

SILVER SLIPPERS



TEMPLE BAILEY

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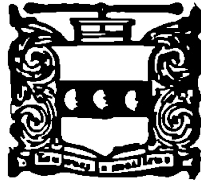
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Silver Slippers

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Silver Slippers

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOG

Joan Dudley, riding down to the sea with her lover was aware of the day as transcendent in her experience. It was wonderful to have Drew there beside her, sitting his horse in splendor like a king. That was the way Joan thought of him, always,—as splendid, like Richard of the Lion Heart, or any other of the mighty heroes of her dreams.

As he brought his horse to a walk, she was glad his hands were ungloved, so that she might see the strength of his brown fingers on the bridle. She was glad, too, when he rode for a time without his hat and the wind blew back the silver of his hair and touched his cheeks with ruddiness. She liked the strength and the ruddiness. They seemed to link him with youth—not that he needed to be thus linked, for she would not have had him younger, yet it added to his fascinations that in him the boy and the man were so marvellously mingled.

But more marvellous than all the rest was the fact that he loved her. He had not put it definitely into words. He had spoken rather through the touch of his fingers on her hand, the glance of his eyes, significant and exciting. He had spoken, too, through his silences, making them pregnant with possibilities,—as if when he opened his lips the miracle would come for which she waited.

Yet even as she waited she was half afraid. There had been now a long silence, and she felt impelled to break it.

She had stuck a wild rose behind her horse's ear and one in the lapel of her riding coat. "Aren't we gay?" she asked, and touched the rose with her finger tips.

He turned in his saddle, "I was willing you to speak."

She was puzzled, "Willing me?"

"Yes. Forcing you by my mental attitude to look at me—or say something."

She considered that. "I'm not sure I like it," she said at last.

"Why not?"

"It puts too much power in your hands."

"You mean I might use it to harm you?"

"Well, you could."

"Do you think I would?" he leaned down to her.

She blushed, "Oh, no."

He did not press her further and as they rode along the sands they talked of other things, and while they talked the fog crept across the sea—that summer sea of the Maine Coast, jade green before the fog caught it, its waves fluting themselves in snowy frills down the broad beach.

As the gray mist draped its mantle over them Joan said, "Aunt Adelaide hates days like this. She is talking about leaving Maine and going to Granitehead."

His voice showed his dismay, "Surely not."

"Yes. She likes more gayety—bridge and all that. The doctor advised coming up here in the woods to help her nerves. But she's getting frightfully tired of it."

"Do you want to go?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh . . . I'm having such a heavenly time."

He knew why she was having a heavenly time. He needed no vanity to know it. Because of his presence her days had been filled with rapture. In spite of his sophistication, the thought thrilled him. The child was so ingenuous, so untouched by the world. The weeks with her had seemed set apart from all those other affairs of the heart with which Drew Hallam had amused himself before he met her.

The fog wrapped them now in a veil. Joan, half-hidden by it, had an ineffable air of mystery.

Drew leaned forward, "Stop your horse," he said.

She stopped, "Why?"

"I was afraid you might slip away from me—in the fog."

"Oh, but I wouldn't."

"Wouldn't you?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Never."

His hand came through the mist, searching for her hand. He found it and drew her close. "You know, of course, that I shall never let you slip away?"

She whispered, "Yes."

"Even if you try, I shall call you back."

"I shan't try."

His laugh was triumphant. "There is something I want you to say to me."

She did not answer, and he dismounted and stood beside her, "Say that you love me, Joan."

"But—it has been only two weeks."

"What has time to do with—you and me?"

The fog drifted between them like the smoke of incense rising from some sacred altar. Joan's face, veiled by it, was rapt as that of a young priestess, starry-eyed.

Hallam lifted her from her saddle, held her close, "Mine?" he murmured with tense insistence, "tell me, Joan . . . tell me."

When they rode on again, she had given him a breathless promise. It seemed incredible. Two weeks ago she had not met him, and now she was to be his until—eternity . . .

He asked as they went along. "Did you think it would be like this."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I had always fancied it would be somebody I had known a long time."

"Is there anyone—you have known a long time?"

“Oh, no,” she emphasized, “you see I’ve lived a rather—cloistered life—schoolteachers do in small towns like ours, don’t they? There has never been anyone else.”

“But since you’ve lived with your aunt?”

“Oh . . . I’ve been so busy getting accustomed to being a princess instead of a Cinderella that I haven’t had time to think of men.”

“You must have time now to think of me.”

He caught up her hand in his and they rode on thus linked together. At last out of the fog came Joan’s happy voice: “You’re not in the *least* the kind of man I thought I’d marry.”

“What kind did you think?”

“Well, not so—splendid,” she laughed a little as if to soften the extravagance of her praise. “Now and then I had a dream, it used to come and go—of a boy with dark clouds back of him, and his hand up and the wind blowing his hair, and a touch of red against the blackness. It was very vivid, and it was always the same . . . night after night.”

Drew lifted her hand to his lips, “It sounds like a Bolshevik or a brigand. And after this you are to stop dreaming about him. I shan’t allow any rivals.”

“You will never have one.”

He liked that. “I can give you more than any boy would give. And I’ll show you the world. We’ll have our honeymoon at Cannes.”

“I’m afraid Aunt Adelaide won’t let me go so far.”

“Not when you are my wife?”

“I promised her I’d stay with her as long as she wanted me.”

“Won’t she always want you?”

“I can’t be sure. She told me when I came to live with her that she usually tired of people and she couldn’t tell whether she was going to tire of me or not.”

There was a subtle change in his voice. “Aren’t you legally her adopted daughter?”

“I am not legally anything. When Mother died, Aunt Adelaide wrote and said if I’d come on we could see how we liked each other. She never cared for Mother. Daddy was her nephew and after his death, she didn’t seem to know

that Mother and I were in the world. But I think as she has grown older she has been lonely. And we have learned to care for each other a lot.”

For a few moments he rode on in silence. Then he said: “Do you think she’ll object to your marriage?”

“Oh, no. She’s really been a darling. And even if she does object it won’t be what she wants, will it?”

“You mean it will be what I want?”

“Yes.”

His laugh was triumphant. “Do you know how adorable you are?”

He told himself that her youth was lovely. And as for the aunt, she was a vain old creature. A little tact and loads of flattery would keep her complacent. Joan had a right to believe herself an heiress, and it would make a great difference in every way if he could be sure she would inherit a fortune. Romance if it was to be worth while for himself and Joan must have its nest well feathered.

They set their horses presently to a gallop. They rode on and on like wild wraiths in the mist, hearts beating, blood surging, gay, careless of the future. The present was enough. They would make the most of it.

Their way led back across the moor, and up to the top of a bluff where stood a log house which had been originally the summer residence of a retired sea-captain from one of the towns below. Wings had been added from time to time because of the needs of an increasing family of children and grandchildren. But now there were no children. There was only Penelope Sears, a widow of sixty, to walk through the sedate and silent chambers, and remember the companions of earlier days.

Penelope, having only a modest income, took paying guests in the hot season. She had made the log cabin comfortable with bathrooms, huge fireplaces, and old furniture which belonged to the simple and somewhat austere background. She wanted people to be satisfied and as a rule they were. But this summer there was one woman who was not satisfied. She sat now in her room which overlooked the bluff and voiced her dissatisfaction to her English maid, Farley.

“The sooner I go the better.”

“Miss Joan will be disappointed.”

“She’ll have to get over it.”

Farley, who had just put on her mistress' head a transforming structure of carefully waved white hair, studied the effect in the mirror. Then she said, "Will the Hallams go if we do?"

"Of course. He's mad about Joan."

Nothing further was said about it while Farley added finishing touches to her mistress' toilet, but Mrs. Delafield's quick brain was busy. Drew Hallam and Joan! A good thing for both of them. And as for herself, a troublesome grand-niece off her hands and a charming grandnephew gained! She liked Drew and his sister, Nancy. They treated her as contemporaries, though she was easily three decades ahead of them. Her seventy years to Drew's forty and Nancy's thirty-eight. And way down the line, Joan—sweet and twenty!

Adelaide was dressed and ready for dinner, when Joan came in from her ride. By all the arts at Farley's command she had been refreshed and rejuvenated: There was a faint flush of rose on her old cheeks, but she was in a frightful temper. The coming of the fog had been the last straw. She felt that somebody besides Providence must be to blame for it. And if they were not to blame, at least she could vent her spite on them.

Joan bursting in had a beauty which needed no artificial aids. Her riding-coat was green, and her breeches white, her hat was off and showed her hair, thick and brown, with a wave of its own, and drawn, Madonna-fashion, over her ears. Joan's shorn head was a thing of the past. She hated the commonplace. When everyone else was shingled, it was time, she felt, to have a nice flat little bun at the back of her neck. Her eyes were darkly blue, her lashes black. She was not beautiful but the richness of her coloring and a certain slender grace made her good to look upon. There was, too, in her manner, an appealing, almost child-like quality which gave the lie to her twenty years.

