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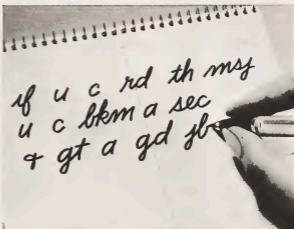
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GOTHIC TALES OF LOVE



THREE GRIPPING BOOK-LENGTH THRILLERS

OUT OF THE DARK, by Norah Lofts12

The sad memories of her half-brother's death were behind her. Then, two more shocking tragedies occurred, to make Charlotte wonder—had she lost her sanity? Had she been responsible?

CALDERWOOD, by Monica Heath36

Camilla always knew that a dark mystery surrounded her mother's death. And she knew that one day she would return to Calderwood, to find out who had killed her—even at the risk of her own life!

LOVE IN THE SHADOWS, by Angela Colby54

From the moment they met, Diane knew Tom was the only man she could ever love. But her sick grandmother hated him violently, to a point where she tried to destroy them both. Why, why?



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STAN LEE, Publisher

JEAN RAMER, Editorial Director

IRWIN LINKER, Art Director

MARCIA GLOSTER, Art Editor

LARRY GRABER, Production Director

BERNIE SCHAFTMAN, Assistant Production Director

TOM MONTEMARANO, Circulation Director

MILT SCHIFFMAN, Vice Pres., Purchasing

If You Can Lick a Stamp - You Can Lick Your Weight Problem!

Now, if you don't lose weight, you can't lose money.

Because Northwestern Pharmaceuticals will not deposit your check or money order for four weeks after your order is mailed. That'll give you plenty of time to receive it, try it—and see for yourself that it really works for you.

If—for any reason—you're not thrilled with the results, all you have to do is return the unused portion within the four weeks. Your uncashed check or money order will be sent to you by return mail!

Here's why Northwestern dares to make this unusual guarantee:

In the first place, it's a proven product. Northwestern's Weight-Loss Plan has been on the market for over 11 years. Hundreds of thousands have tried it—and less than 2% have asked for their money back! And if you have any questions about its safety or potency, Northwestern urges you to check with your doctor.

It's a different product. Northwestern's Weight-Loss Plan is different—and effective—in all these ways:

First—It's your plan... your age, your height, your weight, and how much you want to lose... these things are all taken into account when you select your Plan! The truth is that if you need to lose 50 pounds, you need a different kind of diet than someone who needs to lose 10. And you get it.

Second—You choose the foods you like best. Most diets fail because they're so limited or tasteless that you start cheating. Then you get discouraged and give up—or go on a real food binge. Northwestern expects you to cheat. Their plan encourages you to treat yourself to satisfying amounts of such foods as pie with cream topping, pastries, ice cream sundaes, cheesecake, waffles with maple syrup, nutty brownies, mashed potatoes and gravy, creamy salad dressings, milkshakes, creamed vegetables, chili con carne, chow mein, beef stroganoff, and fried chicken!

Northwestern's Plan not only "allows" these diet-breaks—they actually include the special, delicious recipes!

Third—Your diet is automatically "adjusted"... as your weight goes down. You don't follow a 500-calorie diet or a 1000-calorie diet. In fact, you don't count calories at all! But as you reach your weight goals, you "automatically" eat less—and keep on losing weight.

Fourth—You'll lose... without starving! Follow the Plan and you don't ever have to leave the table feeling hungry! You can even eat out or go on a picnic—and no one will guess that you're "dieting!"

Fifth—It's inexpensive! You get everything you need to know and everything you need to take for 60 days. Tablets that supplement food and safeguard your health, but play no role in weight loss, are included at no extra cost. And the full price is just \$5.50—less than a dime a day!

How much weight you lose and how fast you lose it obviously depends on you, but here are some excerpts from unsolicited, unusual letters. They were mailed to Northwestern with reorders:

Teenager lost 14 pounds

"I am sixteen years old and have been on the diet for two weeks, and have lost fourteen pounds."

'Lost 18 pounds'

"Without the fear of getting off my diet or nervous tension, I have lost 18 pounds. Thanks to you, I look human again."

Lost 13 pounds in 3 weeks

"Your diet plan is wonderful. Have lost 13 pounds in 3 weeks."

'Wonderful list of foods'

"I have enjoyed being on your diet, and the results have been more than I expected on a diet of this nature, that includes such a wonderful list of foods. I was getting desperate, for I found I could not leave food alone. Now I'm back in my size 9 again."

'You don't get hungry!'

"I started 30 days ago. At that time I weighed 197 pounds. Today I weigh 186 pounds. I feel much better and everyone tells me how much better I look."

"P.S.: Your formula gives you so much to eat that you don't get hungry."

Mother lost 37 pounds

"My mother took them for 6 months and is down to 138 pounds. She weighed 175. I would like to order."

'Down to size 12'

"It has done wonders for me. I was a size 18 last year and am down to size 12 now."

'Painless way to diet'

"The first week I lost weight and didn't realize it until I weighed myself and took my measurements. Thank you for a wonderful and painless way to diet."

Lost 30 pounds in 2 months

"I lost 30 pounds and 2 dress sizes with a 2-month supply. It was out of sheer desperation that I answered your ad in the Chicago Sun-Times. Believe me, I will be eternally grateful."

'Easiest way to lose'

"It is the easiest way I ever lost weight. I have lost 37 pounds."

'Shots and pills couldn't help'

"I am extremely overweight and found that shots and pills could not help me because of my nervousness. I tried your plan, starting September 25th and to this date, October 13th, I have lost 12 pounds. The best thing is I am much happier and more active, with no 'nerves'."

'No ill-feelings, nervousness'

"It has been approximately 2 years since I last took your product. At that time I took it for three months and lost 40 pounds. Never for one minute did I experience any ill-feelings, nervousness or weakness. Having had another addition to the family, I once again need your assistance."

'Weight stayed down'

"I lost 30 pounds in only 12 weeks of following the plan and after four more months I have not gained any of it back. I had tried every other diet in the past 20 years and this is the first time my weight stayed down after losing."

And Northwestern is so sure their Plan will work for you that they won't cash your check 'til you're sure. You can lose weight—can't lose money. Why not fill out and mail the Agreement right now?

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Los Angeles, California 90004

Agreement

Northwestern, Dept. 13-L
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Please rush my complete 60-day Northwestern Weight-Loss Plan! I'm enclosing my check or money order for \$5.50. Do NOT deposit it for 4 weeks AFTER my order is mailed. If, during that time, I send back the unused portion, you'll put my UNCASHED check or money order in the return mail.

(Please print)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

SORRY - NO C.O.D.'s!

For Our Records:

Sex: M F Age _____

Height: _____ ft. _____ in.

Weight now: _____

Weight goal: _____

Gothic Roundtable

Welcome, Gothic Readers!

How nice it is to receive your letters from every part of the country! And though we wish it were possible for all of you to gather around our "Roundtable" in person, those letters do make us feel so much closer to you, and help us a lot in planning our future issues. Of course, it's you gothic readers we want to please, so all suggestions—and criticisms!—are very much appreciated.

Speaking of criticisms, we've already taken one to heart. Ms. L.E., Douglas, Georgia, writes, "I purchased your first issue of *Gothic Tales of Love* and I really enjoyed reading it. It was much more interesting than any of the other love story magazines on the market. I enjoyed all three stories, and couldn't put the magazine down until I had finished reading all of it. But I didn't like the 'to be continued' at the end of the third story."

Well, this honest lady was not alone in her opinion. Though the objection to the serial-type story wasn't overwhelming, there were enough readers voicing this complaint to make us put into effect a new rule: *From now on, no more "to be continued" stories!*

Some readers expressed a reaction of Mrs. C. Pulver, Portal, N. Dakota, who wrote, "One of my favorite writers is Victoria Holt, but I have read almost all of her books, including one of her latest, 'House of a Thousand Lanterns,' and I find her books easy to get hold of, so I would prefer to see other stories." We're inclined to agree (incidentally, thanks, Mrs. Pulver, for all the nice things you said about us). Some writers' books, like those of the celebrated Ms. Holt, are more widely circulated than others. And, as in the case of Ms. Holt, their output may be small—so that chances are that readers are already familiar with everything they've written. On the other hand, some topnotch writers, such as Dorothy Daniels, are so prolific that the most enthusiastic gothic fan could hardly have read *all* of their books!

In general, our aim is to bring you fine stories you haven't read, possibly because they're out of print or hard to find, plus at least one (in this issue there are two) not yet published in book form.

Frankly, we need your help on this. We'd like to hear from more of you about which writers you feel are too heavily circulated to be of interest, which writers, though popular, are hard to find, and any other suggestions you may have on this subject. For instance, Ms. J. S. writes, "Will you be publishing any of the classic novels, i.e., *The Castle of Otranto*?" An interesting idea—and quite possible.

But how do the rest of you "Roundtable" members feel about it? Any suggestions?

Last—but far from least—we must answer all you good people who

inquired about subscriptions. To be quite honest about it, we weren't prepared for this, and if you haven't received an individual reply, it's because we've been swamped. Also—we'll have to make arrangements to handle the subscriptions. So—please be patient. All subscription inquiries will be answered as soon as possible. We were especially touched by the plight of those among our readers who told us they live on remote farms, so their visits to town are rare—and then, they may miss the magazine because it's sold out. We'll try to help you—soon!

We were also touched—as even the most hard-hearted publishers would be—by the warm feeling you gave us when you told us we were filling a real void in your reading pleasure. Said Mrs. W.A. of Plantersville, Ms., "I am 22 years old, and I want to tell you how pleased I was to find a book of Gothic on the magazine rack. It should have been there years ago." Mrs. D.E.D. of Waterloo, Iowa, wrote, "Couldn't wait to write and thank you for a magazine of this type. Only one question—why did you wait so long?"

Now, who could ask for more? To all of you, a great, big "Thank You!" And till next issue—happy reading!

The Editors



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YOUR FUTURE

Love, Money, Personal Relationships, Success—Your Horoscope Tells All

June — July, 1975



ARIES (March 21-April 20): You are unusually susceptible to self-doubt the first week of the month. Try not to let this dissuade you from making a decision thought out previously. Your original choice should prove the most practicable. Put off any romantic course of action until mid-July when it becomes easier to choose between a past love and a present admirer.



TAURUS (April 21-May 20): Though love is making you feverish, you would do better to cool your ardor temporarily and turn your attention to a pressing financial matter. Between the first of the month and early July a business opportunity comes your way. You stand to gain if you act quickly and heed some advice from a trusted friend.



GEMINI (May 21-June 20): The new moon may find you tense. Good news from a surprising source should help your anxiety. Later in the month you thrive. A feeling of extreme well-being inspires optimism and encourages a positive course of action whose benefits you will continue to feel throughout the following year. An up cycle for Gemini.



CANCER (June 21-July 22): Tended by an affectionate new admirer, your badly injured ego begins to heal. Don't be afraid to place your trust in this new relationship. It will prove a source of satisfaction and badly needed emotional sustenance. Try providing some nourishment for your intellect as well. A good book or challenging new project will go a long way toward stimulating a sluggish mind.



LEO (July 23-August 22): You have every reason to feel optimistic, Leo. Some unusually fine weather and the prospect of summer travel helps dispel the inertia that's been plaguing you all spring. Your private economic crunch eases up at the end of July when your labors at the office are rewarded with a hefty boost in salary.

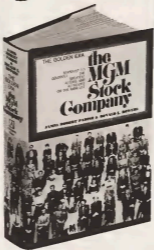


VIRGO (August 23-September 22) Discourage a confrontation with someone you love. Next month would be a better time to air mutual grievances. Your nerves are a little raw. Channel the tension into a favorite creative activity so that your energies are put to constructive use. Avoid people not attuned to your moods.

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— YOUR FUTURE —



LIBRA (September 23-October 22): A rash word spoils a budding friendship. There's no undoing the harm, but try to use the experience to gain insight into your own contribution to the rift. Take advantage of a lull in activity to complete tasks that require minimal concentration. This is a fine time to begin the thorough housecleaning you've been putting off all spring.



SCORPIO (October 23-November 22): A business proposition that seemed promising a few short weeks ago falls through, but don't be discouraged. This is a healthy period for investments, and other opportunities should come your way in the next two to three months. Be sure to act promptly when they do. Be especially solicitous of a child's welfare the first week in July. A carelessly placed object in your home could prove a safety hazard.



SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): The patience you've shown over the year is beginning to reap its rewards. In love, a powerful rival bows out and leaves the field clear for you. Your lover's attention is turned fully on you and the attachment deepens. Your mood takes a definite upswing. Your elevated spirits help concentration, and a problem that has stymied you for some time proves easy to solve now. Any goal you set for yourself is within easy reach during this very productive period.



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19): A romance seems to be making rapid headway this month, but signs of progress are deceptive. You'll find at least one good reason to exercise more caution now than usual. If you have been considering a move, this is the time to make it. An interesting neighbor should help take your mind off the friend you left behind. Your social life will pick up considerably before the summer's up.



AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18): A trip long planned doesn't pan out. Don't give in to feelings of disappointment and gloom. You'll find plenty at home to keep you busy at least through mid-summer. Look for a quickening in the pace of social activities. A round of parties in late June will do a lot to pick up your sagging spirits.



PISCES (February 19-March 20): Guard your health. Your body has taken unnecessary punishment over the course of the year and you need a good deal of pampering. Let family members assume a greater share of the burden at home and try to reserve an hour each day entirely for yourself. You will find that frequent breaks from activity leave you better equipped to handle problems that crop up in the course of the day.

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OUT OF THE DARK

Was she going mad? First, there had been the mysterious murder... then Miss Lamb's disappearance... then the death of the child, Sophie. Could she have been responsible? In desperation, Charlotte turned to the strange, distant man who was her only hope...

By NORAH LOFTS

"Finish your meat, Charlotte," Mrs. Cornwall said. "I've told you before. It sets such a bad example."

"It is rather fat."

"Eat it at once. I will not have good food wasted."

Thomas, fourteen, growing rapidly and perpetually hungry, said, "It need not be wasted, Mamma. I'll eat it for you, Charlie."

Sticking together! They always did!

"That is another thing I have spoken about. Charlotte is far too old to be called by that ridiculous name."

Vincent said, "Charlie! Charlie! I shall call her Charlie!"

One could not suspect a child of four, one's own beloved son, of deliberate defiance; and yet there was a mischievous look on the handsome little face.

The meal proceeded in silence. The twins never had anything to say to other people, and even between themselves had a way of communicating that demanded the minimum of words. Charlotte and Thomas had long ago learned that their stepmother, who had been their governess, had a way of twisting almost any remark into something meriting either correction or rebuke. Silence was best.

The pudding was eaten quickly. The twins were anxious to get back to the sanctuary of their room at the top of the house, and to the fascinating work upon which they were engaged. Thomas was still hungry. Mrs. Cornwall thought with longing of the moment when she could

loosen her corsets and lie on her bed in a shaded room. Vincent had something in mind. Charlotte, with nothing to eat, was putting up that infuriating front of not caring, sitting bolt upright, her hands folded in her lap, so that not even her stepmother could criticise her posture. Vincent carefully scraped up the last spoonful of his pudding, and then, cunningly addressing nobody in particular, said what had so often been said to him:

"Open your mouth and shut your eyes and see what the fairies will send you."

Significantly—a tribute to his charm and his power—they all obeyed, knowing that he would put the spoonful into his own mouth and then laugh merrily. He had tried that trick before. But today he guided the spoon to Charlotte's mouth and, while she half choked, he laughed, and looking at his mother said, "Charlie did have some pudding!"

For the first time Agnes Cornwall understood why, outside the family, Vincent, for all his beauty and charm and youth, was not much liked. Even Cook had said, "I'm sorry, ma'am, I can't have Master Vincent in the kitchen. He's too mischievous." Nellie didn't care for him, nor had any of her predecessors: the man who helped in the yard, and the gardener, said he was a young imp, a nuisance, a little-tattle who invented tales. Even Mrs. Greenfield, the Rector's wife, had once said, not completely admiringly, "Surely, he is very precocious." Agnes had then thought—And why not? The child of love. His



father is clever and I'm pretty smart. Apart from her ordinary mother love, Agnes Cornwall felt, on the fringe of her mind, a certain indebtedness to her son; he had timed his arrival so well—one year after her marriage. . . .

She had come to Stonehridge House when she was twenty-one, a healthy, well-set-up young woman, not exactly pretty, but comely, and lively, very different from Mrs. Cornwall, who was delicate and vague, who had borne the half-witted twins, then two babies who had died in infancy, then Charlotte, normal enough, and finally Thomas, with his peculiar hands. After that she had been advised not to have any more children.

It had not been difficult to assume responsibility for the household; even less difficult to embark upon a violent love affair with Mr. Cornwall. What was difficult was to conduct this love affair, and have full charge of the servants and of the children, while Mrs. Cornwall was around: vague, forgetful, but not unobservant and not uncritical.

Agnes Roach had gone to work stealthily. "But Mrs. Cornwall, I am positive that you told me guests were expected tomorrow, not today. Cook would bear me out on that. If you remember you said tomorrow, because the pheasants would then have hung for a week."

It had been easy for Agnes to lure Mr. Cornwall into a passionate affair. It took a while longer to push his wife over the brink, and replace her . . .

It was a game that could be played with infinite variations. One move had been crucial, and like many such, virtually extempore.

"It is a lovely day," Emily Cornwall said. "The wild daffodils should be out in Tutt Wood. I used always to make a point of walking to see them. That was before Thomas was born."

"They are out. And a sight to see," Agnes Roach said. "Somebody in the village mentioned them to me yesterday and I went to look."

"I think I shall venture," said Mrs. Cornwall, who had hardly set foot off her own premises since Thomas's birth, with all its disabling consequences. "I'll take the children."

Adelaide and Victoria had then reached the age where they resented being called "the children" as much as they were later to resent being called "the girls." They made some excuse. Before leaving, with Charlotte and Thomas, Mrs. Cornwall said, "Miss Roach, I seem to have forgotten. I remember the stile. . . . In order to find the daffodils does one turn left or right where the path forks?"

Miss Roach said, "Left." Almost without thinking.

This was the outing which Charlotte remembered, waking, sleeping, happily along the lane, past the cottages, over the stile. She carried a flat basket in which to bring some wild daffodils home; Mamma loved flowers, and those in the garden were not yet in bloom. Left, and left again; faint flecks of sunlight falling on dead bracken. "Just the colour of your hair, Charlie," Mamma

said. A place in the path where one could only turn right, back into the heart of the wood, darkening now.

Mamma said, "I think we must have taken a wrong turning, my dears. We must try to retrace our steps."

The air turned chilly, the wind moaned in the branches. They were hopelessly lost. And presently a sleety rain began to fall. Mamma said, "I think we should sit down and rest for a little while. Come along, cuddle close." She sat down, her back to the trunk of a stout tree, and opened her cloak, like a bird's wings.

Agnes Roach, back at the house, had not fully understood John Vincent Cornwall's extreme agitation; she did not know that nine hundred pounds a year was involved. . . .

They were found, wet and chilled to the bone, and Thomas had something called pleurisy and almost died. His cough lasted for months.

After that Mrs. Cornwall was deemed obviously unfit to do so much as take her children for a walk; lachrymose, confused, and ineffective now, she relapsed into the invalidism, the incapacity, that had finished her off.

But it had taken a full three years. For Agnes Roach a hard three years: fending off visitors, fending off inquiries. In and around Biddlesford the forgetful, delicate, gentle woman had been astonishingly popular.

Then there had been a little space. Agonising. Will he? Won't he? Like blowing on a dandelion head. In the end he had. Agnes Roach had become Mrs. Cornwall.

And nothing had been the same since.

The stark truth was that Agnes Roach, ruthlessly edging Emily Cornwall into seclusion, into melancholia, near madness and death, had not understood the financial situation at all. Nine hundred pounds a year had vanished overnight.

He came into the kitchen, a tall, handsome man, carrying his fifty-two years very lightly. No grey yet in the thick wavy hair that had once been the dead-bracken colour of Charlotte's, but had darkened a little without losing its glow; no surplus flesh anywhere, and singularly few lines about the grey eyes or the mobile, sensual mouth. He was capable of looking had-tempered, or merely glum, but such expressions were too fleeting to leave any permanent mark. He was selfish enough never to have given a thought to anybody else's troubles, and though he had had troubles of his own, had patches, he called them, a multitude of varying experiences had bred in him the assurance that nothing *finally* ever went wrong for him. He'd been going through a had patch lately—money short and Agnes nagging more than usual. She resented this, her third pregnancy, but she brought it on herself. (There in the bed beside him, saying, "I know you don't love me any more." "I'll show you . . ." It would be another mouth to feed, but it had put Agnes out of action for a bit, thank God.)

In the nursery, one window of which overlooked the

Handsome, spoiled Vincent was their love child. And his half-sister, Charlotte, loved him and understood his antics, unwary of the horror ahead.



yard, Vincent heard his father arrive. Nurse had been cross and horrid; she had washed him very roughly, not let him have jam on his bread and butter at teatime and afterwards made him do that most difficult of all things—sit still and be quiet. Even when he had asked a crafty question in a suitably muted voice—"What are you sewing, Nurse?"—she had not relented. "Nothing to do with you. I told you to keep quiet."

Papa's arrival meant release. Even if he should also be cross and say "Go away," Vincent could go and find Charlie.

At ten o'clock John Cornwall performed his evening routine—entrusted, during his absence, to Cook. He locked and barred the front door, barred the one at the end of the back hall, which gave upon the drying yard, and then went into the kitchen. Tiger's dinner, enhanced this evening by the giblets and neck of the fowl, stood ready in a chipped enamel bowl. He went into the yard and placed the howl by the dog's kennel, at the same time unhooking the chain. Tiger knew better than to go through his "I love you, please love me" with his master. As Mr. Cornwall had explained, "Tiger is not a pet, he is a guard dog. Fussing would just spoil him." While the dog gulped down his dinner Mr. Cornwall walked across the yard, past the carriage house, the stable and the woodshed and barred the tall doors which Catchpole had closed before he went home. He then returned to the kitchen and shot the bolts on the door.

Twenty minutes to eleven. Safe now? He hoped that Agnes had taken some of the drops which Dr. Fletcher had prescribed as a sedative. He hoped she was sound asleep. He would soon know. If she heard him moving about, however softly, in his dressing room, she would call. He'd often thought that the less women deserved attention, the more they demanded it. If she were awake she would want the window opened, or closed, or a drink of water.

Again he was lucky. No voice from the bedroom. He stripped and put on his dressing gown, heavy silk with velvet collar and cuffs, a relic of those carefree bachelor days, and his slippers, matching crimson. Then he stood and listened again and heard a very comforting sound, too slight to be called a snore, but the audible sound of a heavy woman, slightly drugged, fast asleep.

He took the few steps to the door of the nursery.

Rose was waiting for him. Hours earlier she had greeted him with words to which no listener could possibly have taken exception. "I expect you are glad to be home, sir." And he had said, "I am indeed." But their eyes had communicated, saying other things.

As the setting for a love scene the nursery at Stonehridge House was incongruous: walls washed a pale cold blue, a Turkey carpet, once, if gaudy, gay and thick, now worn, faded, stained; curtains with all colour and much substance washed away. But it had advantages; if Amelia woke and whimpered, or Vincent woke and shouted, Rose was there: "Hush now" or "Be quiet!" It served.

Vincent woke. He had a nasty taste in his mouth. Nurse had relented and given him a lump of sugar. She did that occasionally and, although the sugar always tasted all right at the time, when he woke his mouth tasted horrid.

His dream had been horrid, too. Big D, little d, D for dog, and there was Tiger, white teeth, flapping tongue. Nasty taste, nasty dream. But the faint steady glow from the night-light almost re-assured him. (Rose, obeying the order, "Come here," had blown out the two ordinary candles. They had served their purpose.) Vincent could see the rails of his cot; and inside them he was safe from Tiger even if Tiger had somehow got into the nursery. Quite safe, except . . . something was going on in the room, something that linked with his dream. He

reared himself cautiously and saw, in the night-light's faint but adequate light, a huge, hairy animal on top of Nurse, killing her.

He screamed with all the force of his well-developed lungs. Yagh! Yagh! Then something even worse happened. The hairy thing left nurse and came towards the cot, far, far more dangerous than Tiger.

Vincent screamed, and then finding words in this extremity, called, "Charlie! Char . . ." Something large and damp closed over his mouth, his nose, cutting off his cries. And his breath. Bearing him back against the pillow.

In the silence they listened, sweating. The screams had been enough to rouse the whole house. Samuel Vincent Cornwall, thinking quickly, reached for his dressing gown, girded it tightly. The child had had a nightmare and he had come, arriving first. That would be the explanation. He slipped his arm under Vincent and raised him, speaking soothingly, but rousingly, not troubling now to lower his voice. "Vincent! It's all right. Papa is here . . ." Against his hand the shoulder blades felt limp as a dead butterfly's wings.

"He has fainted. Get some water."

Rose had lived on a farm, seen dead fowls, dead pigs. She was a Daughter of Jerusalem and ever since Easter had expected punishment. Here it was.

no time at all. In order to speed the process he had slashed the pig's belly, to let the blood out and prevent it blowing up.

The cot had two blankets, one red, one white. Having kindled one of the ordinary candles from the night-light, Rose took the top blanket, the red one, and laid it on the floor. Then she lifted Vincent out. The cot had a drop side, but some time before Rose had come to Stonebridge House, Vincent had mastered the catch and the drop side was now fixed to an intricate system of knots. He had to be lifted out every morning, lifted in every evening. It did not surprise her that he seemed heavier now; live and dead weight were accepted facts.

She trussed him in the blanket with a sure, callous hand, opened the nursery door, listened. The house was quiet. She took the candle, the bundle and went down the back stairs, which led straight into the kitchen. She went barefoot. Had she had slippers and been accustomed to wearing them, she would probably have put them on. In the kitchen she went to a dresser drawer and took out the implement which Beattie always referred to as "my knife." Rightly, since she had brought it with her. Honed on the stone doorstep, it took a far sharper edge than Mr. Cornwall, using his steel, could produce on the dining-room carving knife; and it had a point, very useful

Vincent woke, and saw the big, hairy creature on top of Nurse. "Yagh! Yagh!" he screamed. Something damp closed over his mouth, stifling him . . .

She said, "He is dead."

The small face was waxen, the lips bluish.

"God! God!" Samuel Vincent said in a terrific voice. He leaned against the corner of the cot and broke into harsh gasping sobs.

Rose said, "Be quiet!"

"You leave this to me," she said. "You do exactly what I say and it'll be all right." He was not listening; he went on sobbing.

"Listen," she said, taking his arm and shaking him fiercely. "It was an accident. You don't want to hang, do you?"

"I deserve to hang."

"Well, I ain't going to let you. You listen to me. Go and get into bed alongside her. You don't know nothing. You hear me? In the morning you behave ordinary, till you're told. Then you can cry all you want. But stop now and go and get into bed."

Never having liked the child was a help to her now.

