away from home. What I want to know is whether or not you let Miss McGurney think there was a possibility you'd send her to Vancouver now? Albion Kelleher thinks you did."

Stephen shrugged. "Lily made up stories when it suited her. She might have made that one up for Albion. I don't see that it gives me a motive for murder."

"It might," McKee observed, "if you used Vancouver as a bribe. Then reneged on the offer..."

"Bribe for what?" Stephen demanded.

"Miss McGurney's seduction..."

"That's absurd!" Stephen's voice was scornful.

"Mr. Kelleher doesn't think so. He thinks Miss McGurney was killed because she threatened to reveal the relation between herself and you."

"There was no relation to reveal," Stephen's voice was crisp. "If I were to use the same kind of evidence, I could accuse Albion."

"Could you?" McKee asked.

"But I wouldn't."

McKee puffed on his cigar. He watched Stephen intently.

"Why not, Mr. Bonner? I should think if you had a shred of evidence against Albion Kelleher, you'd be eager to accuse him. He was with your wife at the time of her fatal accident..."

"That was three years ago. And it was an accident." Stephen's voice had tightened.

"So the coroner's jury said. Of course there were no witnesses."

"If you want me to say I hate Albion's guts—I do. But I've never been able to prove to myself—let alone anyone else—that my reasons are justified."

McKee smiled. "Strange how reasonable you can be about people you dislike while you're very unreasonable about people you're fond of—Miss Carson, for instance."

"Are you trying to goad me into making a case against Albion?" Stephen demanded.

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"You said you could."
"I also said it would be absurd. At least as absurd as Albion's accusation of me. . . ."
"Mr. Bonner, that absurdity is not as obvious to me as you seem to think." McKee's face was somber.

Exasperation filled Stephen's eyes. "Very well. I'll make a case against Albion. Could he have killed Lily? Yes. I understand the Pride left her anchorage about an hour after Albion got back to the Castle. He called at Halibut Bay to fill the fuel and water tanks. I think you said he stayed there while he made some minor adjustment on the engines. So he sailed around eight-thirty or nine o'clock. High tide was at eleven. Albion could have cruised around Coronet Island for two hours. He could have entered False Bay, met Lily, killed her. He would still have had time left to get out of the bay before the tide turned."

"That's your case against him, Mr. Bonner?"

"I told you I didn't have a case against him. He had the opportunity. But if he had a rendezvous to pick up the El Greco, he probably didn't have the necessary two hours cruising time to spare. Why or how he arranged to meet Lily could never be established—without his help. And where's his motive? The only concrete evidence against him is the Pride's being white and of a size suitable for entering False Bay. And that's more wishful thinking than evidence. My three boats are white. There are at least half a dozen white fishing boats registered out of Halibut Bay. God knows how many fishermen and boat owners know these waters well enough to get into False Bay when the tide is high enough—"

"That's enough, Mr. Bonner. You've convinced me you believe in Albion Kelleher's innocence." McKee's eyes became challenging. "Do you have equally good reasons for doubting his brother's guilt?"

Stephen said nothing. I remembered the case I'd been able to build against Matthew. He'd had the opportunity—but had he really had the motive? I waited.

"I think I should tell you that we've fairly good evidence that Matthew Kelleher was Lily McGurney's lover."

Stephen matched McKee's detachment as he said, "Being in love and being a lover are two different things."
"Granted," McKee smiled. "But not always. Would you care to tell me why you hired Lily McGurney to work here? I’ve heard several stories. I’d like to hear yours."

Stephen waited some time before he answered. His voice, when he finally spoke, sounded weary. "Matthew told me some months ago he wanted to marry Lily. He hadn’t asked her at that time... I didn’t think he should; but I couldn’t tell him that. I thought if he saw enough of her, he’d give up the idea. So I hired Lily. I was sure I’d be enough chaperone—"

"But you weren’t, were you?"
"I wish I knew," Stephen said in a low voice.
"You admit then, Matthew Kelleher might have had a motive for killing Lily McGurney?"
"I do not. He loved her."
"Speaking as a policeman, Mr. Bonner, I can tell you one of the commonest motives for a crime of passion is unrequited love."
"Who else—in this case?" Stephen challenged.
"You. His brother—"
"It wasn’t me." Stephen’s gaze became defiant. "No, I can’t prove it, McKee. As for Albion..." Almost against his will, Stephen chuckled.
"You think Albion Kelleher is immune to pretty girls?" McKee asked.
"Of course not. But Albion’s sex drives have to have social status."

McKee impassively observed Stephen’s amusement. "Where would Matthew Kelleher have been able to get a white boat, Mr. Bonner?"
"Why would he need one?"
"Because we’re almost certain the murderer was on the boat Miss Danby saw." McKee became thoughtful. "There were no white boats left in Halibut Bay after the Pride departed. You say—and I can find out easily enough—that the Kwan Yin is too big to enter False Bay. But what about your outboard, Mr. Bonner? I imagine Matthew Kelleher could have used it?"
"He could." Stephen was dubious.
"But why would he?" McKee seemed to ask himself. "All
he had to do was walk across the island which would call a good deal less attention to him." The Sergeant sighed. "I wish Miss Danby could swear to the size of the boat as she can swear to the color."

He knocked ash from the tip of his cigar. "Of course, Matthew Kelleher wasn't the only man who had access to that outboard of yours, Mr. Bonner. Your butler, Tsiang, could have taken it."

"Surely you don't think poor Tsiang was the other man in Lily's life?" Stephen's amusement had become strained. "Miscegenation hadn't occurred to me," McKee said. "Revenge had."

"Nonsense. Why Tsiang—"

"Hated Miss McGurney, as everyone on this island, but yourself, will testify. The day she was killed she had deliberately usurped his duties when she insisted on showing Miss Carson around Chinois. And she didn't make the apology you'd ordered."

"You can't be serious," Stephen smiled. "No man would commit murder because an apology wasn't offered. . . ."

"Are you really amused, Mr. Bonner. Or pretending. Your butler is a member of your family, so to speak. Miss McGurney's contempt wasn't limited to him—it extended to all your servants. And your servants are Tsiang's family. If, on top of her attitude toward them, she posed a threat to you, I think Tsiang would be quite capable of killing her."

"What threat could Lily be to me?" Stephen demanded.

McKee didn't answer directly. "Albion Kelleher isn't the only person who believes you were Lily's lover. I found it to be a common subject of gossip in Halibut Bay. . . ."

"You just said you could prove Matthew—"

"But could Tsiang?"

"Don't be a fool!" Stephen snapped.

"I'm not," McKee told him. He drew on his cigar. Then he began to muse, "But let's see where we stand according to you, Mr. Bonner. You've eliminated both Kellehers and Tsiang. That seems to leave no one but yourself and Miss Carson. However, I don't think you'll admit either one of you are involved. So I'd be interested to know who you
think did commit the murder, Mr. Bonner. You've certainly thought about it. What did you finally conclude?"

Stephen reached for the brandy bottle, and poured a fraction of an inch into his glass before he met the challenge in McKee's eyes. "I concluded—McGurney."

"Her father!" I exclaimed.

"Why, Mr. Bonner?" McKee asked.

Stephen didn't answer immediately. When he began to speak, he did so with care. "If I hadn't seen him standing over Ruth, I might not feel so certain. . . . McGurney's a fanatic. If he'd been able to prove to himself Lily was actually having an affair, there's no telling what he'd do. God knows he beat her often enough for just looking at a man. I think he beat her once too often. Perhaps he didn't even mean to kill her."

McKee didn't look convinced. "What about you, Miss Carson? Do you agree with Mr. Bonner?"

I wasn't prepared for McKee's sudden attention. "I don't think so," I stammered.

"Who is your choice?" McKee asked.

I shrugged. "The closest I ever came—was Matthew Kelleher. He has no real alibi. He was on the island that night. . . ."

"What about his motive?" McKee inquired.

"I don't know. He doesn't bother to hide his fondness for Lily. I did think he might have killed her because she intended to go to Vancouver. But I couldn't convince—"

Constable Lane came into the room with a man who carried a doctor's bag. "This is Dr. Keenis from Nanaimo," the Constable told us. He gestured at me. "That's Miss Carson, your patient."