"Darling," she said, "I'm afraid I'm late. But it was such a perfect ride . . ."

"Perfect? In this weather?"

Her tone should have warned Joan. But it did not. She blundered on. "How lovely you look. That green and silver gown is gorgeous."

"Are you saying that because you mean it, Joan? Or because you want my money?"

Joan stared at her for a moment, speechless. Then she demanded, chokingly, "Oh, why should you say a thing like that to me?"

She began to sob. She was over-excited, and the reaction from her ecstatic

moments with her lover broke down her composure. She cried and cried, standing in the middle of the floor with her hands before her face.

“Joan,” Adelaide commanded, “stop it.”

But she couldn’t stop. “You shouldn’t have said it. Oh, you shouldn’t.”

Her distress was so genuine, that Mrs. Delafield softened. “Well, perhaps I shouldn’t. I’m a cross old thing, Joan. And the deadliness of all this is driving me mad.”

Joan dropped on her knees beside her aunt’s chair, and laid her wet cheek against the wrinkled hand which gripped the arm of it. She was still crying, but with less passion.

The old woman bent down to her, “I’m a cross old thing,” she repeated.

Joan lifted her head, “You know I love you,” she said.

Adelaide knew that the child was telling the truth. Strange as it might seem, Joan loved her. And not many people loved Adelaide Delafield. She was witty and worldly-minded, and a power in her own social circle. But it had remained for Joan to put her on a pedestal and worship her.

When, after a time, Farley came to announce dinner Joan was not dressed. She sat on the floor at her aunt’s feet, talking quietly. She had not told her, however, about Drew Hallam. She had meant to do it the moment she arrived, but the things which had been said had made it impossible.

When she went to her room to make a hurried toilet, she was conscious that the exaltation with which she had left her lover had been succeeded by a deep depression. She felt like one who is lost in a wood . . . a beautiful wood, but strange and with no way out . . . She said to herself, “How silly,” yet she knew she was not silly. Love was a tremendous thing. And being lost in a strange wood was no light matter. Even if the wood was beautiful.



CHAPTER TWO

THE ENCHANTED NIGHT

When Joan came down that night for dinner, she found the Hallams and her aunt in front of a roaring fire in the living-room. Back of the house was the darkness of a great forest, in front of it the grim bluff that overlooked the sea. But within the fog was shut out, and the light of the low lamps and of flames of the pine logs played on the silver and green of Adelaide's gown and the sapphire of Nancy's and made a rich pattern of color amid the shadows.

Joan was in white with a string of pearls wound twice about her throat. Her arms were bare, there was a silver ribbon about her hips, and her slippers were of silver. When Drew Hallam placed a chair for her and she sat down in it, he touched her shoulders lightly with the tips of his fingers. It was a caress and it thrilled her.

Nancy Hallam saw the caress and wished that Drew wouldn't. He thought he was in love with Joan, and the money would help a lot. But Drew and Joan! Nancy couldn't see it. The child had dreams. And Drew would never live up to them.

Nancy was long and lithe. Her hair was red and she admitted, frankly, that she had made it so. Before changing its color she had been an insignificant ash-blond. Now everybody looked at her and that was what she wanted. She wore colors which were keyed to the red of her hair. Tonight in her sapphire gown with a metal rose of a copper shade catching up the sheer draperies she was a striking figure. Penelope Sears coming in to announce dinner, felt as if there had strayed into her Maine cabin something exotic like a gay-plumaged bird, which didn't belong there and which was better away. She didn't approve of Nancy Hallam. She didn't in fact approve of any of her summer guests except Joan Dudley. She was glad they were going. Mrs. Delafield had talked with her earlier in the day and had stated that she would see that Penelope lost nothing by their unexpected departure. Penelope had said, stiffly, that other

people were waiting for rooms. She told herself that she would miss Joan. The child was sincere and sweet. And she was falling in love with Drew Hallam which Penelope felt was a pity.

The dinner was, as usual, an achievement. From soup to shortcake everything was superlative. Penelope's guests were aware that at no resort hotel would they find roast chicken so delicious, vegetables straight from the garden, such whipped cream and fresh blackberries between layers of flaky crust.

While there was a woman to help with the heavy work about the house, Penelope did all of the cooking and serving. She had no sense of degradation in any household task. A sea-captain's granddaughter could not be lowered by her occupation. A princess with a tray in her hand was still a princess!

Throughout the meal Joan had little to say, and when after dinner, they adjourned to the living room and while the others had their cigarettes, she sat among them, smiling into the fire, rapturous in the thought of her happy secret, yet shy because of it.

The discussion had to do with their changed plans.

"We will have six weeks before the hotel closes," Adelaide said, "and we hope you'll go when we do."

Nancy was eager. "I'd love it. But Drew will have to decide."

Hallam delaying his decision, asked: "Is there anything for a man to do down there? I'm keen for the out-of-doors you know. That's why I came to this place."

"As much as there is to do here. You can ride with Joan, walk with Joan, play bridge with Joan . . ." Adelaide's voice trailed off into laughter.

Hallam laughed, too. He tossed his cigarette into the fire, then with a quick lift of his head faced Mrs. Delafield:

"If you'll promise to let me play with Joan for the rest of my life I'll agree to anything."

Joan caught her breath. How daring! And how well he knew Aunt Adelaide. She adored sensations. His boldness would please her.

The brown eyes in the old face sparkled. "So that's it, you want to marry Joan?"

"Who wouldn't want to marry her?"

"Oh, well, she's not a belle and a beauty."

“She is more than that—she is springtime and violets and morning stars . . .” His eyes as he looked down at Joan burned with a deep light. “Give me the word and I’ll carry her off.”

Adelaide demanded of Joan: “My dear, do you want to marry this—highwayman?”

“Oh, he isn’t that, Aunt Adelaide.”

“Why not? He wants to steal you from me.” Mrs. Delafield was playing a game, and getting a lot out of it. She wanted Joan married, yet it pleased her to enact the rôle of reluctant guardian. “He wants to steal you, my dear,” she reiterated, “and I repeat that he’s a—robber.”

Hallam drew Joan up beside him—“Give us your blessing, Aunt Adelaide,” he said, with a sort of delightful impudence.

The old woman glowed under his smiling glance, “A thousand blessings, if you wish.” She made a little gesture with her hands.

Joan kissed her aunt. She was trembling with emotion. She wanted to cry in her lover’s arms. But of course she couldn’t. She could only stand blushing and smiling when Nancy said, “You’re too good for him,” and Drew flung back, “You don’t know how good I can be, Nancy.”

Later in the evening, when Drew was at the telephone getting Granitehead and information about the hotel, Joan went out to the kitchen where Mrs. Sears was washing dishes. The big room was warm and shining, and Penelope was making the matter of dish-washing an attractive rite, with her bright pans, her snowy suds, the smooth, checked towels of Irish linen.

“I am sorry we are going away,” Joan said.

“I am sorry you have to go.”

“Nothing will ever be quite—like this . . .”

Penelope, setting hot plates in the rack, said: “You mean being up here?”

“Yes.”

There was silence for a moment between them, then Joan asked, “Can’t I help you with the dishes?”

“Not in that dress.”

“Oh, but I’ll get an apron.”

She found one of Penelope’s in a drawer. It was of blue gingham and it

covered her up. Below it shone the silver slippers.

Penelope, caught by the shine of the little shoes said: "I never wore silver slippers."

"These are my first. Before I lived with Aunt Adelaide I had very few pretty things."

"Do you like living with her better than at home?"

"Oh, yes. It has been rather wonderful. Of course if mother were alive I shouldn't want to be away from her. But then if I hadn't been with Aunt Adelaide, I shouldn't have met Drew Hallam. I am going to marry him, Mrs. Sears. I wanted you to know."

Penelope waited for a moment before she said: "My dear child, I wish you happiness . . ."

"I am so happy now that I feel a bit frightened—as if it couldn't last. Yet I know it will—last."

Penelope's brain rapped. "How can you know it?" But she did not voice her doubt. She went on washing dishes.

When Drew Hallam came into the kitchen to look for Joan, she was wiping the last cup. He frowned as he saw her occupation. "Take off that apron, Joan. I don't like it."

She stood in front of him. "Am I always to obey orders?"

"When it comes to your looks!" He had crossed the room and was busy with the button on the bib of the apron. It was at the back of her neck, and for the second time that night she thrilled to his touch. "There," he said, at last, "and don't do it again. You belong to beautiful things, not to serviceable ones."

He turned away without a word to Penelope. But Joan, following him, waved a hand and said with a note of defiance, "I'll do it again sometime, Mrs. Sears, when he isn't looking."

In the hall Hallam stopped. "You mustn't do it."

"Why not?"

"Because you should be above it."

Joan was puzzled, "Above what?"

His tone was impatient. "Don't pin me down to definitions. I want your loveliness untouched by practical things," he put a finger under her chin,

“Look at me, Joan.”