Most help of all was experience. When a pig sickened and died from some mysterious cause it was best not to say anything about it. And when Matthew Ellis's sty suffered its first casualty he had put the body into the manure heap; a reasonable action, it saved the bother of digging a grave and it contributed something to the heap. Charity Ellis had ventured a little protest: "It'll stink." She meant that, to the permanent and not noticed manure-heap odour, something extra would be added. Her husband had replied that well inside the heap, where there was heat, flesh, bones, hide would be consumed in

for coring apples or taking the deep-seated eyes from a potato. Nobody, not even Nellie, was supposed to use "my knife." Now Rose Ellis, parting the folds of the red blanket, used it.

Outside, in the drying yard, she did not even need a candle. What remained of the brief June darkness was illuminated by a lopsided moon and a multitude of stars. In the East the darkness was already lifting. The drying yard was almost entirely enclosed: a blank, windowless wall of the kitchen to one side of the door, the long disused laundry, with its heavily covehed window, on the other. Then the gable end of the stable and on the opposite side the opening into the kitchen garden, with, just inside, the heap, a flat-topped pyramid. Its main component was the sweepings from the stable, but it also contained grass cuttings from the lawn and kitchen refuse. Tonight the heap, March's idol, wore on its flat crown the empty pea-pods and the strawberry hulls. They glimmered, pale.

Rose, with Beattie's knife, cut into the base of the heap; it cut rather like rich fruit cake. She made a kind of cave, placed the red-blanketed bundle in it, shovelled back with her hands the stuff that had been disturbed and patted the mound into shape. She was not in the least concerned that a healthy, extremely intelligent child had come to an untimely end. It had happened and she had done her best. Nor did it concern her that a child whose end, however untimely, should have been decently observed with full funeral paraphernalia had been shovelled away, like a dead pig.

John Vincent Cornwall did not sleep at all. He lay and lived through the moment of tragedy again and again. Accident. Accident. But one that would never have happened had he been content, as so many men were, with a wife who had lost her charm for him. His over-riding emotion was remorseful grief, but he also felt fear and a doubt as to whether they had acted wisely. . . . Open conduct would have been better, send for the doctor, tell the truth. No jury would convict. . . . Would they not? It was murder, accidental, but murder linked with adultery and fornication, a fatal combination. Now and again he wondered what Rose had planned and was now doing; he thought she might intend to put the body into the water under the Stone Bridge, or hide it in Tutt Wood. *The body, it.* It was Vincent, his well-beloved, his favourite, the charming little hoy who had mastered eight letters in one afternoon. . . .

Mrs. Cornwall called, "Come in," expecting Nellie with the morning tea.

Rose Ellis said, "Good morning, Madam, I've come for . . . oh, I thought he was with you. Master Vincent . . ."

Samuel Vincent lay still and tense; he had time was about to begin. Above the edge of the sheet he saw, with one bleared eye, Rose, trim in the grey alpaca, inherited from her predecessor, and a shining white apron.

"And why should you think that?" Agnes Cornwall asked.

"Because he is not in his cot, Madam. I overslept a hit. I thought he'd woke early and called and you fetched him."

"I didn't. I had a very restless night myself and slept until this moment." More or less fully awake now, she reared on one elbow. "If anyone heard him it would be Miss Charlotte. Or were you careless again and left a chair . . ." It had once happened; Vincent had climbed out of his cot onto a handy chair.

Rose said, "Well, I might. I did move the chair to make way for the hath last night."

"In that case he might be *anywhere*," Mrs. Cornwall said crossly. "Go and look."

"And whass all this about?" March asked Catchpole, referring to the manner in which Mr. Cornwall, in the gig, with the less manageable of the two horses, had

gone smashing past him, almost running him down in the lane.

"Little hoy missing. Gone in the night. They think gypsies."

"Don't talk daft. There ain't no gypsies. They went off, coupla days ago. Pea-picking at Lopham."

"Then where is he? He seem to be gone."

"Up to some trick," March said. "Artful little sod. I said last time what he needed was a good slap on the bum. And if he'd heen mine he'd have got it, long time ago. Where've they looked?"

"All over the house. All over the garden. And he ain't in the yard. That I do know."

"What about the drying yard?"

"But I come through there, like always."

"Did you look?"

"Why? Why should I? I didn't know then. I didn't know he was lost till they started yelling."

"Little limb of Satan," said March, who had fathered four such, and helted them. "I bet you a tanner he's in the one place they wouldn't look."

He made for the drying yard, the one place where nobody had looked. Catchpole followed him. March, just inside the enclosed space, halted, forgot about the lost child.

"Who been messing about with my muck-heap?"

It wasn't everybody who could make one and few who



"Listen!" Rose said, shaking Mr. Cornwall's arm. "Be quiet! Leave everything to me. Get back into bed with her. You don't want to hang, do you?"

understood what he called the principle of the thing, which was to keep the heat in, the air out.

"Somebody been at it. And whass this?" This was about an inch and a half of blue ribbon lolling out from the place at the base of the heap at the point where a disturbance had obviously taken place. He jerked at it and it resisted for a moment and then yielded, bringing with it something that looked like red flannel. Female, mucky stuff, and he'd told them and told them that anything to be disposed of in this way should be put on top. Irritably he pulled the red flannel and the cave that Rose Ellis had made, too soon disturbed, not given time to solidify, broke, flaked away and gave up its secret.

"Christ," March said.

Catchpole turned away a little and was sick.

March felt worse than sick, remembering how often he had said "No" and "Get out of my way" and "Be off with you" and how often he had thought—and only a moment ago to Catchpole said—that a good smack on the bum was what the child needed and would have had, had he belonged to him. He envied Catchpole being able to be sick.

"When you've done," he said, "go and warn them. I'll bring him in."

The kitchen was full of the good smell of frying bacon

brandy for himself.

"You have not sought it elsewhere?" If not, why not? "No. It never occurred to me that a lawyer could do anything at this stage of affairs."

"We have our little uses. For example, when your nursemaid is examined *in camera*, you would not be admitted to the hearing. I should be. Shall be," he corrected himself, facing the fact that he must be involved. It had been his hope to find Mr. Cornwall so well legally represented that he could go home. "I understand that no reward has been offered. The omission seems to have attracted unfavourable comment. My uncle Hugo—somehow, by the repetition of that name Mr. Fothergill managed to give the impression that he was disassociating himself—my uncle Hugo suggested a thousand pounds."

"Frankly, Mr. Fothergill, I don't possess such a sum."

"My uncle Hugo had foreseen that possibility. He said that he would put up that sum."

"That is extraordinarily generous," Mr. Cornwall said.

Chief Inspector Fowler had travelled down from London on the same train as Mr. Fothergill, but he did not arrive in Biddlesford until much later in the day, having had a long, long talk with Spender, who could not

"Christ!" March said. Catchpole turned away a little and was sick. The bundle they'd pulled from under the muck heap was the body of little Vincent!

and freshly made coffee; Beattie was not easily put out of her routine and she did not believe that the gypsies had made off with the child. Why should they? They had enough of their own.

Catchpole said, "We found him."

"I knew it," she said and went on gently ladling fat over an egg. All that fuss about nothing.

"He's . . ." Catchpole said, and could not bring out the next word. Stammering, stupid fool, she thought—late with the kindling and now disturbing her. She looked around, ready to give him some scathing words, a searing look. His face was greenish.

"Dead."

"What!" She dropped the spoon into the pan.

"March is just bringing him in."

"In here," he said. March obeyed him and laid the dead child down on the long stone bench just below the window. Then he said:

"Poor little sod. What a way to end! Who could of done it?"

Nellie had by this time come back from setting the table in the dining room. She had shared Beattie's scepticism about gypsies and expressed an opinion that a child who could climb out of a cot—as Master Vincent one of his elegant little supper parties in his elegant little house in London.

"My uncle, Hugo Ampton, is very much concerned about you, Mr. Cornwall. He feels that you need legal advice and representation."

"That nobody could deny," said Mr. Cornwall, pouring

conceal his relief at being superseded. Fowler's genial, hearty manner enabled him to conceal his contempt for a man who, on the spot from the start, had been so inferior.

He drove into the yard of the Jolly Sailor and Sally Awkwright gave him a warm welcome. She liked big, hearty men. Her husband had been big and hearty when she married him and she had taken delight in feeding him. He was now two hundred and fifty pounds of inert blubber, too idle even to talk. And she was a naturally garrulous woman, her talk restricted by the rule that in an inn you must *listen* to everything, but not *say* much because you might appear to be taking sides and thus, pleasing one customer, offend another. She was very happy to let Fowler the little parlour that adjoined the bar and the low, beamed bedroom above; very happy to serve up a piece of steak, a brown shell over a pink succulence, with onions, new potatoes and fresh peas; very happy to chat.

She said, "It never was what you could call a *happy* house. Poor Mrs. Cornwall—that is, I mean, the first one—was never strong and went into a decline. A bit touched in the head. Then she died and after a bit he married the governess. And she never was nice to the two youngest. Miss Adelaide and Miss Victoria, well, they were old enough to look out for themselves, but the two others. By all accounts they had a rough time."

This was the kind of gossip which could yield most fruitful results, and often had, but it must be checked.

"In what way, Mrs. Awkwright?"

"Well, four-five years ago there was a maid there. A nice girl. Maggie her name was, and tell you the truth I set my eye on her for my brother. He ain't all that bright—in the head, I mean—but he's decent and a good upstanding girl like Maggie could have been the making of him. So I had hopes and I asked her here, a good few times—her time off." Kindness, hospitality, all wasted! Sally Awkright had for a few weeks seen her old mother and her not wholly capable brother safely delivered into Maggie Simpson's hands. "She left, all of a sudden. She said she couldn't stand the ill-treatment."

"Who ill-treated her?"

"What, Maggie? Nobody'd ill-treat her! She could stand up for herself. No, it was Mrs. Cornwall being so hard on Miss Charlotte and Master Thomas. Boxing their ears. Locking them in the cellar. Maggie couldn't stand it. So she left. Took off and went to Lopham and got married. Did right well for herself, too."

"Whom did she marry, Mrs. Awkright?"

"A farmer called Peabody. And the funny thing is he grows peas. Acres and acres."

Thomas came into Charlotte's room, where the dusk was gathering, clutching between his left hand and his chest a little tray on which stood a glass of milk and a plate holding a chicken sandwich.

Thomas fell in behind them. The path that climbed up between the yews was lined with villagers; farther back some stood on tombstones to get a better view. At the sight of them John Vincent Cornwall set his teeth and regretted accepting the Rector's suggestion. In any case it no longer mattered about making a favourable impression. He had a very shrewd idea that this would be his last Sunday at liberty. Tomorrow an Inspector Fowler, a man who was said never to fail, would take over from Spender; and the magistrates irked by the accusation of inertia had arranged to hold a more thorough examination of Rose, *in camera*.

When the family arrived home there was a hired cab standing to one side of the drive and a man at the front door, in the act of ringing the bell.

Fowler!

Mr. Cornwall said to the four young people whose mother Agnes Cornwall was not, "Look after your mother," and himself advanced towards the man on the step.

"Mr. Cornwall. My name is Fothergill. Of Fothergill, Ampton and Fothergill."

"Ah. Young James?"

Turn the clock back. Fothergill, Ampton and Fothergill had been the trustees for John Vincent Cornwall,

The funeral was strange . . . only Charlotte made a "tiddly bit of a wreath." When Mr. Cornwall and Thomas returned, Chief Inspector Fowler was waiting!

"Charlie, I know it's awful. I know how you feel. But you can't live if you don't eat. Charlie, what'd I do if anything happened to you? There'd be nobody."

"I don't feel like eating, Thomas. Thank you all the same."

Once the inquest was over the victim could be buried and public attention switched to the funeral. Here again John Vincent Cornwall acted with a lack of diplomacy. Whatever theories were held—and they were many and various—pity for the child was general, and there was not a woman in the village who would not have stripped her garden for flowers to line the grave or strew upon it. But the old grave-digger said he had no orders, and Catchpole—now no longer dependent upon his sister Sally for his beer—said he knew nothing. He continued to know nothing until Wednesday, when he informed a shocked audience that there was as much mystery about the funeral as there was about the murder. The little coffin had been placed in the back of the gig and covered with what looked like a velvet tablecloth. Then Mr. Cornwall, in black, and Master Thomas, with a black hat and arm band, had mounted and driven away. "Miss Charlotte was the only one to see him off. She'd made him a tiddly hit of a wreath."

Sunday was a warm day though overcast and thunder-threatened. Catchpole drew up at the churchyard gate, Thomas hopped down from his perch and wrestled with the carriage door; Mr. Cornwall alighted and offered his arm to his wife. The twins followed and Charlotte and

an orphan. The Trust had paid his school fees, the best preparatory school on the south coast, and then Eton. It had arranged for his holidays, not with tutors exactly but with young men who taught him to shoot and ride, read a menu, know his wines. When he was twenty-one the Trust had been wound up and he had been handed what had then seemed a fortune. He could remember the very day, when, emerging from the musty office where he had signed his name about twenty times, he had seen a little boy, very small-faced and shy, waiting. And Mr. Hugo Ampton had said, "This is my nephew. Young James. He is about to start school."

John Vincent Cornwall had given the boy a sovereign, in his exuberant mood tossing it. "You'll need some tuck," he said.

In a just world such generosity should have endeared John Vincent Cornwall to James Fothergill forever, but the little boy had been too sunk in misery to be grateful. Their paths had not crossed again, but in the last few days old Hugo Ampton had been showing an astounding interest in the Cornwall case, and as a result Mr. Fothergill was here instead of overlooking the preparations for

Out at Lopham, in a fine old Tudor farmhouse—just the kind of place to which Fowler hoped one day to retire—over a table spread with cloth starched to crackling rigidity and from behind a silver teapot, Maggie Peabody, born Simpson, said:

"Yes. I left. I'm funny that way. I never could bear to see an animal, leave alone a child, ill-treated. There

Rose had stuck to her story. It appeared that Charlotte was threatened—but she was innocent, wasn't she? An arrest was imminent . . .



was nothing I could do. Not there. It's different here. Anybody rough, even with pigs, and they hear from me! That poor little girl. . . . You see she just would not call her stepmother 'Mamma.' That was really what started it all. You see, the second Mrs. Cornwall thought that as soon as the ring was on her finger she'd slip into the first one's place. I wasn't there at the time, but I do know that she didn't. And every time Miss Charlotte wouldn't say 'Mamma' this Mrs. Cornwall went angry and she'd stand that poor little girl facing the wall with her hands on her head. Did you ever try that? Well, I did, just to see how it felt. Ten minutes and I was ready to drop. Miss Charlotte did drop, more than once. She'd drop where she stood. And the same with the cellar. One time she was down there a day and a night, without sip or crumb. And I never knew her to make a complaint or shed a tear. But I couldn't bear to stand by and do nothing. So I left. And I was right glad to hear in a roundabout way that she'd gone to school."

"Where, Mrs. Peabody?"

"Now let me think. It was bearsay. I may have got it wrong. . . . It was a bit of a way back. But I'll catch it. . . . Yes, Miss Barker's, over at Thornden. May I give you another cup?"

Quite unintentionally Mrs. Peabody had presented Fowler with a character who fitted into his mental picture: tough, resilient, shedding no tears, voicing no complaint, but quite capable of thinking—One day! At Miss Barker's he found a very different character described, but he knew that human beings were capable of duplicity and that circumstances could affect behaviour.

Bit by bit the picture built up, and in his talks with Charlotte, Fowler observed a composure unusual in a girl of sixteen. He also thought that her posture, sitting very straight, head high on an exceptionally slim neck, indicated pride. She was the kind who would feel humiliation very keenly, but be too proud to show it.

The magistrates' examination of Rose Ellis led nowhere. She, too, stuck to her story, credible because of its very incredibility, the kind of thing that nobody would have invented. Curiously, although Rose had turned away from her father's stern old God, she still had faith in His rules. As her father had said, "No harm can come to the righteous," and although, with attention so much centred on the nightdress, Miss Charlotte might seem to be *threatened* she was in fact safe because she was innocent.

The innocent were safe; the wicked were punished.

Rose Ellis was taking her punishment. . . . Night after night, waiting behind the half-closed door.

"What I should really like to do, Charlie, is to send you abroad for a bit. But frankly I can't afford it. Also, I'm not sure about this ridiculous bond. There might be difficulties about your leaving the country."

"Something will turn up, Papa. Don't worry."

Outside the house, since Fowler was not only busy but seen to be busy, an arrest was momentarily expected. And most people thought that the person to be arrested would be Mr. Cornwall. By a process almost as mysterious as the operation of tom-toms in an African jungle, bits of genuine information spread alongside rumour. The mag-

istrates had had a session with the Inspector and he had applied for an order to arrest, which had been granted.

Finally a policeman, one of the strangers, came out of the house and walked to the cab, opened its door and stood waiting. Scarcely breathing, the crowd watched. Next, Inspector Fowler and Miss Charlotte. Nobody else. As they walked towards the cab the house door closed behind them. Carrie Whinney spoke for all when she said, "Christ! Not Miss Charlotte!" There was a hissing groan. Few in the crowd had ever had much contact with Charlotte; those who had, people who lived in the lane or kept shops in the village, liked her for the same reason that Catchpole had liked her mother. She had a pleasant way with her. People to whom she had never spoken had seen her playing with Vincent, or taking walks with him. There were the old stories, largely spread by Maggie Simpson, that in earlier years she had been roughly treated. Added to all this was the fact that Dr. Fletcher had mentioned "considerable force." Her naturally fragile look had been lately increased by grief, by lack of sleep, lack of appetite. "She could hardly carry a cat, poor little soul, leave alone that great bouncing boy," a woman said. Vincent had been displaced as an object of pity. And in the minds of most people, indignation against the assassin, known or unknown,

platform, used in happier occasions for the making of tea and the buttering of buns. They were soon back with a verdict which pleased everybody but the prosecution and Mr. Edison and Mr. Fowler, who recognised it as a compromise. There was insufficient evidence to justify committing Charlotte Cornwall to the assizes; but her father, John Vincent Cornwall, must enter into a bond to produce her for trial should any further evidence be forthcoming, or forfeit three hundred pounds.

To the crowd this was understood to be acquittal and they gave noisy evidence of their approval. Public indignation against Fowler took the form of a shower of stones and horse-dung as he drove away; and then, more hurtfully, in angry letters to the Press.

Four hundred solid citizens demanded his instant dismissal. He forestalled that by tendering his resignation. He had, he said, always wanted to farm and it would be silly to leave it too late. In fact for him it was already too late. Mary Tudor, Queen of England, told that Calais was lost, remarked that when she died the word *Calais* would be found written on her heart. Fowler could have said the same of *Charlotte Cornwall*. More than his failure, more than the obloquy heaped upon him, was the ridicule. He was dead within a year.

Nineteen men wrote and made her offers of marriage.

The crowd watched and waited outside the house. Then Inspector Fowler came out—with Miss Charlotte. She would have to stand trial for Vincent's murder!

had been transferred to Fowler.

"May I just speak to Papa?" Charlotte asked as, escorted by the Governor, she entered the crowded Guildhall, now transformed into a courtroom.

"You may indeed. Come back to *this* table."

She crossed to the one where Papa sat, with Mr. Fothergill and Mr. Edison.

She had not seen Papa for ten days. He had once come, Mr. Fothergill had told her, but inside the gaol had broken down and been unable to complete the visit. Now she thought that he looked extremely ill, worse even than when she last saw him, his face fallen away into greyish folds, semi-circular lines as definite as scars under his eyes and much more white in his hair. Poor Papa, to have lost one child in such a cruel way, and now to be so worried about another. She kissed him. His face, for all its collapse felt curiously hard, almost mummified. She said, "Papa, you must not worry about me. I did not do it, so I shall be all right." She went back and sat at the table beside the Governor. From there she could see that Papa had put his stony face in his hands and for the first time it occurred to her to wonder whether Inspector Fowler had talked him into believing in her guilt. Fowler seemed so certain, had produced such a closely knit story, that sometimes it was almost enough to make one doubt oneself. She sat very straight and folded her black-gloved hands in her lap and thought—I must remain calm. It will soon be over, and all the stories, not only the Inspector's, will be heard.

And the day came when she said to Papa, with her slightly crooked, sad smile, "Perhaps I should have accepted the least crazy-sounding one. Nobody else seems to want me."

When they reached home they entered by the kitchen door and Mr. Cornwall went straight to the library and the brandy while Charlotte paused to explain her failure to do the errands: "I didn't feel like going into shops." Nellie and Cook understood. Would Addie and Vikky? Not that it mattered. Everything was so horrible, a few complaints could hardly make it worse.

As she reached the top landing, Thomas, who had obviously been waiting for her, emerged from his room. He had now been a pupil-teacher for four days and learned that his fear and dread of the job in no way measured up to the reality. Charlotte braced herself to listen once again to his account of how awful it was, how awful Mr. Macferson was, how awful, collectively and individually, the children were. But this afternoon instead of saying, "Oh Charlie, I can't bear it," Thomas said:

"Mr. Greenfield came into the school this afternoon and gave me this to give to you. From Mrs. Greenfield."

It was quite a thick packet.

"Let's see what it is," Charlotte said.

It was a thick, glossy brochure. "Homelands," it announced. "The School That Is Also a Home." There was also a letter in Mrs. Greenfield's meticulous copperplate hand. It was quite a long letter, but Charlotte perused it in a flash. Then she said, breathlessly:

"Oh Thomas! Isn't it marvellous? Mrs. Greenfield has

The magistrates retired to the little room behind the



found a place for me. With a distant relative of hers. I shall be a pupil-teacher too, helping with the little ones in the morning and having lessons with the older girls in the afternoon. That is, Mrs. Greenfield says, if Papa consents. I am sure he will."

And it augured well. Mrs. Greenfield wrote that her cousin by marriage, Mrs. Armitage, to whom the school belonged, had been "fully informed." (Mr. Greenfield had insisted upon that. He had met Viola Armitage once and had not been much taken with her, but when his wife, after the second orphanage had professed itself able to function without Charlotte Cornwall's services, had said, "What about Viola?" he had said, "It would be necessary to be absolutely honest with Viola, my dear." It was necessary to be honest even with those one faintly disliked. So Mrs. Greenfield had been honest. And her cousin by marriage had been honest too, writing back that she was full prepared to offer a home to the poor child, but she did think that a change of name was advisable.)

Papa, tackled at just the right moment, almost genial, said, "No difficulty. There's no law against using any name you like. I could write you a cheque, Charlie, made out to Little Miss Moffat, and if you endorsed it thus it would be valid."

"Then I think I shall choose *Burns*, Papa. Mamma's maiden name."

In the mellow, lingering light of a September afternoon, Homelands seemed to fulfill the promises of the hro-

chare. Only the narrow lane and a few low bushes separated it from the beach. The drive, lined with laurels and rhododendrons, hinted at spacious grounds, and the house itself was imposing, red-brick with grey-stone facings, several gables, two little turrets, balconies in front of french windows on the upper floor. It had been built twenty-six years earlier by a very rich brewer whose delicate wife had briefly benefited from a stay in the bracing east coast air at Lowestoft. There had been no time to test whether permanent residence in the area could halt her decline. She died just as the house was completed. He had never wanted to see it again. It was not everybody's house: too large, too much exposed,

She was acquitted—but Charlotte knew she would never be really free. At least, she could find a position far away, and change her name . . .

rather more than half a mile from the village of Gorston-on-Sea, three miles from Lowestoft. It had stood empty, its price cheapening, a godsent bargain, almost a gift to Mrs. Greenfield's cousin by marriage when she came along looking for a suitable property in which to establish her school.

She rang the bell and the door was opened by a trim parlourmaid in black and white.

"I am Miss Burns."

The hall was high, lighted by a lantern window in the roof. Some of its panes were coloured and cast shapes of red and blue and orange light on to the tessellated floor, on a white-painted staircase that ran up to a gallery, on to a white marble statue in the centre and two black ones, bearing lamps. Several pieces of furniture and some decorative objects had been in the house when the brewer was bereaved and he had never wanted to see them, or even to think of them again. The statue was of the Goddess of Health.

"Miss Burns, Madam," the maid said, opening a white-pannelled door upon a room that gave the impression of being all rose-coloured, a warm, pretty, sweet-scented room. Near a cheerful little fire, on a rose-brocaded chaise longue, Mrs. Armitage reclined. She offered a slim white hand, and a sweet, welcoming smile.

"My dear, I'm afraid you've had such a tedious roundabout journey. Do sit down. No, wait. You may find it rather warm. Take off your hat and your jacket." As Charlotte did so, Mrs. Armitage said, "Tea will be here immediately. Before it comes, while we are alone together, I have just one thing to say and then the subject will never be mentioned again. My cousin has told me everything and believe me, I deeply sympathise with your sorrow and all the trouble you have borne. I have divulged nothing, even to Mrs. Osgood, and I never shall. I just hope that you will put the past completely away and be very happy here."

"Your accepting me has already made me very happy, Mrs. Armitage. I am extremely grateful."

The maid came in with a laden tea tray, which she placed on a round table, well out of Mrs. Armitage's

reach. Outside the open door there was the sound of footsteps, firm, heavy. A woman entered, fairly tall, fairly stout, plain.

"Augusta, this is Miss Burns, about whom I was telling you. Charlotte, this Mrs. Osgood, my partner and my friend."

Mrs. Osgood put out a large, hard hand, said, "Good afternoon," in a voice which though coarse was friendly and sat down by the tea tray. The service was of silver, highly polished, the cups frail and beautiful. There were tiny savoury sandwiches and two kinds of cake.

Mrs. Armitage inquired after Mr. and Mrs. Greenfield and being answered very smoothly on. "I am sorry to say that I shall not be able to keep exactly to what I promised my cousin. I'm afraid you will get very few lessons this term. The junior mistress whom we were expecting let us down at the last moment and I shall not try to engage another before Christmas. Any teacher, unemployed once a term has started, simply is unemployable. So, with Miss Lamb single-handed, she will need more help from you than was foreseen."

Mrs. Osgood said, "Miss Burns, if you won't have another cup, I'll show you your room and then take you along to Miss Lamb."

"These are the school stairs," Mrs. Osgood said, lead-

others must write and it makes a frightful amount of marking. Do excuse me. . . . Frances, will you find the dictionary and look up the word *receite*." Miss Lamb looked back at Charlotte and said, "I hold that a mere correction is water on a duck's back. Makes no impression at all. Once it is looked up it makes some impact."

Miss Lamb did some more marking and Charlotte sat, conscious of an atmosphere. Extremely quiet and courteous, very different from that of any plain sewing class at Miss Barker's, where such classes were gossiping sessions. "May I have the scissors, please, Constance?" "Florence, would you mind passing me the white cotton?" And all the voices, however young and treble, had a kinship with Mrs. Armitage's: quiet, soothing. The tall girl who had brought the chair said:

"Excuse me, Miss Lamb. Table girls."

"Goodness me. Your watch must be fast, Ella."

Ella's watch was a pretty thing, pearls and turquoises suspended from a pin like a bow. Miss Lamb's was a battered little silver one hung on what looked like an elongated shoelace.

"You are right, Ella. Table girls! Oh dear me, half the evening gone. Frances, if you are still under the delusion that in the word *receite* the *t* precedes the *e*, you will never find it."

The school, on the east coast of Lowestoft, was pleasant enough. And in Miss Lamb, Charlotte felt she had found a friend in her troubled world . . .

ing the way to another staircase, its paint a more utilitarian brown, its steps covered with linoleum and edged with metal. Across a kind of lobby into the classroom, spacious, pleasant. It had once been the billiard room, planned but never played in.