The doctor studied me. "She looks all right," he remarked as the Constable gestured McKee over to him and began a whispered conversation.

Stephen's voice was sharp, "I didn't have you brought here to tell me what Miss Carson looks like. I want to know how serious the blow on her head was.

Dr. Keenis frowned at Stephen. He walked over to me. "Good color," he observed. He took my pulse. Stephen got

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up and stood behind my chair. The doctor ignored him. He dropped my wrist and put a thermometer in my mouth.

"Well?" Stephen demanded.

Dr. Keenis glanced at him. "Young man, patience is a virtue you should cultivate. Papers say she’s your fiancée," the doctor remarked as he read the thermometer. "So you’ve a right to worry, but not to snap my head off. Where’s the lump, young lady?"

I guided his fingers to it. He examined it. He looked pleased and snapped his bag shut. "Can’t give you a guarantee without X-rays of course, but I’d say a good night’s sleep will do wonders for her."

I noticed that the Constable had left the room in a hurry. McKee seemed impatient, but he waited for the doctor to finish.

"You’re sure it’s not serious?" Stephen insisted.

"Well, how do you feel, young lady?"

"The bump itself hurts. Aside from that I feel perfectly all right."

The doctor nodded. "Her braids absorbed most of the blow. I don’t think X-rays necessary, except for your peace of mind." He glanced at Stephen. "Of course, she can fly back with me tonight and we can—"

"I’d rather she didn’t," McKee interjected, "unless you feel it’s absolutely necessary."

"It’s not," the doctor said shortly.

"Good. The plane is ready to leave whenever you are," McKee told him.

"The sooner the better." Dr. Keenis picked up his bag.

"Aren’t you going to leave any medicine?" Stephen demanded.

The doctor faced me, not Stephen. "Do you have some aspirin, Miss Carson?" I nodded. "Then take some before you go to bed—which should be soon."

"I will."

"Look here!" Stephen protested.

"Mr. Bonner," Doctor Keenis told him, "I’ll send you my bill. Good evening." He left the room.

"Doctors!" Stephen snorted.

"Generally know their business," McKee suggested.
"How is Mr. McGurney?" I asked.
"I'm sorry," I said.

McKee wasn't paying any attention to me. "Mr. Bonner, if your theory about Ezekiel McGurney is correct, can you fit the following facts into it? Fact one, Matthew Kelleher is at the Castle so drunk he's unable to answer questions. Fact two, Albion Kelleher and the Pride have both left Coronet Island."

Stephen shrugged. "I don't have to. I can't see either fact has anything to do with Lily's murder. Matthew's probably drunk because it was he who struck McGurney. As for Albion, I don't care where he goes."

"So you find nothing surprising about those facts?" McKee raised his eyebrows.
"Did you expect me to?"
"Not necessarily, since you may have known about them already."

I couldn't figure out what McKee was getting at.
"I don't think I understand you." Resentment colored Stephen's voice.
"I'll make myself as clear as possible," McKee said, his voice hard. "It occurred to me that Miss Carson's reasons for going to the Castle were weak. Wednesday night Albion Kelleher insulted her so strongly you struck him in her defense. Today she lunched with him."

"That was accidental."
"Was it, Mr. Bonner? Or did you instruct her to go there while the two of you were alone in the drawing room this morning. You could have told her to advise Albion Kelleher to remove his boat from the island before we examined it. We haven't yet had time to, nor have we located the scene of the crime."

I was stunned. Could Sergeant McKee believe Stephen and I had conspired with Albion?

Stephen's eyes began to glitter. "I thought your suspicions of my butler were the most fantastic I'd hear. But this—"

McKee ignored him. "And then again, it's quite possible Miss Carson gave Albion Kelleher such instructions on her own. Your renewed acquaintance with her has been short,
Mr. Bonner. You aren't in any position to know everyone she is connected with."

"If you're suggesting Ruth and Albion—"

"Please try to control your temper, Mr. Bonner. Let me remind you, Miss Danby isn't certain how many persons got off the boat she saw. She told me there may have been as many as three. We've already considered the possibility you might have rendezvoused with the Pride. So we also have to consider that Miss Carson could have been one of the persons Miss Danby saw."

"McKee, if you weren't a policeman—"

The Sergeant's face was expressionless. "Miss Carson has no more witnesses to the fact she remained at Chinois the whole night of Miss McGurney's death than you have to the fact you were sheltering at Deadman Reef."

I stared at McKee. It hadn't occurred to me that I might come under suspicion.

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Stephen controlled his anger with obvious difficulty. "McKee, you find Albion and his damn boat! Then you'll know how idiotic—"

"We intend to do that, Mr. Bonner. You may even be able to help."

"Anything to make you eat your words!"

Stephen's fury had no effect on McKee's aplomb. His voice remained reasonable, calm. "You have a thorough knowledge of these waters. If you'd indicate to us the secluded, little known harbors where the Pride might—"

"I said 'anything,' McKee." Stephen was grim.

"Well then, if you'll just come down to our boat and go over the charts with us."
"All right!" Stephen's angry scowl swung from the Sergeant to me. "Ruth, I want you to go to bed."

I was still smarting with resentment from McKee's suspicions. Worse than that, I was terribly afraid Stephen might believe them. "Stephen, I didn't—"

"Only a jackass of a policeman would think you had," Stephen assured me. "Just go to bed and try to sleep." He stepped around the chair and brushed my forehead with his lips. He put his hands on my shoulders reassuringly. "And don't worry! Everything will come right." His eyes met mine with confidence. I knew I'd never be able to tell him how much his trust meant to me at that moment. He touched my cheek with his fingertips. Then he turned and stalked past the Sergeant.

McKee followed him without hesitation. I glared at his back. I had never supposed anyone would be so foolish as to believe I was implicated in Lily's murder. I was sure McKee was the most dense, the most impossible man in the RCMP. And yet, if McKee wouldn't take my word that I'd been at Chinois that entire night, how could I prove it to him? There was no proof.

Thank God Stephen didn't need proof. He believed me. The confident touch of his fingers, the trusting kiss on my forehead kept me from panicking, because what did it matter how much McKee doubted me so long as Stephen believed in me.

My anger at McKee died. Why did Stephen believe me? After all, McKee was right. Stephen hardly knew me. But, without hesitation, he had shown me he had unquestioning faith in me. He had the kind of confidence in me Miss Danby all too correctly said I lacked in Stephen.

I huddled back in my chair. Shame, misery, and humility that had come too late mingled inside me. I had never trusted Stephen. Even tonight I'd still been doubtful. I'd had no hesitation in suspecting him of theft, assault—my own attempted murder. I buried my head in my hands. I knew what it would have meant to me if Stephen had hesitated in showing he trusted me. Why had I never realized what my lack of faith in him must have meant?

The knowledge that I couldn't undo the damage I'd
already done him burdened me with futile guilt. It was too late to run after him and tell him I had faith in him—now. But at least the belief, the confidence in him I’d lacked was inside me at last.

I slumped in my chair. Surrounded by the beauty of Chinois’s drawing room, my guilt grew until I could stand it no longer. I got up and walked out of the room.

There was no longer any sense in trying to go to bed. Guilt and the knowledge of how greatly I’d failed Stephen wouldn’t have let me sleep. I couldn’t think of any way to make it up to him. Right now, he was trying to help me. And there was nothing I could do for him. Nothing!

I wandered past the library and down the hall to the gallery. I hesitated beside its entrance. Memory of the serene Chinese paintings drifted into my mind. I wondered if looking at them might ease the depression that weighed me down. I fumbled for the light switch.

I stepped past the lacy elegance of the jade devil screen and gazed up at the paintings. Instead of solace, I found renewed reproach. I had been able to believe a man who loved all this beauty was capable of crime against it. I fled into the Renaissance room.

That was worse. The haughty faces in the pictures seemed to drip scorn on me. I went from one accusing face to the next. I didn’t blame them. I was guilty as charged. I had nothing to say in my own defense—I had no defense.