She lifted her eyes to him, her cheeks pink with excitement. “I want you beautiful always . . . for me . . . for my kisses . . .”

How strong he was! Her bronze head lay now in the hollow of his arm. How strong he was . . . and . . . splendid . . .!

The door was open and they went out into the forest. The moonlight came splashing through the trees in a golden shower. The dark branches made shadows on the ground.

Joan said, leaning on her lover’s arm. “Don’t you adore the stillness?”

He smiled down at her. She was like a nymph in the enchanted night, with her pale draperies, and the sheen of her silver. “Of course I love it. With you to make it perfect.”

“I don’t mean that,” she insisted. “Even if you were not here I should feel there was something solemn and sacred about it—like a cathedral. Do you know what I mean? It’s as if there were nothing between the tops of the trees and heaven.”

He laughed aloud, “You funny little thing.”

Her eyes were startled. “What do you mean by ‘funny’?” she asked.

“With your raptures and enthusiasms. They are out of date, my sweet.”

“Don’t you like them?”

“Of course. Only you mustn’t live too much in the clouds. Or I can’t follow you.”

“Why should you follow me. When I can follow—you?”

He caught her up in his arms at that, and as he set her down he whistled under his breath a waltz song from a popular musical play. “We have never danced together. Let’s see how well we do it.”

They took a step or two, tentatively, then swept on. It was a magical night, the pine needles made a soundless floor under their feet, the moonlight splintered against Joan’s hair in a thousand sparkles.

In Drew’s arms she was as light as the wind, the soft draperies of her sheer gown fluttered and flew, her silver slippers shone.

Then suddenly, she was jerked roughly away from him by an unseen force.

“Oh,” she gasped as he held her up. “My heel is caught in a root.”

It was wedged so tightly that she had to pull her foot out of the shoe before Hallam could release her. He handed her the slipper and she surveyed it ruefully. “The heel is loose. It will have to be mended.”

“Why not buy another pair.”

“They’re expensive.”

“But my dear child,” he knelt to put on the slipper, while she steadied herself with a hand on his shoulder, “isn’t your aunt generous with your allowance?”

“Yes. But I’ve had too many years of having to be thrifty.”

“Why not forget them?”

“Why not remember?”

They let it go at that. But later the thing was to come back to them. Tragically. Silver slippers. Mended.



CHAPTER THREE

THE MAN IN THE STORM

They were to motor down to Granitehead. Dixon, Mrs. Delafield's chauffeur, was glad to get away.

"Beastly hole," he said to Farley.

"Well, it is."

"Not a movie or nuthin'."

Farley's hands went up, "I'm thanking Heaven Mrs. Delafield's tired of it."

On the morning of departure, Joan got up early and went out of doors. She walked to the edge of the cliff and saw the dawn sweep over the sea—the sharp, steel spread of it, across which were flung, presently, the golden banners of the rising sun.

Oh, the world was so beautiful! Life was so beautiful! Joan, high up on the cliff, stretched out her arms . . . !

From a window in the log cabin, Penelope Sears saw the girl's worshipping gesture. The older woman had often watched the sun rise and never without deep emotion. Of all those in the house, she was the only one who could understand what was in the child's heart. Not one of the others, Drew or Adelaide would have known that the loveliness of the dawning was linked in Joan's mind with the loveliness of the future which was before her. Because of her own happiness she saw God in his Heaven, glory in the universe, good in everything!

When Joan came back from the cliff, she found Penelope in the garden, "So you're going today, my dear?"

"Yes, Mrs. Sears, and I don't want to."

"I wish you could stay. But you'll be coming back? You must come back."

"We'll both come, Drew and I. We will make a pilgrimage on the anniversary of the day we found each other."

Penelope had not meant that. She waited until she was ready to go in to say: "You'll remember, dear child, that I am always your friend . . . that my latchstring is always out . . . and come if you need me."

"I will."

"Is that a promise?"

"Yes."

She gave Joan an armful of flowers to arrange for the table—delphiniums and mignonette and rose-colored phlox, and, as the two of them walked towards the house, Drew Hallam emerging from it saw Joan in a bower of beauty, like a lady in a poem.

When he came up to her, he kissed her. Penelope had gone on and they were alone. "You were up with the birds."

"I had to say 'good-bye' to everything."

"You could have said it later."

"I wanted to be alone."

"Why not with me?"

"Oh, well, I thought you might think me—silly."

"We'll say it now, together," he drew her towards the cliff. The fragrances of the flowers she carried mingled with the fresh fragrances from the sea.

"How shall I say it?" he asked.

"Like this," she made a trumpet of her hands and spoke through it. "*We're coming again. We're coming again.*"

"But are we?"

"Of course. Every year—a pilgrimage."

"My dear, what a romantic program."

"Don't you like it?"

"Yes. But place has nothing to do with my love for you."

"But this place, Drew? It was the beginning."

He made a trumpet of his hands. "*We're coming again . . . We're coming*"

again!”

The echo which returned to him had a hollow sound. “*We’re coming again . . . we’re coming again . . .*” It was as if some old sea monster took up the cry and flung it back in a spasm of satiric laughter.

While they were all at breakfast the sky darkened. Penelope, weather-wise, remarked: “I’m afraid there’ll be rain.”

“If there is,” Adelaide complained, “I shall tell Joan what I think of her. It was her idea to motor.”

“You’ll love it, darling.”

“How do you know? I am beginning to hate it already. I had to get up early this morning, and my nerves are on edge.”

As the day wore on, Penelope’s prophecy proved true. The rain streamed and the sea was lashed into fury by the storm. “If the gods keep me until I get under shelter,” Adelaide said, vindictively, “I’ll stay there until it stops.”

They had had their lunch at a picturesque tea-room and had left before the rain began. “We’d better make Portsmouth, if we can,” Drew stated, and exerted himself after that to keep Mrs. Delafield amused. He talked well, and his worldly-mindedness met the worldly-mindedness of the old woman. Joan wondered a little as she listened, it was all so foreign to the things she knew. But she was too happy to be critical. She knew that never for a moment did Drew forget that she was near—there was the glance of his eye for her, the turn of his head and the flash of his smile, the clasp of his hand over her curled fingers.

Conversation flagged before the trip was ended. Adelaide napped. Nancy yawned, and Drew sank into a sort of bored apathy.

But Joan was not bored. Quite unabashed, she laid her head against her lover’s shoulder and smiled up at him, “I’d like to ride like this—forever.”

He touched her cheek with a caressing finger, “I’d give my kingdom for a cigarette,” was his only response, but she was satisfied.

When they reached the big hotel near Portsmouth, Adelaide announced, “I meant what I said, I shall stay here until the storm is over.”

“Our reservations are made at Granitehead,” Drew reminded her.

“What of it?”

“We’ll have to pay for them.”

"Of course," Adelaide entered the elevator on Farley's arm and went serenely to her room. Double bills had no terrors for her? She spent as she pleased, and her income was always equal to her extravagances.

But Drew, having dressed for dinner, rapped on his sister's door. "Look here, Nance," he said, when he was admitted, "how's the bank account?"

"As bad as ever."

"And there'll be double bills because the old girl hates the rain. She really ought to pay our expenses."

"Rather difficult to suggest, isn't it?"

"Yes," he was moody and showed it, sticking his hands in his pockets and gazing at the floor.

Nancy, touching her lips with color, asked, presently, "Are you marrying Joan for her money?"

"No, I'm not."

"Because if you are, you'd better find someone without a heart to break."

"I'm not going to break her heart. And besides she may not have the money."

Nancy turned and looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. She may not have the money. There are no legal adoption papers and no assurance that she is mentioned in the will."

"Yet you are taking the chance?"

"Yes. I am taking the chance. I am fond of the child, although I suppose you won't believe it."

"You'll never be able to stand poverty."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Why borrow trouble. We'll be nice to the old girl, which should help, shouldn't it?"

After dinner, Adelaide and the Hallams met some people they knew—a Mrs. Carter and her daughter, Rose. Adelaide at once proposed a game of bridge: "We four women. Drew and Joan can dance."

Rose Carter was a slim, smooth creature, of perhaps thirty. She was just back from Paris and wore black with pearls. Her hair was shingled to show her well-shaped head, and she had thin, flexible red lips and a white skin.

When she was dummy, she danced with Drew.

“Who is the little girl?” she demanded.

“Joan Dudley. I am going to marry her.”

“Marry her? Good heavens!”

“What makes you say that, Rose?”

“Marriage and you! You aren’t made for it.”

He wanted to say: “You thought once that I was.” But of course he couldn’t. Rose had been the heroine of his war romance. Ten years ago when she was twenty. She had been in Red Cross work in France, and there had been the glamour of it. But neither of them had had money, and the thing had ended.

She was still attractive, however, and her cleverness amused him. When she went back to play her hand, he sat beside her, looking on. Joan on the other side of him, wished he would ask her to dance, and presently he did it. “You little featherweight,” he flattered, as they moved to the rhythm of the music.