Thirty faces, mainly young, but some not so young, turned and stared as Mrs. Osgood, followed by Charlotte, entered.

"Miss Lamb, this is Miss Burns, our new assistant."

Miss Lamb stood up. She gave the impression of being badly put together, large, knobby joints connected by almost skeleton bones. Even her face, with its prominent cheekbones, a high bony forehead and teeth over which the pale dry lips seemed only just to close, had a starveling look. But her eyes were brilliant, green and clear between dark lashes that matched the plentiful, untidily bunched-up hair.

She said, "How do you do, Miss Burns. I am indeed very glad to see you." A third handshake. "Oh, thank you, Ella." A girl—gracious! how tall, how beautifully dressed, how old-seeming—had risen and brought a chair.

"Now," Miss Lamb said, "would you like me to reel off the names, or would you prefer to come to them gradually?"

"I think . . . gradually."

"Very wise. This is plain needlework, make and mend. I combine it . . ." Miss Lamb looked at the pile of exercise books and the sharp red pencil which she had laid down in order to welcome Charlotte. "Thirty," she said, "is a small class—I once had sixty—but the varying ages make it hard. While you try to deal with one group, the

Four girls—their age, Charlotte judged, about twelve—had risen. "Valerie," Miss Lamb said, "look to the salt." As the four girls went out a very appetising scent of onions drifted in.

Miss Lamb marked three books, looked up, and said, "That will do girls. Pack up."

There was movement, but no noise, none of the this-is-the-end-of-class commotion which Charlotte remembered from Miss Barker's. The girls moved away and presently gathered again in the dining room, the room that had been planned to accommodate a housekeeper and a few servants of a superior kind, ladies' maids, gentlemen's gentlemen. Now two white scrubbed tables ran lengthwise. There were little posies of late-flowering scabious and knapweed and a few autumn berries set along the centre of each table and they, with the lamps brought in from the schoolroom, gave an almost festive air.

Miss Lamb said, "Ella, you are deposed. Miss Burns will take the junior table."

The tall girl said, "Miss Lamb, I welcome the deposition. As you know, I was never very good at fractions."

They both laughed and very soon Charlotte saw the allusion. On the dish before her lay a kind of elongated dumpling, to be divided amongst the fourteen girls at the junior table. And myself she thought. Admittedly she had had tea, but the dumpling smelt inviting.

It tasted as good as it smelt; a plain stout roly-poly, made not with jam but with onions chopped small and fried golden brown. Everyone received a slice about an inch thick. As in the classroom the standard of manners was high. "Would you like salt, Veronica?" "Thank you.

"Would you?" "Sophie, would you mind passing the water jug?" There was some quiet conversation. Charlotte learned a name or two; admired the little posies, answered one question, put politely: "And where is your home, Miss Burns?" She almost replied Biddlesford, and remembered just in time that the village name was as infamous as her own. "Oh, a little village you would never have heard of," she said.

The table girls collected the plates and the forks and carried them into the kitchen. Movement became general, a drift back to the classroom.

"After supper," Miss Lamb said, "the girls do what they choose. It would be an opportunity for you to learn names."

Ella approached and said, "Miss Burns, would you care to play whist?"

"Thank you, Ella. I do not know how."

Ella, with an experienced hostess air, said, "Another time perhaps. We should be delighted to show you."

Within a few minutes everybody was busy, or at least occupied. Two games of whist were in progress and at the other end of the age scale there was a dolls' tea party going on. In-between girls wrote, read, painted, did embroidery.

Charlotte moved about. Drawn to the youngest group,

Charlotte went to bed and had time to reflect only upon one thing before she slept. Miss Lamb had once, only once, referred to Mrs. Armitage as Mrs. A., and because she and Thomas had used a similar curtailment for Mrs. Cornwall, she deduced that Miss Lamb did not much care for Mrs. Armitage. Charlotte had liked her very much. But she liked Miss Lamb, too. And even Mrs. Osgood had seemed quite friendly. Charlotte's last thought was one of deep gratitude to Mrs. Greenfield.

Close friends as they had become, they always addressed one another formally and had exchanged no confidences; Charlotte knew that Miss Lamb had no bome; Miss Lamb knew that Charlotte had a bome to which she did not wish to return. Except with the book-seller in Lowestoft, who gave credit, Miss Lamb had no communication with the outer world. Charlotte wrote and received a few letters. Those she wrote were always addressed to Mrs. Greenfield, those she received always postmarked Bereham. This rather complicated arrangement, the result of Mrs. Greenfield's determination that there should be no obvious link, caused Charlotte to write less frequently than she would otherwise have done. It seemed to place a burden on Mrs. Greenfield's good nature.

"Where is your home, Miss Burns?" one of the girls asked innocently. Charlotte froze. "Oh, a little town you never heard of," she managed to reply.

she accepted imaginary tea in a cup the size of a thimble and said, "Delicious. I hope you will invite me to drink tea with you again."

"Tomorrow we shall have cherry cake."

She moved on to a little girl, sitting apart, busily writing.

"I am doing my letter. I write a little every day."

Such of the letter as could be read ran:

"It has ternerd veree Kold beer if you could send me some beet and I could send you some Kold we should be orl right i shall ask the wind deer mamma deer Papa if a wind blos Kold on you it is from me with a Kiss. . . ."

"And what is your name?"

"Sophie. Sophie Wrenn."

"And where is this letter going, Sophie?"

"To Calcutta, Miss Burns."

"And how long have you been here?"

"A month, nearly . . ." Suddenly tears brimmed. At Miss Barker's there had been little homesick creatures. Charlotte said with feeling—not that she had ever been a homesick school-girl, in fact only too glad to get away—but she knew what it was to have lost a whole way of life, to yearn, to hunger and remember.

"Sophie, it gets better. In about another month you'll feel at home here."

At half-past seven Miss Lamb tapped the end of her red pencil on the table and said, "Junior bedtime. And please remember your teeth. Miss Burns and I will come and say good night in just ten minutes." The fourteen under-twelves packed up whatever they had been using and went quietly away.

Thomas's letters were uncheerful; he hated the school more every day, he hated Mr. Macferson, at home there was no one to talk to. On one occasion he wrote: "The new baby has come, it is another girl, it cries all the time. There is some talk of Papa being moved, but I don't think that will do me much good. I suppose I shall be left here and sent to board with the Macfersons. Then I couldn't bear it and should run away."

Answering his letters called for much discrimination. To tell him that she enjoyed teaching, liked those for whom and with whom she worked, would simply emphasise the contrast between her lot and his. She could write, "At least, Thomas, in a day school you have Saturday and Sunday free. Miss Lamb and I get alternate Sunday afternoons, but usually we don't bother because there is nowhere to go and nothing to do." Then she reflected that Thomas's free time must be equally blank.

"Thomas, dear, could you make me a little watercolour of our house? We were happy there once, weren't we? And if Papa is to be moved I may never see it again."

Thomas sent Charlotte the picture of Stonebridge House for which she had asked. It was a good picture in a way, like and yet unlike. He must have drawn it, or studied it, from the far side of the lane, for the picture included the leafless copper beech, every branch ending in tendrils that seemed to be reaching. . . . Papa sent a sovereign and best wishes for Christmas and Thomas's letter brought some information. Papa had been moved. At the end of the spring term, in April, he was to go to London. "Papa," Thomas wrote, "is not pleased about the place itself, though he welcomes the move. And so do I.

Miss Lamb showed her to her room. Charlotte sensed that she did not like Mrs. Armitage and Mrs. Osgood, although they had seemed quite friendly.



Nothing has been said about my staying here and boarding with the Macfersons, which I did so dread. In fact, Papa, speaking of the house that he is going to look for during the Christmas holiday, spoke of a room for me. So I am looking forward to the move. Nothing could be worse than here."

Nothing could be worse than here, John Vincent Cornwall thought, as he moved in his hired cab through a part of London that he had never seen or envisaged. Street after street of fundamentally charming little Georgian terraces from which sixty, seventy years ago prosperous merchants had set out for the City. The centrifugal movement making itself evident everywhere, even in such a backward country town as Bereham, had scattered the decent families and now every house had its ground floor occupied by some shabby little shop, its upper floors divided and sub-divided into dwellings which, if not quite so horrible as the rookeries of the East End, were indescribably dreary, the paint and plaster flaking leprosy, windows broken, windows patched with paper or cardboard.

May, pleasantly warm on the east coast, was hot in London. In the West End, once John Vincent Cornwall's stamping ground, roads were swept, the horse droppings and any other debris taken away and the water carts went their round, sprinkling, laying the dust. London on a May morning, swept and sprinkled . . . but this was a different place. Horse droppings and even more disgusting things lay where they fell and dried in the sun and were powdered by passing wheels so that the very dust stank, and water carts were rare. The crowded horse-buses stank, the over-crowded schools stank. Also London teachers were lacking the deference which—at least until the disaster—the rural ones had shown to Her Majesty's Inspector. Several of the head teachers were graduates and they were all damned Radicals, with no respect for anything or anybody. They were unamenable to suggestion and resentful of criticism. In his own manner there was nothing left of the bonhomie which had made him popular in Suffolk; everyone with whom he had to do considered him gloomy and disagreeable.

Mrs. Cornwall's growing circle of friends, most of whom had never spoken to him, thought that he looked disagreeable and stuck-up into the bargain.

As hideous day followed hideous day, he lost his inner certainty that it was all too horrible to be true, that this simply could not be happening to him. It was true, it was happening, and would go on, and on. He reached a point where he needed the fortifying glass of brandy before he could face the day; and on the morning when the post brought him a square white envelope of very superior quality, with the familiar embossed seal of the Board on its flap, he imagined that it contained his dismissal. At first sight the letter did not re-assure him. It simply requested him to call, at his earliest possible convenience, to discuss a matter of some urgency. His first impulse was not to go; they could dismiss him—that was their right—but he did not intend to submit himself to a scolding. Then, looking at the letter again, he saw that it was not signed by the official who dealt with such matters as appointments and dismissals in the inspectorate. And why a matter of some urgency? If they felt that he was no longer fit for his post, they could suspend

him at a moment's notice. A faint curiosity began to stir. He'd go, this very morning. He went back upstairs and changed into clothes that were not permeated by the school smell. He'd go, and if it turned out to be, after all, a face-to-face lecture, he'd simply walk out.

He was cordially greeted. "Hal Cornwall. Very good of you to come at once." A firm, friendly handshake and invitation to be seated, to have a glass of sherry. Then a rather tentative approach:

"The idea may not appeal to you at all, but we've gone into it thoroughly and you appear to be the most suitable, indeed in the circumstances the only suitable, man we could suggest. I'll put it briefly . . ."

Put briefly what it amounted to was this. Uttahpore, one of the remaining independent states in India, had lately come under the rule of a Rajah with very enlightened and progressive ideas. He wished to inaugurate an educational system and had—very sensibly—applied to the Board to assist him in this worthy scheme. He asked the Board to send him a Director of Education. Like the twins, the Rajah of Uttahpore knew exactly what he wanted and what he wanted was rather rare. A man from a public school, from either Oxford or Cambridge, yet with a thorough knowledge of education at a primary level.

A transfer to Uttahpore in India! It was just what John Cornwall wanted! He convinced Agnes the climate was bad for her, and packed up to leave . . .

"Uttahpore!" John Vincent Cornwall said. "That rings a bell somewhere, but for the life of me . . ."

"The Rajah mentions that he himself enjoyed the benefits of an English education. At Eton."

"That's it! We used to call him Bunjo. He fagged for me." And a dirty little tyke he was in those days, too.

The remuneration was lavish: rupees 90,000 a year, a house in the capital as a permanent residence, accommodation in rest houses near each school that was planned. Servants and horses provided. "He who rules must have grandeur," the Rajah wrote.

"Would you think about it, Cornwall?"

John Vincent Cornwall had already thought. The prospect filled him with ecstasy and yet somehow he was not really surprised. It was *bad* luck that surprised him—and God knew he had had enough of that in the last year.

It was easy enough to convince Agnes that Uttahpore was unfit for a white woman. Actually old Bunjo had written that the Director could bring his family should he wish to do so; the plains of Uttahpore were hot in summer, but there were hills. . . .

Put briefly what it amounted to was this. Uttahpore, one of the remaining independent states in India, had lately come under the rule of a Rajah with very enlightened and progressive ideas. He wished to inaugurate an educational system and had—very sensibly—applied to the Board to assist him in this worthy scheme. He asked the Board to send him a Director of Education. Like the twins, the Rajah of Uttahpore knew exactly what he wanted and what he wanted was rather rare.

Rose cried on; she cried herself out. Then she got up and foraged about and found a card left by a visiting Daughter of Jerusalem who had called one day at the house when Rose had been out with the double-burdened perambulator, lifting Amelia out to take some staggering steps under the soiled but still sweet-scented lilac bushes of the garden in the centre of the square.

The card said that the Children of Jerusalem met on Sundays at seven o'clock, at 24 Cumberland Street, Bethnal Green, over the fishmonger's shop.

A far less egoistic person than Rose Ellis might have been forgiven for feeling that the whole meeting had been designed to fit her need. The doleful, unaccompanied hymns both dealt with the cleansing quality of the Blood of the Lamb; the preaching and the prayers would have led an uninformed listener to believe that gathered in this upper room was a collection of the worst sinners in the world. Every word seemed to apply to her who had committed sins of the flesh, sins of the spirit and never properly repented until now. It seemed to her not sufficient that the false god, first by withdrawing his favours and then by deserting her, had inflicted suffering upon her; she must punish herself. She must do something to show how penitent she was.

As was usual, the Brother in charge stood at the door—

way and said "God keep you" to each member. He had noticed the new face and to Rose he also said, "We hope to see you next Sunday, Sister."

She shook her head slightly. "I am a member of the Lowestoft community and I am going home tomorrow."

Back to meek submission, to gruelling physical work, a tiring trudge each Sunday. What better proof of penitence could she give? She was sorry for all her sins; she would show that she was sorry, and God would eventually forgive her and bring her safe to Heaven. The substitution of one hope for another was easily accomplished by her shallow, single-minded nature.

At Homelands, as in all similar establishments, the summer term was the best of the year. The afflictions of the winter vanished; walks on the beach became a pleasure. On two consecutive Thursdays Mamzelle brought strawberries enough for all; and then she brought raspberries and the luscious yellow gooseberries called Golden Drops.

Tuesday, the last day of June, dawned clear and bright and rosy red, the kind of morning which those connected with the soil or the sea knew, by experience or hearsay, to be no good omen of fair weather. Inland they said "Red sky at morning, shepherd's warning"; on the coast they said "Rosy at seven, black by eleven." The day had darkened steadily, and in the evening, when Miss Lamb had gone to her interview with Mrs. Armitage and Charlotte was preparing to make tea, the sky was purple over a hushed sea, the colour of pewter.

"Well," Charlotte asked, not looking up from the tea-making, when Miss Lamb entered, a little earlier than she had expected, "How did it go?"

When Miss Lamb did not immediately answer, Charlotte was reminded of the evening when Miss Lamb had brought back all the reports that must be done again. So she looked up and saw Miss Lamb much more upset than she had been on that occasion. Speechless. She tottered to the bed and laid upon it the shabby old reticule from which almost all the beads had fallen away, lacking that stitch in time, and five gleaming sovereigns, dropped from her clenched left hand. Her always pale face was the colour of paper and her green eyes blazed.

"What happened, Miss Lamb? What happened?"

Miss Lamb attempted to speak; she opened her mouth. Her lower jaw shook convulsively and she put up both her thin hands and pressed it into position, into steadiness. Then between her teeth she said:

"She sacked me."

"Oh no!"

The sensible, practical streak in her said, "Make the tea." And she obeyed. Miss Lamb sat, holding her jaw, looking, in the purplish light, like somebody dead.

"Here," Charlotte said, "drink this. And tell me all about it."

sit quietly and drink your tea. I shan't be a minute." A single impulse carried her out of the room, along the corridor, down the private stairs and to the white-painted door where she halted, drew a long breath and ran her hands over her hair. One must not appear distraught.

Mrs. Armitage reclined on her sofa. On the long table behind it there was a great bowl of roses.

"She is greatly upset. Mrs. Armitage, I felt compelled to come and ask you in what respect she is unsuitable?"

"You may ask, Charlotte. I am afraid I cannot give you an answer. Unsuitability is very difficult to define."

"But there must be some reason. She is such a splendid teacher. So clever. So devoted to the girls."

"I agree. Entirely."

"Then what did she do that was wrong?"

"Wrong? Nothing that I know of."

"Mrs. Armitage, you must have some reason. Whatever it is I must say that I think you are making a terrible mistake."

Miss Lamb was not in her room. She had drunk none of the tea. The shabby old reticule, the five sovereigns, lay on the bed together with the sodden handkerchief. Perhaps she had gone to what was politely referred to as "the end," a place to which it was very ill-mannered to

Rose wasn't so easily convinced. She cried and cried. For Charlotte, there was grief, too. Dismissed, Miss Lamb had left without a trace. Was it suicide?

Tea, hot and strong, that had never before failed as a restorative, failed now. Miss Lamb tried to take the cup, but her extended hand shook so violently that she withdrew it again and propped her jaw; and when Charlotte held the cup to her lips, though she tried again, all that resulted was a clatter of teeth on the cup's rim and some splashes on the front of her blouse as the liquid spilled.

"Absurd of me," she said. The rigor had passed, and the hysteria, but her eyes looked wild.

"Try the tea now," Charlotte said and poured a fresh cup. "What happened? Did you have a row?"

"No. There was nothing. No warning. She paid me. And before I had even time to put the money away, she dismissed me. She put the money in my hand and said she had come to the conclusion that I was not suitable for this post."

"How could she say that? Why, you're the best teacher . . . What did you say?"

"Nothing. I was unable to speak. Had she taken up the poker and struck me . . . But there it is. She said I could stay until I found a post, but that I cannot do. I must leave at once. All my plans . . ." she said, in a voice of great pathos. Then she gathered her forces and said, "Miss Burns, you are very young for such a burden, but promise me . . . try to carry on. If I have given you any guidance, if you follow it, my time here will not have been entirely wasted."

"But I couldn't possibly . . ." Charlotte said and stopped short. Useless to say that to Miss Lamb. "You

admit that you, or anybody else, ever went. But after waiting two minutes Charlotte went and searched. She looked into every bedroom. Conscientious to the last, Miss Lamb would have answered any call.

Downstairs, perhaps, collecting the books which were, with her few clothes, her only worldly belongings.

Not there. Not anywhere in the house. Guilt fell, heavy and cold. I left her, when she was in no fit state to be left.

She tore open the front door and ran out. The wind gave its final cry and flung the last handful of rain at her; the evening lightened as she ran. "Miss Lamb! Miss Lamb!" The laurels in the drive glistened; the beach, when she reached it, stretched away to right and to left, the colour of honey, lapped by the sea which, as the storm blew inwards, brightened and frisked.

Drenched by that last fall of rain, her hair, like Miss Lamb's half down, Charlotte broke into the rose-coloured, rose-scented room again and gasped out, "Miss Lamb has drowned herself. And it is my fault." Then something happened that had not happened for years, not since those times when she had stood with her hands on her head in the hall at Stonehridge House—a spinning darkness.

"Lay flat." Mrs. Osgood's voice. Scent of roses overlaid by the horrible stench of burnt feathers.

"A fine fright you gave us all." That was Mrs. Armitage. The world settled and steadied. She found her voice. "Miss Lamb drowned herself."

"Charlotte, you have absolutely no reason for saying

such a thing, Miss Lamb left. As she was perfectly entitled to do."

Charlotte said, "I am to blame. I left her. I should have known."

"My dear child this is absolutely ridiculous. You are upsetting yourself and everybody else over nothing."

I am upsetting Mrs. Armitage. I am on her sofa.

"I gave Miss Lamb notice," Mrs. Armitage said gently.

"I made a point of offering her a home while she sought another post. She chose to leave at once. And did so. Why you should assume that she drowned herself is quite beyond my understanding. As is the fact that you blame yourself. Quite absurd."

"She never thought about anything except her work. And," said Charlotte, reverting stubbornly to her argument, "she would have taken her money and changed her shoes."

"I can see that you are not in a state to be reasoned with. I shall ask Mrs. Osgood to give you something to make you sleep. Everything will look quite different in the morning."

Mrs. Osgood returned, and taking Charlotte by the arm said, not unkindly, "Come along, Miss Burns. Bed's the place for you."

She helped Charlotte upstairs. In the corridor she

Lamb's *Tales* and Miss Lamb's battered Shakespeare and some bits of odd paper and a pencil, and did her best.

Miss Lamb returned as abruptly as she had left. There she stood, wearing the house with the odd button and the skirt with the patch, studying the bits of the play upon which Charlotte had been working before she blew out the candle. Stunned, unable to speak for a moment, Charlotte watched her, smiling when something met with her approval, frowning when something did not. When she found her voice Charlotte said, "Miss Lamb! Oh, where have you been? How could you leave like that? I have been so worried!"

Miss Lamb looked up and made a silencing gesture. Of course, it must be late; one must not make a noise. Making no noise, Miss Lamb beckoned and turned towards the door. Pushing her feet into her slippers and snatching up her dressing gown, Charlotte followed.

She had not been in Miss Lamb's room since that June evening. No effort had been made to clear it; her worn hairbrush and cheap bone comb lay on the dressing table beside a little dish holding hairpins; books lay just as she had left them on the top of the chest of drawers. The dust was thick everywhere.

Keeping her voice low, Charlotte said, "Now tell me.

"I am to blame. I left her!" Charlotte said. She'd come back to find Miss Lamb gone, her money, purse and sodden handkerchief on the bed.

halted outside Miss Lamb's door and said, "I suppose it isn't possible that you missed her somehow and that she is . . ." She tapped on the door and called Miss Lamb by name. Then she opened the door. The money, the reticule and the tear-soaked handkerchief had gone from the bed; so had the cloak from the door, the out-door shoes from under the chest of drawers.

"You must have been mistaken," Mrs. Osgood said.

"I swear I was not. She was sitting *there*. I was hardly gone a minute and when I came back everything was here, except Miss Lamb."

"Maybe you're muddling what you saw one time with what you saw the other. People do that. Or maybe she was in the building when you ran out and came back and collected her things. Anyway, they've gone, you see. Now come along, your drink'll be getting cold. . . ."

For the first time in her life Charlotte entertained a fleeting doubt of her own sanity.

Lonely, already half defeated, she pressed on. There must be another play, another communal effort for Christmas, abandoning the whist, the dolls. But which? Miss Lamb's success in combining the story in the Lamb's *Tales* and the original text had led Charlotte to think that the communal effort must be another of Shakespeare's plays, but was she capable, as Miss Lamb had been, of selecting and discarding, welding a kind of patchwork into a whole? And then of choosing characters, avoiding any cause for envy, inspiring enthusiasm and liveliness without noise. She doubted it, but she must try. Every evening, by candlelight, she sat up in bed, with

Where have you been? Why didn't you tell me? I thought something terrible had happened to you."

Miss Lamb did not reply. She seemed to be looking for something amongst the books. She found it, a thickish notebook with a mottled cover. She held it out to Charlotte with a smile. Charlotte took it and then said, more urgently:

"What is wrong? Why won't you speak to me? Can't you speak?"

She had, not long before, just after the start of the term lost her own voice and Mrs. Osgood said no wonder, hollering about in the yard every morning. But even without a voice one could mouth words, give some indication of a willingness to speak. Miss Lamb did not and a terrible fear fell upon Charlotte. A ghost! Safe in the dormitory at Miss Barker's, other girls within arm's reach on either side, Charlotte had enjoyed a ghost story as much as anyone. This was different, a chilly fear in the heart. Yet she remembered someone saying that though ghosts might not speak, they liked to be spoken to. In a tremulous, strangled voice she said, "I miss you. All day. Every day. I never realised how good you were to me. . . ." Miss Lamb gave no sign of having heard. She was dead; drowned; a ghost, and Charlotte knew that she could no longer maintain self-control. She was going to scream. . . .

Waking in her own bed when the senior girl whose turn it was tapped on her door—at Homelands there was nothing so unhomelike as a clanging bell—Charlotte knew

that she had had an exceptionally vivid dream. One might almost say a nightmare. Its source was readily traced—her daily need for Miss Lamb's guidance and support; her worry about reducing *The Merchant of Venice* into a short play suitable for girls to perform; and her conviction that Miss Lamb was dead. A very vivid dream, one of those that last on, colouring the waking hours.

It was only when she was half dressed that she saw the mottled notebook lying on top of the papers which represented her own poor efforts at drama-writing that she realised that something more than mere dreaming was involved. That book had not been there when she went to bed. She picked it up, cautiously, as though it were red-hot.

It was Miss Lamb's version of the play. There in her small but legible hand, everything that was needed to keep the gist of the story, the grandeur of the language, while reducing it to something that could be performed by children, with the minimum of scenery and within the space of an hour. There was even a cast, with girls' names, some marked with a question, against each character.

Standing bare-armed in her petticoat and corset cover, Charlotte remembered that in the dream Miss Lamb had handed her the book, in the deserted, dusty room along the corridor—the room into which, waking, she would

never willingly have entered. But the book had not moved itself! She had fetched it in her sleep.

Now, without ever even having heard the word, she became a spiritualist after a fashion. If Miss Lamb were dead—as she had always believed—somewhere enough of her had lived on to make her do this, to make some kind of contact. And at night, after the routine prayers, there was almost a cosiness in the thought that some essence of Miss Lamb was somewhere and could be communicated with. As the days shortened and it grew colder and she struggled with the impossible task of holding to Miss Lamb's standards, Charlotte found herself more and more inclined to direct her last conscious thoughts towards Miss Lamb. If you are there, if you can hear me . . . Miss Lamb, I thank you for the mottled book. I hope that wherever you are, you are happy. . . . I hope you understand that I am doing my best. . . .

And if something of Miss Lamb still existed somewhere, what about Mamma? And Vincent? Miss Lamb, if wherever you are you should meet . . . say that I love them still. A thought to sleep upon. A thought that occasionally provoked another—I must be going dotty! And that thought recoiled. Miss Lamb, you were always so sensible, help me to be sensible. You managed, help me to manage.

January, having come smiling in with a few mild days, settled down to savage frosts and icy winds. Mrs. Armitage had her fire, Mrs. Osgood had hers, but the only heat on the school side was provided by a single paraffin stove. It was inadequate even in the schoolroom, where it spent most of its time, yet it was missed when the table girls carried it away into the dining room. There it had hardly any effect at all before being carried back again. Chilblains and what Mrs. Osgood called cold sores proliferated. The chilblain cure which Charlotte had bought and, in the proper spirit, shared with everybody, though it smelt nice and was not painful to apply, was quite ineffectual.

Halfway through January, Charlotte caught a cold so heavy that she thought it advisable to join the queue outside the little dispensary.

Waking in her bed, Charlotte thought her visit with Miss Lamb, and going to her room, must have been a dream. But there was Miss Lamb's notebook!

"T'll dose you first, Miss Burns," Mrs. Osgood said cheerily. "Then you can set a good example."

Charlotte swallowed the crude oil without grimacing, but five minutes later, being terribly sick in one of the cubicles at "the end," she thought—What an example! Her stomach, resentful even of fat meat, had completely revolted.