I stopped in front of the fragment after Michelangelo. My eyes followed the burning strength of the man-angel’s legs, up his torso, to his face. The cruelty of his mouth seemed more than justified now. The melancholy, merciful eyes had a generosity of forgiveness I didn’t deserve. I found strange solace in that picture. Perhaps, after all, I might be able to live with myself again. I no longer found Lily’s attachment to that powerful painting hard to understand... . .

My eyes shifted from the man-angel’s eyes to his mouth. I gasped and took a step away from the picture. I stared at it with disbelief, as I began to understand what I was seeing.

Excitement welled up inside me. I hadn’t seen Albion Kelleher before. I’d seen his mouth. It was the man-angel’s. I’d
seen something else. The look on Lily’s face—a too precocious, too passionate, too adoring look. I knew then she had cared no more for this painting than she cared for the others. But she’d worshiped the man she’d seen in its image. Lily had been in love with Albion. Wantonly, passionately in love. What else could have explained her hating Stephen? That hadn’t been her own hate—it had been an echo of Albion’s.

I didn’t stop to sort out my thoughts. Some primitive instinct suddenly told me I must go to Kelleher’s Castle. Perhaps it was my conscience that was driving me there, my guilt for suggesting to McKee that Matthew could have killed Lily.

I dashed to my bedroom and got into a jacket, certain now that Matt needed help. Why was he drinking himself into a stupor? Was he trying to blot out the knowledge that Albion was a murderer? Or was it because his brother had killed the girl he loved. Was he the kind of man who, unable to face what he knew, would destroy himself?

I ran out of the house still pulling on my jacket, and down to the dock.

I knew I was right, that Matthew had loved Lily from a frustrated distance, and that it was Albion she was having an affair with. I didn’t know the details, but Matt probably did. Else why would he try so deliberately to get drunk? Perhaps I should have taken McKee or the Constable with me. But I was afraid that the sight of a policeman might drive Matt further into the solace of alcohol. He would talk to me, I was sure of that. And by getting whatever facts he had, by laying the groundwork for McKee, I could perhaps make up to Stephen for having so little faith in him.

And, as a matter of fact, it would seem that I had taken leave of my senses if I went to McKee or Stephen and said, “I know Albion killed Lily because the painting shows the cruelty of his mouth.”

“Did you want something, Miss Carson?” Constable Lane inquired as he walked toward me from the dock.

What could I tell him? “No,” I said, “I thought I . . .” A solution to my dilemma arrived in my mind with opportunity suddenness. “Sergeant McKee asked me to let him know
whenever I left the grounds. I'm going over to the Castle. I don't think Matt should be alone."

"I wouldn't, Miss Carson. Matt's in pretty bad shape."
I almost snapped, "Of course he is. So would you be if you knew your brother was a murderer." I didn't. I said instead, "I know. But I think someone should be with him. He could hurt himself, you know."

"I doubt it. You just go back to the house, Miss Carson. Let us take care of—"

"Are you going to order me not to go to the Castle?" I demanded.
The Constable shot a puzzled glance at me. Then he shrugged. "No."

"Then you will tell Sergeant McKee and Mr. Bonner where I've gone, please."
He nodded. "But I don't think—"
I didn't wait to hear what he didn't think. I walked away from him.

I knew I was right. But I'd have to be able to prove that to McKee. I determined to do just that. McKee wasn't going to be able to shrug off my suspicions. Somehow I'd get concrete evidence to prove them.

Besides, I was perfectly safe. Drunk or sober, Matt was harmless. Albion was the killer, and he was miles from here by now. And the police with Stephen's help, were covering every cove and inlet on the island, should Albion risk coming back.

No, I was right in going to Kelleher Castle. I needed facts, and Matt needed help.

What I had to prove was as starkly visible to my mind as the contrast between the moonlight on the sand, and the depth of shadow extending from a lea of sea-washed rocks was to my eyes. Lily had had a love affair. That was a fact. But whom had it been with? Halibut Bay, enjoying life vicariously, had wanted to believe Stephen was her lover. He, in turn, had finally believed her lover was Matt because Matt was obviously in love with Lily. But, as Stephen himself had said, being in love and being a lover are two different things. There was only one person who could have seduced Lily and never been suspected. Albion Kelleher. His exagger-
ated snobbishness had eliminated him from consideration, protected him from discovery.

Certain sentences Albion had used, taken out of their context and arranged in another order painted a frightening but convincing picture: In her way, Lily could be as ruthless as Stephen. She was perfectly able to sacrifice anyone or anything to gain her ends... a slut like Lily McGurney.

I wondered why I hadn’t realized that only a man who knew Lily well and had reason to hate her—perhaps even fear her—could have spoken so harshly about the dead girl. And how could Lily have guarded herself from Albion’s charm? I was more sophisticated than she and he had duped me into accepting his apology with relative ease. How flattering, how exciting Lily would have found his attentions. How easily she must have accepted them. But what would have happened when she found out she was only a passing entertainment, a sop to Albion’s selfish idleness. What would she have done then? First, she would have begged and wept. That wouldn’t have moved Albion. Then, she might have threatened to go to her father. More likely she had demanded marriage. I couldn’t know exactly what she would’ve done. Whatever steps she had taken drove Albion to murder. Poor Lily.

My hurried walking brought me to the foot of the path that led up to the Castle. I hesitated before I began the climb up it. A light touch of fear drifted into my mind. I beat it with logic. There was nothing to fear. Albion was gone. What but guilt could have driven him from the Castle? And Albion’s guilt explained Matt’s drunkenness. Stephen might believe Matt drank because he had attacked McGurney. I didn’t. Matt knew Albion was guilty. He was trying to hide his knowledge behind an alcoholic screen. But I was sure he’d talk to me. He’d want to talk to someone. He’d loved Lily. He’d want her murderer punished, even if he couldn’t bring himself to turn his brother over to the Mounties yet. I thought Matt would welcome the opportunity to let me do what he couldn’t face doing.

My glimmer of fear died away. I climbed the path confidently. Not even the monstrous clumps of shrubbery which
looked like misshapen, hungry animals in the half wild garden could intimidate me.

The veranda stretched darkly in front of me. I walked up its steps and across its flagstones. My footsteps were a lonely, echoing sound. I turned the door knob and shoved the door open. Cold moonlight cascaded down the main staircase from the window on the landing. There was such a sense of emptiness inside the house that some of my confidence began to leave me. It took an effort of will to step across the threshold and push the door shut with care. It occurred to me I hadn’t the slightest idea of where Matt might be. The only parts of the Castle I knew were downstairs. I lingered by the door, trying to decide where I should try first.

A crash echoed through the house. I shoved my body flat against the door. I mastered my momentary fright and decided the noise had come from the kitchen. I started toward it on tiptoe. I heard a thickened voice curse, followed by a crash of glass.

It was Matthew’s voice and it was coming from the kitchen. I was relieved that he was still conscious. I pushed open the service door and stepped into the kitchen.

Matthew was standing with one hand braced against the wooden table. With the other he had just succeeded in lighting the wick of a kerosene lamp. He dropped the match on the floor as I came in. He lurched across the floor and came to rest against the sink. He peered at me blearily.

“Ruth?”

There was a reek of gin in the air. I walked to the table, put the chimney on the lamp and turned it up. Then I looked around. A broken bottle was lying on the floor beside a chair which had fallen or been knocked over. I righted the chair.

“Go ’way,” Matthew growled.

“I want to talk to you.”

He staggered toward me. I hadn’t expected him to be quite so drunk. He clutched at me with unsteady hands. One of them closed over the bruise on my left arm, the other grasped a handful of my jacket. He teetered uncertainly. His hand tightened on my arm. I managed to keep from wincing. I was sure his grip on me was all that kept him on his feet.
"You go," he said with intoxicated earnestness. "You go." His eyes were bloodshot and desperate in his flushed face. "I've got to talk to you, Matt. Is there kindling for the stove? I'll make us some coffee."

"No kindling. Don't want coffee." He gave me an ineffective shove. "You get out!" Unwisely he loosened his hold on me and I had to grab his arm to keep him from falling.

I took a firm grip on one of his elbows and half pushed, half guided him to a chair. He slumped down on it and watched me with sullen attention as I went over to the stove.