The Carters were, it was discovered, on their way to Granitehead. It was decided that, if it was raining in the morning, Rose should take Adelaide’s place in the car, and Mrs. Delafield and Mrs. Carter would go on by train, with Farley, of course, in attendance.

The storm continued through the night, and the next day when the limousine left the hotel, Rose was in it, a striking figure in her orange coat and with a helmet of orange-colored felt molded to fit her head. She sat beside Nancy, but she talked to Drew. And he talked with her and laughed a lot, more, perhaps, Joan noticed, than on the day before. But she was not jealous. She was, indeed, filled with a great content. Now and then Drew’s eyes rested on her and the look in them made her heart beat faster. Once when the wind blew cool, he folded her wrap about her. “Lovely child,” he whispered, and again, “I like you in that white cape. It’s charming.”

It was after they entered the North Shore Drive below Gloucester that something happened to the car. Dixon got down and tinkered and tapped. After a while Drew climbed out, and came back to report: “We’ll have to telephone to a garage.”

The rain had stopped. On each side of them hemlock groves covered the low hills between the highway and the rocky shore. Rose suggested that they walk about a bit. “Come on, Drew. It’s deadly sitting here.”

He held out a hand to Joan. “You’ll come, too?”

But Nancy objected. “I’m afraid to stay alone.”

“Why should you stay?”

“I’m wearing thin shoes and it’s wet.”

“Dixon will be back in a moment.”

It ended, however, by Joan’s offer to remain with Nancy.

“Sure you don’t mind?” Drew asked.

“Not a bit,” she smiled at him. What did she care who walked beside him, when he left his heart with her?

When the others had gone, Nancy apologized, “You wanted to go. And I’m a selfish pig.”

“No, you’re not.”

“I am, and I know it. And I want you to like me.”

“I do like you.”

“Well, I’m not a really likeable person. But I’m honest in my friendships. And I kept you here to say something to you. You mustn’t think Drew perfect. He isn’t. And you’ll be happier if you just take him for what he is—with all his faults. And love him, as I do, in spite of them.”

There was a waver of emotion in Nancy’s voice. Joan said with earnestness, “I shall love him whatever happens.”

“I hope so. I want you to be happy. He . . . hasn’t always known how to be happy, Joan. I wish you might show him . . .”

Dixon came back just then with a man from a nearby garage. Together they did things to the engine. When they got it in working order, Dixon announced that in a few minutes it would be ready. “Shall I look for Mr. Hallam?”

“I’ll go,” Joan said, “I’ll be glad of the walk.”

She sped up the path which led through the hemlock grove. It was only a thread of path and when she reached the top of the hill she found it hard to follow. Under the dark trees with their wet nerveless branches was deep gloom. After a time she came out on the rocks and saw the sea beyond. Clouds were piled high on the horizon and thrown upon them was the red stain of the afterglow. Far to the right a lighthouse glimmered in the gathering dusk. It was very still, with the ominous stillness which comes before a storm. Not a soul was in sight. Joan was gripped by a feeling of panic. She was desperately afraid of storms.

Then, suddenly, the silence was broken by the rackety noise of a motor

engine, and cutting across the darkening waters came a long gray boat with bright brasses. A man stood up in it, steering. He had a straight, boyish figure, and the wind blew his hair back. Joan had a sense of having seen him before. She leaned forward looking at him, a white and slender figure against the blackness behind her.

The man in the boat saw her and raised his hand in a gesture of warning. She turned and met the rush of a mighty wind. The tops of the trees were flattened by the weight of it . . . the strength of it seemed to push her back as if it would topple her into the sea.

She began to run. As she came again into the grove, the branches of the hemlocks swept back and forth like gigantic brooms. The air was filled with a ghastly greenness. She stumbled over underbrush and caught her cape on the bushes. It was dreadful to be there alone in all that noise and chaos.

“Drew,” she called, “Drew, Drew, where are you?”

Her breath was almost gone when she at last reached the road and saw Nancy peering out from the car. Dixon hurried to meet her.

“I couldn’t find them,” she panted, as she came up.

“They are coming now,” Dixon told her.

She saw them then, running down a path to the left of the one she had followed. Rose had her hat off. Her cheeks were reddened by the wind and her eyes shone. Her blown-about hair gave her a charming air of disorder. Drew had hold of her hand, helping her. They were laughing like two children.

They romped up to the car. “We went farther than we thought,” Drew said, “we had a great time getting back.”

Joan was standing in the road. “I went to find you, and I . . . couldn’t . . .” her voice shook.

He gave her a sharp glance, “Frightened?”

She nodded, unable to speak.

With a sudden movement he held her close. “You poor little thing.”

The storm came booming down like great guns. There was thunder now and lightning, and the rain rushing in sheets. The car as they sought its shelter swayed and shook. But Joan was not afraid. Her lover was beside her. His strength was hers, and his tenderness.

It was not until that night when she was safe in her room at the Granitehead hotel that she thought of the man in the boat. How quick he had been to warn

her, and where had she seen him? She lay for a long time wide-eyed in the darkness before she placed him. The boy of her dream had been like that . . . with his hand up, and the wind blowing his hair, and the red light in the sky above him.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE TWO SHOPS

Along the rocks at Granitehead ran a primitive boardwalk. It connected one hotel with another, and between the hotels were small tea-rooms and libraries and all the little places of trade patronized by summer guests and open only during the hot season.

At the end of the boardwalk, however, where it ascended a steep promontory was a shop which was open all the year. A sign above the doorway said:

GILES ARMIGER—RARE BOOKS

In the window of the shop were displayed a few volumes of current fiction, whose gay jackets were in sharp contrast to the dark leather of the old books back of them, and to the dim prints and somber steel engravings.

Set low in the window, as if it modestly refrained from competition with the more aristocratic commodities of letters, was another sign. There was no name on the modest sign. It simply read:

SHOES MENDED

The shoemaker's shop was reached from the outside by a winding path up from the lower road, or indoors by a flight of stairs down from the bookshop. It clung thus to the side of the rock like the nest of some timid bird. Its windows faced the open sea, and, indeed, the view of the water was so wide and free that one looking out had the sensation of being on the prow of a ship and sailing forward. Within the shop, there was for furniture a cobbler's bench, a set of shelves on which were set forth shoes to be mended, a table piled with more shoes, and a modern machine for stitching leather. On the outer sills of the windows, beyond the screens, were boxes of growing plants, snapdragons and petunias and painter's-brush—their pink and white and lavender blurred this morning by the gray slant of the rain which had beaten the waves into

stillness and had shut people up in their houses.

The storm had, too, stopped business on the boardwalk, so that it was after ten before the owner of the bookshop arrived. He called a greeting down the stairs and when no answer came he descended them, showing himself in the doorway as rather tall and shapeless in a yellow slicker with an oil-skin hat pulled over his nose.

There was a rustle in a corner and out came an old sea-gull, raising its wings in an ecstasy of welcome. White of breast, keen of eye, it had a sort of wild dignity which made it impressive in spite of the dragging pinion which held it to earth and kept it from the flashing flights of others of its kind who, even in the rain, dipped and rose, or hung suspended above the sullen surface of the sea.

“All alone, Peter?”

Old Peter stretched his neck and seemed to listen. There was a step outside.

“Scripps is coming,” Armiger said, and the door opened.

The man who entered wore no hat or raincoat. He nodded to Armiger and stripped off his worn leather jacket and threw it in a corner. There had been a time when Scripps’ leather jacket had been worn for more spectacular uses—when he had flown high in the air above other seas than this—above war-swept zones. Then one day his wings had been broken by the guns of enemy planes. He had come down, as old Peter had come, to walk henceforth with men who had no wings. To mending shoes, because when the doctors had diagnosed his case they had spoken of nerves and the necessity of doing something with his hands. “No more law books,” the big specialist had said, “it would be wiser to learn a trade if you don’t think it beneath you.”

Scripps had spoken with bitterness. “Beggars can’t be choosers. I’ll mend shoes. My great-grandfather was a cobbler. There were many cobblers in Granitehead, and nobody was ashamed of it.”

Stephen Scripps and Giles Armiger had come from France together. There had been things overseas which had drawn them close. Their asset was now a friendship which touched the skies, their liabilities that they had the strength of only one man between them. Giles always spoke of his own perfect physical condition with a note of apology. “I seemed to bear a charmed life, Scripps. It wasn’t fair when the rest of you had to suffer.”

Yet Giles had fought through four years of it, and he had come back with the marks of it on his soul. Never again would there be the radiance, the youth, the gayety. Never again, perhaps, the hope, the ambition. When his friend,

Stephen, had elected to mend shoes, Giles had said: “My grandfather’s library was his pride. He bought rare books, I’ll sell them.”

So here were the two shops, Scripps safely hidden in his, his sign in his friend’s window. Armiger happy among his books. Or as happy as a man can be who through four years has seen horrors.

Scripps said now: “Dilly came over this morning. I met her at the landing. She’ll be up here at lunch time. She has brought a cake. She remembered your birthday.”