Coming out of the cubicle she found Sophie Wrenn vigorously spitting into a washbowl.

"Have you been sick, Sophie?" Sophie ran the tap, wiped her mouth and smiled.

"I don't swallow it," she explained. "I just hold it in my mouth until I can spit it out. It tastes horrible but it is better than feeling sick. You should try it, Miss Burns."

"I think I shall have to," Charlotte said. "Don't tell anybody though."

Delighted, the child said, "A secret, just between us." She added solemnly, "Mrs. Osgood once held Kathie's nose to make her swallow."

Two mornings later, Mrs. Osgood's keen eye spotted more than the symptoms of a heavy cold in Sophie Wrenn; she knuckled her neck and gave her a little push into the dispensary, beyond which the sick room lay. "A day in bed for you," she said. "Sylvia, fetch Sophie's nightdress, dressing gown and slippers."

When the sick room was occupied Mrs. Osgood slept with the door between her bedroom and the dispensary ajar and though she was a heavy sleeper she was twice disturbed in the night by a cough that she admitted she did not like the sound of. She gave Sophie a drink and found another pillow so that she lay higher. In the morning, since Sophie's temperature remained stubborn, Mrs. Osgood said, "I think I shall ask Dr. Bowen to have a look at the Wrenn child. She sounds bronchial to me."

"I think she should be kept an eye on. Not much resistance there."

"Could you give me some idea when you will be here? Not that I want to tie you down to time, Doctor, but I am rather busy. We are without a cook at the moment and I have the evening meal to attend to."

"I shall be here at six," he said.

At a quarter to six Eva took away the stove from the schoolroom. At five minutes past six Dr. Bowen found the stove, the open pan, the water just bubbling and the smell of Friars' Balsam on the air, exactly as he had ordered. And of the patient he could say, "She seems to be holding her own. I'll look in tomorrow."

The stove was back in the classroom by half-past six, and everybody was pleased to see it.

"I have been waiting for you, Miss Burns."

"How are you, Sophie?"

"The doctor said the stove and I was better then . . . I don't think Mrs. Osgood quite understood . . ." She coughed again. "I don't think he meant just to warm his hands over, though he did. I think he meant it for me."

And of course he did, Charlotte thought, remembering

Little Sophie Wrenn was terribly ill. But Mrs. Osgood wouldn't listen to the doctor's advice, and put a steam kettle in the room. Sophie grew worse . . .

She spoke rather crossly. Parents paid medical charges so the thought of the expense did not irk her; it was the feeling of having failed, of being obliged to call in, for a precaution, an amiable old dodderer who would be in a position to tell her what to do. She hated being told what to do and one of the reasons why her partnership with Mrs. Armitage had been so successful was that Mrs. Armitage so often said, "You know best about that, Augusta."

She said it now. Eva was despatched to fetch the doctor.

Dr. Bowen arrived, used his stethoscope, his thermometer and sounded Sophie's chest with his fingers.

"There is some congestion," he said. As he spoke he could see his own breath like steam on the air of the frigid room. The child, well tucked up in bed under a fat pink eiderdown, was warm enough, but he knew from long experience that breathing cold air was bad for bronchial conditions. To his mind that was proved by the fact that old people creeping down for comfort and warmth to the kitchens of poor houses often did better, when bronchial, than those better attended, put to bed in unheated rooms. Steam from the kettle, steam from the pot. Warmth and humidity. The ideal was of course an open fire, and a kettle on a trivet. But this room had no hearth, so he said:

"An oil stove, Mrs. Osgood. And a pan of water on it. A tablespoonful of Friars' Balsam to a pint of water."

Outside on the corridor Mrs. Osgood said, "Is she so poorly?"

when Thomas was so ill, a fire burning day and night and a steam kettle on the trivet.

She stayed for a little while, kissed Sophie good night again and promised to look in next evening. Then she went downstairs slowly, planning how best to approach Mrs. Osgood; it would not do to say that the child had mentioned the stove.

"I have been thinking about Sophie Wrenn, Mrs. Osgood."

"Yes?"

"When my brother was a little boy he was once very ill. He had a cough that sounded very much like Sophie's. Our doctor found a splendid way of relieving it. May I tell you?"

"If you like."

As Charlotte spoke of the fire and the steaming kettle, Mrs. Osgood's expression hardened. Somebody else telling her what to do!

"I don't agree. There's fashions in doctoring like everything else. You wouldn't send a child with a cough out into a fog, would you? To my mind a steam kettle is just bringing the fog indoors."

"My brother recovered."

"When blood-letting was fashionable," Mrs. Osgood said reasonably, "people recovered. In spite of, not because."

"It might be worth trying. . . . We could manage without the stove for a day or two, Mrs. Osgood. We could wear our overcoats."

"If I had twenty stoves," Mrs. Osgood said, "there wouldn't be one in the sick room longer than needs be." Charlotte seemed unwilling to take that for an answer and go; she stood behind one of the upright dining chairs, gripping its back with her chilblained hands. "When I come into the schoolroom and meddle with you, Miss Burns, then you can meddle with me. Until then I'll thank you to mind your own business."

Huddled in her bed she had one of her now almost nightly sessions of communication with Miss Lamb.

I still think that Mrs. Osgood is wrong about the stove, don't you?

Oh, Miss Lamb, I do miss you so much. I have nobody with whom to talk things over.

Then—it seemed almost immediately—there she was, looking exactly the same, wearing the same old clothes.

"Miss Lamb. Just when I needed you most. I know you can't speak to me. Could you make some sign? When I think about you, when I talk to you in my mind, does anything get through?"

The unanswerable question. Miss Lamb gave no sign. She made that same beckoning gesture and as before led the way to her old room. This time she ignored the books and went on and indicated the tray of tea-making gear under the bed.

It was possible when eating this to sniff with less envy than on porridge days the scent of fried bacon coming from the kitchen.

Talk at table was always quiet, but positive whispering was frowned upon. To whisper was as rude as to point. This morning, however, there was whispering; finally a girl near Charlotte said in a normal voice:

"Is it true, Miss Burns, that Sophie Wrenn died in the night?"

Charlotte dropped her fork. "Oh no! Who says so?" Everybody looked at her own immediate informant; a girl at the farthest end of the senior table said, red-faced:

"I did, Miss Burns."

"And how did you know?"

"I heard Mrs. Osgood telling Eva to go to the doctor's and to tell him . . ."

Several girls began to cry, some because they had been attached to Sophie, some because death is a matter for tears, some simply affected by the tears of others.

Choking back her own tears, Charlotte said, "It is sad. But Sophie was very ill . . ." Here, in mid-winter, she could smell again the scent of the white summer flowers, hear again Mrs. Lark's voice. Conscious of the utmost falsity, she said, "Perhaps it is better to be an

Charlotte saw Miss Lamb, guiding her toward the tea things under her bed. She put the kettle on for Sophie . . . The next morning, the child was dead!

"Of course! Oh, Miss Lamb, how clever of you."

Mrs. Armitage stirred, unwillingly opened her eyes and was astounded to see not Eva with her morning tea, but Augusta, looking ghastly and holding a candlestick in an unsteady hand.

"What is it? Worse? Dead?"

"Come and look. I thought you should see . . . before I touched anything."

"This is what I found," Mrs. Osgood said; and she made no distinction between the dead child in the bed and the little stove whose fuel had outlasted the water in the kettle, which was now a lop-sided half-melted lump of tin. The room smelt strongly of burnt metal and scorched Friars' Balsam.

"It's the stove Miss Lamb used for making tea. Miss Burns put it there. She was on at me yesterday about a stove and a kettle. The fumes killed Sophie. And in twenty years I never had a death."

Charlotte woke, remembering only that she had dreamed about Miss Lamb again. On the former occasion there had been the mottled book to prove that she had followed the beckoning figure; there was no such concrete evidence this morning and she was left with only a hazy impression that Miss Lamb regretted the disuse of her tea things.

Breakfast was one of the more popular dishes, mounds of potatoes that had been par-boiled, sliced and fried.

angel in Heaven than to be so ill."

In most minds the words made a link with something overheard: a blessed relief; at least his sufferings are over; she is in Heaven now.

In Charlotte's mind Sophie's death was linked with Vincent's because she had loved them both. Vincent had been foully murdered and nobody had been punished. Sophie had been killed, less horribly, but nonetheless killed, and Charlotte knew how, by whom.

In the confrontation which Mrs. Osgood had planned in other circumstances and been persuaded to postpone, Charlotte, entering the room without the preliminary knock, said:

"You are to blame, Mrs. Osgood. If you'd done what the doctor said"—she could say that now, since Sophie was no longer there to be shielded—"Sophie would have stood a chance. I begged you. . . . I said we'd sit in our coats if she could have the stove. She's dead now because you are so pig-headed."

"Hol! You dare come here and say that to me! You and your stoves! You killed her with your stove!"

"What stove?"

"That gimcrack little thing you used for making tea."

"What has that got to do with it?" Mrs. Osgood was too angry to notice the complete amazement in Charlotte's voice and face, but Mrs. Armitage's gaze, ice-blue this morning, suddenly became intent.

"I'll tell you what it has to do with it," Mrs. Osgood said furiously. "You put it there, with a pint of water and enough spirit to boil it ten times over. The kettle

boiled dry and melted, with half a bottle of Friars' Balsam in it, too. The fumes were enough to kill anybody, leave alone a sick child."

Charlotte looked towards Mrs. Armitage as though seeking denial or confirmation and Mrs. Armitage said: "I am afraid that that is what happened."

Charlotte said, in a horrified voice, "Oh no!" and put her hands to her face. From behind them she said brokenly, "If I did it, I did it in my sleep."

"It is possible that I did it. I have walked in my sleep . . . and done things of which I have no memory afterwards. . . . Last time there was a book. And it is true that Miss Lamb . . ." She broke off, hovering on the verge of understanding.

"You can leave her out of this. You killed Sophie Wrenn as surely as though you'd strangled her with your hands." There was something about that last phrase, something backward-reaching and so horrible that reason must refute it.

"We cannot be sure of that. But I shall ask Dr. Bowen. I shall tell him everything and ask him whether Sophie died because she did not have what he ordered or because I did what you say I did."

In the crimson room, scented with the odour of fried eggs and bacon and coffee, there was a little silence.

"The kettle boiled dry and melted, and the fumes were enough to kill Sophie," said Mrs. Osgood, accusingly. "Oh no!" Charlotte cried. Was it true?

Then Mrs. Armitage said:

"About that, Charlotte, I would advise you to think again. If Dr. Bowen has the slightest reason to doubt the cause of Sophie's death, there will be an *inquest*." She weighted the word with a slight pause. "At inquests very awkward questions are apt to be asked. Such as *what else you may have done in a state of somnambulism*."

Mrs. Osgood, in ignorance of the matter to which Mrs. Armitage had referred, was astonished by the effect the words had. Charlotte cried, "Oh no!" again in an even more horrified voice and instead of putting her hands to her face, put her arms on the table and dropped her head upon them, not crying exactly, but shuddering and making little whimpering sounds.

In London, Spring had taken a hesitant step or two. The weeping willow in Mr. Fothergill's sheltered little garden had changed colour and was dripping its green-gold hair over the first crocuses; in a week there would be a pool of them, golden, white, pale and dark purple. The window of the dining room looked out upon the garden and Mr. Fothergill studied it and the morning with approval before settling down to his breakfast, the egg poached, the bacon grilled; fried food did not agree with him. To the left of his place lay his post and the slim silver paper-knife. He had no hesitation about opening and glancing at his letters while he ate; troublesome communications always went to the office. This morning he had two invitations, four acceptances of invitations that he had sent out and two impersonal notices, one informing him

about a concert, the other concerned with a picture exhibition. All in order. There remained the last letter and that gave him a distinct jolt.

Dear Mr Fothergill, I am sorry to trouble you, but I can think of no one else to whom to turn. I rather fear that unless I can talk to somebody, I may go mad. Something has happened here which has made me think that I may have done what Inspector Fowler said I did. I would come to you, but it is difficult for me to get away. Could you possibly come to see me? If I did it, I do not even know to whom to give myself up.

He had, almost deliberately, put her out of his mind. He'd liked her, admired her tremendously, had been anxious—and still was—to be of service to her. Aware that he was old enough to be her father. She was, he understood, still at school. Now and then when he thought about her, he had a curious sensation, rather like a man who, suffering from some disquieting symptom, is given a comforting diagnosis; nothing but a touch of indigestion. He had supplied his own diagnosis. It was his age. Men around forty were often attracted to young girls; some married, usually with disastrous results; others behaved scandalously in railway carriages. But he had once told her, and

he had written, that if ever she needed him . . . as she now most obviously did.

He rang his bell and Mrs. Hawkins came, glanced at what was left on his plate and said, "Wasn't it to your liking, sir?" almost as much upset as Mrs. Osgood had been over the breaking of her long record.

"Ask Hawkins to pack my bag, will you, Mrs. Hawkins, and bring it round to the office. I may be away for a couple of days. Just what I need for the night. And a clean shirt. And if you would ask him, on his way, to send a telegram it would save me time. But of course I must look up the trains. Wait . . ." In quite a flutter, as she termed it, he went into the next room and came back, having consulted the railway timetable, and wrote on the back of one of the envelopes, "Burns. Homelands, Gorton-on-Sea. Be with you at six or soon after. Fothergill."

"That's all right, sir," the cab driver said. "We got our nosebags. We don't mind a bit of a wait."

He produced the one that belonged to the horse, and also two identical bits of old blanket. Back in his seat he wrapped himself in one of the pieces and ate his bread and cheese. After London, the bracing east coast air was very bracing indeed, and Mr. Fothergill shivered a little as he rang the bell and waited.

All telegrams were automatically delivered to Mrs. Armitage, so that in case of bad news it could be broken gently. She explained this as she handed over the opened envelope and then asked, "Who is Fothergill, Charlotte

dear?" That was one of the least tolerable things about the last five days, the assumption that nothing had happened, that nothing had changed.

"My solicitor."

"Good Gracious! What on earth do you want with a solicitor?"

Even Mrs. Armitage's calm was shattered.

"I wish to talk to him. About everything."

"It is about myself that I wish to talk to Mr. Fothergill.

When my father went abroad Mr. Fothergill took over the responsibility for me."

Mrs. Armitage did a bit more coaxing, issued some more warnings. Then, finding that Charlotte was not to be moved, took counsel with Mrs. Osgood, who said:

"I don't see what there is to worry about. She can't do me any harm. If she tells the truth, she'll come out of it badly. And a lawyer's just the person to tell her so."

Now, rising up, extending the white hand, offering a sweet, sad smile so tentative that it was hardly a smile at all, Mrs. Armitage welcomed Mr. Fothergill.

"It is all so very difficult, almost impossible," Mrs. Armitage began in her gentlest, most plaintive voice. "Perhaps I should begin by telling you that I know everything about Charlotte—her real name, the ghastly crime of which she was accused—everything. My late husband's

steam kettle in the sick room, a kettle which boiled dry and made fumes which she believes choked the child. The disturbing thing is that she claims to have done this *in her sleep*."

Mr. Fothergill's expression betrayed nothing.

"I need hardly tell you that no spirit stove or boiled dry kettle was found in the sick room. I never saw the articles in question. Mrs. Osgood did and says that they belonged to Miss Lamb and that when she left she took them with her. The point is, Mr. Fothergill, though Charlotte has never said so in so many words to me, that I fear this tendency to self-blame, over Miss Lamb, over Sophie Wrenn, has now extended to self-blame over her little brother's death. I suspect that, because when talking about the spirit stove, she said, in a most agonised voice, 'What else may I not have done in my sleep?' She was so upset, poor child, at the very thought, that once again we were obliged to put her to bed, and for her own sake keep her there until the funeral was over. She is not yet really well, physically, and I am afraid that you will find her most confused in mind.

He made one of his non-committal statements:

"You appear to have had a trying time."

"I have indeed. You see, if Charlotte manages to con-

"Who is Fothergill, Charlotte?" Mrs. Armitage asked. "My solicitor," she said, calmly. And all their coaxings and warnings wouldn't prevent her from seeing him.

cousin is the wife of the Rector at Biddlesford. She asked me to take Charlotte in. Naturally she told me the circumstances, and I felt so sorry for her, a mere child. Mrs. Greenfield—that is my husband's cousin—could not have known then—and indeed I did not suspect myself for quite some time—that Charlotte's dreadful experience had deranged her."

Despite the warmth of the room Mr. Fothergill felt another little shiver.

"In what way, Mrs. Armitage?"

"It began with Miss Lamb. . . ." Miss Lamb, an assistant mistress, properly dismissed, had chosen to leave without saying good-bye to anyone. Charlotte chose to believe that she had drowned herself, and took the blame because she had left Miss Lamb alone for two minutes. "She ran out, Mr. Fothergill, up and down the beach, along the lane. It was raining at the time, she came in drenched and quite distraught. She had to be put to bed." Charlotte had been demonstrably wrong about Miss Lamb having taken nothing with her; but she refused absolutely to believe the evidence of her own eyes. Mrs. Armitage then moved on to Sophie's death. "Quite tragic, but the child had had the best attention. The doctor came twice each day and Mrs. Osgood is such a good nurse that this was our first loss in twenty years. But Charlotte is now convinced that she is responsible for that mishap. This is very difficult. It seems, Mr. Fothergill, that when Charlotte's brother was ill he benefited by a steam kettle, and Charlotte claims that she placed a

vince you that she was responsible for Miss Lamb's death, for Sophie's and for that poor little boy's . . . where do I stand? How would parents feel if they knew that *Charlotte Cornwall* had been here for over a year, and that I, knowing her history, had taken her in. They would be appalled."

"Yes. I see that."

"Perhaps I should see her now."

Mrs. Armitage rang her bell, a pre-arranged signal, and turning back to him said, "I'm afraid you will find her much altered in appearance."

Even thus fore-warned, and even though the rose-shaded lamplight was kind, Mr. Fothergill was shocked to realise that he might have passed Charlotte in the street and not recognised her. He had never thought her "bonny," by which old-fashioned term he meant young, healthy, plumpish, but he had always thought her attractive and that in happier circumstances she could have been more so. Now he looked upon a wreck, bone-thin, pale as tallow, with a furrow of bewilderment between eyes darkly shadowed. Even the hair which he had admired looked dull and brittle. And what in the world had happened to her hands?

"Mr. Fothergill. It was so good of you to come at once."

She sat down, folding those swollen, raw-looking hands in her lap, and he resumed his seat, his listening posture. As she did not immediately begin to speak, he said, kindly, "I am very sorry to hear that you have been ill."

"I wasn't. It was the medicine. At least, something in the medicine. Or in the food. They didn't want me at

the funeral, you see. They didn't want me to talk to Dr. Bowen."

Delusions, Mr. Fothergill knew, often centred about *They*; the deluded had enemies, the anonymous *They*, who dogged their footsteps, threatened their lives, tried to cheat them out of their rights. However, in this case *They* might be taken to mean Mrs. Armitage and Mrs. Osgood.

Again it was left to him to break the silence. "You wanted to talk to me, Miss Charlotte."

She told him about Sophie being ill; the argument about the oil stove, of how she had accused Mrs. Osgood of neglect and Mrs. Osgood had accused her of placing the spirit stove, with too little water, too much Friars' Balsam in the sick room.

"I did not remember anything about it, Mr. Fothergill. But I was willing to accept the possibility that I had done it. For one thing I do walk in my sleep—when I am worried. This is very difficult to explain, you may not believe me. They don't. The fact is that you only know that you have walked in your sleep if something happens, or there is something to show. For example, once I was very worried about Thomas. He was to spend the night in the cellar and I suppose I meant to let him out. Cook heard me, she thought I was a burglar and nearly hit me

not a man of impulse, but he gave way to one now. Without stopping to ask himself—Where can she go? What shall I do with her? he said, "That can wait. I think that the first thing is to get you out of this place."

When Mrs. Armitage drifted in, prepared to offer sherry again, he said, "I have decided to take Miss Burns away, Mrs. Armitage. I think that may spare you any further embarrassment."

"Where do you propose to take her, Mr. Fothergill."

He answered with that good, evasive phrase, "That all depends."

In the cab, talk was, if not impossible, disjointed. The horse, headed for home, put on a turn of speed which anyone except his owner would have thought impossible. Mr. Fothergill asked Charlotte if she would like to change places with him as the draught seemed to be coming from her side, and she replied that she was quite comfortable; that her cloak was very warm. She also said, "It is such a comfort to feel that I can leave everything to you, Mr. Fothergill. I was beginning to think that I was losing my mind. I feel better now."

He sat and thought things over. Carrying one speculation to its furthest limits, he wondered how far, in law, sleep-walking would be accepted as a defence against a

"I know I walk in my sleep," Charlotte faltered. "When Mrs. Armitage asked me what else I'd done—the really dreadful thing is—did I kill Vincent?"

with a flat-iron. So then I knew. Another time . . ." She told him about fetching the mottled book from Miss Lamb's room. "So you see it is possible. I was prepared to admit it and then Mrs. Armitage said something about what else had I done in my sleep. And that made me begin to think. But then . . ." She wrestled with her throat again and her eyes flickered wildly. "Then they said I hadn't put the little stove there. That there was no such stove in the house, that this conversation had never taken place—except in my mind—that I had invented it all. And of course by that time I wasn't very clear in my mind. Whatever it was that Mrs. Osgood gave me . . . I couldn't really think, do you see?"

"I do indeed."

"There was another thing, too. Nothing to do with sleep-walking. May I tell you about that? There was Miss Lamb . . ." She told him how certain she had been that Miss Lamb had taken nothing with her and how Mrs. Osgood had seemed to prove otherwise. "Once you begin to doubt yourself, Mr. Fothergill, it is so easy . . . especially when there is nobody to talk to. You were the only person I could think of. But of course none of this is really important. The dreadful, the really dreadful thing . . . whether Mrs. Armitage really said it, or whether it was only my mind . . . I must face it. I could have killed Vincent. In my sleep. What do you think?"

"I should need to know a great deal more, my dear Miss Charlotte, before I could even begin to answer that question." Except in his response to his hackles he was

murder charge. Rack his brain as he might, he could not recall a case of any kind in which somnambulism was concerned. And the plea, in itself, would attract just the kind of publicity which Hugo Ampton so wished to avoid. Having carried that thought as far as it would go, he brooded over the things she had told him. He could see Mrs. Armitage's reason for insisting that Miss Lamb had left in the ordinary way; suicide attracted attention, too, and scandal was bad for a school. That Charlotte should first have been accused of putting the spirit stove in the sick room, and then assured that she had not done so, was more difficult to understand; unless the women were trying to unhinge her mind; but if they had succeeded in doing so, what then? Suppose the poor girl had not written to him, or that he had not been there to be written to, what would have happened? Would they have found a public lunatic asylum? Or kept her at Homelands, broken, convinced that she was crazy and grateful for shelter?

The Three Ships Hotel, which the cabman recommended as the best of those that stayed open during the winter—which, as he explained, it could afford to do, since it was run by a family—had recently been embellished by gas lighting, and in its glare Charlotte looked so ghastly that the landlady, who combined the role of cook with that of receptionist, took her to be far gone in consumption, brought—too late—to benefit from the famous bracing air.

"My name is Fothergill. This is Miss Burns. We need

two rooms, in one of which a fire should be lighted immediately." He also had noticed that Charlotte looked even worse now; perhaps he had been unwise to have moved her; he should have insisted that she went straight to bed, sent for the doctor, kept watch over her. Patently impossible! "I think, Miss Charlotte, that you should go to bed at once and I think you should see a doctor."

"Honestly, Mr. Fothergill, there is no need. I am much better. And if you could bear it, I should like to continue our talk."

Mr. Fothergill's stomach reminded him angrily that it had had no lunch and that its dinner was overdue.

"Then we will have something to eat," he said.

The fire was splendid, great chunks of driftwood burning orange and blue. There were two other guests, but they had almost completed their meal; they were fish-buyers and had to be up early in the morning. The table to which the waiter—son of the house—led the way was within the fire's ambience, and the tablecloth was clean, Mr. Fothergill was pleased to see. There was oxtail soup and roast shoulder of mutton.

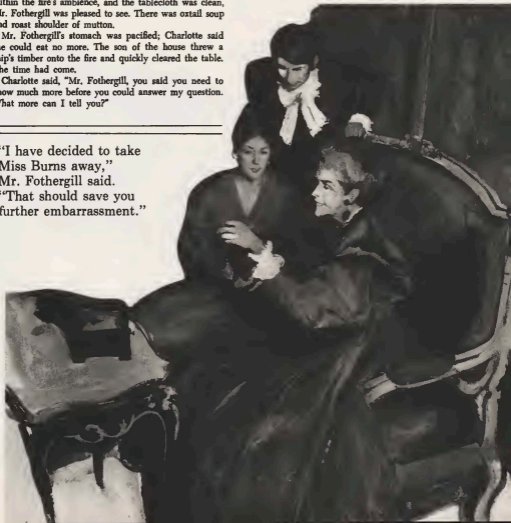
Mr. Fothergill's stomach was pacified; Charlotte said she could eat no more. The son of the house threw a ship's timber onto the fire and quickly cleared the table. The time had come.

Charlotte said, "Mr. Fothergill, you said you need to know much more before you could answer my question. What more can I tell you?"

"I have decided to take Miss Burns away," Mr. Fothergill said. "That should save you further embarrassment."

He said, "So far as I can see, in every case when you have walked in your sleep—or been said to have walked in your sleep—there has been some purpose, some emotional involvement. The common denominator is a concern for something, or somebody. Were you concerned, in any way, about Vincent?"

"That question I asked myself, Mr. Fothergill. And the answer, hateful as it is, is yes. Mrs. Cornwall was very angry and Vincent turned to me for protection, he hid his face in my skirt. And as I stood there, I thought—What will he do when I am gone and he has no one to turn to? I remember thinking that, because I was about to ask Papa for permission to go to London. Mrs. Cornwall was very fond of Vincent, he was her first-born, her son. . . . But he was becoming wilful, and she only liked him when he was amenable. And she was a very



jealous woman." The scowl, which had eased slightly, clamped down again, and she lifted her hand and made that wrestling movement at her throat. "It is difficult to explain. I can only tell you that I stood there and foresaw trouble, if Vincent should ever say, instead of 'I'll tell Mamma,' 'I'll tell Papa.' He was capable of it. And I thought that her next baby might be a boy—Amelia she hardly noticed. I remember thinking that I wished I could take him with me. That was of course quite impossible. But did this thing in my mind . . . the thing that makes me do in my sleep what I know, while awake, to be impossible, make me get up during the night and try to take him away? And did he make a noise? Did I smother him?"

To this there was no certain answer. Mr. Fothergill said, very gently, "Miss Charlotte, the child was also stabbed."

Her brow furrowed, her eyes flickered. Speaking more slowly, she said, "Yes, I know. But there is a connection, in a way. I don't know whether even you, Mr. Fothergill, will understand."

"I shall endeavour to."

"I loved Papa's razors. I learned to tell the days of the week on them. When I was very small, when Mamma was alive and well, I'd go into his dressing room and he'd say, 'Charlie, this is Tuesday,' or whatever the day was, 'which razor must I use?' He'd put them in different positions, so that I could not cheat. And when I could read the names and say 'This one,' and be right, he would be so pleased. . . ." Her voice trailed off for a moment, like that of a very old person, recalling happy, youthful days. Then she went on, "But I hated them, too, when they were open—so sharp, so cruel."