The light of the lamp didn't touch the corner of the room where the stove stood. It took me a little while to locate the woodbox at the right of the stove. I raised its hinged lid and peered inside.

"Ruth, you go now!"

I ignored Matt. Inside the woodbox was a neat stack of paper, some kindling and plenty of stove-length wood. I crumpled some of the paper, opened the fire door and shoved it inside the stove. I laid some kindling on top of it and two lengths of wood. I found my cigarette lighter in my pocket, flicked it into flame, and lit the end of the papers.

The fire began to crackle just enough so I knew it was going to go. I picked up the enormous teakettle from the top of the stove and carried it toward the sink.

Matt lurched out of his chair. He put out his hand to stop me, misjudged the distance and fell forward. He caught himself on the counter, braced his back against it, and faced me.

"Where's the coffee pot?" I asked.

"There isn't any. You go 'way."

I ignored him. I filled the kettle from the tap. "I'll make boiled coffee," I told him.

"No coffee."

I carried the kettle back to the stove. "Tea, then," I said.

"No tea."

I lifted a lid from the stove and put the kettle directly over the flames.

Then I opened cupboards. I found a battered drip coffee pot and about half a pound of coffee. I filled the drip basket
with coffee and set the pot on the counter. Now all I had to do was wait for the water to boil.

Matt was still leaning against the counter. Beneath the blur of alcohol in his eyes, resentment burned.

"It's going to take a little while to make coffee," I told him. "You might try putting your head under the tap for awhile."

"Why?"

"Because you're drunk, that's why."

"Damn right," he agreed and sounded just a little pleased. "Be drunker. Bottle broke."

"Good."

He waved a hand at me. "You're a fool. Big fool. Go away."

"I'm not going away. I came to talk to you and I'm not leaving until I do." I spoke slowly and took care to make each word very clear.

"No."

"Yes!" I would have given anything to be strong enough to shake him.

"Go on," I instructed. "Bend over the sink."

"No."

Exasperation swept over me. "You're going to have to sober up some time . . ."

"No."

"Oh for heaven's sake. If there's a fool here, it's you!" Anger swelled the sound of my voice. I went up to him and turned him around. He tried to resist, but he was too drunk. I got him to face the sink. I shoved at his neck but I couldn't make it bend.

"Matt, put your head under the tap. I'll turn the water on."

"No."

"Look, I just want to run cold water on your neck. It'll make you feel better."

Mule stubbornness showed in his voice as he said, "No. Don't want to feel better."

I struggled with my impatience and controlled it enough to say in a tight voice, "All right. Go and sit down until the coffee's ready."

"No. Ruth, you don't understand."

His voice was more slurred than ever.
"I'd understand a lot better if you were sober," I snapped. He held onto the sink. "Is that so?"
"Yes."
He seemed to be considering. "Must understand," he muttered. Suddenly he ducked his head under the tap. "All right."
I turned on the water. He gasped as its icy coldness touched his neck, but he stayed where he was. After about two minutes, he lowered his head and raised one hand to it slowly. He began to splash water on himself.
I felt encouraged. I glanced at the teakettle and saw a cloud of steam rising from it. I carried the coffee pot over to the stove. I thought it might take more than one pot of coffee to get sober sense out of Matt.
He was still splashing water on his head. He'd soaked the top of his shirt too. I rummaged through the cupboards for cups. The lack of food and utensils awakened pity in me. It took me a little time to locate two cups. Only one had a handle. Both were Royal Doulton.
I put them on the table and went back to Matt. I turned the water off. "Towel," Matt demanded. I looked under the sink and saw a grubby piece of cloth. It was the closest thing to a towel I'd seen in the kitchen. I handed it to him and he began to rub his head ineffectively. I took it away from him and dried him as well as I could. I did better than he had done, but he was still dripping a little when I managed to get him back to the table. He put out a hand to detain me, but I brushed past him and went to the stove. I picked up the coffee pot, brought it to the table and poured us both cups of coffee.
He didn't seem to see the cup I set in front of him. I wasn't sure the cold water had helped any. "Drink it," I ordered.
"Ruth, you don't understand!"
"Drink it!"
He glared at me. That encouraged me. He picked up the cup and gulped at the coffee.
"Don't drink it so fast," I told him, "you'll burn your mouth."
He ignored me. He finished that cup and I poured him
another. He shook his head. "Ruth, you must understand. You have to leave." His voice was still thick, but it was more intelligible.

"I have to talk to you, Matthew!"

He reached out and grabbed my wrist. "You must leave. Kill you if you don't." His voice was desperate.

I twisted my wrist out of the grasp of his hand.

He tried to shove his chair away from the table. The sound of its fall echoed through the empty house. He held himself erect by clutching at the heavy table. Light from the lamp caught his face as he leaned toward me. I wondered why I hadn't seen it before. The mouth of the picture Lily worshipped had been Albion's all right. But the eyes were Matthew's. The difference was that now his had no mercy in them. Was it Matthew after all? Was he drinking to blot out his own guilt?

XV

For an instant I stared at Matt with a kind of fascination. Then I backed toward the service door. Once through it, I was sure I could get away from him.

Matt released his hold on the table. He came toward me. The drunken deliberation of his steps was horrible. Anxiety filled his eyes. He was afraid I would get away. I thought I must be almost to the service door.

"Not that way," he said. "Kill you if you go that way." He pushed blindly at me. The liquor he'd drunk tricked his feet, and he sprawled on the floor.

I reached behind me for the service door. My hand groped in air. I had been sure I'd gone far enough. Matt was coming at me on all fours with the terrible deliberation of a hulking, wounded animal. In desperation, I turned to run.
“That’s not necessary,” Albion said from the open doorway. “It’s almost over now.” He flicked a pitying look at his crawling brother. He held a heavy, old revolver in his right hand. He touched me reassuringly with his left.

I mastered an impulse to throw myself into Albion’s rescuing arms. I don’t think I’ve ever been so glad to see anyone in my life. “Thank God! Matthew—”

Albion smiled. “He’s disgusting drunk, isn’t he?”

I nodded. Puzzlement overlaid my relief. “But I thought you were gone. The Pride—”

“So I was and so she is. I expect the Mounties are looking for her?”

I nodded again. “I was sure they’d go after her.” Satisfaction fattened his voice. “But I mustn’t keep you standing, Miss Carson—Ruth.”

He gestured at the table. I went over and sat down. I didn’t understand him at all. But how did I know how I might have behaved if Matt had been my brother and I knew he was a murderer?

Matt had stopped crawling. He sat on the floor, abject with misery. Even knowing what he had done and what he’d tried to do, I felt a scrap of pity for him.

“I’m glad you came,” Albion remarked. “It’s the first real piece of luck I’ve had. I thought I’d have to come for you myself.” His eyes moved over my face as though seeking something. “But why did you come? You couldn’t have known . . .”

His voice trailed off and his lips curved into a curious smile.

Embarrassment touched my face with heat. I glanced away from Albion before I began to explain about the resemblance I’d seen in the picture, about what I’d thought.


“Shut up!” Matt shouted. “Don’t say her name. Don’t ever say it again!”

The agony in his voice chilled me. I wondered how he could have loved her so much—and still have killed her.
Albion’s voice was without feeling as he said, “Be quiet, Matt. You’re drunk.” Then he turned to me. “I wonder . . . Ruth, if I had come to you and told you Matthew was ready to confess, but that I needed a witness—would you have come back with me?”

“Why would you have come to me? Sergeant McKee or Stephen—”

“Of course. It would’ve been a mistake to go to you. Besides I could hardly be sure of finding you alone, could I?” I was unable to follow his meaning. My confusion must have shown on my face because he changed the subject. “I suppose the good Sergeant and Stephen know where you are?”

I smiled more to relieve my own nervous tension than to be pleasant. “Oh, yes. The Sergeant asked me not to leave Chinois without saying where I was going.”

“Good.” Albion seemed to be considering something. It was at least a minute before he spoke again. “I couldn’t do without you now.” His face lit with a pleasure I found disquieting. What had he to be pleased about?

“I tried to tell you,” Matt’s drunken voice said. “You stayed. Now he’ll kill you.”

I turned to stare at him. His slack, liquor-coarsened face was despairing. Nausea clogged my throat. I put a hand on the table for support.