“How’s the baby?”

“Much better. That’s why she could come. She left her with William.”

“Nasty weather for her to be out.”

“Dilly doesn’t mind rain any more than a little duck. She said the storm of yesterday blew things about a bit. Carried one of her Plymouth Rocks out to sea, and she had to row to the rescue.”

They laughed at the picture of Dilly in pursuit of her wind-blown biddy, then Giles said: “It was a dreadful storm. It caught me on my way down from Gloucester. I’ve never seen blacker clouds, coming up from the west, with a green tint, like a tornado.”

He seated himself on the edge of the table and swung a foot. “Just as the storm broke a girl appeared on the rocks above me. She was all in white and with that blackness back of her the effect was tremendous . . . like something supernatural . . . or like that statue, you remember, we saw in France, when the smoke drew away and it stood out against the dark . . .”

“I don’t want to remember,” said Scripps. “I don’t want to remember anything, in France.”

“I know,” Giles shelved the dangerous topic and went on with his story. “Well, I saw that the storm was about to break but the girl didn’t, and I waved a warning. She began to run and her white cape billowed up about her like wings . . .”

He stopped suddenly and sat staring into space.

Scripps glanced at him and said, drily. “An angel visitant?”

“Yes, something like that. You needn’t try to be funny about it, Scripps.”

“I couldn’t be funny. But I’m not quite sold on angel visitants.”

“You have no poetry in your soul.”

“Well, why should I? I deal in shoes.”

“There’s poetry in shoes—seaman’s boots and slattern’s slippers.”

“There aren’t any slatterns in Granitehead.”

“Oh, well, have your way about it,” Armiger stood up, undisturbed by the argument, “and just for that I’ll leave you to Peter’s company. I’ll be down when Dilly comes. It’s raining hard again, thank heaven. I shall have a peaceful day with no barbarians to bother me.”

The barbarians were, it may be said, certain of the summer people who haunted the boardwalk. They bought of Giles not because they cared for old books, or fine bindings, or the association with rare minds of other ages, but because they felt that something which must be paid for by checks of three figures should be worth having. Few of them knew the difference between Ben Jonson and the incomparable Samuel; had never read Keats or heard of Fanny Brawne. They stared blankly when one spoke of Pepys, and refused utterly to enthuse over Shelley even while they bought him. Giles, lacking the commercial mind, would have preferred to keep his treasures rather than have them go to those who had no real appreciation of their value. “I have patience with ignorance which seeks knowledge,” he told Scripps, “but not with these literary upstarts who buy books as they would bonds.”

Having doffed his slicker, Giles proceeded to set the shop in order. He worked swiftly and competently, and as he moved about, he gave an impression of strength and vigor exceeding any demands made upon it. One felt he should be now, as he had been in France, in command of men, rather than selling books over a counter. He had a well-knit, slender frame, small hips, broad shoulders. His features were clear-cut, his eyes keen and brown. His small mustache was darker than his hair which was ruffled up on his head and of a reddish-brown.

As he worked, he whistled under his breath. He felt an unusual lightness of spirit. There were days when he was deeply depressed. Days when it was difficult to preserve a cheerful front before Scripps. Which must be done, of course, lest Scripps descend into the depths.

His whistling ceased as a customer entered. He went forward to find a girl in a green raincoat. A small green hat was pulled down over her eyes. She had left outside a dripping umbrella.

“Are you the shoemaker?”

“No. But I look after customers.”

She handed him a parcel, "I want my slippers mended."

He took off the paper. Silver ones! Small and exquisite. "What's to be done to them?"

She showed him. "I caught the heel. I was dancing in the woods."

Dancing in the woods . . . and she was all in green . . .

He said before he could stop: "You're not a dryad?"

She drew back a little, her eyes startled. "I don't know what you mean."

He laughed, "I'm sorry. Perhaps I shouldn't have said that. But dancing in the woods! Not many people do."

Her voice was cold. "How silly I must have sounded."

"You sounded—superlative."

She hesitated for a second, then found herself smiling. He seemed a gentleman. And his manner was not in the least presumptuous. "It was a heavenly dance," she confided.

"I am sure of it."

"Moonlight," she vouchsafed further.

"And for a partner—a faun . . .?"

Another moment's hesitation, then with a thrill in her voice, "And for a partner—Apollo—"

Oh, could anything be better? To have her meet his thought like that. And who could have expected this out from the boardwalk on a rainy morning? He said with eagerness, "Your silver shoes will shine among Scripps' seaman's boots and slattern's slippers."

"Scripps?"

"My friend, the cobbler. His shop is downstairs."

"Oh . . . will you tell him then that there's a torn place on the other shoe? And may I have them by Tuesday night? There's a dance on then and I'll need them."

She would, she continued, call for them. She was at the Wind and Wave and would like the walk. And when she had said that, she glanced around the shop and decided: "While I am here I might as well buy a book."

She wandered over to the tables and began to read the titles, and it seemed

to Giles watching her as if every time she moved a light followed her, like the light in the theatre thrown on the leading lady. He found himself saying things over in his mind, like *She walks in beauty* . . .

The girl held up a popular novel. “How about this?”

He shook his head. “No . . . It’s not a book for dryads—it is for satyrs and people with machine minds.”

“How do you know I haven’t a machine mind?”

“One can judge of these things quickly.”

“But you’ve seen me only once.”

“I’ve seen you twice.”

She looked at him in astonishment, “When was the other time?”

“Yesterday in the storm. You were on the rocks near Gloucester.”

“Were you the man in the boat?”

“Yes.”

They stood silent for a moment. Each felt, perhaps subconsciously, the significance of this meeting. Then Giles spoke: “You have no idea how amazing you were against that black sky. With your white cape blowing, and the sea surging up below you. When I was a little boy I had a picture of an angel on a rock. I always liked to look at it.” His eyes as they met hers held a glint of laughter in them which robbed his words of any suggestion of sentimentality.

She smiled back. “Angels on rocks make me think of tombstones.”

“Do they? They make me think of Revelation.”

They talked of the storm after that, and she told him of her flight through the wood and her fears. Then he chose a book for her and wrapped it up. “Before you go, won’t you let me show you one or two things I think you’ll like? I have a copy of a letter from Keats to Fanny Brawne. My grandfather made the copy himself from the original, and I was lucky enough to have it left to me. I wouldn’t sell it for a fortune, but now and then I let somebody look at it.”

He drew out a chair for her, then brought the letter. While she read it, he stood leaning against the table. It was the one beginning, “My sweet girl,” and ending, “Ever yours, my love.” Joan bending above it read with breathless interest. Giles thought her very pretty, with the deep rose of her cheeks, the

length of her dark lashes, the brightness of her hair as it showed beneath her green cap.

When she raised her eyes there was a light in them like the glow and shine of candles in a sanctuary. With keen intuition Giles told himself, "She is linking some experience of her own with that letter."

The thought weighed on him. He had been, perhaps, a fool not to let her go at once when she had bought her book. He knew that when she left, he would still see her sitting there with her lighted eyes in his dark shop. He would dream of her. And who was he to dream of such a woman?

She was saying, "I adore Keats. My father was the editor of a country newspaper and his only really valuable possession was a library of old books. He made me learn pages of poetry. When I began to teach school I found it a great help with the children to pass on to them what I had learned."

So she was a schoolteacher! He had not thought that. It did not fit in with the expensiveness of the silver slippers and the fact of her sojourn at the big hotel. Yet even country mice have now and then a holiday. And he was glad to know her as not one of the rich barbarians whom he hated.



CHAPTER FIVE

BIRTHDAY CAKES

When Joan had gone, Giles took the silver slippers downstairs.

“These were left to be mended.”

Scripps reached out a hand for them and looked inside. “Fifth Avenue shop and old French buckles. Who brought them?”

“The girl I saw on the rocks.”

“You don’t mean it.”

“I do. It’s a bit queer a thing like that—two meetings in two days.”

Scripps, examining the heel, asked, “How did she do it?”

“She was dancing in the woods. She caught the heel in a root.”

After that the little shoes were set on a shelf, where, shining amid the clumsy footwear they seemed to draw light to themselves and to illumine the dreary day.

“So you’ve seen her again?” Scripps said, as he returned to his bench, “what do you think of her?”

“I’d hate to say.”

“Why?”

“You’d tell me my language was extravagant; that I was a darned poet, or words to that effect. That I was seeing rose-color when I ought to see drab.”

“Is it as bad as that?”

“Worse . . .” Giles was smiling. Scripps was not sure he was in earnest. He didn’t want him to be in earnest. Not Giles . . . who mustn’t fall in love with anybody.

But there was no time to say more about it, for the door opened and a young woman entered.

“Dilly,” the two men said in a breath, and Giles went with both hands outstretched to meet her. “You were a darling to come.”

“Oh, well, your birthday, my dear.” She set a basket on the table and uncovered it. From it she took a parcel wrapped in a napkin, and a great cake set on a pink plate and protected by waxed paper.