"You wish me to understand that you stabbed Vincent with a razor. My dear girl, that is impossible."

What was needed now, he realised, was evidence to convince her that she was innocent. He looked across the table and saw her eyes fixed upon him with an expression far more tragic and disturbed than she had ever worn while in gaol. She had not doubted her innocence then.

Suddenly he saw what he must do. He reached out and rang the bell. The son of the house, disturbed from his own supper, came and said, not too graciously, "You rang, sir?"

"Would you please bring me a loaf of bread?"

"Now, Miss Charlotte," he said, coming back to the table, "we are going to make a little experiment. Will you put these on." He handed her his own gloves, kid, fur-lined. The child had been wearing a woollen vest and a flannel nightshirt, so Mr. Fothergill enveloped the loaf in two layers of his own flannel nightshirt; near enough, he thought. He then opened his own razor and held it out to her. She shrank away.

"I told you, Mr. Fothergill, I cannot bear . . . while

In her dreams, she would picture a dashing young man, come to rescue her from her drab life, and the horrible memories that haunted her. Mr. Fothergill wasn't young—he was forty—but he was good and kind, and the only person she could turn to.



I am awake."

"I would do it myself," he said gallantly, "but then you might think I was fumble-fingered, or something. Just make this one effort. For my sake. . . Good. I have always thought you were brave. Now, will you stah the loaf."

He was actually trembling with trepidation. Even through the gloves, she might cut her fingers; but better cut fingers than a wounded mind.

The razor behaved as expected; the flannel withstood its rounded end and as she pressed harder, still failing to penetrate, the blade closed back towards the handle, trapping her fingers. He opened it instantly. "A'eh' you hurt?" but he could see that the kid of the gloves, though marked, had not been sliced.

"I'll try again."

"Indeed you will not. Next time you might cut yourself. Miss Charlotte, you could try a thousand times, I might try. A circus strong man might try. It is impossible to stab with a razor."

For a moment the wretchedness vanished from her face, leaving it, though thinner and paler, much as he remembered it. Then it collapsed into misery again.

"But I told you, sleep-walkers do seemingly impossible things."

But when she had recovered, the sobbing dying away into little gulps and the handkerchief plied, and her face, still pallid, hollowed, but cleansed of fear and doubt, lifted towards him, and she said, "Mr. Fothergill, how to thank you . . ." he had a disquieting thought about the resilience of youth. It was something as definite as the nature of inanimate things which he had earlier mentioned. It was something that he had lost. He was indeed spent. It had been a long tiring day; her letter, the tedious journey; the shock her appearance had given him; the need to take that instant decision to remove her; and then the experiment, which might at worst have sent her over the narrow borderline, at least have injured her fingers. Such things took toll when a man was forty.

She said, gravely, "Mr. Fothergill, earlier this evening I made a statement which I wish to withdraw. I said that I could not return to my step-mother. That was stupid. St. Lawrence Square is my home, the proper place for me to be until I can find some occupation. I am saying this now because . . . well I have been so much trouble to you already, I should not like you to worry about what to do with me tomorrow."

"I have been giving the matter some thought." Shyness

The nightmare was over. Charlotte broke down and sobbed. Mr. Fothergill offered his handkerchief. And they knew they wanted to stay together . . .

"Only within limits," he said, rather sternly. "The nature of inanimate objects remains constant. A razor does not know whether it is being handled by a waking or a sleeping person. Let us suppose that the story of the spirit stove was true. It may seem *unlikely*, that is as far as I would go, that you could move about without waking Mrs. Osgood, but she probably was very sound asleep. So there you did not perform the impossible. And the stove behaved in an ordinary way. It did not go off like a firework, or begin to play a tune." He paused to let that piece of reasoning find its mark.

"Then why did I seem to see . . . ?"

"Because you have a very lively imagination. And because, since Miss Lamb's disappearance, you have been under an almost intolerable strain. And because on the occasion of her disappearance, a trick was played upon you which made you doubt yourself."

He could see that she was about to cry.

She said, lips and chin trembling, eyes filling, "Mr. Fothergill . . . the relief!" And then she hurt into a healing flood of tears which he welcomed. He had always thought that nature had given women the ability to cry and feel better as some slight compensation for their obvious disadvantages in a man-made world. He had seen grief, disappointment, even sheer rage washed away by tears. He also knew that any woman, weeping, either had no handkerchief or a perfectly inadequate one.

"There, there," he said. "It's over now. . . Have a good cry and forget about it. . . Have this handkerchief."

made him sound rather more pompous than usual. "Frankly, I do not consider that St. Lawrence Square is the proper place for you in your present condition."

Young James, who sometimes took a puckish delight in poking fun at Mr. Fothergill, commented—What an expression! It sounds as though she were pregnant!

Mr. Fothergill coloured slightly, but pressed on.

"I have an alternative to suggest. I have plenty of room. I have a married couple who would, I know, do their best to make you comfortable. I think you would find my friends congenial. And I should be only too delighted if you would accept my hospitality."

"You mean that I should go home with you?" Something that he had always sensed to be there, always, so far obscured, a lively brightness, flooded into her face.

He said humbly, "Yes. I would do my very best to make you happy."

"Mr. Fothergill, I should be happy just to be with you!"

Too much significance must not be attached to that simple statement, made in the aftermath of emotional stress, probably influenced by gratitude. But it was something to be going on with. And one good thing about being forty was that one had learned patience.

"Then that is settled. You have given me great pleasure. Now"—he consulted his watch—"the only good train in the morning leaves at seven-twenty. That means an early start. So I think we should begin to think about getting to bed."

Young James had something to say about that expression, too.

CALDERWOOD

Camilla knew she shouldn't have come back to Calderwood... back to the scheming Deedee, who flaunted her blonde beauty and her possession of Kris Kincaide... back to the strange relatives, and the mystery surrounding her mother's death. But she knew she could never rest until she learned the truth — if it cost her life!

By MONICA HEATH

I spread my small treasure trove before me on the polished surface of Aunt Lynette's dining room table.

There wasn't much, considering that the few scattered items represented a man's lifetime, a pair of gold cuff links my father had favored, antiques, I guessed, from the look of them, passed down to him from some long forgotten member of the stoic Scots family of which he and his widowed sister had been the last surviving members; an ivory letter opener scrolled and yellowed with age; a monogrammed pen and pencil set still in their felt-lined holder. Several slender volumes of verse lay beside them, his favorite passages marked faintly in pencil, for he had been a literary man who found great excitement in reading Coleridge and Carlyle.

Lastly, there was the letter that had fallen from between the frayed pages of a worn volume of Keats. It lay accusingly against the table's gleaming surface, filling me with a strange sense of turmoil.

The letter was addressed to my father in an unfamiliar hand, the spidery, black script twisting and twining across the linen surface of the cream-colored envelope that had begun to fade around the edges. There was no return address on the letter. Had it not been for the slightly smeared postmark, I might never have known for certain who had sent it to him, for the brief message inside was signed, quite simply, *Marilyn*.

There were, no doubt, a great many women named Marilyn in the world and it was entirely possible that during the course of his academic career, my father had met more than one person by that name. But because the letter had been posted in the small, Louisiana town whose name was still familiar to me, even after all of these years, I knew it had come from Calderwood, where I had spent a brief portion of my life as a child.

Taking the sharply creased sheet of monogrammed paper from its envelope, I read the letter through for perhaps the dozen time.

Dear John:

You may be surprised to hear from me after all that has happened. But I feel duty-bound to write to you regarding Camilla's well-being. After all, whatever else she may have been, Victoria was my sister and, as her child, Camilla is welcome to come live with us here should you ever have reason to send her to us.

Marilyn

There was something condescendingly critical about the letter that hinted openly at scandal. I continued to stare at the fine script in a futile attempt to read between the lines, aware of some subtle nuance behind the words that, according to the date on the postmark, had been sent to my father years ago, shortly after the two of us had fled Calderwood under a dark cloud of tragedy, to come live with my aunt in San Francisco.

I knew who Marilyn was, though my memory of her was understandably vague, considering that I had neither seen nor heard from her or any of the others who lived at Calderwood in over fifteen years. Not since the death of my mother, when I was six.

There had been no memento of my mother among my father's things; nothing at all that might have told me why he had come to despise her. Perhaps I would never know what had transpired between them to turn him against her, now that he, too, was gone.

Torn as I was by my recent bereavement, the letter I had found among my father's things seemed suddenly to provide a solution of sorts to my dilemma and I wondered if I dared to follow through on my idea to go to Calderwood after all of these years, not knowing how I would be received by my dead mother's family in view of my father's neglect. I was almost positive that Marilyn's letter had gone unanswered.

Did I dare to return to Calderwood on the strength of that long-ago invitation from Marilyn? I had to decide,



I knew little about my mother. "She was flawed," my father had told me. "Flawed beyond redemption." Now he was gone, and I had to find out the truth.

and, reaching for the Keats my father had treasured, I found myself searching haphazardly through its worn pages for some clue he might have left behind for me to find and which might serve to guide me in my decision.

The thin pages parted to reveal hencratch jottings in the narrow margin; faint tracings beneath the lines illuminated a passage from Lamia.

*My parents' bones are in their dusty urns
Sepulchred, where no kindled incense burns,
Seeing all their luckless race are dead save me,
And I neglect the holy rites for thee.*

Softly. So softly that I could scarcely make out the twists and turnings of the letters, someone had traced my mother's name at the end of the dreary stanza. *Victoria*.

What significance had my father found in those mournful lines from Keats to remind him of my mother? A sense of mystery stole over me, giving way to a queer feeling of dread.

I had experienced that devastating sensation of encroaching horror before, in the depths of night, when I started out of an uneasy sleep, my troubled mind groping after the illusive fragments of a half-remembered nightmare.

The dream was always the same, the faceless spectres that brooded somewhere in the depths of my mind stealing forth like sinister shadows when sleep had caught me off my guard. When, as a child, I woke screaming, my father reassured me by telling me that those threatening shadows were merely the harmless products of an overly active imagination; that I need not fear them.

I had no memory of crying out at night while my mother lived. The nightmare shadows had begun with her death.

When I grew old enough to wonder what sort of person Victoria Calderwood Caryle had been, I was amazed to discover that I had no conscious memories of her. Vaguely, I recalled a low, silky voice and great, dark, haunted eyes shining out of an alabaster face. Her hair had been dark, like my own, and very long. It had glistened with its own lustre, catching every ray of light when she moved her head, coiling like a live thing, across her bare shoulders.

For no particular reason, I remembered her in clinging silk, Grecian in its simplicity, a brilliantly set ring burning with a luminous flame on her long, pale hand. Though I could not be certain that she had ever worn such a gown or owned a jewel of such fiery magnificence.

Victoria. There was no mistaking the name penciled so faintly between the pages of Keats. "Death always comes as a terrible shock," he had once told me, in an attempt to explain away the disjointed pieces of the dreadful dream that haunted me. "No matter how determined we may be in our efforts to inure ourselves against the inevitability of loss. Or how well prepared we may imagine ourselves to be, there is always that small, disbelieving part of us which insists on denying the consequences of a cruel Fate."

His words had made very little sense to me at the time. "What an odd way to put it," I had cried. "Almost as though you expected my mother to die, even willed it."

"Don't ever say a thing like that to me again," she lashed out angrily, becoming suddenly a stranger. "She's gone. That's a blessing I can't expect you to understand. Not now. Perhaps never." His voice contained a harsh

note of finality.

"She was flawed," he said. "Flawed beyond redemption." There was an edge of pain underlying his voice so that, for the barest instant, I was able to glimpse his terrible vulnerability.

Flawed. Was that why she had died? Because, like some rare piece of handblown crystal, there had been a fine line of imperfection running through that exquisite alabaster form my grasping thoughts had conjured? A flaw that had gone unnoticed by my father until it was too late for him to redeem himself?

I had to know.

Slipping Marilyn's letter back into its faded envelope, I went upstairs to pack my bags, my decision made.

I would go to Calderwood.

I steered my rented car south from New Orleans, through a score of old Acadian towns surrounded by cane fields and oil refineries. I had fully intended to call Calderwood from the airport when I had arrived in New Orleans late the previous evening. However, the line had been busy when I had finally dialed the number the operator gave me and I continued on, driving past sluggish waterways choked with blue hyacinths drifting lazily past floatlines set for catfish.

Calderville. The name leapt out at me from a listing signpost. Calderwood itself could not be more than a scant, three miles away, along a winding road paved with clamshells from the old Indian mounds, shattered and flaked so that they crunched like coarse sand beneath the car tires.

It was then that I saw the car, an antiquated Rolls Royce, its emerald-green flanks shimmering like the florescent shell of a ground beetle as the final rays of sunlight spilled over it, filtering through the ragged veils of moss draped from the gnarled limbs of an ancient oak which guarded a freshly painted old house that had been transformed into a fashionable dining inn.

Chromo, polished to a mirror brightness, flashed at me out of the tree's shadows, triggering some half-forgotten memory. I knew precisely how the gleaming metal would feel beneath my fingertips, satiny cold and as smooth as glass.

Cutting the engine, I pressed my forehead against hands whose knuckles had turned white where they gripped the wheel, disjointed bits and pieces of memory dancing behind my tightly, squeezed eyelids. *Waving, black hair burnished to a blue sheen by a smiling sun that seeped between the sail-like leaves of a banana tree . . . A man's voice saying, "So this is Camilla," in slightly awed tones, and my mother's silky voice replying, "She's a very special girl, Jules."*

Other voices intruded into my scrambled thoughts, and I opened my eyes to see a man and a woman coming toward me. Both of them were in their twenties, the man slightly older than the girl who was model-slim in denim slacks and boots, her fully rounded breasts cupped daintly above the plunging V of a striped, silk shirt that was tied into a knot against the bare, brown skin of her midriff.

I caught my breath, something in her face tugging at my memory.

"That's not it at all, Deedee," the man beside her said, resuming their conversation.

His words came to me with a shattering clarity.

Deedee. I knew then why I had seemed to recognize the girl, though only her eyes were the same. Apart from her magnetic, green stare, there was very little about her to remind me of my cousin, Deedee Calderwood, whose real name had been Diane.

Too stunned to speak, I watched my cousin climb into the Rolls while the russet-haired man held the door for her, lovely, self-assured, more strikingly beautiful than she had any real right to be.

Three years older than myself, Deedee had exerted a peculiar power over me when we were small, her wildly switching moods giving rise in me to a painful ambivalence. She had enjoyed nothing more than to torment me and I had learned very quickly when my parents first brought me to Calderwood, that she was not to be trusted.

Dodee was neither Marilyn's daughter, nor Kate's. A child who had been gathered in from some distant branch of the family tree when her parents died, she guarded her tentative toe-hold in my grandmother's house with a jealousy that knew no bounds. My presence there had posed a threat to her, I knew that now, though I had been unaware of her motives at the time.

There had been yet another reason for her to hate me. At the tender age of six, I had fallen madly in love with my mother's adopted, young brother, Neil. My grandparents had brought Neil to Calderwood from some remote New Orleans orphanage when they realized they would have no son of their own to carry on the family name. A half-dozen years older than Deedee, he had attracted me in the same way a puppy is attracted to one who has shown it a kindness. I had followed him doggedly and thus had earned Deedee's disapproval and wrath, for she had told me once that Neil belonged to her.

Vaguely, I pictured Neil's sunburned face. But it was Deedee who was illuminated by my memory, because of

the cruelty she had shown me when I would have wished for the understanding of a confidante and friend.

The man with her had slid behind the wheel of the Rolls, the two of them appearing oblivious to me now that their conversation had been resumed. He seemed out of place behind the wheel of the ancient car that was obviously a classic.

"Don't I know you from somewhere?" she demanded of me through the car's open window.

"I'm Cammy." My voice was high and uncertain.

I had slipped unconsciously into the old pattern, pinned as I was by her haughty stare. Suddenly hating myself, I went on with a feigned lightness, "Your long, lost cousin, Camilla Carlyle, Deedee. I'm not surprised you don't know me. We've both changed a great deal since those days when we were children together at Calderwood."

"I should hope so." Slowly and deliberately, her pale eyes appraised me, above full, slightly petulant lips. "So the little mouse has grown up," she finally said, triggering a hurtful memory. "This is Victoria's daughter," she went on to the man behind the wheel of the Rolls.

The faint smile he wore vanished and he said gravely, "Camilla. I'm Kris Kincade."

"He's one of the Dazincourts," Deedee said. "You must remember Leonce and Jules. And that hideous crone, Toinette."

"I recognized the Rolls," I said.

"Jules would never part with it," Kris said. "I'm his overseer, by the way, which means I live there at Dazincourt Hall, not that I am one of them, as Deedee seems to want you to believe."

"Kris was Amelio's husband," Deedee contradicted him, going on to explain, when I gave her a blank stare, that Amelio Dazincourt was dead.

"I'm sorry," I said haplessly, my memory of the tall, thin girl who had lived in the big house located next to the Calderwood plantation as vaguely illusive as the half-formed picture of the man who belonged behind the



I was stunned to see my cousin Deedee when I drove into town. As a child, she had hated and tormented me. She was a slim, platinum-haired beauty now, but cruel and petulant as ever.

"I plan to marry Kris," Deedee announced. I thought, "She hasn't changed. She is still Deedee, out to get what she wants no matter whom she destroys."

wheel of the Rolls.

I would have had to be blind not to see that there was some hidden conflict between him and Deedee and I found myself wondering what their relationship might be. I was not surprised when she said, with a quick toss of her long hair that had been bleached to a luminous, platinum shade, "I plan to marry Kris."

Her pale eyes challenged me in the old way, putting me instantly on my guard, as though it had been only yesterday that I had been a wary six-year-old caught in the cruel grip of her power.

"Pay no attention to her," Kris countered, giving a crisp little laugh. "The truth is, Deedee can't quite make up her mind who she wants to marry."

"I've only just decided," Deedee said, caught up, I suspected, by some inborn flair for the dramatic. "Kris stands to inherit Amelio's share of the Dazincourt estate when Toinette dies. One day he'll be sole owner. I'd be a fool not to accept his offer. Jules will never marry now, and he can't live forever."

Her blunt materialism snatched away my breath and I thought, *She hasn't changed. She is still the same old Deedee, intent on making the whole world her own, one way or another, and no matter how many lives she must destroy.*

"I've noticed that you haven't mentioned Jules," she said.

"I don't remember him that well." I could be cool and remote, too. I wanted her to know that I was no longer the frightened six-year-old she had bullied when we were children together, though it remained to be seen whether or not I would prove to be a match for her.

"I had thought for a time I might marry him instead of Kris," Deedee told me with a spirited toss of her shining hair. "Does that shock you, Cammy?"

"Why should it?" A strange uneasiness came over me. "After all, he was Victoria's lover." Deedee's pale gaze pinned me.

Something darkly hideous writhed deep inside me. Like the nightmare shadows, it refused to show itself. I only know that it crouched there waiting, filling me with a sudden sense of horror.

Deedee was watching me, something darkly malicious lurking behind her eyes. "Surely you knew that," she said, when I didn't answer her.

I recalled how she had delighted in tormenting me as a child and disbelief swept over me, driving back the terrible sickness I felt.

"I knew no such thing and I'm not at all certain you do either." I was able to say then, with a small show of spirit.

Deedee shrugged eloquently. "Have it your way, then." Her tone was disdainful. "Though I'm afraid you are in for a rather rude awakening if you persist in playing your silly little mouse-in-a-hole games. I should have thought you'd have outgrown all of that by now." She turned to Kris. "As I recall, I told you the story, darling, about how we found her hidden in the old playhouse at the end of the garden the night it happened, her nightgown all bloodied from a little old cut she had on her foot. She was like a scared puppy who wouldn't come out, no matter what treats we offered."

Kris flashed me a sympathetic smile. "We're keeping you," he said, setting the Rolls into motion, allowing it to coast slowly away from me.

"If you still insist on coming to Calderwood, perhaps I'll see you there later, Cammy,luv." Deedee gave me a falsely gay little salute, the rings on her tanned fingers flashing brightly in the last lingering rays of the setting sun, the fiery shards of light seeming somehow to taunt me.

It was clear to me that she did not want me there at Calderwood. Knowing Deedee, I guessed that she had her own selfish reasons for trying to discourage me and I tried to imagine why, after all of these years, she still harbored such a fierce resentment against me. *Why had she lied about my mother?*

I could not deny, after Deedee had driven off with Kris Kincaide, that my cousin's shattering remarks concerning my mother's relationship with Jules Dazincourt had had their effect on me. If it had been Deedee's intention to unnerve me, she had succeeded admirably, although I was more determined than ever not to let her guess she could so easily disarm me, after all of these years, with her indiscriminate remarks and crushing innuendos.

Leaving the town behind, I turned with a queer reluctance onto the bayou road, following the *banquette* past green-scummed water that glittered darkly beneath a sky in which the first large stars had appeared.

Increasing my speed, I peered ahead, searching the thick gloom for some familiar landmark that would tell me I was on the right track. If memory served me right, I should arrive soon before the mammoth gateposts of Dazincourt Hall which stood guard before the entrance to a sultry peacan alley nearly a quarter-of-a-mile in length. It could not be much farther then to Calderwood which boasted its own towering gateposts set before an alley equally as grand as that which had once provided a vastly shadowed marquee to shelter Dazincourt's arriving houseguests.

Perhaps because I was intent on the road ahead, my gaze scanning the thick shadows beside it for some sign of Dazincourt Hall's illusive gateposts, I failed to see the bits of debris strewn across the pale gravel until my car was upon them. There was a sudden, muffled thud, followed by the sickening hiss of air escaping from inflated rubber. Almost at once, a second, bouncing thud resounded through the car's metal framework with a force that jerked the wheel from my hands.

Only then, as my car swerved dangerously in the direction of the swamp, did I see the bits and pieces of lumber spilled haphazardly in my path, the weathered ends of boards blending into the dingy gray of the crushed clamshells so that only the stiff, rusted spikes protruding out of them in evil rows showed up clearly in the backwash of light from the car's veering headlamps.

Belatedly, I plunged my foot down hard on the brake pedal, imagining for a shattering instant that I would be flung headlong into the viscid looking water which shimmered before the car's sharply tilting nose.

But luck was with me. Just as I imagined we were going over, the wheels beneath me lodged against some solid object rooted beneath the soft mud, bringing the car to a shuddering halt.

My first thought was that I would need a light. Leaning to fumble in the economy-size glove box, I prayed that once again luck would be with me, for I did

not relish the thought of attempting to find my way through darkness for the remainder of the way to Calderwood. And as fortune would have it, the light I sought was there, tucked into the narrow compartment with two tubular lengths of oiled cardboard which I quickly identified as safety flares. There was a pack of matches as well which I used to light the torches when I had picked my way gingerly around the sagging car to plant them in the road's soft shoulder.

Vaguely, it occurred to me when I had set the flares and had struck off far more boldly than I felt in the direction of Calderwood, that the nail-studded debris which looked as though it had come from the site of some ancient, razed building, had been strewn with a deliberate symmetry along the road's grooved tire tracks. As preposterous as it seemed, I was almost certain something like that had been the case when I played the beam from my light across the dangerously strewn litter.

But who would want to do such a thing? Why? Particularly since the drive which connected the isolated plantation houses with the town provided access, as well, to a small game preserve tucked off in the midst of the marshes. Telling myself then that I was over-reacting, I continued on my way after taking a last look at my car which had become hopelessly mired.

Except for the crunch of my sandals against the finely broken shells, there was no sound. The sudden silence made me uneasy. There was something about that eerie stillness . . . something I did not like. Then suddenly it was broken by a strange, hoarse whisper: *Turn back, Camilla. Turn back now, before it's too late.*

Turn back, Camilla, the voice repeated itself, its tone softly rasping, like the sawing sounds made by some coarse-winged insect. The effect was paralyzingly unreal.

Was I going mad? Flying wings brushed my cheek and I cried out, darting in a frenzy of fear toward the twin gateposts that rose before me like pale ghosts. Somewhere behind me, a nightbird shrieked.

Overwhelmed by the chilling sensation that I was being followed, I spun around, shooting the beam from my light in a sweeping arc across the swamp. It was then I saw it: the unmistakable image of a woman's face hovering above the rippling water. For the barest instant, it hung there watching me. In that same stunning moment, recognition dawned on me with an indescribable horror, for it was my mother's face I saw, her flawless, alabaster features staring out at me from between the trailing fronds of moss which fell like a tattered shroud from the limbs of the crouching cypress.

I screamed and in the next instant, she had vanished, fading behind the dense ranks of reeds which grew as tall as a man's head behind the old Indian mound. Balls of swamp fire bounded across the shimmering surface of the water where only seconds before that chillingly familiar shade had hovered.

"She was flawed," my father had said of my mother. "Flawed beyond redemption."

In the next instant, I went flying, my head striking against the gatepost that towered suddenly above me, with a sickening thud. A myriad fireflies erupted behind my eyelids, their dancing flames dying one by one until there was only the smothering darkness.

"Camilla!" The voice belonged to Kris Kincade. "What in God's name are you doing here? Where's your car? Surely you haven't come all this way from Calderville on Shank's mare." I heard him pause, then hurry forward with an oath. "But you've been hurt, for God's sake," he exclaimed.

"Let me look at you," he said, his hand still cupping my chin. "How in hell did all of this happen?"

Drawing in a deep breath in an effort to clear my stunned thoughts, I said, "I had a flat. Two of them, as a matter of fact—and as incredible as that must sound to you. Someone had scattered trash across the road. I didn't see it in time to stop."

"I think someone wanted to stop me from going to Calderwood," I said numbly, giving voice to the thought that hovered at the edge of my mind.

"Who would want to do a thing like that?" he said sensibly, reaching for the gear stick to set the heavy car in motion, nosing it, smoothly between the towering gateposts whose nearness filled me with a strange trepidation. Or was it Kris's nearness that disturbed me, causing me to feel that something menaced me here? I could not forget that he belonged to my cousin; I dared not forget, I thought, knowing Deedee.

Then I saw it in the darkness . . . unmistakably a woman's face, hovering above the rippling water of the swamp. I screamed in horror. It was the beautiful face of my mother!



"Has Jules no rights at all as a father?" Kris demanded. "I won't believe there was ever anything between my mother and Jules Dazincourt," I retorted.

The thready strains of an old woman's creaking voice, accompanied by the tinkling chords of an ancient piano, came to me from some distant room as Kris led me inside the old mansion, the quavering sounds lending themselves to the impression I had of moldering age and decay.

Guiding me toward the ancient couch whose coffin-tufted upholstery emitted a distinct odor of mold when I settled my weight against the faded cushions, he told me he would be back shortly, before vanishing through a nearby doorway.

The spiraling steps which wound upward into impenetrable, black shadows were empty. I shuddered, unable to put aside the lingering impression I had of being stealthily observed. Only then did I see the tall, dark man who stood behind the stair's ornately carved newel post, his keen stare blazing at me across the top of the thickly garlanded pedestal, Jules. When he spoke, his voice was cold. "And who might you be?"

I swallowed, forcing my lips to move, "I'm Camilla," I said. "Camilla Carlyle, Victoria's daughter," it occurred to me to add when he continued to watch me in that same darkly, skeptical way.