Albion laughed. The dry narrow sound jabbed at me like a dagger. “Don’t pay any attention to him, Ruth. I’ve no intention of killing you, now.” He paused and a look of concern flickered in his eyes. “I hope your head doesn’t hurt too badly.”

“You hit me?”

Albion smiled agreement. “If McGurney hadn’t been following you, I daresay we wouldn’t be having this opportunity visit. I’ve no idea why he was after you, but he interrupted me.”

“So you had to kill him.” My voice spoke automatically. My mind was numb, unable to comprehend the situation.

“I tried. Did I succeed? I wasn’t sure.” Albion’s interest was polite.

“He may live.” I fought to keep myself from going into a blind panic as I began to understand.
Albion sighed. "I was afraid of that. I underestimated McGurney. I was sure he believed what I'd told him about Lily and Stephen. It didn't occur to me until I saw him watching me there in the woods that there was some intelligence under his fanaticism. If I hadn't panicked after I hit him, of course, it wouldn't have mattered. Pity."

He was no more than politely interested in what he was saying. His eyes flicked from Matt to me watchfully, but he showed no anxiety.

"You're mad," I said.

He pulled a chair away from the table and straddled it. From the location he chose he could keep Matt, the service door, and me under observation. The revolver hung heavily from his hand.

My words amused him. "If I come to trial I imagine I shall plead insanity. But, you know, I don't believe I'm really crazy. I don't think what I've done is morally right. Until now, killing has given me no pleasure. But you see, Ruth, I had to make a choice between what I wanted and what other people were willing to let me have. Put like that—well, I found murder necessary."

Matt was working his way across the floor to the chair he tipped over earlier. Albion watched him. "You're in no condition to make gallant gestures, Matt. Just pick up the chair and sit in it. I'd rather not shoot you."

I pulled the chair upright. Then I helped Matt into it. He slumped over the table. I poured him a cup of coffee and shoved it at him but he ignored it. The futility of my gesture brought a smile to Albion's lips.

"If you're going to shoot us, why don't you get it over with?" I demanded.

"I told you," his voice was patient, "that I wasn't going to kill you, Ruth. I'm not going to kill Matt either. He's my brother and I'm fond of him."

"Then what's the point of . . ."

Albion ignored me. "On the other hand, if either of you try to interfere with me, I'll shoot you both." He studied me for some time. "I see you don't understand. Let me try to explain. You're my bait, Ruth, so I can't let you go. Matt is sobering up. The initial shock of his discovering my guilt
has worn off. He wouldn't hesitate to go to the Mounties and I'm not ready for them yet." His glance said that everything should be clear to me now.

It wasn't. "Bait for what?"

"Stephen." The vicious hunger in the smile that accompanied his single word was chilling.

"What makes you think—"

He shook his head at me. "My dear Ruth, it's obvious to anyone willing to see, that Stephen would go through hell to get to you if he had to. He won't hesitate to come to Kelleher Castle."

"And when he comes, you intend to kill him."

"Of course," Albion told me with casual interest. "Stephen won't be in the least bit suspicious. When your return is delayed, he may even think poor Matt is in a bad way. He'll come running with help. And he'll come alone, I think. The RCMP should be busy enough searching for me and the Pride without bothering to send anyone after you." He stopped and pleased confidence suffused his face. "As a matter of fact, I doubt very much that Stephen has ever suspected me of killing Lily. Putting myself in his place—especially since he found McGumey standing over you after I'd struck you—I'd say he'd think McGumey had done it himself."

"But why?" Desperation flawed my voice.

"Why would Stephen think McGumey—"

"No," I shouted. "Why Stephen?"

For the fraction of a second that intangible weakness I had seen on his face before showed itself. "Because I hate him."

"But—"

Albion talked through my objection. "I don't think you'd understand, Ruth. You couldn't unless you know what hate really is. In its purest form it can fill life with as much satisfaction as love. For eight years I've lived with it. After I've killed Stephen, savored the last joy hate can give me, I shall be quit of it. I think I shall miss it."

He fell silent to brood over his passion and I had a wild idea that I might be able to slip away unnoticed. I slid toward the edge of my chair.
“No!” his voice cracked through the smothering stillness in the kitchen. “I’ll kill you if I have to.” I saw the gun in his hand move. I stayed where I was.

“What has Stephen done to you that—”

The knife edge of Albion’s laughter slashed at me. “If I could tell you, Ruth...” He ran his free hand along the back of his chair. “I’ve never tried to put it into words before. Perhaps... We may have to wait quite awhile for Stephen. I suppose that telling you would pass the time.” He stopped talking and watched Matt and me with wary eyes.

“You swine!” Matt spat the word at him. Pain flickered in Albion’s eyes. His mouth tightened. He glanced away from Matt. When he raised his eyes again they rested on me.

“When does hate start, I wonder,” Albion pondered. “Certainly I didn’t hate the lonely Stephen who came from China. At first I didn’t even envy him. I enjoyed introducing him to his new country. I think we were friends.” His eyes probed mine. “It’s quite true. Stephen and I were friends.”

“I believe you,” I said.

Derision lit his pale blue eyes. “You still hope you may be humoring a madman, don’t you, Ruth?”

I looked away from him.

“Thank you. It’s easier to talk without your tragic eyes on me. I know how it feels to lose the person one loves, Ruth. Believe me, I know.” Bitterness flowed into his voice.

“But I’ll come to that. Everything in its proper place. As I said, Stephen and I were friends. But as time passed, our relationship changed. Stephen began to lead. He got his Canadian legs easily and they carried him tall. I began to envy him. I could see that, beside Stephen’s wealth, mine was no greater than Miss Danby’s was in shadow of the Kellehers’. I was ashamed of my envy. I drew Stephen closer to me, to my family to make up for it. And then I met Maude. I found out what love was. It was everything the poets have ever said—and it was hell. Because there wasn’t much to Maude, I never had any illusions about her. I knew the Kelleher money attracted her more than the Kelleher name. I knew my position mattered more to her than the person I was.” Scars of old disillusion marred his good looking face.
"But I didn't care, Ruth. I was willing to take her on any terms. I never got the chance. I introduced her to Stephen. He bid higher than I." Albion fell silent; his eyes brooded over the past. "I could have stood their marriage if there had been love on either side. I didn't ask for much, just for one of them to be in love. Then I might have had the consolation of making the noble, sacrificial gesture of giving up Maude. But they didn't leave me that. They were frank. Stephen admitted he was buying a hostess with the right background, a female convenience. As for Maude . . . If someone could have bid higher than Stephen, she'd have sold out. A pearl of price, Maude."

Albion paused and rubbed his free hand across his eyes before he went on. "I tried to hate Maude—instead I went on loving her like a dog loves a brutal master. But I was free to hate Stephen. If I could have told him what I felt . . . but I couldn't. Just about that time my father's investments began to go to hell. We needed Stephen's help. I put my pride away, pushed down my hatred and begged from him. Oh, I told myself I was doing it for my father, for the Castle. And each time I asked something of Stephen and each time he gave it, I hated him more. There were nights I lay awake pressing hatred to my mind like I might have pressed a woman to my body. I learned to take pleasure from my new passion."

His voice died. I thought he had stopped trying to explain. I glanced at him—and shuddered. He was savoring his hate, gloating over it. He caught my eyes and held them with his own feverish gaze. "Oh, there's much more, Ruth. Once when I went to Stephen, desperately in need of his help, he wasn't there. I begged from Maude. Unlike Stephen, she had no generosity. She turned me down—and laughed. I had to have the money. I couldn't go to anyone else. It was bad enough for Stephen to know how serious the financial crisis of the Kellehers was, without anyone else. . . . So I stole from Stephen. I was careful to take a picture I thought I could find a buyer for, and I imagined I'd been clever.