“There,” she said, “what do you think of it?” She whisked the paper from about the cake and showed it, snowy with cocoanut and circled with tiny pink tapers, “thirty-three of them, Giles,” she indicated the candles, “it doesn’t seem possible . . .”

“Eight years older than you, Dilly,” her cousin reminded her.

She nodded and smiled at him . . . “Thirteen when I was five. What glorious times we had together.”

She stripped off her raincoat, handed it to Giles and flung her little hat to Scripps, who lighted-up and laughing, caught it. Her short fair hair, thus revealed, framed a fresh-cheeked, smiling countenance. Her nose had little golden freckles, and in the gray eyes under the long fair lashes were twinkling lights.

She began to lay the table, deftly, having brought a cloth, and going back and forth to Scripps’ cupboard for the dishes.

“There’s coffee in the thermos bottle,” she enumerated as she bent over her basket, “pickles,” she set a bottle on the table, “olives,” another bottle, “open them, Giles, and then we’re ready.”

Giles drawing out a chair for her, said, “Scripps tells me the baby is better.”

“Yes. I left her with William. And he is scared stiff. He has lived five years in a lighthouse and he’s never been afraid of anything. But baby has him petrified. She’s so helpless and little. He handles her as if she were going to break.”

Dilly was pouring the coffee. “Cream for you, Scripps, and none for Giles. What a pair you are, doing everything differently, yet such friends.”

Scripps flared: “Does drinking my coffee with cream make me different from Giles? We’re absolutely alike in everything except that I won’t accept his philosophy. He believes that everything works together for good. Which is

archaic . . . rot . . .”

Dilly’s eyes met Giles and saw a warning, “Oh, well, we’re not going to quarrel about it on anybody’s birthday, are we? And you haven’t told me how you like the sandwiches.”

“Delicious,” Giles said, “how do you do it, Dilly?”

“Do what?”

“Take care of a house and a baby and a garden and look after that husband of yours . . .?”

“Keeping house,” Dilly told him, “in a lighthouse has its advantages—with no neighbors running in, and nothing to interrupt, and William and I get up early . . . He helped me make the sandwiches . . . buttered ’em and sliced the roast chicken . . . He’s to have the wings and legs for his dinner, and I baked a little cake for him . . .”

“Lucky William.”

Dilly was complacent. “Yes, he is. And so am I. And so’s the baby . . .” she sent her smiling glance to meet their smiles, “And now, will one of you light the candles?”

Scripps did it, touching each pink tip with flame, his white hair and young face illumined by the growing brightness.

“And now,” Dilly prompted, as they gazed upon that rosy effulgence, “make a wish Giles, and if you blow all of them out at once it will come true.”

“What shall I wish?”

“It must be a secret. In your heart.”

“What if I have no heart?”

“Then in your soul.”

“Why should I have any secrets from you and Scripps? I shan’t make a wish. I’ll drink a toast instead.” He raised his glass, “To the silver slippers.”

“What slippers?” Dilly demanded.

“Those on the shelf.”

She turned and looked at them. “Whose are they?”

He rose and brought them over, showed her the tag. “Joan Dudley.”

“Never heard of her.”

“She’s at the hotel. A schoolteacher out for a holiday.”

“If she is a schoolteacher she has squandered a month’s salary on these shoes.”

“So Scripps says.”

Dilly’s voice was wistful, “How wonderful it must be to wear slippers like that, and the gowns to go with them. Yet you say she’s a schoolteacher.”

“So she told me. But there’s a rich aunt, who probably pays for luxuries. Miss Dudley motored down with her.”

“I wonder if I’d dare try them on?”

“Why not?”

Dilly’s feet were small, and the silver shoes fitted perfectly. “I feel like Cinderella,” she said, delightedly, “at the ball,” she essayed a few dancing steps, humming a tune, “Come on Giles . . .”

He danced with her, until suddenly she stopped . . . and said with a sort of quick decision, “The ball is over. And my William doesn’t dance . . . Take back your slippers, Scripps. They’re too . . . disturbing.”

Giles was aware that beneath the light words was some emotion not seen on the surface. But he said nothing, at the moment, and presently they were all laughing together as Giles blew out the gutted candles, and Dilly cut the cake.

When, however, Giles carried Dilly’s basket back to the boat, he asked a straight question. “Happy, little Dilly?”

“Yes. What made you ask that?”

“Because when you stopped dancing there was something . . . as if you were wishing for pleasures you didn’t have, Dilly?”

She smiled up at him, “Everybody yearns now and then for—the fleshpots. And sometimes I’m fed up a bit on solitudes. But there’s always William and the baby . . . and the great light . . . and love . . .”

It was bravely said, and beautifully. He laid his hand on her shoulder and looked down at her, “What a dear child you are . . .”

“Not a child any longer, Giles. I’m the mother of a baby.”

“But always a child at heart.”

As he helped her into the boat, she asked, “How are things going on the Island?”

“No better.”

“If you could only get away for a bit.”

“I can’t leave Scripps alone to bear it.”

“Oh, you deserve a halo.”

“My dear child, it is Scripps who deserves the halo.”

As he untied the rope he said:

“More rain. But you’re such a little duck you won’t mind.”

“You taught me to swim . . .” she reminded him. The motor began its “plop, plop,” and Dilly, standing up, steered expertly. “Good-bye,” she called over her shoulder.

Giles watched her until she was a mere speck on the gray surface of the harbor. Such a brave soul, little Dilly, living there in the lighthouse at the end of the sandy peninsula with William and the baby. Her grandfather and Giles’ had been brothers, sons of a sturdy English merchant who had settled in Salem. Giles’ grandfather had studied law and had loved his books; the other son, Mark, had been a rover and a ne’er-do-well. Thus it had happened, as it often happened on that rocky coast, that one branch of the family had advanced in wealth and influence, and the other had gone back. Young Giles and Dilly had been the best of friends. But Giles had had private schools and college, while Dilly as she came along had taken education as she could get it in Granitehead and she had been in the same classes as William Tucker, whom she had married. William was fine and upstanding, but now and then young Giles had sighed to think of the waste of Dilly’s charms.

He said something of the kind to Scripps when he returned to the shop. “Sometimes I think if she had not married William and could have seen the world . . .”

“You and I have seen the world,” said Scripps, “and what good has it done us?”

Giles Armiger had that to think about when he returned to his books. There were few customers for the rain continued, and below stairs in his shop, Scripps tapped and sewed, and old Peter slept and waked to preen his feathers and slept again.

It was almost six when the two men went down to the float and stepped into the gray boat with the bright brasses. They had a longer way to go than Dilly. They swept around the lighthouse and into the open sea. Then a mile

along the coast, and a low island lifted its head. They steered towards it, and as they came up to the landing a man came to meet them. José, a Portuguese, was man of all work, and Margarida, his wife, looked after the house. The house as they approached it showed as a long low structure built to conform to the outline of the rocks so that it seemed almost a part of them with its shingles silvered by the weather. There were vines growing over it—wisteria, which roofed it with lavender in the spring, and roses with their pink in June. Just now the riot of color was in the garden in which bloomed all the old-fashioned flowers which are at their gayest in midsummer. Even the pouring rain could not deaden their brilliance. It seemed rather to intensify it as it washed down on larkspur and four-o’clocks, lady slipper and phlox.

The outer door of the house led into the living room, which was faintly illumined by a fire on the hearth and by its shine on dark old woods and on the rich blue of two huge Chinese vases, by the red of lacquer and the gold of all the small heathen gods in a cabinet inlaid with mother-of-pearl. In the dining room beyond was the glimmer of glass and silver, with two tall unlighted candles, white as ghosts amid the gloom.

Entering this house, Giles and Scripps went at once upstairs. When an hour later they came down they had bathed and changed. In the dining room the candles were lighted and the table set for formal service. The two men stood until a girl in evening dress arrived. She was dark with a pale skin, and her dress had a golden glow like that of the midsummer flowers outside.

She went straight up to Giles. “Why are you so late?” she demanded.

“Are we late?”

“Yes. I watched . . . I wanted to talk to you. About Margarida. She baked a cake and was putting candles on it when I caught her at it. She said it was your birthday. But it isn’t. Your birthday is in April. Don’t you remember? There was always dogwood.”

He drew out her chair for her. “Was I born in April, Scripps?”

Scripps said, promptly. “Of course. Fancy a man forgetting when he was born, Amélie.”

She paid no attention to him. “You must speak to Margarida, Giles. She was very obstinate. I just happened to go in the kitchen. And I made her take the candles off.”

When they had finished their canapés and Margarida brought the soup, Amélie said, “I was right, Margarida, his birthday is in April.”

Margarida, placing a soup plate, kept a frozen silence.

“You hear, Margarida?”

“Yes, I hear.”

“How did you make such a mistake?”

“I am old . . . the old forget . . .”

“Well, then, you may serve the cake for dessert, but there must be no candles.”

When the cake appeared the two men ate and said nothing of that other cake which they had eaten at noon. Nor did they speak of Dilly. They talked of the rain and of books and of things that were in the evening paper which they had brought over with them in the boat.