"You don't remember me," I said, unnerved by his oddly hovering silence.

His dark stare filled with something that might have been suspicion. When at last he spoke, his voice was weary. "Of course, I remember now that Victoria had a daughter. You resemble her, as a matter of fact. Although there's no way you could know that, after all of these years, is there." His dark brows lifted slightly, seeming to question me, while at the same time, I saw something in his face that bordered on contempt.

I said, "You must be Jules."

A door opened and I glanced up to see Kris coming toward me, his gaze lighting on Jules with a queer intensity.

"So the two of you have met." His hesitation suggested that he had intended to say more but had thought better of it. He looked at me. "I had some trouble catching up with Dr. Forsythe. His answering service finally succeeded in tracking him down for me. He should be here shortly."

Jules shot him a curious look. "You've called Tom? But why? What has he to do with any of this?"

"Camilla met with a slight accident down by the gates," Kris told him, reaching to draw aside the thick loop of hair I had pulled down to hide my scarred brow.

An aura of decadence enveloped the room like a shroud, visible in the dusty skeins of the draping cobwebs that hung from the corners of the high ceiling, streaming downward from an elaborate cartouche to veil the exquisite droplets of a monstrous chandelier. The acrid smell of rancid beeswax clung thickly to the humid air, blending into the musky scent of Jules' exotically expensive cologne, as he brushed by me, going to lay his hand gently on the old woman's frail shoulder.

"This is Camilla, Toinette," Kris said quickly. "Camilla Carlyle, Victoria's daughter."

"I told you Victoria is dead," Toinette flung at Jules.

Mad, I thought, turning my attention to Jules who had gone with his drink to lounge against a corner of the square piano.

I was relieved to hear a sudden pounding on the mansion's front door. An instant later, a squat little man hurried into the room, a worn, black medical bag dangling from his pudgy hand.

Although the plump little doctor seemed faintly familiar to me, I was unprepared for the sudden sense of horror that swept over me when he moved toward me, saying in a matter-of-fact voice, "I'm Dr. Forsythe. You must be Kate's granddaughter. I'd know you for a Calderwood anywhere."

I found myself cowering against the sofa's faded cushions, caught in the clutches of an irrational dread. It was all I could do not to flinch away from him when he reached to take my wrist, his short fingers settling expertly onto my pulse.

"Just relax now," he said, smoothing back my hair to examine my wound. "This doesn't look so bad. An antibiotic should take care of it. I don't suppose you remember the time I sewed your foot up for you," he continued in that same easy way, dipping into his battered bag for swabs and an antiseptic, dabbing some of the pungent liquid gingerly onto my grazed flesh. "Now there was a cut that warranted looking after. From the appearance of things, you'd stepped on a broken bottle. Funny thing, though. No one seemed to know how it happened and mite that you were then, you couldn't remember. Could be you'd been sleep walking. As I recall, you were in your nightgown. You and Deedee—Neil, too, I suppose—had been put to bed early because of the ball."

While from her place at the piano, Toinette said in a vaguely wandering voice, "That was the night it happened. The night of the ball." Her vacant stare focused on Dr. Forsythe, that same look of wanderment masking her small, wizened face. "No one told me you'd succeeded in saving her life that night, Tom. All of these years, I've thought she was dead."

An uneasy silence fell over the room.

Finally, Kris said, his voice oddly gentle, "If you're thinking of Victoria, she is dead, Toinette."

"Then why can't her spirit rest," Toinette said.

Taking my bags from the rear of the Rolls, Kris followed with quick strides. "The place seems unnaturally quiet, even for Calderwood," he said, sounding slightly puzzled.

"It might have been better if you'd accepted my invitation to stay over at Dazincourt Hall," he said. "It still stands, you know. I can bring you back here in the morning when things are more civilized."

I said briefly, "No."

"Why are you so adamant?" Then, before I could find an answer for him, he asked bluntly, "Has it something to do with Jules?"

"This is where I belong," I said, a note of defiance edging my voice.

"Has Jules no rights at all as a father?" He spoke so softly that I wondered at first if I had heard him correctly. "I know who you really are," he went on in that same softly subdued way, as though he feared someone might be listening behind the gallery's dense shadows.

"I won't believe there was ever anything between my mother and Jules Dazincourt." Defiantly I lifted the knocker a second time, letting it fall of its own accord to

strike a shattering note. "Especially after meeting him."

"Those who knew Jules then say he has changed rather drastically since Victoria died," Kris said.

Suddenly, I felt Kris' arms folding around me, turning me gently about to face him. "Come back with me tonight, Camilla," he pleaded softly, his face so near above my own that I caught the faint, leathery scent of his shaving lotion, blending into the other, more subtle smells that emanated from his sturdy person.

I tried to speak.

But before I could find the words I wanted, his lips found mine in a crushing kiss that left me breathless.

I was only half-aware of a regal voice saying close behind me, "That will be quite enough of that!"

Lost as I was on a wild wave of excitement that burned through my veins like molten metal, I had not heard the door behind me open. Yet, there could be no mistaking those low-pitched, magniloquent tones that carried with a clarion-like authority.

"Kate?" I said in the same small, pleading voice I had used as a child, calling her by her first name as I had

side of the mansion's great hall.

A hand-painted, china hurricane lamp stood on a tilt-top cherrywood table in the upstairs hallway, its subdued rays reflecting in the gold-leaf design of a mammoth, Duncan-Phyfe sofa which stood beneath a gilt-framed mirror.

The death couch. The thought stunned me into silence, an involuntary little shudder going through me as Deedee's voice came to me from that other time, saying, *You're even dumber than I thought, Cammy, if you insist on spending all of your time coloring on the hall sofa. That gloomy old couch is for dead people. Surely Victoria told you that much before she brought you here.*

But my mother had told me nothing of the sort. Not that I could recall.

In the end, it was Deedee who had explained to me in her scathingly superior way that the monstrous sofa where I had sought refuge from her perfidious tricks was used as a funeral bier where innumerable dead Calderwoods had been laid out to receive the last respects of the living, before their remains were carried away by



Suddenly, I felt Kris' arms around me, his lips on mind. I was lost on a wild wave of excitement that burned through me.

always done.

"Camilla had a slight accident down by the swamp," Kris said. "I came to her rescue is all."

"No doubt you were thanking Kris for bringing you here when I opened the door just now," she said, her clarion tones edged with sarcasm. "Seeing you here like this, you could be Victoria all over again," she added obscurely, her gaze that was as steely-bright as ever, seeming to weigh and judge me to my disadvantage.

Victoria. What manner of woman had my mother been to cause her memory to live on so vividly in all of their minds? I wondered numbly, aware that, like Jules and Toinette—and even Deedee, for all of her coldly calculating sophistication—Kate was still haunted in some inexplicable way by her own dark memories of my mother.

I was relieved when Kris said, after he had deposited my bags inside the door, "I'd best be getting along now. I have an early day tomorrow." He reached to lay his hand lightly on my shoulder. "I'll see you soon, Camilla. 'Til then, take care."

She turned away from me then, going toward the broadly sweeping staircase which wound upward at one

carriage to be interred in the family's clamshell cemetery at the far end of the sprawling acres of gardens, beyond a densely fragrant citrus grove.

A door opened down the hall from me when Kate had gone, the soft sound drawing me abruptly back to the present and I looked to see Deedee coming toward me with the langorous stride of a stalking cat.

"So you decided to come here, in spite of everything," she said. "I was hoping you'd reconsider, after we had our little chat in town. No good can come of it, you know. Your being here will only serve to bring it all back again."

"The death couch, crouching there in all of its obscene glory is only the beginning. The beginning and the end. Everywhere you look, you are going to be reminded of that night."

"They brought her here, remember?" Deedee was saying, the sound of her voice seeming suddenly to rise and fall around me, like the swelling tides of a relentless sea, pounding with a stubborn persistence against the protective barriers I had erected in my mind to hold the nightmare at bay. "You picked a cluster of white cape jasmine flowers to lay in her crossed hands. They'd gone

stiff and cold and I remember you couldn't pry them open. You always were such a dumb mouse, Cammy. I suppose it never occurred to you that she was dead. You can still see the marks where her body lay, if you look closely, no matter how hard Flossie worked afterward, trying to scrub them away."

Forcing my gaze away from the faint tracings that had combined with Deedee's morbid twist of mind to play such a cruel trick on me, I said, "You're as mad as you ever were. Anyone can see those marks are nothing but water stains."

"Think what you want to." She shrugged, feigning a petulant innocence, her long, tawny hair rippling like silk against the filmy folds of the apple-green dressing gown, she wore over voluminous pajamas cinched in tightly to emphasize the incredible wasp-slowness of her waist.

Throwing caution to the winds, I said, "It was you there in the swamp tonight, wasn't it, wandering around just as you used to do when we were children, looking for your own twisted ways to frighten me." I was treading on dangerous ground and I knew it. But I could not stop there. "Was Kris in it with you?" I rushed on recklessly. "Did you tell him you intended to disguise yourself as Victoria in some mad effort to frighten me away from Calderwood, in the event I refused to be intimidated by your wicked gossip? Is that why he happened along when he did? To see for himself whether or not your chilling little charade had done the job you hoped it would? Why do you dislike me so? What have I ever done to you?" I tacked on a little desperately.

I had caught her off her guard with my sudden attack, silencing her for a stunned instant. When at last she spoke, her tone was disbelieving. "You are absolutely paranoid, Cammy," she said coldly.

It seemed then that I saw something in her that might have been fear. But before I could attempt to read the strange look she had turned on me, footsteps sounded down the hall and I turned my head to see Kate coming toward us at last, followed by a waddling black woman wearing a faded, cotton wrapper, her bunioned feet clad in distorted, felt carpet slippers.

"Flossie," I said in a small, eager voice; the voice of that other Camilla who had lived at Calderwood as a child.

"It's me, child! It's me!" The elderly black woman brushed past Kate, her heavy arms reaching to draw me tightly against her ample bosom.

"Miss Victoria, honey." She shook her head dazedly. "You done come back to us again. You done come back."

If Kate had seen anything remiss in the old woman's greeting, she did not allow it to show. "Flossie will see that you are made comfortable here, Camilla," she said.

"Don't you worry yourself none about that, Miss Kate," Flossie said. "I always know just what to do to make my baby happy."

"Miss Camilla will use the blue room while she's with us," Kate instructed her.

"No need for you to tell me that, Miss Kate," Flossie replied. "I know where my baby belong."

I had the uncanny sensation when the old servant had gathered up my bags to lead me off along the quiet corridor, that I had entered a world still dominated by some ineffable spell cast on them long ago by Victoria.

I thought then that Deedee had been right; Victoria still lived in this house, in spite of the fact that she had been dead for fifteen years.

I woke to the crooning sounds of warblers in the trees outside my windows. For a dazed moment or two, I could not remember where I was or how I came to be here, a wave of alarm going through me when I turned my bruised head against the soft thick pillow to peer into the room's dimly lighted corners.

The portrait of a young woman who looked remarkably like myself, stared down at me from above a white-painted fireplace, its skillfully jointed panels ornamented with delicate Wedgwood medallions. *Camilla*. I remembered then that the portrait had hung in the mansion's huge, central hallway when I was a child, and I tried to imagine what it was doing here in this room that seemed only vaguely familiar to me.

Located at the rear of the mansion, the blue room opened onto a deeply shaded veranda which overlooked a half-dozen acres of tightly massed plantings. Plump clusters of purple bloom hung heavily from the creepers draped about the mansion's sturdy columns, the vines rioting out of control to send their tenacious tendrils twining upward to envelope aritrave, frieze and cornice. The effect was one of overwhelming verdure, swagging downward in thick masses to cast a twilight gloom across the thick, cypress floor of the eighty-foot gallery.

The door opened and Kate stepped into my room, still in the same beige lace she had worn the previous evening, every brightly gleaming hair of her expertly dyed head immaculately in place. I could not help comparing her then to Toinette Dazincourt, thinking what a startling contrast she made to the wizened crone who had crouched like a madwoman over the yellowed keys of her ancient piano.

"Good morning," I said to her in a subdued voice.

"I hoped I'd find you up," she said. "There is something I wanted to discuss with you before you came down to meet the others."

"If you are still wondering why I was with Kris . . ." I began, feeling my cheeks redden, when I remembered the kiss he had given me and that Kate had unwittingly witnessed.



"I want to talk to you," Grandma said. I felt my cheeks redden. She had seen me with Kris, watched our passionate embrace . . .

I told my grandmother, "If you're wondering whether I'm aware that my mother was murdered, Deedee told me that last night." "Don't pry!" she warned.

Before I could go on to explain again how I had come to be with someone from Dazincourt Hall, Kate said, "It isn't Kris who concerns me. It is even possible that he may prove to be the means through which the property which rightfully belongs to Calderwood will be restored to us. Your cousin, Deedee, has been seeing quite a good deal of him since Ameljo died. I shouldn't want anything to interfere with Deedee's plans, Camilla."

"Why did you wish to see me then?" I asked, more deeply disillusioned than I wanted to be to find that the aversion I had seen in Deedee had been but a shallow reflection of Kate's own coldly callous cupidity.

"I'm naturally curious about how much John Carlyle may have told you about us," she said. "The fact that he didn't accompany you on your visit seems to suggest that he may be bitter . . ." Her brows rose curiously, her mouth that was still firm and unlined, quirking into some semblance of a humorless little smile.

"My father is dead," I said. "That's why I'm here. Because I needed somewhere to go for awhile."

"If you are thinking I have come back here hoping to sponge on the Calderwoods, nothing could be farther from my mind," I said.

"I can't imagine Calderwood holds many happy memories for you, all things considered," she said. "It can't have been pleasant for you, losing your mother at such a tender age. Victoria was fond of you, in her own curious way."

"My memories of her are vague," I said.

"Which is perhaps just as well," my grandmother said. "Although it does occur to me that John may have told you something about her, as you grew older."

"If you are wondering whether I am aware that she was murdered, Deedee told me that last night," I said.

She said, "I wouldn't pry, if I were you, Camilla. There are some things that are best left hidden."

Pausing beneath its rounded archway, she said, "We breakfast at eight on the back veranda. I shall expect you."

Then abruptly, she left me, closing the door firmly behind her. Perhaps because I had seen in her a strong reluctance to have me here that had seemed to be centered around a puzzling core of suspicion and mistrust, the gesture aroused in me a sudden foreboding that I could not dismiss.

The others were waiting for me with cups of *café noir* steaming in their hands when, a few minutes later, my hair freshly combed, and a dab of lipstick brightening my mouth, I went down to join them on the back veranda which was shaded by the same thick-stemmed vines that had crawled upward to shield the gallery outside my windows.

"Camilla!" Putting down his cup, Neil rose with a quick, wiry grace to hurry toward me, his face that was darkly tanned in lieu of the sunburn I remembered, spreading in a broad smile.

"Camilla," Marilyn gave me a wooden little smile when I went to press my cheek to hers in a dutiful gesture. "Kate told me you were here. I trust you slept well."

"As well as could be expected in a strange bed," I said awkwardly, when her eyes seemed suddenly to probe me from behind the gold rims of her spectacles, assessing me

in that same, distrustful way Kate had done.

A plain, colorless woman, Marilyn's faded, cotton housedress hung limply from her bony shoulders, below greying hair pulled back tightly behind her ears into an untidy chignon. I could not help noticing, when she raised her cup to take a sip of the dark liquid that my grandmother had always insisted must be made strong enough to stain the cup in order to be good, that even her gestures had about them a certain *gauche* quality, and I was reminded suddenly of something jerkily mechanical, run by a wind-up spring.

Across from me, Deedee said, "You must be aware that you bear a rather shocking resemblance to Camelia, just as Victoria did. I wonder. Do you suppose it's a case for reincarnation?"

"Only if you happen to believe in such things," I said.

"It could explain why Victoria was drawn to Camelia's portrait, enough to want to name you for our legendary ancestress," Deedee said.

"My name is Camilla, not Camelia," I reminded her, my thoughts whirling in an effort to determine what private little game of her own she was attempting to lure me into.

But I would not be drawn into her senseless little intrigues. Not willingly. And I fumbled in my mind for some witty repartee which would serve to let her know that. But before I could find the words I needed, Flossie appeared with steaming platters heaped high with bacon, eggs and sausage, and golden triangles of hot, buttered toast stacked beside lusciously fragrant brioche, still steaming from the oven.

When Flossie had refilled our coffee cups and gone, Deedee said, "Kate couldn't bear looking at Camelia's portrait after what happened here that night. The night Victoria died," she added, watching me slyly, as though she expected me to reward her with some betraying reaction which would serve to reinstate her old unequivocal powers over me.

I became aware of Kate's voice, haughty with disapproval. "I find your topic of conversation highly unsuitable, Deedee, particularly when we are at table."

But apparently Deedee's thoughts had taken the same turn as my own, for she said, in spite of the frowning look Kate gave her, "Marilyn was always determined to make certain Cammy and I—and Neil, too, for that matter—never dared to venture near the old springhouse." She looked at Marilyn. "Do you remember how adamant you were, threatening us with all sorts of dreadful disasters if we dared to defy you by trying to go inside. For years, I imagined it was because the ghost of that poor, ignorant slave was still lurking in there somewhere, waiting to have his revenge on any Calderwood who dared to go near the place." Her tone seemed to suggest that she had since discovered otherwise; that she knew now of some better, more satisfying reason to explain why we were forbidden to play near the gloomily rising old tower.

"Agreed," Neil said. "Any attempt to pry open a door or a window could result in tragedy. All that's holding that old pile upright are those ancient vines that had succeeded in devouring every last morsel of the mortar that once held those moldy old bricks together. It's high time I followed Kris Kincade's example and did some constructive razing around here to make way for some more practical outbuildings. When I get around to it,

I knew that the old springhouse tower was in some mysterious way connected with my mother's murder. It wasn't safe to go there—but I had to . . .

that old heap will be the first to go."

"No!" Kate's sharp outburst startled us all. "No, Neil," she went on more calmly when she realized we were all watching her. "Not while I'm alive. I've fond memories associated with the springhouse tower."

Neil studied her for a silent moment during which I saw something that might have been skepticism dart behind his dark stare.

"I think I understand, Kate," he finally said, although I was certain, from the look he gave her, that he did not see her point at all.

While across from me, Deedee quipped, in her boldly mocking way. "It's hard for me to picture you in a swimming suit, Kate, let alone tucked off in your own little romantic shrine somewhere up there inside that gruesome old pile."

"Contrary to what you may think, I was once a belle," Kate said tartly. "Although I must say I tried to be sensible about what I wore. Styles were dignified then, designed to protect a young woman's modesty."

"And totally lacking in sex appeal," Deedee said.

"A hint of mystery is far more tantalizing to a man than some brazen show of immodest flamboyance," Marilyn commented.

It was Kate who said, "There were those girls even then who chose to flaunt convention by exposing themselves in a daring way to the men who courted us. Toinette Dazincourt, for one. I shall never forget the spectacle she made of herself at our swimming parties."

"Toinette?" It was Deedee's turn to look stunned.

"She was present merely on sufferance," Kate said primly. "One of Wyatt's friends had become interested in her and insisted on bringing her along, in spite of what she was."

"Nothing ever came of their liaisons, I gather," Deedee remarked. "At least nothing that was ever legalized," she added wilyly, a smug amusement tilting her sensuous mouth into a wry little smile. "Crone that she is, I've always suspected that Toinette had something scandalously naughty in her past that she wanted to keep hidden."

Kate made a small, snorting sound that seemed entirely out of character with her splendid appearance. "The Dazincourts are nothing but Cajun trash, for all of their impoverished pretense. It was because he was wise enough to see through their indolent posturings that Camelia's father forbade her to marry one of them. If you plan to remain here with us, Camilla, you shall be expected to know the difference between a crawfish man and a Creole!" Her pale eyes blazed at me with a sudden, seething malevolence.

Her embittered tirade stunned me, when I realized how deeply seated her hatreds were. There seemed to be no logical reason to explain her seething resentments against the Dazincourts, unless I was prepared to place the blame on Camelia for having committed the supreme folly of falling in love with the wrong man more than a century-and-a-half-ago. Common sense alone told me that no one, including Kate, for all of her staunch adherence to propriety, could keep a hatred alive after so long a time, and it seemed to me then that there was no choice left to me but to believe what Deedee had told me about Jules and Victoria.

"Looking for more ghosts, Cammy?" Deedee's voice said behind me.

I turned my head to see her emerging through one of

the round-topped doorways a short distance down the veranda, a stemmed-crystal glass filled with some cool, lime-tinted liquid sparkling in her hand.

"Hi, Deedee," I said as civilly as I could, thinking that if I intended to remain at Calderwood for any length of time it was imperative that I declare a truce. "I'd forgotten how fragrant the garden is," I went on conversationally, waiting for her to give me the opening I needed before I plunged ahead to demand a cessation of warfare between us.

"I'm glad someone finds it pleasing," she said, giving her head a little fling tossing her thick, tawny hair which flowed in a wild array around her small head carelessly away from her flawless face.

"I take it you are still unhappy about my being here," I said.

"What did you expect?" Her voice raised on a challenging note. "That I would do a turn-about-face and throw open my arms to welcome you. Not even you can be that naive, can you, Cammy, huh?"

I sipped the black coffee Flossie had brought with my lunch in silence, not wanting to encourage her further by responding to her macabre comments. At the same time, I could not help wondering if it was because of her sinister tales that I felt such a queer mixture of excitement and dread when my gaze was drawn to the far corner of the garden where the old azalea bushes crowded together to provide their own dark screen, as though whatever was hidden there had gained some strange, malignant hold on me that I was powerless to resist.

Beside me, Deedee said, "I've found out something else about the old springhouse. Something that should especially interest you."

I gave her a startled look. "What is that?" I was foolish enough to ask.

"It's about Camelia." She flashed me an amused little look.

Above her curling lips, her eyes glittered with a secret malice.

"I remember you telling me some sad little tale about her," I countered.

"I didn't have the whole story then. Now I do."

"Camelia was murdered by her own father, or the same as," Deedee said. "Murdered, like Victoria," she added chillingly.

I felt wrenched with dread.

Nevertheless, I forced myself to say, "Camelia's death must have been an accident. Fathers don't murder their daughters."

"What I didn't know before, Cammy, is that the Dazincourts are cursed." Deedee looked at me, that same wild excitement I had seen in her before burning brightly behind her pale eyes so that they seemed oddly transparent, like the eyes of a cat viewed from an oblique angle. "That's the real reason Camelia died. And Victoria, too. They were both victims, Cammy, Iuv. Victims of the Dazincourt curse, just as you are destined to be."

"You are involved whether you want to believe me or not, by virtue of whom you happen to be," Deedee said. "When I find the proof I need, perhaps you'll feel less inclined to doubt me. All that's needed now to establish the validity of my research is the Dazincourt ring. Have you ever heard of it, Cammy?" she added with a false brightness.

"No, of course not. How could I have?" I said.

She regarded me in silence for a moment or two, her

pale stare seeming to test me.

"It exists, believe me," she finally said. "Camelia's lover, whose name was 'Etienne, incidentally, is said to have presented it to her to seal their love pact. From what I gather, it's a priceless bauble, once owned by a famous French courtesan. Even then, it had gained a reputation for being cursed, which may explain how it came into the hands of the Dazincourts, no doubt by virtue of their pirate cronies. Anyhow, when Camelia's father discovered it was in her possession, he became rabid. He demanded that she hand it over to him, and when she refused to obey, he locked her inside the springhouse. She was found there the following morning, hanged by her own hand, the ring glittering defiantly on her wedding finger." Deedee paused to dart me a meaningful look. "Her ghost has been seen there recently," she said then.

I sipped from the Limoges cup that trembled in my fingers, saying, when I had found my voice, "Is that what you want me to believe? That it was Camelia's ghost I saw in the swamp last night?"

She sat there staring at me, a vivid look coming onto her face. "Tell me, Cammy. Was she wearing the ring?"

"It was stolen from Camelia's finger while her body lay on the death couch," Deedee revealed then. "It was discovered later that 'Etienne Dazincourt had slipped into Calderwood under cover of darkness to retrieve it. And to make a death mask of his beloved Camelia, a tragically touching little gesture, if ever I heard one. He sent the death mask to France where he had it made into a lifesize, hisque likeness of her, replete with lustrous, glass eyes, and a modish wig of human hair to match her own flowing, dark tresses. The head was fitted with a soft, kid body and there were matching limbs to create the illusion he wanted."

I shot her a disbelieving look, shocked, in spite of myself, by her wild tale.

"He must have been mad," I said.

"They're all of them a little mad over there," Deedee glanced in the direction of Dazincourt Hall whose hipped roofline was partially visible from this angle through a shadowed opening between the huge, old liveoaks that formed a dark barrier between the two houses. "Particularly those among them who have been stamped with the Dazincourt mark."

"Mark?" I repeated dazedly.

"A birthmark that's been passed down among them for generations," Deedee said. "Oddly enough, it's shaped like an opal."

"I don't understand," I said.

"That's the central stone in the ring," Deedee told me. "It's said to be one of the largest black opals ever found, even larger than the Queen of Earth which is said to be valued at more than a quarter-of-a-million dollars at today's prices." Avarice glinted like shards of ice behind her pale eyes.

"That's why you're interested in Jules, isn't it?" I said. "And Kris, too, for that matter. Because you think they still might have the ring."

"It has to be around somewhere," Deedee said.

A numbing sense of unreality swept over me and I felt the old familiar tug of terror. For suddenly I was certain I had once seen the ring Deedee had described for me with such a voracious clarity, its evil stones blazing wickedly on my mother's finger.

Late that afternoon, when the first, long shadows had begun to fall across the gardens, diminishing the sun's suffocating rays, I put on slacks to protect my legs and ventured out into the gardens, going quickly along the upstairs veranda to the narrow staircase at its far end.

Glad for a brief respite from the uneasy nuances of menace which seemed to hover around me, partly as a result of my experience on the swamp road the night before, partly because of the wild tales Deedee insisted on telling me, I struck off bravely along a brick path which wound between thick clumps of Spanish dagger and giant elephant ear, in the direction of the old springhouse.

I wandered aimlessly at first, having no idea where to begin my search, or even what it was I sought. What I had seen in the swamp last night had left its own chilling imprint, so that, without stopping to consider where my

"You're after Kris or Jules because you think they have the Dazincourt ring!" I said. "It has to be around somewhere," Deedee answered defiantly.



The door of the crypt slammed shut, leaving me in slimy darkness. Then I heard the voice, whispering, "You didn't go away. Now you must die!"

footsteps might take me, I found myself heading in the direction of the old cemetery. My memory of its location was hazy, scarcely more than a veiled impression of squat orange trees, their glossy leaves pressing together above grassy isles that culminated at the edge of a swampy wood where the Calderwood tombs stood lost in shadow.

Still determined to find my way to the old cemetery along a route that would afford me the privacy I wanted from prying eyes, I thrust the spragging willows stubbornly aside.

Built of brick, the ancient tombs had, through the decades, become darkly scaled with mold and lichens, their seams cracked where chunks of mortar had broken away. Pushing my way through the thickly tangled growth that had sprung up around them, I pried open the rusted, iron grate that blocked the entrance to the largest among the scattered vaults, peering uneasily into its gloomy interior that was filled with the pungent smell of dankly, moldering growths.