"The next day Maude asked me to go sailing with her. Naturally, I thought she'd decided to give me the money I'd asked for after all. It was a beautiful day for sailing.
We went out beyond Bowen Island, out and out. Maude was rather quiet. When she did speak, it wasn’t about money or anything important. I was happy that day. Wasn’t I with Maude? Didn’t I love her? In her own good time, she’d tell me the money was mine. Just as we turned back toward Vancouver, Maude told me, quite casually, that she could prove I’d stolen a picture from Stephen, that if I didn’t return it immediately she intended to go to the police. I thought at first she was joking. She wasn’t. She even said she might go to the police whether I returned the picture or not. Then she told me she was through with me, that my devotion was tiresome and, in any case, it could jeopardize her position as Stephen’s wife. I did the only thing I could. I tried to destroy us both. I swamped the boat. I remember that Maude and I struggled together in the water. She tried to get back to the capsized boat. I managed to keep her away from it. We flailed at each other with our arms and legs in the icy water, and then she was gone. I intended to die with her. But I couldn’t. I fought for my life and clung to the boat till help came. Her body was found on Bowen Island two days later."

The past clouded his eyes with pain. “At first I thought I couldn’t stand it, the knowledge that I’d killed her. Instead I found a kind of happiness... Her life had never belonged to me. Her death was mine without question. I amused myself with the sympathy lavished on me for being involved in such a tragic ‘accident.’ I got satisfaction from the complete lack of suspicion everyone seemed to feel. All that changed the first time Stephen confronted me after Maude’s death. He made me admit I was a thief. His eyes let me see he knew I was a murderer. And every time I saw him, I had to meet that knowledge in his eyes. He knew. *He knew!*” Albion’s clenched left hand struck the back of his chair.

“And I couldn’t avoid him. The family was more and more dependent on him until, finally, my father’s investments failed altogether. Stephen offered to finance making the Castle into a resort. Father accepted.”

“You mean it wasn’t as you said that night?” Matt asked with startling sobriety.

Albion’s dry, narrow laugh was answer enough. Matt
picked up the cup of cold coffee from in front of him and threw it. It flashed past Albion’s head and crashed against the wall. The liquid dripped down the discolored enamel of the kitchen’s surface like drying blood. Albion’s body sagged as though the cup had hit him, but his eyes remained wary and the gun in his hand steady.

After a lengthy pause, he spoke again, “But before the plan was realized, my father died. I waited for Stephen to withdraw his offer. Instead, he told me he’d go ahead—for Matt, for what our family had meant to him when he’d come from China. But I could still see the knowledge in his eyes and I couldn’t stand it. I couldn’t take anything more from him, not even when I knew Matthew would be driven away from me.”

Albion permitted himself the thinnest sliver of smile. “There was something else in Stephen’s eyes too—hate. But I don’t think Stephen ever found any pleasure in it. You see he could never prove his hate was justified. He could know Maude and I were both good sailors, that the day she died was ideal sailing weather, that there was no reason for an accident. But he couldn’t prove an accident hadn’t actually happened. Oh, he was morally certain, but legally . . .” Albion laughed again. “I didn’t need justification. It was enough for me that hate existed.”

“You built the Pride to spite Stephen,” Matt accused.

Albion shrugged. “Why did I build the Pride—I don’t know.” His eyes touched Matt’s with a questioning glance. “Do you really think I believed I could beat the fishermen in Halibut Bay at their own game?” He appeared to be considering his own motives. “Perhaps I wanted to destroy my heritage—even myself. I destroyed nothing but other people’s respect for me, yours especially, Matt. And after the Pride was built there was nothing for me to do but sit here watching her ride at anchor while Matt kept up payments on the mortgage—out of the salary Stephen paid him.”

The distant sound of an outboard motor entered the kitchen. Albion’s eyes began to glitter with anticipation.

“Albion,” I pleaded, “for God’s sake . . .”

His eyes met mine with disdain. “Like Matt the other night, it’s not for God you’re asking, Ruth, but for Stephen.
Don't waste my time. Let me finish my story—it's all I have to leave behind. That and the Pride.” He paused. When he spoke again he descended to self-conscious drama. “I think there's a touch of irony in her present moorage. Albion Kelleher’s Pride anchored at Deadman Reef.” He seemed to want appreciation of his wit from Matt and me. He didn't get it and his effort to smile froze into ugliness on his lips.

The sound of the outboard's approach grew. I made one more attempt to reason with him. “Albion, what good will it do you—”

“Good! I'm not expecting good. I'm expecting revenge. I'm expecting payment for the empty, lonely days I spent here at the Castle. The days that drove me to Lily McGurney so I'd have something in my life. And to get that I had to promise I'd marry her and take her to Vancouver.” His voice was hard and bitter.

Matt leaned forward and stared at his brother. “If the Mounties don't get you, I will.”

Before the sound of the approaching boat had entered the kitchen, I think Matt's words might have had some effect on Albion. Now he shrugged them away. It was apparent he no longer cared about anything but killing Stephen. His voice went on mechanistically, “Even Lily wouldn't have mattered if I hadn't got that charter. At the time it seemed so easy—”

“But the offer wasn't Stephen's,” I stated.

“No, it wasn't Stephen's,” Albion agreed easily. “I told you I knew I could sell the picture I stole from him. It was the prospective buyer who made me this new proposition. It was so simple. I met the freighter, took the package, brought it to the Castle, held it until any danger of discovery was past and then took it to the buyer in Calgary. There wouldn't be anything to suggest I had any connection with the theft at all. In return, the Castle would be mine again.” Albion became thoughtful. “And everything went according to plan, up until the time Lily came on deck. She'd stowed away before I left Halibut Bay. I don't suppose one can blame her. McGurney beat her again. But she'd seen everything and understood just enough of what she'd seen
to know she had the power to make me do what I'd promised—marry her. Only I couldn't, I couldn't . . ."

"Because she wasn't 'good' enough for you, I suppose," Matt shouted. "You dirty, rotten murderer!"

"Yes—to all that," Albion told Matt without inflection.

The nearing crescendo of the outboard motor drove me to action. I slid my hand across the table toward the lamp.

"I wouldn't, Ruth," Albion said. The gun in his hand pointed at me.

I folded my hands in front of me. I was shaking. Matt slipped his hand over mine. It didn't make me feel better, but I think it helped him.

Albion's empty, uninflected voice continued his story, "I hit her with the boat hook. I kept on hitting her. And yet, you know, I was surprised when I discovered she was dead. I couldn't leave her on board. I didn't dare dump her so close to Coronet Island. I couldn't risk having it known she'd—died—on a boat. I think I got panicky or I never would've been idiotic enough to leave her body where I did and let Miss Danby see the Pride. It was easy to cruise for the rest of the night despite the storm and wait until late next day to return. I figured everyone would think my charter had absorbed my time. And it did look like I was going to get away with it, you know. I even thought I'd accidentally done the right thing with Lily's body because it seemed to me the Mounties were only interested in Stephen and his butler."

He sighed and glanced at me with regret in his eyes. "You made my hate betray me, Ruth. I tried to take too much revenge on Stephen. You see, when I saw you with Matt this afternoon it occurred to me that if I handled you just right I might be able to turn you against Stephen. I'd be able to rob him of the first woman he'd begun to love as he'd robbed me. I failed. You were willing to go to the police about the picture. I tried to stop you. I failed again. I even failed with McGurney." Brooding dissatisfaction flooded over his face.

Unexpectedly, a smile twisted at his lips. "But perhaps I did get a little of my own back. If you told Stephen I said Maude's death was suicide, I hurt him all right. I don't
think he ever found that ‘convenient’ marriage of his very happy. He must’ve wondered if Maude discovered as much bitterness in the bargain as he had. Suicide was a possibility he’d have to consider—and one he’d think he was responsible for. Did you tell him, Ruth?"

I ignored his question. The sound of the outboard motor swelled in the silence. Then it died.

"Albion, believe me, there won’t be any satisfaction—” my lips were stiff around the words.

His eyes tore at my face. All the agony he imagined, all the agony he’d really suffered distorted his face. “Do you think I could afford to believe that now?” he demanded.

“Oh God,” Matt groaned.

My eyes clung to Albion’s face, at once repelled and fascinated by the eagerness on it. He could hardly wait for the last death he’d cause.


I couldn’t stand it. “He’s got a gun,” I shouted. “Stay away.”

The dagger of Albion’s laughter stabbed into the silence. “You must come in, Stephen. If you don’t, I’ll shoot Ruth. And her death would hurt you more than a bullet in your own head, wouldn’t it?”