After dinner, the men smoked, and Amélie played for them. A little later Scripps read aloud. Amélie listened for a time, then demanded, “Why don’t you read to me, Giles?” She was impatient and impolite.

Scripps looked up from his book and said, passionately, “Doesn’t my voice mean anything to you?”

“What should it mean?” Amélie had risen and stood looking down at him. “You are always saying things like that. And I wish you weren’t here. I want to be alone—with Giles . . .” She turned away from him. “I’m going to bed. I hate the rain. When I’m asleep I forget it . . .”

After she had gone, Scripps said, “Giles . . . how can I ever stand it?”

His friend laid a hand on his shoulder, “Hereafter I’ll do the reading.”

“But I thought that *Aucassin and Nicolette*—years ago we read it together.”

“I know,” the grip of Giles’ hand was comforting.

When Scripps went finally upstairs for the night, Giles made his way to the kitchen. José sat before the glowing kitchen stove with his feet on the shelf of it. Margarida was kneading bread, the elastic dough puffing between her strong fingers.

“What happened,” Giles asked, “about the cake?”

Margarida’s hand, sticky with dough, went up in the air. “I was such an old fool. I wanted you to know I had not forgotten. So I baked the cake and was going to bring it to you and Mr. Stephen tonight after she was in bed. And then she came through the kitchen. And I was caught.”

“You couldn’t help it, of course.”

“What I hate,” Margarida was vehement, “was that I was made to tell lies. Which is a sin on my soul . . .”

“May you never have a worse one, Margarida.”

He talked after that to José about the garden and the chance of more bad weather. José and his wife had been on the place before Giles’ mother had died. It had been the summer residence of the Armigers in her time. But since the war Giles had lived in it all the year around, and there was his friend Scripps to share it, and Amélie . . .

But tonight Giles refused to think of Amélie. He went back to the living room and hunted for a book. It was a little book with green and gold binding and yellowed pages.

He turned the pages and read:

“The ladies of St. James’s,
Go swinging to the play,
Their footmen run before them,
With a ‘stand by! Clear the way’!
But Phyllida, my Phyllida,
She takes her buckled shoon,
When she goes out a-courtin’,
Beneath the harvest moon.”

He turned another page:

“The ladies of St. James’s,
They’re painted to the eyes.
Their white it stays forever,
Their red it never dies.
But Phyllida, my Phyllida,
Her color comes and goes.
It trembles to a lily,
It wavers to a rose. . .”

He stood there, reading, beneath the light of the standing lamp. He had hunted for the poem because it made him think of the girl of the silver slippers . . . *her color comes and goes . . . it trembles to a lily. . . it wavers to a rose . . .!*

And he wanted to think of her. As he had seen her high on the rock with

her white wings bearing her up—as he had seen her in his dim shop bending over the old letter—as he saw her in imagination, dancing in the wood!



CHAPTER SIX

SWEET AND TWENTY

In the bookshop was a tall ladder with little wheels. By means of it books on the highest shelves could be reached.

Giles, sitting on the topmost step of the ladder on Tuesday morning, had a bird's-eye view of the tables below him, of the square of sunlight framed by the open door, the moving feet of people on the boardwalk beyond, and a brief glimpse of water between the moving feet.

So absorbed was he in his task, however, that he did not notice when the sky darkened and the feet hurried fast and faster. Four of the feet took refuge in his shop, and a man's voice said: "There's no one here. Fancy leaving a shop like this."

And a woman's voice: "I'm drenched. Such a sudden shower!"

"You deserved to get wet, Nancy. You would come."

"And you didn't want me. But I had to talk to you about Joan."

"You've done more than talk. You've nagged unmercifully."

"Thank you. Yet all my nagging hasn't done any good. Here you are, engaged to sweet and twenty, and you don't know how to treat her."

"You're making a lot of it."

"I can't bear to see Joan hurt."

"I have told you I didn't intend to hurt her."

"But you called her stingy, Drew. And there's really no reason why the child should not have her slippers mended."

"She should have bought new ones."

Giles could see the pair of them plainly now. The woman was without a

hat, and had opened that it might dry a gorgeous paper umbrella, on which white storks flew against a background of lettuce green. Her hair was copper-colored, and in the green sweater that she wore was a little line of copper thread which matched the hair. She stood with her hands back of her leaning against the table. "You simply didn't want to call for the shoes, and you gave her a bit of your temper," she declared.

"I hate petty economies. You know that, Nancy. You and I have always spent as we pleased."

"Yes, and you and I know there isn't much left to spend."

The man blazed at that. "Well, and if there isn't? I am going to marry Joan. And she's worth millions."

Giles, sitting up aloft, felt the world rock under him . . . millions!

He was aware that he was eavesdropping and that he must end it. He made a strategic move, however. He descended the ladder noiselessly, and rounding a bookcase, seemed to have just come in. "Can I do anything for you?" he demanded.

Drew said: "Miss Dudley asked me to get her slippers."

"Sorry. They are not quite ready."

"She was to have them today."

"I will bring them up to the hotel."

"Tonight? She wants to wear them."

"Tonight."

Giles had known he was stretching the truth when he said Joan's slippers were not ready. Scripps could have finished them in a moment. But was it simply to hand over to this pair those ineffable little shoes that he had waited for this day? Why the morning had seemed glorious, because it was Tuesday and she was coming. And he would see her yet, in spite of the unkind fate which had kept her from him.

Drew and his sister had started out of the shop when Nancy's eye was caught by a flash of color among certain dingy volumes in a locked cabinet. "What a delectable binding." She leaned down to look closer, "Thackeray—the Four Georges . . . such a nice fat little book, and that red and gold."

"It's a first edition," he said, and laid the book in her hands.

"How much?" she asked.

He named the price and she said, "Outrageous."

He laughed, "You know it isn't."

He found she had a nice taste in leathers, knew a lot about collections, and had made some rare finds of her own. "Picked 'em up for a song. That's the only kind I dare indulge in."

She pounced on another, "The Amber Witch . . . how adorable! May I see it?"

He got it out of the case for her, "It's not for sale."

Drew, who had been showing signs of impatience while they talked, broke in rather insolently, "You'd sell it if you got your price for it, wouldn't you?"

"It hasn't any price."

"You mean that you won't take any offer?"

"Yes."

"Why not?"

His tone was insufferable, but Giles, leaning back against a table, surveyed him with calm eyes. "I won't sell because I got the book from my grandfather's collection. He lived in Salem and pleased himself by studying the history of witchcraft. He was a gentleman and a scholar."

After he had said it, Giles hated himself. Why should he fling out the facts of his ancestry in that crude way, as if he had to prove it? He was glad when Nancy interposed, before her brother could speak. "Lucky for me The Amber Witch isn't for sale. I might pawn my jewels to get it."

She smiled at Giles, and he found himself rather liking her in spite of her storks and her lettuce-green and the too-high color in her cheeks. "My tastes run beyond the limits of my pocket-book," she added.

After that, she held the conversation, while her brother stared moodily at the floor. Giles wished they would go. He wanted to be alone to consider this matter which had seemed to be so amazingly thrust upon him.

So this was the man the dryad was going to marry? For this man the light had been in her eyes as she had bent over the book, the rose in her cheeks. This was the man with whom she had danced in the moonlight. This man with his impeccable clothes, his air of owning the world, his abominable insolence, was, Heaven save the mark—Apollo!

When at last they left him, he swung his foot as he sat on a corner of the

table and considered it. A schoolteacher with millions! And the man was marrying her for her money. Would take to himself all that lovely innocence, and give in exchange his egotism, his sophistication, his uneven tempers.

He found himself pacing the shop like a caged animal. He couldn't get the thing off his mind. That exquisite youth and idealism linked to materialistic middle-age. The thought of it was preposterous!

There was, too, the somewhat confusing conflict between what the girl had told him and the things he had overheard. He had had it from her lips that she had earned her living, yet here was her lover crediting her with a fortune.

Her lover . . .! Giles, sitting down to his desk, found it difficult to keep his mind on his accounts. There were few customers. Such as came in he waited on, then went back to his uncongenial task. He hated figures, but felt he could not afford a book-keeper.

On a sudden impulse, he dropped his pen, closed the ledger, and took from a drawer a journal in which it had become his habit in his somewhat lonely life to write of the things which happened in the day.

He began without preface: "She shall not marry him. That is as settled in my mind as if I had the right, like a guardian in an old melodrama, to forbid the banns. And why shouldn't I forbid them? Why should not any man of chivalrous purpose set himself against such a catastrophe? If I saw a ship heading for the rocks, wouldn't I have a right to save it? And this child must be saved. I have met her but once, but I am as sure of what she is as I would be if I had known her forever. Everything about her speaks of simplicity and sincerity, and grace of spirit. Married to such a man, in a month she would hate him. It would be his darkness against her light. His worldliness against her innocence. She would never have the power to draw him up to her. He might have the power to drag her down . . .