Dimly I made out the rows of crypts banked along its low walls, their plaques blanketed with some moistly velvet fungus. Somewhere nearby, leaves rustled, as though some hidden creature had brushed past them, to slither softly into silence.

Ignoring the sudden chill that gripped me, I slid swiftly into the vault, my eyes straining to read the rowed plaques through the grey gloom that surrounded me.

But my mother was not among those who had been laid to rest inside the monstrous old tomb, and, giving a grim little shudder, I went quickly out into the hazy, evening light that seemed shatteringly bright, after the dismal darkness inside the vault.

I had started to turn away, burdened by that sudden, dark melancholy, when I noticed a small, lonely mound rising above the dark threads of water at the far end of the Calderwood cemetery. A lonely crypt, surrounded by rankly growing mayhaw and dewberry stood dimly in its center, the vault's thick, brick walls crumbling beneath an onslaught of ravenously growing ivy.

Standing apart from the Dazincourt and Calderwood cemeteries, the grim little island with its dankly looming crypt seemed to draw me and I went quickly along the brick pediment, seeking a break in the iron fence. Coming at last to a narrow opening where a section of the spiked grate had rusted free, I scrambled onto the low bricks, making my way cautiously in the swampy trough which separated the smaller mound from the Calderwood cemetery.

Turning my attention then to the rusted doors hinged to the mouth of the ancient tomb, and that stood partially open, I knelt to tug at the tangled vines that blocked their passage, opening them wide when I had cleared the ground beneath them, to light my way inside.

I think I knew, even before I found the marker set into the facing above the first crypt, what I would find. Headless of my nails, I scraped away the thick layers of mildew from the darkly corroded metal plaque, uncovering first a V, and then the rest of her name, *Victoria Calderwood Carlisle*, tracing the letters with my fingertips in that faint light, like a blind person reading braille.

Curious to know whose remains, besides Victoria's, had been relegated to the isolated mound, I went deeper into the vault, finding a second market all but obscured beneath thick layers of fungus near the rear. Clawing quickly at the black mold, I uncovered an archaic inscription: *Camelia Calderwood*. This, then, had been her

tomb. The fact that Camelia had died by her own hand, if Deedee's tragic tale was to be believed, seemed suddenly to explain why the vault in which she was laid to rest stood apart from the Calderwood cemetery on its own small hill of unhallowed clamshells.

I had started to go when I became aware of a third market set above the crypt next to the drawer which held my mother's remains. Rubbing it free of mold, I traced the name etched into the plain metal. *Leonce. Leonce Dazincourt*.

I stared in stunned amazement at the faintly etched letters, hearing a man's voice saying softly out of the past, *After all, we're peas from the same pod*. The sudden snatch of memory flashed for a shattering instant against the grey void of my mind, like a zigzagging flash of lightning ripping across a stormy sky.

Then, as quickly as it had come, it was gone, leaving in its wake the old nightmare sensation of my dreams.

Pulling away from the market that seemed somehow malevolent, I had started to go when there was a sudden, shattering crash of grating metal. In that same instant, I was plunged into an unfathomable darkness. For a numbing moment or two, I did not know what had happened.

My first thought was that I must escape, and, feeling my way past the slime-covered crypts, I hammered against the rusted doors, crying out frantically for whoever was there to release me.

At first there was only silence. Then, softly, so softly that I imagined for a stunning instant that my mind had slipped again into that hazy past that eluded me, a voice whispered, "There is no hope for you, Camilla. You are cursed. Cursed as I was."

"Victoria." The whisper came faintly to me. "I am Victoria. Do you think I want you to die, locked away from the world as she was? I have no choice, Camilla. You must understand that. You didn't go away as I asked you to. Now you, too, must die."

"No!" I cried. "This is madness. Let me out of here." But this time there was no reply. Whoever had locked me inside the vault had gone, leaving me alone with the ghosts from out of the past. *Alone to die*. The thought sent a fresh wave of horror through me, when I realized how isolated the old cemetery mounds were from the two mansions. There was only a remote chance that I might be heard if I cried out. I had no choice then but to admit to myself that I was trapped.

I have no idea how long I crouched inside the lonely old tomb, going from time to time to hammer wildly on the iron doors, crying out for someone to please hear me and come to my rescue. Only that it seemed an eon, sealed, as I was, in darkness, surrounded by an atmosphere of tragedy mingled with that strange sense of malevolence which had come over me at the sight of Leonce Dazincourt's name engraved on one of the tomb's markers.

Overwhelmed by a dark despondence, I tried to imagine who had done this to me. Who at Calderwood wanted me dead? It seemed suddenly that they all had their reasons and it occurred to me as it had done earlier, that they might all be conspiring against me for their own selfish reasons.

At first, when I heard the voice calling my name, I imagined my assailant had returned to taunt me further.

Then, as the sounds grew nearer, I realized that it was no stealthy whisper I heard this time; that whoever was there called my name boldly, the sound of his voice muffled by the thick walls around me.

The voice came nearer.

Kris Kincade, Frantically I pounded on the iron doors, crying out for him to release me. An instant later, metal grated sharply against metal and the doors were flung wide, admitting the faint, grey light of late evening.

Much to my astonishment, I felt hot tears welling behind my eyelids, and my first impulse was to rush headlong into Kris' arms.

Then he said, "So there you are. I should have thought you'd have more sense than to go blundering about inside that dangerous old pile," his matter-of-fact tones sobering me.

"Someone locked me inside," I said.

He looked skeptical. "Who in God's name would want to do that?" he asked.

"The same person who scattered debris in the path of my car and posed as a ghost in the swamps in an effort to scare me away from here," I said.

He bent to examine the tomb's iron doors. "Are you certain these doors didn't swing shut behind you of their own accord?" he asked maddeningly. "It's plain to see you cleared a track beneath them so they swing free."

His words aroused in me a tumultuous sense of outrage, so that I felt torn inside by seething torrents of emotion I could not understand.

I said coldly, "You were looking for me?"

"I returned your car to you. But you were nowhere around to thank me."

I watched him cautiously for a moment or two. But it was impossible to see what he was thinking.

"Next time you get an urge to go wandering off, call me," he said gruffly. "I won't have you roaming about in the midst of these swamps alone."

"I've seen what I wanted to see," I said, casting a quick look across my shoulder at the old tomb.

"Does it bother you that they put him beside her?" he asked, as though he had seen something in me which had triggered his curiosity.

"Leonce!" I made myself speak the name that seemed to carry with it some dreaded connotation of evil.

"Leonce."

"He was Jules' twin, wasn't he?" I said.

Kris nodded. "I've seen photographs of them together. They were identical. Except for the so-called Dazincourt mark," he added curiously. "Local legend has it that Leonce bore the famous stamp of the Dazincourts, whatever that is supposed to suggest."

"It sounds like some more of Deedee's nonsense," I said skeptically.

"The fact remains that Leonce is dead, while Jules still lives," Kris said.

"I'm certain any number of people have similar birthmarks," I said, thinking vaguely that I myself had a birthmark that might be construed to be oval in shape. Like the Dazincourt opal. I thrust the hazy thought quickly aside. "And sooner or later, everyone has to die," I added vaguely.

"Most people don't take their own lives," Kris said.

"Is that what happened to Leonce?" I asked, thinking at once of Camelia who was said to have hanged herself.

And my mother? Was she, too, dead by her own hand? Did that explain why the three of them were there together, inside the isolated old tomb which was situated outside the two cemeteries, on unhallowed ground?

"You mean you don't know?" Kris was saying, sounding slightly shocked.

"Know what?" I asked dumbly.

He hesitated. "You may as well hear it from me as one of the others, I suppose," he finally said. "Leonce was in love with Victoria. He was determined to have her, one way or another. So he shot her, then turned his gun on himself. The two of them were found together."

"Leonce killed her?" I asked in a small, stunned voice, something sinister seeming suddenly to surround me, dimming the light and the shadows.

We had come to the edge of the orange grove without my quite knowing how we came to be there, the glossy masses of foliage beginning suddenly to swirl madly before me.

"Leonce," Kris' voice said, as though from a distance. "I should have thought someone would have told you that."

Neither Kate nor Marilyn appeared at breakfast the following morning. Nor was Neil anywhere in evidence when I went down to the back gallery, which left me alone with Deedee.

I said now to Deedee, "Think what you want about me. My father always told me truth will out in the end."

Briefly her pale stare challenged me. Then, giving a seditious little shrug, she said, "You are right, you know. Truth will out, sooner or later. Meanwhile, what we all need is some excitement and glamour in our lives. I'm thinking in terms of a ball. How does that strike you, Cammy-uv? Don't you agree that we can use an evening of merry making and gaiety here in this old pile?"

I said coolly, refusing to relent, "It has been less than a month since I lost my father. The last thing I want now is gaiety."

"But that's precisely what you need, darling," Deedee persisted. "You can't go on playing the wounded mouse forever."

I sensed something devious in her. Something that frightened me a little. But before I could define what it was I felt, footsteps sounded behind me on the veranda's brick pavement and I turned to see Neil coming toward us, his blue workshirt stained with field dust and sweat.

"Neil, darling," Deedee greeted him. "You're just in time to help me plan a ball."

"What I'm in the mood for at the moment is a cup of Flossie's coffee," he said. "What I want is some excitement. A costume ball! Why didn't I think of it sooner?"

"What are you up to, now, Deedee?" Neil asked suspiciously, his dark eyes smoldering above the rim of the delicate Limoges cup which looked suddenly incongruous, clasped as it was in his work-roughened hands.

The day of the ball arrived, going by in a flurry of last minute preparations, with Deedee pacing the house like a restless cat, leaving nothing to chance by putting her own final touches on everything.

The first of the guests had begun to arrive before I could bring myself to take the dress Deedee had brought for me to wear from its hanger, to slide it listlessly over my head. It seemed to fit me differently than it had done that day in the attic, when Deedee had accused me of taking the Dazincourt ring from my dead mother's finger, and only then did I realize that Deedee had switched dresses on me; that this was not the same gown I had tried on then.

The dress I wore now was of soft, silk, jersey, falling in simple folds from my shoulders, with a silver cord securing it at my waist, I had started to turn toward the cheval mirror to examine my appearance, when a light tap sounded on my door.

"Camilla, are you decent?" Neil's voice called to me.

He poked his head into my room, when I called out to him, his white teeth flashing me a debonaire smile from beneath a slitted harlequin's mask. His costume was that of a nineteenth century riverboat gambler, his black redingote and colorful cravat giving him an excitingly rakish air.

"I came to volunteer as your escort," he said.

I recognized Dr. Forsythe, whose squat figure and brusque mannerisms gave him away and there were one or two others among those circulating about me whom I seemed vaguely to recognize.

Kate was present, of course, regal in aubergine velvet trimmed lavishly with ermine tails, a rhinestone studded tiara flashing against the shimmering abundance of her cleverly dyed hair. Nor did I have any trouble recognizing Marilyn who had come disguised as an Ur-luline nun.

Slowly, so slowly at first, that I was scarcely aware of what was happening, I was drawn into a subtle sense of dejavu.

I turned sharply away, catching a glimpse of myself in a tall, gilt mirror which stood between life-like marble statues done in the Grecian style. For a stunned instant I stared at the pale image which seemed scarcely more than a reflection of one of the marble figures, the memories flocking around the numbed edges of my mind growing more persistent. *Victoria, in a flowing silk gown, Grecian in its simplicity . . .*

Suddenly I was gripped by a terrifying sense of unreality. Victoria had died the night of the ball. Now it seemed as if history was repeating itself. Somehow Deedee had arranged it all, directing us in what we were to wear, switching the dress she had craftily told me I would wear for the Grecian gown my mother had worn the night of her murder. Was Kris in it with her? Was it he who would, in the end, play Leonce?

Soft laughter seemed to whisper wickedly around me and suddenly it seemed that I was going mad. Whirling away from the pale image in the mirror, I ran, finding myself on the mansion's front gallery without quite knowing how I came to be there.

The faint outline of a small building loomed out of the shadows. The old playhouse . . . Unwittingly I had retraced the steps I had taken that other night.

Still driven by that terrorizing sense of unreality, I crept inside the miniature house, my fingers fumbling along the midlevel floor, feeling for the loose board where I had hidden the Mason jar which held the matches and candles I had smuggled out of the mansion long ago.

Miraculously the jar was still there beneath the playhouse floor. Miraculously, too, the seal was still intact, serving to protect the matches I could hear rattling around inside the damp glass, as I worked to pry free the rusted lid.

The seal broke and, an instant later, I held a flaming match to the wick of a bent candle.

Drawing out a tightly wrapped packet, I unfolded the midlevel layers with fingers that had no feeling left in them, coming at last to the small, grimy notebook that had the words, *Camilla's Journal*, printed in neat, block letters across its cover.

I saw Jules come to the hall in his Cajun cape. Monnny said he should have a horse for the courrir du Mardi Gras, which means the running of the Mardi Gras. It is something Cajuns do. Kate told Deedee and nie that once.

I watched them kiss, the next line said. Then Jules asked her how his special little girl was. I knew he meant me and I ran back up to my room. But I didn't go to bed. I waited and I watched and a long time after that, I saw Monnny in the garden below the back gallery with Leonce. I heard Leonce say he loved her. He said he must have her. He said if she loved one pea she could love another. Then they went into the old springhouse and I followed them in my nightgown. I saw Leonce hurt Monnny. Then Jules came. There were loud noises and blood all over. Then he put something white on Monnny's face. That's when I ran away.

Something warm glided down my cheek, and I blushed at it with impatient fingers suddenly aware that I was

crying.

Kris was there waiting for me when I left the playhouse, the linen suit he wore pale against the darkness of the garden, giving him away.

"Camilla!" he called softly, his gentle tones luring me. I struggled against a compelling desire to fling myself into his arms, as he came slowly toward me through the velvet shadows. *Leonce*. It was Leonce who had worn the planter's suit that night.

Tearing myself away from the clutching tendrils of emotion that threatened to engulf me, I ran blindly through the garden, unmindful of the rankly sprigging branches that reached to tear at my hair.

The old springhouse loomed darkly before me and, struggling through the layered vines at its base, I found the hidden door, my fingers flying to lift the latch. Flinging myself through the dark opening, I heard his flying footsteps pounding past me along the brick walk, thinking as I quietly closed the door, that, for the moment, at least, I was safe.

It was then I heard the voice, murmuring softly around me, seeming to come to me from the hidden room beneath the stair where I had seen the eerie likeness of my mother lying on a bed, a cluster of fresh cape jasmine clasped in her lifeless hands. The voice had a mesmerizing effect on me, and, icy with dread, I crept through darkness toward its source, making out a thin thread of light seeping through the seams of the door-frame where the ancient wood had begun to rot away.

Pressing against the wall, I peered cautiously through one of the narrow openings. A man stood in the center of the room. Jules, still wearing his purple-and-gold captain's cape. A woman languished in his arms, her long, black hair falling in a shimmering cascade across his arms as he bent forward to kiss her, his back blocking my view of her face.

He lay her down gently. Still watching through the narrow crack, I saw her face, a fresh wave of horror going through me. *Victoria*.

I stood braced against the clammy wall, all feeling drained from me, as I continued to peer into the dimly lighted room, hearing Jules' murmured endearments, as he removed his cape and began to disrobe.

It was then I saw the birthmark seared darkly across his flesh just above the line of his trousers. It was oval-shaped, as mine was, the stamp of the Dazincourts.

Leonce had a mark like that, Deedee had said.

In that same instant, I knew the truth. I had not recorded all I had seen that night in my diary. Even then, before I could set it all down in my childish script, memory had begun to fade; the shutters of my mind had started to click shut.

My parents' bones are in their dusty urns

Sepulchred, where no kindled incense burns . . .

The lines from Keats flowed through my mind and, too late, I knew what my father had meant for me to derive from them. Jules could not have killed Victoria. He had loved her far too much. It was Leonce who had killed them both and then had pretended to be Jules all of these years so no one would guess he was a murderer.

Now it was Leonce who spun to face me, bracing against the door so that I could not escape.

"I have to kill you now," he said coldly, his voice edged with that same devastating bitterness that I had caught behind it that first night at Dazincourt Hall. "You've left me no choice. If only you had used your head and turned back that first night. Kris and Deedee mentioned they'd seen you in town when they stopped by the house on their way back to Calderwood, I thought it would be easy to frighten you, a young girl alone in the swamp road at night. But I soon realized I had misjudged you."

"It was you all the time," I said. "You and . . ." I glanced at the bed where the doll wearing the death mask of my mother lay. "You and *that*."

"Victoria and I both want you dead," he hissed in that same hoarse whisper I had heard before. "You're Jules' seed. She wants you dead for that reason, just as I do." His words sliced scathingly across my terrified thoughts.

"You killed Jules," I said. "You killed him and made it look as though he had shot Victoria and then took his own life. You even changed clothes with him. Put on the captain's cape . . ." my voice dwindled in the face of a flashing memory.

Leonce, kneeling over my dead mother's body, applying the deathly-white plaster to her dead features. Features of alabaster . . .

Leonce had made a death mask of my mother that night. Just as 'Etienne Dazincourt had done years before of Camelia, when she had hanged herself.

"I had to find a way to have her," he said in that same unnatural voice. "It was always Jules who had everything. Churm, Popularity, Victoria. While I was stuck with Marilyn. How I hated her plainness and martyred ways when she tried to coerce me into marrying her, by claiming she was pregnant. I was glad when Kate locked her up. I hoped that, like Camelia, she would hang herself. But no. She bore her child here in this very room. A child I never claimed. The only person I ever really wanted or needed was Victoria." He gestured toward the hideous caricature on the bed, that I saw now was composed of the ancient, kidskin-and-bisque likeness 'Etienne had ordered made in Paris more than a century before. Except for the face. The face had once belonged to Victoria. "Tell her, darling. Tell her we must be together. It's Jules, darling. Tell her how much you love me. Tell her that she has to die, like Amelio, so we can always be together."

Amelio, Kris' wife.

I said through lips that had grown numb with fear and horror. "You killed Amelio?"

"She followed me here one night," Leonce said. "She saw me making love to Victoria. She would have told them we were meeting in secret. We couldn't risk having that happen. I drowned her in the swamp. Everyone knew she had never learned to swim."

I shuddered, thinking only that I had to escape. I had to get away. Seizing my chance, I flung myself past Leonce, groping wildly for the door. By some miracle of fate, I managed to pull it open before he could catch me, lunging through it into the darkness beyond.

I came onto a landing. But in the uncertain glow which rose around me from the bobbing light Leonce carried in his hand, I could not be certain it was the one that opened onto the outside staircase. Briefly I hesitated, hearing him gaining on me. Aware that there was no time left to search the black shadows for the tower's other exit, I began again to climb, the long gown I wore whipping around my flying legs.

But I had waited too long. In the next instant, I felt his hand dart up from below to catch at the hem of my long skirt.

Jerking away from his clutching fingers, I threw out my hand to steady myself against the handrail, even as he caught up to me, his arm reaching from behind to circle my waist.

Throwing my weight away from him, I felt the impact of his body against my own as he continued to hold me, the two of us crashing together against the rickety guard rail.

In the next instant, there was the shattering crunch of splintering wood and suddenly I felt myself plummeting through darkness, wrapped irrevocably in Leonce's choking embrace.

"Camilla," a voice called to me from a great distance. "Camilla, do you hear me?"

A soft light burned against my eyelids, warm and tender like the voice that drew me out of darkness.

Pain mingled with pleasure and I opened my eyes to find Kris bending over me.

"Leonce!" I whispered, uncertain why the name pressed so urgently behind my lips.

"Gone," Kris said.

Slowly, I turned my head. Something . . . someone lay beside me, shrouded in satin that shimmered with purple and gold highlights.

"*El Capitaine*," I whispered.

"His body broke your fall," Kris said. "Just lie quietly. Deedee has gone to the house for Dr. Forsythe."

"You'll want the ring to give her," I said hazily. "The Dazincourt ring. Someone gave it to me. But it should belong to Deedee when you marry."

"Hush," Kris said, pressing his fingers to my lips. "You're confused, darling. Do you understand me? I'm not marrying Deedee. I'm not marrying anyone if I can't have you."

"Me?" I whispered numbly.

Kris nodded. "You," he said.

I closed my eyes, thinking vaguely that I was dreaming.

It was impossible for me to attend Leonce's funeral, and I am not certain I would have gone had I been able, even for appearance's sake, as the others had done.

"Toinette went to pieces completely," Kris said, when he told me about it later. "Apparently she had seen Leonce carrying his gruesome likeness of Victoria around from time to time, with the result that, all of these years, she was never quite certain whether or not Victoria actually died that night. Which explains the vague remarks she made upon seeing you for the first time," he added knowingly.

"Don't remind me," I said. "What I want to know is who told you I was Jules' daughter, if it wasn't Deedee."

"Toinette, again," Kris said. "She isn't so far gone that she couldn't tell me everything I needed to know, and in a way which convinced me she knew what she was talking about. Putting the ring on your pillow was an attempt on her part to warn you. She thought the curse connected with it would frighten you into running away. She knew you were Jules' daughter, of course, and that Leonce would try to kill you for that reason alone, if he got the chance. It was Toinette who told me the Jules I knew was actually Leonce, and that if you insisted on staying here, it would be wise for me to keep a close eye on you."

"Which explains why you were always there when I needed you," I said.

"As I intend to be for the rest of our natural lives, if you will have me," he said.

As graciously as it is possible for someone like Deedee to do, she relinquished her claim on Kris, admitting that she had known even before I did that I was the one he wanted.

Now I live at Dazincourt Hall as Kris' wife. It would not be entirely the truth for me to say that the past has been resolved for me at last, with the return of my memory. The ghosts of the dead Calderwoods and Dazincourts who lived out their tragic lives beneath the rooves of these two old houses still linger in all of our minds.

Surprising us all, Toinette returned her cherished "treasures" to Calderwood, turning them over personally to Kate, saying she had become too busy planning for the new baby Kris and I expect in January, to care for them properly.

Ours will be a New Year's baby. Kris tells me. A new life. A new beginning.





LOVE

As I left Harrisburg and drove north toward the Pennsylvania coal regions, it started to rain — a heavy, steady downpour. I switched on the windshield wipers and gripped the wheel tensely, peering at the slippery, winding road, so unfamiliar to me. It was growing dark now, and on every side the mountains loomed — steep, black, barren and forbidding. So unlike the country I remembered from my childhood, when they were covered with lush greenery in the summer that turned to a glorious riot of color in the fall. But that was long ago, and coming back to the little town of Freedom didn't promise to be so pleasant, either, under the circumstances...

Only yesterday morning, Dad and I had been enjoying our breakfast in our sunny kitchen, a favorite spot in our comfortable Colonial home in Alexandria, Virginia. Since Mother had died, two years ago, after a long illness, I had always tried to make breakfast a special occasion, as she had. Dad was a prominent Washington lawyer, and it was the only time we could count on to be together, just as a family, instead of having guests or going to dinner parties.

"These muffins are delicious, Diana," Dad exclaimed. "And I'll have another cup of that good coffee." I smiled at his compliments — he always came up with them —

From the moment they met, Diana knew she and Tom were hopelessly in love. Why did her grandmother hate him? What other evil forces were at work to tear them apart, and turn their own private heaven into a terrifying, devastating hell?

IN THE SHADOWS

By ANGELA COLBY

but my cooking was one thing I did take pride in.

As we lingered over our coffee, Dad went through his mail. "Why, here's a letter from your Aunt Rose," he said. He opened it, frowning slightly. Aunt Rose wasn't in the habit of writing letters to us — it had to be something unusual.

His frown deepened as he read it. "Oh dear," he said. "It seems your grandmother is a bad way. Rose went to visit her, and she was very weak, hardly coherent. But you know how she is — won't have anybody around, let alone a doctor. Here — you read it."

There were pages of Aunt Rose's round, extravagant, childish scrawl. Years younger than my mother, she was plump and pretty, not very bright in school, but had quickly made a fine match with a wealthy Scranton politician. Thereafter, her life had remained, as always, completely self-centered.

"One of the neighbors called me about her," Rose wrote, "and since I was the only relative for miles around, I felt it was my duty to go, and Harold went with me. Well, she practically threw us out. We were afraid to excite her more for fear she'd have a stroke. I would have stayed longer, but Harold has a big campaign on, and we were expecting guests. Besides, it wouldn't do for us to be involved in any bad publicity. I thought perhaps Diana could come.

Mother always did seem to be fond of her, at least..."

"Well?" Dad asked, when I had finished the letter. As usual, he was letting me make my own decision.

I sighed. "I think I'd better go. Harriet can look after the shop for a little while. I don't know if it's a good idea — she's never even acknowledged my Christmas gifts — but I know it's what Mother would want."

Dad smiled, got up from the table, and kissed me. "That's my girl!" he said. "I'd go with you, if I didn't have this big court case on now. But you know I'm no further away than the nearest telephone."

After he'd left, my heart sank. The nearest telephone, he'd said. Grandma didn't have a telephone. It wasn't that she couldn't afford it. Grandpa had been one of the lucky ones who made a fortune in the rich Pennsylvania anthracite fields, and kept it, pulling out and making wise investments before the bottom dropped out of the coal industry. I never knew him — he died before I was born — but I did remember the big, musty mansion on the hill where Grandma lived alone — and that my mother had a time getting her to install as much as electric lights. She was content to live in the past, among her treasures, and would have none of such new-fangled inventions as the telephone, radio or television.

* * *

I sighed, remembering that gloomy

place, as I drove on cautiously through the rain. I switched on the radio — at least I could enjoy that now. And the cheery lights of a diner ahead reminded me that I'd probably find little to eat in Grandma's house, if anything.

I felt a little like the condemned enjoying his last meal as I gobbled up every bit of the Pennsylvania Dutch food. I'd forgotten how good it was! Then I called Dad to let him know I was all right, and Harriet, my assistant at the antique shop Mother had started. She loved beautiful, old things, and had taught me to appreciate them, too. Harriet said, "Don't worry. Everything's fine. Stay as long as you like."

Feeling much better, I started to drive again, happy that Freedom was just a few miles away. Then, an unpleasant thought struck me. Suppose Grandma would react violently to me, and try to "throw me out" as Aunt Rose had put it? Of course, I had written to her about my coming, but I had thought it best, especially in view of Aunt Rose's letter, not to suggest more than that I was just passing through, on a casual visit.

Perhaps she hadn't received the letter in time. To try to communicate with her in any other way, we knew, was useless. She belonged to the time when a telegram was usually an announcement of bad news, and she would have been very frightened by it

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— if not for me, she would certainly have suspected something was up regarding herself. And for the life of us, Dad and I couldn't think of anyone in the vicinity to call.

"There was one person she used to trust," Dad remembered, "her lawyer. His name was Pendergast, or something like that. I'm not sure, and anyway, he's probably dead by now."

A lot of good that did me. I was beginning to feel very lonely, and a little sorry for myself. I just hoped that the one remaining gas station in that town was still open, so that if I got a cold reception, I could tank up and head for the nearest motel.