Footsteps coming steadily toward the kitchen were reply enough. My eyes darted around the kitchen frantically. The stealthy turn of the back door knob held them for one second. I peered into the gloom beyond the door’s glass window. I thought I saw Sergeant McKee. I didn’t hesitate. I slipped my hands under the table and held them against it palms up. Matt saw and followed suit.

Albion’s eyes had followed mine to the back door. He leveled his gun at me, stood up and moved to the wall. “Call off your dogs, Stephen. Ruth will die if you don’t.”

One of the Mounties brought the butt of his gun down against the glass of the window pane.

As the glass tinkled to the floor, Stephen called, “I’m here.”

Albion swung toward the open service door. Stephen stood in front of him. I waited no longer. I flicked a look at
Matt, and we both pushed against the table with all our strength. It crashed over toward Albion. The kerosene lamp hung in the air for an instant, then broke at his feet. Fingers of flame began to leap up along the spilled kerosene. Stephen’s arms ripped me from my chair and flung me to the floor. He thrust his body over mine.

The Mounties had the door opened. They poured into the room. Albion retreated before the spreading fire. He put his hand to his eyes to shield them as he searched for Stephen. The gun was steady in his hand.

The flames were between Albion and the advancing Mounties. A rush of cold air from outside tore over the fire on the kitchen floor. The rooms behind Albion acted as a flue. He hadn’t quite reached the doorway when the first finger of flame touched him. An animal scream tore out of his throat. He turned to run. Fire enveloped him like a cape; it billowed around him as he ran. I fainted.

XVI

Why my mind should choose to forget what happened after the worst was over, I don’t know.

The next thing I remember was waking in my bedroom at Chinois to another sun-dappled June day. The terror of the night before had the clarity and distance of something seen through the wrong end of binoculars. It was there, but so far away it had no reality. It kept its distance as I ate the light breakfast Mei Ling carried to my room. By the time I had dressed, it had drifted even further away.

When Sergeant McKee sent word he wished to see me in the morning room, I believed I had it completely under control. Halfway down the main staircase I stopped dead. My hand clutched the bannister. Fear of the future, not the
past, shook me from head to toe. The horror was over. Whatever lay between Stephen and me remained. And I had no strength to face it. None at all. I grabbed at the bannister with my other hand.

I don’t know how long I stood there. Desperation turned my mind to the past. Every fear from the night before was engraved on my mind with deliberate brutality. Violent memory managed to push my dread of seeing Stephen far enough into my mind that I was able to make my way to Sergeant McKee.

He took me over my story several times with a thoroughness that was both efficient and gentle. Then he asked me to wait while my statement was typed. Constable Lane’s steady touch on the typewriter clicked evenly through the silence between us. And every click brought my inevitable interview with Stephen that much closer. I tried not to think about it.

McKee’s voice destroyed my introspection. “There are some things you’d better know, Miss Carson. First, there was no chance of saving Albion Kelleher after he ran. Nor were we able to save the Castle, though we did manage to keep the fire from spreading.”

“I couldn’t think of anything else. . . .” My shoulders bent under the knowledge that if it hadn’t been for me there would have been no fire.

“You did what you had to,” McKee told me with neither pity nor blame in his voice. He seemed to regard my actions as an unpleasant duty unavoidably done. I hoped I’d be able to look at it that way some time.

“If you’d waited just fifteen minutes to get that hunch of yours, Miss Carson, or perhaps if you’d told me about it before you acted, you’d have been spared a great deal. As soon as we knew the Pride had vanished, we started an air search for her. One of our helicopters located her minutes after you left Chinois. The pilot was able to land and board her. Albion Kelleher had managed to obliterate all marks of the actual murder. It wasn’t until this morning that our laboratory technicians were able to turn up traces of human blood on her deck, but he hadn’t bothered to search the boat. Our man had no trouble finding the few pitiful belongings
Lily took on board with her and put away in one of the lockers. From that moment we wanted Albion Kelleher very badly."

"But why did you think he'd go back to the Castle?" I asked.

"We didn’t know, of course. But it was a place to start. Mr. Bonner said the only way Albion could’ve got off Deadman Reef was in his dinghy which only had a three horse kicker. Our planes couldn’t spot the craft anywhere in the Strait. It stood to reason he couldn’t have gone far. Coronet Island is closer to Deadman Reef than any place else, so we decided to try the Castle first.”

"I see." I hesitated and then demanded, "Why on Earth did you let Stephen come?"

"Let!" McKee snorted. "Short of locking him up, we’d no way of stopping him. I hope he doesn’t give you as much trouble as he gave us."

I avoided McKee’s eyes and my own thoughts. I tried to hide from the future in a flurry of words. "You didn’t suspect Albion until you found the Pride, then?"

"Suspect, yes. From the moment Mr. Bonner finally con-descended to tell us about Albion’s previous theft and you came up with his tale about the charter, we had strong suspicions. Before that we suspected him no more than we suspected you. After we knew, we were able to put some judicious pressure on the gentleman who arranged the theft in the first place. The gallery guard he bribed had broken down and given police in the States his name. He corrobo-rated Albion’s story and eliminated Mr. Bonner from suspicion of theft. After that, it was obvious there was no sense in the picture’s being here unless Mr. Kelleher had deliberately planted it. We also managed to locate the ship Albion met and members of the crew testified he appeared to be alone. Since Matthew Kelleher has told us that according to his brother, Lily remained hidden until the Pride was well away from the freighter, we could eliminate the accomplice who might have been present.”

"What will happen to Matt? I mean, will he be prose-cuted for carrying the picture to Chinois?"

McKee shrugged. "The decision to prosecute doesn’t
rest with me. In view of the cooperation Mr. Kelleher gave us both last night and this morning, I shall recommend clemency. But that's all I can do.”

“I see.” I sighed. “I wonder what he’ll do now.”

“He said something about going to Australia. He’ll have the money from the sale of the Pride. It's understandable he wouldn’t want to stay here.”

Silence fell between us. The click of the typewriter knocked against it rhythmically. “Is there any news about Mr. McGurney?” I asked McKee.

“His condition is still critical. But the hospital did admit there'd been a small improvement.”

“I hope he'll be all right.”

“If he does recover,” McKee said thoughtfully, “I don’t imagine he’ll come back to Coronet Island. God knows there’s nothing left here for him.”

The click of the typewriter stopped. Constable Lane pulled out the last copy. The sound was startling. The Constable brought my statement to McKee. He handed it across the table to me. “If you'll read this, Miss Carson, and then sign it if you find it correct.”

I lingered over each word I'd dictated. On paper, in black and white, my behavior sounded more idiotic than brave. The statement was correct and complete. There was no use in procrastinating. I signed it.

McKee took the papers from me. “Thank you, Miss Carson. That’s all. You may go.”

I took my time in getting up. Once I left McKee, I'd have to face Stephen.

“By the way,” McKee told me, “Mr. Bonner said you would find him in the drawing room. I believe he wants to talk to you.”

“Thank you,” I muttered. There was no use in trying to avoid the inevitable, I told myself as I loitered through the dining room. Sooner or later I'd have to see Stephen. Why try to put it off? I found myself lingering in the hall despite my injunctions to myself. I tried to force myself through the archway into the drawing room. Stephen's voice stopped me. He was standing with his back to the
arch addressing someone I couldn't see. His voice was exasperated. "Ruth and I do not need a chaperone."

"That is only your opinion, Stephen," Miss Danby's papery voice was tart. "Ruth's parents—"


"Ah, you are aware of that," Miss Danby's voice pounced on him. "I should think that alone would make you consider her position with some care. Tsiang tells me you breakfasted with her yesterday morning, in her suite." There was a silence during which I could almost visualize the critical shake of Miss Danby's head. "I cannot understand what young people think of nowadays."

Curiosity drove me into the room. Miss Danby was perched stiffly on a chair facing Stephen. Every wrinkle in her face was bristling disapproval.

I felt almost sorry for Stephen. "It was all right about the breakfast, Miss Danby," I said, trying to reassure her.

That was a mistake. Her shrewd eyes peered at me. "You and Stephen and I may know that. What I am concerned about is how it looked to others."

The only acknowledgment Stephen made of my presence was the slightest inclination of his head. He devoted his attention to Miss Danby. "No one," Stephen assured her with weary amusement, "goes about looking into the second story windows of Chinois."

"I wasn't referring to peeping Toms, Stephen. Don't be deliberately obtuse. Would you venture to guess how your breakfasting with Ruth looked to the Mounties?"

Stephen flushed. My face felt warm.

Miss Danby's chirp of laughter contained reproof. "I thought as much. Now, Stephen," she said, earnestness giving her a look of owlish wisdom.

"Yes?" Amusement lingered in his voice.

Impatience touched her face. She glanced from Stephen to me as though she hoped I might be more cooperative than he. She leaned forward to study me better. "You look peaked this morning, my dear. Stephen must take better care of you." She frowned at him with displeasure.

Stephen ignored her. "You were going to say—"

"Indeed I was, Stephen. I want you to talk with Ruth.
I’m sorry to rush you, but there are still a number of journalists about. The sooner you make a statement, the sooner they will go away.” She considered us briefly. The stubborn set of Stephen’s face when she mentioned journalists seemed to irritate her. “You must realize you have to tell them something. If you don’t, you’ll find yourselves at the mercy of their active imaginations.” She paid no more attention to him. Instead she glanced at the cloisonne lapel watch with which she’d fastened her paisley shawl. “I shall give you fifteen minutes to reach a decision.”

She rustled to her feet and came toward the archway. As she passed me, she said, “I shall see you’re not disturbed.”

Stephen watched her stately exit with a mixture of appreciation and amusement. “How much did you overhear?” he asked me.

“Enough to understand that Miss Danby thinks we need a chaperone.” I kept my voice as even as possible. I didn’t move away from the arch.

“You missed the best part, then,” Stephen told me. “Cigarette?”

If I accepted I would have to go to him. I fought a brief battle with myself and decided that I might as well do it sooner as later. He had the cigarette lit for me when I reached him. I took it, careful not to touch his hand as I did so.

Stephen lit another for himself. For an instant, the transient vulnerability I had noticed on his face seemed to return. I expected him to touch me. Instead he said, “Miss Danby believes I’ve compromised your reputation beyond repair. She informs me the only honorable course of action I have is to marry you. If I don’t do so immediately, the alternative is a formal courtship under Miss Danby’s eye.” Stephen paused and gave me a warm, challenging glance. “Well, which do you choose, Ruth? I’ll leave it up to you.”

“Don’t be a fool,” I snapped. “Miss Danby or no Miss Danby, what’s going to happen is quite clear.” I stalked over to the windows and stared blindly out at the view. I struggled for composure. “But it needn’t happen. We could let well enough alone. I was going to leave—the day I found Lily’s body. It’s still the wise thing for me to do—for you to
let me do. We've had no chance to be sensible. So much happened so quickly there wasn't time for sense. Now there is!"

"Is there, Ruth?" Stephen demanded. I didn't answer him. I wanted to salvage something from the emotional chaos Stephen had made of my life, but I knew I wasn't strong enough to overcome my attraction to him unless he let me.

He joined me at the window, leaning against the frame opposite me with negligent ease. The arrogant presumption of his attitude should have irritated me. Instead, I knew I found it attractive. I glanced away from him. "Sense!" Stephen's voice flung the word at me with disdain. "I've had enough of sense to last a lifetime. I've made a mess of my life and maybe caused Maude's death because of sense! I married her because it was sensible. While the marriage lasted, it was empty—fraudulent. We robbed each other of any happiness we might have had. Her death was no release. I was morally certain it couldn't have been an accident. I kept telling myself Albion had killed her—and I hated him. But I was never sure. Never! There was always that other alternative—suicide. I knew how desperate the bargain we'd struck made me at times. I'd no right to ask Maude for my freedom—but there were several times I thought of taking it, and my life. How could I be sure she hadn't felt the same way? When you repeated what Albion had told you about her death, I felt as though . . . as though she'd killed me." His voice fell silent.

I searched my mind for words. There were none. I heard Stephen shift his position against the window frame, but I couldn't look at him. "The only hope I had—Well, I knew Maude hadn't asked me for a divorce. I couldn't think why she'd lie to Albion. I hoped he had lied to you."

"Albion told me that story to hurt you, Stephen. He said so." My voice sounded lost and far away in my own ears. "Matt told me," Stephen's voice was strained. "Well, I've tried to explain what sense meant to me in the past. I don't want anything more to do with it."

"I can understand that," I told him choosing my words with care, "but that was in the past. It's over, done, finished—"
"And I don't want anything to do with it in the future either," Stephen affirmed. "Until I saw you Wednesday night, the only thing I wanted out of life was resolution of the doubt inside me and vengeance for my hatred. From the moment I saw you, I wanted something else. It was almost as though I had recaptured that summer you and I spent together. But it was different. And whatever it was, I wanted it until the undefined desire for it obliterated my doubt and hate. But the last three years did more to me than I knew. They brought me to the verge of murder. If it hadn't been for you, I'd have killed Albion that night. More than that, those years left me with no guard against unexpected passion. And they deprived me of the right of my desire. Until I knew how Maude had died, I had no right to speak to you, to touch you. But I couldn't help myself. So I caused you pain because I'd no right to offer you pleasure." He stopped speaking and minutes slipped by us in silence.

"Ruth, look at me." I obeyed with hesitation. The soft, yielding green of his eyes shook my composure. "I've no intention of being sensible again. My acquaintance with the folly of wisdom has been long enough." His eyes challenged me to deprive him of his desire.

"Then you won't let me go, even if I want to?"

He considered my question with superficial gravity, but I didn't miss the spark of amusement that sprang to life in the depths of his eyes. "Not even if you want to—which you don't."

I fought against the truth of what he said. I fought against my own desire. I tried to turn myself from a course which would bring no happiness to either of us. "You're too sure of yourself," I told him, my voice not quite steady.

"Am I? You've put up with my bullying with very little objection up to now." His voice assumed a tone of gentle mockery, "Right now you're probably nerving yourself to say 'no' when I ask you to become my mistress—and you're miserable because you're afraid you'll say 'yes.'"

I tried to show resentment and failed. I tried to summon up enough courage to defy him.

"Have I summed your situation up correctly?" I nodded. "I thought so," he remarked with satisfaction. "Well, you
can relax. I've no intention of asking you to be my mistress."

I stared at him, making no attempt to hide my astonishment.

His eyes grew softer. "Ever have a love affair, Ruth?"

Blood swam hotly into my face. "You don't need to answer. It's none of my business." His eyes became reflective. "The affairs I've had were miserable battles of will. They ended by being uncomfortable, insecure and unsatisfactory. Besides which they were a hell of a lot more trouble than they were worth. I've no intention of going through one with you, Ruth."

"No one asked you to," I told him with dignity. "But it's what you expected of me," Stephen reminded me, his voice cool. "It's all you think me emotionally capable of."

I took refuge in the view outside the window. "I don't understand," I said as he made no effort to break the silence between us. "You say you won't let me go, yet you don't intend to—to—"

"Take advantage of you?" he suggested.

I let my silence answer him. He reached over and took the cigarette from my fingers. He put it with his in an ashtray.

"I told you to choose between Miss Danby's alternatives. You can marry me now. Or you can stay here, catalogue my library as you were hired to do, and undergo a formal courtship chaperoned by Miss Danby."

I turned on him. "You can do what you want, but don't make fun of me! You're right when you say you've bullied me. You have. And I've let you. I've even—enjoyed it." I made no effort to control the anger inside me. "But don't joke about marrying. . . ."

"I'm not." Amusement had deserted his eyes. That burning presence was escaping from his eyes and reaching toward me again. It held me silent and still.

"Ruth, I can name the objections better than you. We hardly know one another. We've been thrown together under the worst possible circumstances." He took a step toward me. "It's probably a damn fool thing to do. But I want you, Ruth—I love you and I need you." He reached
out to me. The world our kiss made was more than enough for me.

“You’ve had twenty min—” Miss Danby’s voice stopped. “I do hope you plan to have the wedding soon,” she observed.

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