Perhaps my anxious thoughts made my driving reactions more erratic; perhaps it was just the rain, coming down in heavy sheets now. Whatever it was, my little car suddenly went into a skid, careening drunkenly. I had enough presence of mind not to put on the brakes —

Suddenly, I felt my little car skidding into a dangerous spin on the wet, lonely road!

from somewhere in my training, I remembered that — but as the car spun around, I felt sickeningly helpless. When it finally stopped, it was on the other side of the road, headed in the opposite direction! Shakily, I pulled over to the shoulder, stopped and put my head down on the wheel. For a little while, I cried uncontrollably. What if a car, coming in the opposite direction, had hit me when I went into that spin? I knew I was much too upset to try to drive, now. What was I to do — stay here, in the dark and freezing rain, on this isolated mountain road where there was very little travel?

After the first spasm of fright had subsided, I began to think more sensibly. I simply had to pull myself together and get going. But when my efforts to start the car failed, I knew what had happened. The engine was flooded.

I found my flashlight in the glove compartment. Though there hadn't been a single car on the road since my skid, I decided to rig up a sort of signal for oncoming traffic. But the rain was still coming down in torrents. Well, at least I had a warm coat, and a pillow and blanket in the

car. I'd just make myself as comfortable as possible, until the rain subsided and I could attract someone's attention.

I must have been exhausted from the whole ordeal, because in spite of my efforts to keep awake, I dozed off into a deep sleep. Though I couldn't stretch out comfortably, the pillow was soft, my coat and blanket gave me a cozy sense of warmth, and it was a welcome relief, just to lie there for a while, and rest.

But my sleep was troubled by a strange dream. In it, I came to my grandmother's house. No one was there. It was a rickety, abandoned shell, dark and rotting. Then I heard it — my grandmother's whining voice:

"Diana! Go away from here, and leave me in peace! I don't want you — all I want is this!"

She held up a music box, one that I remembered from my childhood. Unlike the majority of the people in

the region, who were Pennsylvania Dutch who had settled it long before the Revolution, my grandparents had come from Germany after World War I. Though they were also of German descent, the local people, proud of their heritage and still harboring enmity from the war, had never accepted them. And I remembered there was a great deal of unrest among the townpeople — including the Welsh and Polish newcomers — when my grandfather sold the mines he owned to callous opportunists who stripped them for what they could get, then closed them down when the demand for anthracite coal decreased, leaving many miners without jobs or means to support their families.

The little music box was a kind of link, for my grandmother, with a past, that, for her, had been much more pleasant. Intricately carved with scenes from the mountains of the Black Forest, it played the tinkling notes of "Tannenbaum" when it was opened.

I could see her now in my dream, half-smiling, half-leering, as she opened the lid and listened to the tinkling chords. I knew she must be

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mad. I called to her, "Grandmother! Grandmother! I want to help you!" But I couldn't make her hear me. So I stepped across the threshold, onto the rotting floor.

"Now you've done it!" Grandma shrieked.

Then the floor gave way, and I felt myself falling, falling into a dark abyss. Then, there was a blazing light. A fire? Had I died and gone to Hell?

I screamed...and screamed...and woke up, in the midst of a scene just as frightful. As I became conscious, I realized that the whole car was surrounded by a bright glow, and swirling smoke.

Fully shocked into wakefulness now, the first thing I thought of was — fire! My car was on fire! But then, I realized there was no smell of smoke. No nothing, except the brightly lighted billows outside the windows.

Then I heard it — faintly, but

unmistakably a man's voice, calling, "Help! Help! Is anybody up there?"

I realized, then, that what I had thought was smoke was actually a heavy fog, as sometimes settles between the mountains in rainy weather. The light? It must be coming from the headlights of a car, parked on the other side of the road.

Again I heard the voice, fainter this time. "Help! Help!"

I felt pretty helpless myself, but at least I wasn't hurt. I had to answer that call.

Feeling my way cautiously through the fog, moving toward the car lights, I called, "Hello! Hello! I'm coming to help you! Can you hear me?"

"Yes!" The voice was more weak and hoarse now. "Here! Toward the car!"

Then, as I moved closer to the car, I saw him — a man, half-crawling, dragging an injured leg behind him. Without a second thought that he might be some villain, intent on

raping and robbing me, I rushed to him.

The face that looked up at me, though it winced with pain, managed a roguish grin. "An angel of mercy!" he gasped. "I'm not sure I haven't died and gone to heaven!"

Something about his laughing, openly admiring eyes was distinctly disturbing. "Well, we've got to get you off that wet ground," I retorted tartly, "before you die of pneumonia. Is that your car?"

He nodded, and winced again. "I seem to have hurt my ankle. This damned fog. I got out to try to see where I was, and stepped off the edge of the road into the ditch." His tone softened. "Thank God, you came along."

His gratitude embarrassed me. "Now, I'll help you on the bad side," I said briskly. "It's going to hurt some, but you've got to get into the car."

He was bigger and heavier than I'd thought, but I managed to be a sort of crutch as we inched our way back to the car, where he finally collapsed on the front seat, with a sigh. When he recovered after a moment, he turned and looked at me, with those penetrating eyes. "Hey, what are you doing here, anyway?" he asked. "A nice young girl like you should be home in bed. And I don't know you. I know everybody around these parts." Suddenly, his face changed — not from pain, but from worry and concern for me. "If you're in some kind of trouble —" he said. "Well, whatever it is, I'll do all that I can to help. I don't know how, but I'm a lawyer, if that's any good."

Sodden as he was with water and ditch dirt, at that moment I wanted nothing more than to fling my arms around his neck, to nestle against his broad shoulder and stay there forever.

As I moved through the dense fog, I saw a man, dragging an injured leg. Without a thought that he might be a rapist, I ran to rescue him!



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Is there such a thing as love at first sight? Looking back now, I believe so. I honestly think that even though we didn't know each other's names, from that moment this stranger and I were pledged to belong to each other forever. But there was no time for romance then.

"My car went into a skid," I explained briefly. "Then the engine flooded. There wasn't any hope of getting help, so I fell asleep. Until your lights woke me up, and I heard you call.

"I'm so glad I did," I added weakly, thinking I might have sounded too abrupt. "Now, we must get you home, and call a doctor. The fog is lifting a bit. If you show me the way, I'll drive. Oh, by the way, I'm Diana Marshall."

The roguish smile returned, as he stretched out his hand. "Tom Pendleton, Miss Marshall," he said. "Your very humble servant."

Why did he always have that mocking manner that made me feel

though I'm not sure she's expecting me."

I was surprised at Mr. Pendleton's reaction. As I talked, he had become strangely grave, almost fearful. And when I finished, he sat silently lost in thought.

Finally, he spoke, "Did you know," he said slowly, "that I am your grandmother's attorney?"

"You!" I laughed gaily. "Father couldn't remember the name — only that it began with a P. What a coincidence!"

He didn't even smite. But he reached over to give my hand a reassuring pat. "My dear," he said, in his measured lawyer's tones, "I feel it would be best if you stayed here with us tonight. Then, in the morning, when you are rested, we will talk about your grandmother."

"B-but," I blurted. "Is she as sick as Aunt Rose said? Has she lost her mind? I have to know!"

His face was inscrutable. "Tomorrow," he promised, "you will know

"Maybe I could persuade her..." I faltered.

"I doubt it," he said drily. "But I wish you luck."

"Oh," he added, a bit more kindly. "If you're going up there, first thing you ought to do is have a telephone put in. And if you need me, just call."

"Thank you," I said. "He was right, of course. I had to take things into my own hands."

But I was very happy to surrender myself to the kind hands of Mrs. Pendleton, as she fed me hot, nourishing soup, ushered me to a hot bath with piles of thick, fluffy towels, then into the welcome softness of the guest room bed. Before my eyes closed in the sleep I needed so badly, I thought, "It's like a miracle. And Tom...? Maybe he's a miracle too."

I woke when a beam of light struck my face, and staggered out of bed, gathering up the voluminous flannel nightgown Mrs. Pendleton had given me. To my surprise, all my bags were

From the moment I saw him, I knew I was hopelessly in love with Tom. But I couldn't understand his family's strange reaction when they learned who I was.

so uncomfortable? And why did the touch of his hand on mine make me tingle all over?

We could see the lights burning brightly in the big, Colonial white frame house as we drove up, and before we could get out of the car, the front door was thrown open, and a spare, white-haired man was running down the walk to meet us. In the doorway, a buxom, sweet-faced woman peered out.

"My parents," Tom explained. "You'll see — they've spoiled me rotten."

In no time, Tom was bustling off to bed, and the doctor had been called.

"But now, what can we do for you?" Mr. Pendleton asked, as we sat in the living room to wait for the doctor's arrival. "It goes without saying that we are greatly in your debt. Can we assist you in any way?"

"Right now," Mrs. Pendleton put in, "I'm sure she could use a little brandy, followed by some hot soup." And, as Mr. Pendleton poured me a sizeable snifter, she bustling off to the kitchen.

Then, I told Mr. Pendleton the whole story. "So you see," I finished, "I must go to see my grandmother,

everything."

The doctor came as quickly as he could, and after a speedy examination, announced that Tom had suffered no broken bones, but only a very bad sprain. In the manner of all country doctors, who have looked after their charges, since childhood, he muttered, "Danged fool! He should've known better than to go wandering around in that fog. Could have caught his death from pneumonia!"

I could see that Dr. Schmidt was the kind of physician who knew nearly everything about everybody in the community. So, on a sudden impulse, I blurted, "Doctor, I am Maria Hess' granddaughter, and I've come here because I am very concerned about her. Can you tell me how she is?"

Now, I was beginning to become alarmed. The doctor reacted even more strongly than Mr. Pendleton, with an odd withdrawal, as if I had touched a very sore subject.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you how she is," he said crisply, "because she'll never let a doctor come within ten feet of her. All I can say is, she's as ornery as ever."

piled neatly in the room! I ran to the window. Yes, there was my car, too, standing in front of the house.

I got out fresh clothing, happy to see my dresses weren't too wrinkled. I put on one, a swirling blue jersey print, that I knew was especially becoming with my blonde hair. ("Why?" a little voice inside me nagged. "Are you trying to impress Tom?")

He didn't greet me with that sardonic smile and quip when I came down to breakfast. His eyes were dark and brooding as he said, rather stiffly, "Good morning, Diana. I hope you slept well."

"Good morning," I replied, avoiding his eyes and addressing the greeting to his parents. "I feel fine now. And thank you so much for rescuing my car and luggage. However did you manage it so fast?"

"Tom and I went down there this morning," Mr. Pendleton explained. "We figured we'd better get to it before the cops or robbers did."

"But, Tom —" I exclaimed. "You're supposed to rest that foot!"

He did seem to come out of his dark mood now, and smiled at me, holding up a cane beside him. "The

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My uncle's been a gambler for years. Even as a child, I could remember the ribbing he got for "living at the track," his steady poker game on Thursdays, the numbers man he'd phone before he drank his morning coffee. He tried one "system" after another — they never came through. In fact, his gambling was a big family joke.

But recently we had to stop laughing — and start listening. Uncle Fred was suddenly raking it in! What's more, his whole betting pattern had changed. He didn't bet all the time anymore — but when he did bet, whether it was the horses, or cards, or football pools, or you name it — he was a winner.

And when I finally got him to stop winning at me and tell me his secret, he said he'd actually found out how to predict many of his "lucky streaks." "Discovering my 'winning pattern,'" he said, "has made all the difference. It changed me from a loser to a winner!"

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Your winning pattern actually makes solid scientific sense. In fact, it has been used by scientists for charting human behavior for over 70 years.

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• Floyd Patterson lost to Ingmar Johansson on a critical day.

• Arnold Palmer shocked fans at the Pro Golfer's Association "Pay-off" in 1962 when the "sure winner" tied for 17th place instead (he was at a low in his winning pattern).

• Bobby Riggs lost to Billie Jean King on a day when his physical cycle was critical and his emotional cycle low (Ms. King, however, was at an emotional and intellectual high).

• Back in 1927, during Babe Ruth's famous 60% homer season; 80% of his big hits were on days of his physical and/or emotional peaks!

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He came up behind me, and before I could cry out, clapped a strong hand over my mouth! Could this be Billy, the poor boy my grandparents had sheltered?

foot's a lot better," he said, "and I can get along fine with this."

Still, there was something in the atmosphere at the breakfast table that made me feel uneasy. Even Mrs. Pendleton seemed subdued, as she served us platters of ham and eggs, stacks of hot, buttered toast, and steaming coffee.

I waited until everyone had finished before I broached the subject that, I sensed, was the cause for the tension. "Mr. Pendleton," I reminded, "you were going to speak to me about my grandmother. Do you have time for that now?"

"Yes," he said heavily. "Come into the study. You'd better come, too, Tom."

When we'd settled ourselves in the pleasant, book-lined room, Tom blurted, "All I know is that your grandmother hates us, Diana," he said. "Particularly me. I don't know why. To be frank, she doesn't seem to like anybody. But this is different."

"Yes, it is," Mr. Pendleton said, with a sigh. "and until now, I felt I couldn't explain it, even to you, Tom, because it might violate our lawyer-client relationship. But Diana's arrival, and the news that her grandmother is so ill, puts a different light on it. I feel she must know the facts."

"What facts?" I demanded.

Mr. Pendleton handed me a yellowed file folder. "When I started practice here as a young lawyer," he said, "your grandfather was my first important client. This is his will. Please read it carefully."

It seemed simple enough. His entire estate was to go to my grandmother, and upon her death, to be equally divided between my mother and her sister, Rose, or their surviving children. Then I saw what Mr. Pendleton was driving at. There was a paragraph, appointing him as sole executor of the estate during my grandmother's lifetime. If he should die first, his successor was to be

executor.

"You see," Mr. Pendleton said, "much as Mr. Hess loved your grandmother, he knew that she was a capricious woman who knew nothing about business. So he felt it was wise to entrust that to me. I was flattered then, of course. But over the years, this trust has become an unbearable burden. Perhaps it's her advanced age, but she has constantly reviled me, and accused me of cheating her. And as for you, Tom — she particularly hates you because she knows you will be the successor named in the will."

"How awful!" I exclaimed, completely shocked.

"That isn't the worst," Mr. Pendleton went on, wearily. "Some strange accidents have occurred. Mysterious fires in my house and garage, that the firemen could find no cause for. Several times, my car was tampered with, and we narrowly escaped harm. Last night, when Tom

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Against Tom's strong shoulder, I sobbed out the whole, terrible story. "We have to get you out of here," he said firmly. "We have to go to the police and tell them everything."



didn't come home, I feared that this time, he wasn't so lucky.

"Now, I must tell you," he went on, "that we have no concrete evidence linking your grandmother to these occurrences. But to put it bluntly, if she isn't behind it, we can't imagine who is."

"Well!" I said, rising to my full five-foot-four height. "I can promise you one thing. I'm going over there and get to the bottom of this right now!"

"Bravo!" Tom exclaimed.

Even Mr. Pendleton smiled weakly. "At this moment, Miss Diana," he said, "you look exactly like your grandfather." Then he frowned. "But I am genuinely concerned about your safety."

"I'm not much good with this bum foot," Tom said, "but I could drive Diana over, and sort of keep a watch on the place at a short distance, at least until she can get a phone installed."

"Good idea!" his father said. But as we headed for the door, he added, "Be very careful, you two..."

With Tom following me, I drove ahead to my grandmother's house. The sight of the old Victorian mansion on the hill sent a chill through me — it was even more foreboding than I remembered. I signaled to Tom, and we pulled up at the side of the road, under some trees where we couldn't easily be seen. I jumped out and ran, crawling into the car beside him quickly.

"Oh Tom," I said. "I know it's silly — but I'm scared!"

He put his arm around me and drew me close to him.

Then it happened — without a word exchanged between us. He cupped my chin in his hand, and those penetrating eyes looked deeply into mine. Then, as if by some magnetic force we couldn't control, our lips met.

I felt such an intense surge of passion sweep thorough me that, when we finally drew apart, I felt weak and shaken. I could see that Tom was just as affected, for his hands shook slightly as he reached for a cigarette.

Then, putting his arm about my shoulders and drawing me close again, he spoke, softly and gently. "I guess I knew from the moment I saw you, standing over me on that wet bank, that I was hopelessly in love with you. I know there are obstacles... your grandmother... but Diana, will you marry me?"

"Oh, yes!" I breathed, and we kissed again. Then Tom whispered shakily, "I hate to let you go... I don't want to let you go, ever."

"I don't want to go either, darling," I said. "It's so wonderful to find someone, to love and be loved..."

Then, resolutely, I drew away. "But I have to go... I have to find out what's going on up there, you know."

Tom nodded. "Maybe it won't be as bad as we think. Anyway, I'm going to stay parked right here. Try to slip out as soon as you can and let me know what's happening."

Knowing he would be close, I felt more brave, as I drove up through the gates and up the drive, stopping

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under the *porte cochere*. I got out of the car, and lifted the heavy knocker on the door. In the silence, I could hear the sound echo through the house. There didn't seem to be anyone around. I tried the door, but it was locked. I knocked again. Then, faintly, I heard a sound of shuffling feet, heard someone open the bolt inside. . . .

I don't know what I expected, but at the sight of the hulking man with dangling arms and big hands, I could only gasp, "Why, Billy! Hello! Do you remember me?"

I had forgotten about Billy—or perhaps, just didn't think he'd be there anymore. He was an unfortunate orphan my grandfather had taken in, and given a home in return for helping with the chores. Though he was retarded, he was always cheerful and willingly performed whatever task he was given, pathetically eager to please those who had been kind to him.

I could, and into the bedroom. There was my grandmother, lying in the bed, looking old and shrunken—a far cry from the lively, vigorous woman I remembered.

Her eyes were closed, but I could see that she was breathing regularly. As I sat down quietly on the dusty chair beside her bed, my eyes filled with tears. Poor soul! Left alone with only Billy to look after her! How awful!

But she wasn't asleep. She stirred, and in a voice surprisingly strong, asked, "Who's there? Billy, is someone here?"

I took her wasted hand, and bent to kiss her cheek, that felt like parchment. "It's Diana, Grandma," I said. "I've come to visit you."

Her eyes, wandering vaguely, fixed upon me now. "Diana," she said. "Yes. Little Diana. My, how you've grown."

"I want to help you, Grandma," I said, brightly. "It looks as if you

Suddenly, there was Grandma, brandishing an old pistol. "Get out!" she screamed at us.

Now, his face broke into a broad grin. "Diana! It's little Diana, grewed up!"

"Yes, Billy, I've come to see my grandmother. How is she?"

His face twisted strangely, and he shook his head. "Not so good. . . . She's upstairs, in bed."

"Then I'd better go up right away," I said. "Will you please take my bags from the car and put them in one of the bedrooms? Any one will do."

"Right away, Miss Diana! It sure is great to see you!"

When my eyes adjusted to the darkness inside after coming in from the bright sunlight, I was shocked. There was dust everywhere, in a thick layer on the carpet, the pieces of bric-a-brac, the heavy drapes, which hung, rotting, at the windows. Obviously, my grandmother didn't care, or wasn't able to keep up the house as I once knew it—filled with gleaming wood, shining damask, silver and porcelain, for which the lush velvet drapes and Oriental carpets added a rich setting.

As Aunt Rose had written, she must be in a bad way!

I rushed up the stairway, as fast as

haven't been well. I'll stay and look after you, if you like. . . ."

Feebly, Grandma made a great effort to sit up. "Don't need any help," she said. "Always got along on my own. But thanks, anyway."

There was some of the old fire in her, I could see, but I decided it was high time I showed some spirit, too. "Well, I'm going to stay here and take care of you whether you like it or not. What you need is some good food, for one thing, and I'm a pretty good cook, if I do say so myself. This house could stand a good cleaning, too."

Before she could say another word, I flounced out of the room, and ran downstairs. A quick check of the kitchen revealed what I'd suspected—there was nothing to eat but a few cans of soup and some half-moldy bread. But the refrigerator and stove did seem to be in working order. The first thing I had to do was go to town for food—and plenty of cleaning supplies.

Of course, I stopped to talk to Tom on the way out—and revel in the wonder of our new-found love again, as we kissed and held each other close for a few moments.

"Now you mustn't worry about me, darling," I told him. "I'm sure I'll be perfectly all right, and I have a feeling Grandma will be much better, too, once she's had some decent food. Oh, and I'm going to take Dr. Schmidt's advice and have a phone installed tomorrow. She needn't know about it."

"Do that," Tom said. "I'll feel so much better if I can reach you in that house. If I don't hear from you before then, I'll meet you here again tomorrow evening, at about eight. Let's hope she's asleep by then."

Dusk was beginning to fall when I came back, and since I didn't see Billy anywhere, I picked up two big shopping bags myself. But just as I went into the dark hallway, someone rushed up behind me, and a big hand closed over my mouth, stifling the scream I was about to utter. I dropped the bags and cans and bottles went clattering all over the floor. I tried to twist away, but was powerless in the vise-like grip!

Then a voice said, "Sh-h! Don't make a noise!" My knees turned to jelly, and in a flash, all the dreadful stories about rape and murder in deserted country homes went through my mind. Could it be... Billy? When I first knew him, he was a child. Now, he was a grown man, with a man's desires...

Just as his grip tightened and I felt myself falling into blackness, the door opened, and throwing me roughly away from him, the man bounded away down the hall, toward the kitchen door. I revived enough to see that his head was covered with a ski mask. And standing above me, holding the rest of my packages and looking as if he were about to cry, was Billy.

"Oh Billy!" I gasped. "You saved me!"

He scratched his head when I asked him if he'd ever seen anyone lurking about. "Oh, there's prowlers now and then. Guess they think there's nobody here. But I can take care of 'em," he said proudly. "I just give 'em a blast with my shotgun, and they run. Now, don't you worry none. I'll see the place is locked up good and keep that gun right beside me tonight, in case that feller comes back."

I shivered. The prospect of spending the night in the rickety old house, which could easily be broken into, with only Billy and his old shotgun for protection, was frighten-

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ing. I'd stopped at the phone company in town, but they wouldn't come until tomorrow. For an instant, I just wanted to get into the car and go back to Tom's protective arms. But that would be cowardly. I couldn't leave Grandma — and I knew I could never convince her to leave, even if I told her of the danger.

Resolutely, I gathered up my purchases and we carried them to the kitchen. Sure enough, the kitchen door had been forced open, and Billy busied himself, repairing it, while I made dinner. It was a simple, nourishing meal I thought Grandma would be able to eat — broiled chicken, mashed potatoes, creamed spinach, and a pudding for dessert. I was beginning to feel less shaky as I fixed an attractive tray with some of her prettiest china. Then I filled Billy's plate, and urged him to help himself. As for me, I still felt a long way from being up to eating a bite.

"Here's some dinner, Grandma," I said, trying to sound cheery.

"Don't want any," she grumbled, turning away from me.

After all I'd been through, it was too much. "All right," I said. "I'm leaving it here. If you can't eat, we'll have to call Dr. Schmidt in the morning." Before she could answer, I left.

"Um-m, this is good," Billy told me, when I came back to the kitchen. "Haven't had food like this in ages!" Poor Billy, I thought. He'd been neglected, too.

I made some strong tea, and it revived me a bit. Then, conscience-stricken, I decided to go offer some to Grandma. When I went into her room, I was amazed to see that she was sitting up, and had eaten every bit of food on the tray!

"You're a good girl, Diana," she said, as I poured her a cup of tea. "But you must leave here, or they'll get you, same as they're after me!"

"Who, Grandma?" I asked. I knew now her words were no senile person's wanderings.

"Those Pendletons!" she said. "They've been after me since my poor John died. They'll kill us! They'll stop at nothing!"

My head was in a whirl. My Tom and his father — was it possible? No — I couldn't accept that. "Now, Grandma," I soothed. "Tell me just what's happened to frighten you like this."

"A man in a mask," she said. I shuddered. "He tried to break in a

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couple of times, but Billy drove him off with his shotgun. I know what he's after, that Pendleton. That!" She pointed to the music box on her dresser. It was the one I remembered in my dream! "Bring it here, Diana."

When she opened it, the tune of "Tannenbaum" tinkled just as I'd heard it years ago. Then I saw it was packed with money—big bills, too!

Before I could say another word, a shot rang out! I rushed downstairs, to find Billy, standing in his hand. He closed the door, and bolted it. "Somebody was prowling around out there," he said. "Reckon I scared him off, though."

He hadn't. As we stood there, the knocker sounded, loud and insistently. "Who's there?" I cried, more bravely than I felt.

"Diana! Open up! It's Tom!" I rushed to open the door, and half-sobbing, fell into his arms, and stammered out the whole story of the horrors that night.

"There, there!" Tom soothed. "Now, we've got to get to the police on this, right away. You and Billy will have to come with me." He held

out his hand to Billy, who shook it, beaming. "Thanks for saving my girl," he said, "even if you did almost shoot me a few minutes ago!"

"But I can't leave Grandma!" I protested.

"You'd Better leave Grandma!" Her voice came from the top of the stairs, and there she stood, pointing an old, rusty pistol at us! "Get out of this house, Tom Pendleton! Get out, all of you! Before I shoot!"

We beat a hasty retreat, outside the door. "Tom," I said. "We've got to get help, fast. But we can't go back. She might shoot that old pistol, and it would explode in her hand! And I can't leave her like this, either!"

"Okay, you're right," Tom agreed. "You stay here with Billy. I'll go call the police, and get them here as fast as I can."

Billy and I waited outside the door, afraid to go inside. "Don't worry," Billy said. "I've still got my shotgun here!"

Then we heard a blood-curdling scream! It was hard to tell whether it was from a man or a woman; but I rushed inside and up the stairs, Billy

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behind me, to Grandma's room. There she stood, the smoking pistol still in her hand, in a state of shock. And on the floor, in a pool of blood, was my ski-masked attacker!

I was trying to get her to lie down when I heard Tom returning, with the police. Quickly, we got Grandma into my room, and into bed, while the police examined the body. "If you feel up to it, Miss," they told me, "it might help if you could identify him."

I gulped, and nodded. But when I looked at his face, I froze with horror. "It's Harold," I gasped. "Harold Mason, my Aunt Rose's husband!"

Further investigations soon revealed the whole, grisly story. Harold Mason had been stealing from his party's political funds, and knew that it was going to be discovered unless he could come up with the money, fast. He and Aunt Rose had gone through their own fortunes, and he was desperate. There was only one hope — to get his hands on Rose's inheritance from my grandmother.

First, he had tried to destroy the Pendletons, thinking that, since they controlled her fortune, it would be prudent, and he and Rose could easily have Grandma committed as a senile incompetent. But his plots failed, and when I arrived, he decided to make one, last attempt that would give him the chance to get his hands on the Hess fortune — to pose as a prowler, and murder both me and my grandmother!

Aunt Rose was distraught, of course, but when I assured her she was still entitled to her share of the estate, and would be taken care of in the meantime, she recovered very quickly. The last I've heard of her, she was carrying on a lively flirtation with another wealthy man!

Grandma is as spry and peppery as ever — but being cared for by a competent nurse and housekeeper. The funds in the music box, alone, will keep her in comfort, to live out her days in the home she loves.

Tom and I? Of course, we were married — and settled in our Arlington home, though we often visit our folks in Freedom. Tom felt, as a lawyer, he'd have more opportunity in Washington, and it's turned out that way. In a few weeks, we're looking forward to two great events. He's going to present his first case in the Supreme Court. And I'm going to have our first baby!

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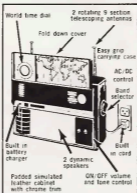
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