"In finding a way to save her, I shall ask nothing for myself, except perhaps a little fire of friendship at which to warm my hands. I can ask no more than that. I would not if I could. Such an undertaking must be selfless . . .

"Scripps would call me a fool. Perhaps I am a fool. But I see no other way. Her little ship of life is heading for the rocks. I cannot stand by and see it wrecked . . ."

He put the book away and going downstairs later, Giles further relieved his mind by describing the precious pair to Scripps. "And people like that come and high-hat us . . . you and me whose grandfathers were sailing ships when theirs were digging potatoes. Oh, you should have seen them, Scripps. The

kind you and I have laughed about at Trouville and Nice and Paris—the type is unmistakable. Bizarre and self-satisfied.”

“I know. Amélie always hated them,” Scripps’ voice died away. He remembered a day at Trouville with Amélie. It had been cool and clear and she had worn a rose-colored wrap. The next night when he had gone back to the trenches he had thought of the coolness and clearness and of Amélie’s face like a pearl against the rose.

He put the memory from him. “If Miss Dudley’s friends had waited a moment the shoes would have been ready.”

“I didn’t want them to wait. I am going to take them to her. I want to see her again, Scripps.”

Scripps flashed a glance at him. So that was it. Giles was thinking about that girl. He would fall in love with her. And then what would happen?

For Giles had not told his friend what he had overheard. He had not told him that Joan was engaged, or that she had money. He had in fact said nothing except that her friends had come for the slippers, and that he wondered that they could be her friends.

While the two of them talked, the telephone rang. Giles answered it and came back. “It was Margarida. She says that Amélie wants me. She has grown very excited and insistent. Thinks that something has happened to me, and that she must see me.”

“You’ll go, of course?”

“If I do, it means that I must close the shop.”

“Well, why not?” Scripps argued, his voice shaken and almost hysterical, “why not? When you come to it, why are you selling books, Giles? Just to keep me company.”

“What better can I do than sell books?”

“Oh, there are a thousand things . . . travel, adventure. If I didn’t tie you, and Amélie.”

They were silent for a moment, then Giles said, with gentleness, “Don’t mull over things, old man. Do you think I should be happy, leaving you to bear it?”

“Oh, God help us,” said Scripps, brokenly, and his head went down in his hands.

Giles a little later, driving the gray boat towards the bright waters felt that

only God could help them. He had a rather simple faith, held close in his heart in spite of all the things which might have made him skeptical; Amélie, Scripps, the great war. And now here was this lovely child, whom he had met once, seen twice, drifting towards a life of inevitable disillusionment. God must help . . . give strength and direction to the vague plans that were forming in his brain. As Giles reached the island and tied up his boat to the pier, the name painted on it came to him with new meaning—The Conqueror. One must fight if one meant to win . . . *we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*



CHAPTER SEVEN

GILES BRINGS A BOOK

Joan had not gone for her slippers because her aunt that day had been in a demanding mood. Adelaide had insisted that her niece stay upstairs for breakfast and read the morning news, "I must save my eyes and Farley mumbles her words."

Later, Mrs. Delafield had decided to go to Boston. She wanted to pick out bridge prizes. She and Joan would, she declared, have lunch in town, and return to Granitehead late in the afternoon.

Joan had hated the program. She had planned to swim with Drew, to sit on the sands and talk to him, to ride with him in the afternoon, or motor to some charming tea-house where they might be away from the prying eyes in the hotel—away from Rose Carter, who so often managed to make a trio of their duet, away from everything which had seemed of late to clutter up her life and keep her from her lover.

For no sooner had she arrived in Granitehead than she had known that the idyllic days in Maine were over. Drew was much in demand. Everybody knew him and he was popular. He went among the hotel guests, gay, laughing, a good fellow. While there had been no formal announcement of the engagement, people had begun to take it for granted. Drew's attentions were unmistakable, and when her friends spoke of it Adelaide did not deny that an understanding existed. The thing which troubled Joan, however, was that she didn't care for Drew's friends. Most of the women were like Nancy and Rose Carter, good-looking, smartly gowned, and with a sort of hard brightness of manner. None of them were young, although with their short skirts and short hair they attained something of the effect of youth. As for the men they were absorbed in sports and spent their days on the links or the tennis courts, sailing their boats in the yacht club races, and at night giving themselves wholeheartedly to flirtation. They didn't seem to care with whom they flirted;

married or single they sought simply the thrill of the moment. It had apparently no more meaning than that. Joan couldn't get on with the men in the least. She hated their light love-making. Now and then Drew laughed at her. "My dear, you shouldn't take it so seriously. It's just a game."

"But do you want them to do it?"

"Oh, well, it's nice to have you popular. And I'm not jealous."

And now this day which she had hoped would be her own was to be spoiled by a trip to Boston. She had run downstairs after breakfast to have a word with Drew, and had found him sitting on the porch with Nancy and reading the stock reports. She could not know, of course, that it was the stock reports which had set his temper on edge.

When she had made her request, "Will you call for my slippers, Drew? I've got to go to Boston," she had been startled to find herself precipitated into a situation which astounded her. Drew had been most unpleasant about it. He had been, in fact, unpardonably rude. She should not, it seemed, have had her slippers mended. People didn't. It savoured, Drew emphasized, of miserliness. And he had said these things sharply as if she were a naughty child.

She had stood very still after that, the hot blood staining her cheeks, then she had turned and fled. Upstairs she had found Adelaide ready for the trip, and with trembling hands had donned her own hat and coat. The telephone rang just as she was leaving her room. Drew was at the other end of the wire. "I'm a darned idiot, darling. Come down and I'll beg your pardon."

But she had to go to Boston and there was no time for anything but a squeeze of her hand as he put her in the car. "Come back soon," he had whispered, and her heart had leaped in her breast, and for a moment she had been happy.

The reaction had come, however, during the long ride. Oh, how could he have said such things to her if he loved her? She felt as if she never again wanted to see the slippers. She would buy a new pair, and fling the others into the sea. She wanted no reminder of that awful moment.

Yet, might there not be other moments? If Drew had done it once, why not again? Nothing in the wide world would have made her speak to him as he had spoken to her. Nothing. She was ready to excuse him, she knew he had faults, but there had been that in his manner which had deeply offended her. Joan was gentle, but she had a keen sense of her own dignity and what was due it. She had done nothing to call forth such invective. She knew that in all the intimate relations of life there will be, inevitably, friction, but she knew, too, that there

are certain amenities which must be preserved if two people are to retain their mutual respect. Drew had not observed them, and she had been not only hurt but repelled.

As the day wore on she had helped Adelaide choose the prizes, had eaten her lunch, had bought another pair of slippers. Through all of it her mouth had been dry, her cheeks hot, there had been an almost physical ache at her heart. She did not know that the deadly thing which gripped her was fear of disillusionment. Her lover had been her god, she could not bear to think him less than that.

When she reached home there were flowers waiting for her, and written on a card, "For my lovely child . . ."

She dressed for dinner and when she went down, she found Drew waiting for her. Without a word he put his hand on her arm and guided her to a deserted card room, still and dark with its curtains drawn against the sun outside . . . There he took her in his arms. "I was a brute," he said.

She clung to him. She was not crying, but her breath came in little shivering sighs. He smoothed her hair with a tenderness which soothed and comforted her. "My little child . . . my dearest . . ."

His penitence was complete. "I've a nasty temper. Ask Nancy, and she'll tell you. But I never want to hurt you. You must believe that, Joan. I've been miserable."

He meant it. Even while he had talked to Nancy in Armiger's shop he had been suffering with the knowledge of what he must have made himself seem in Joan's eyes. He could not bear to think that he had lessened in the least the adoration which she had accorded him.

And now when she said: "It was silly of me to care so much," he answered ardently, "I love you for caring. You must never stop caring, my sweet."

They spoke then about the slippers. The man would bring them up, Drew said. They had not been ready. Joan, with her lashes lowered over her eyes, whispered, "I wish I could never see them again." And Drew had laughed at that and kissed her. And it had seemed to them then that the thing was ended.

It was during dinner that Rose Carter came over to the table which the Delafields and the Hallams shared. She wore a sheathlike gown of gold tissue, in her ears were gold coins, a wreath of them banded her sleek head. "I dressed for the costume ball," she said, "because I knew I wouldn't have time to do it after dinner."

“How nice you look,” said Nancy.

“What do you think I am?”

Drew ventured: “The Yellow Peril?”

“Guess again.”

“Gold-digger.”

She laughed. “You’re getting warmer. But I’m not going to let you guess any more. There’s a contest, you know, and prizes. It wouldn’t be fair to give myself away.”

“You never give yourself away,” Drew said, lightly.

She flashed a provocative glance at him. “Perhaps I don’t. But I didn’t come over to let you analyse me. What I want to know is whether you’ll drive me down to Marion Stickley’s. I’d like to have her come over for the dance and there isn’t any one to bring her.”

There was a second’s hesitation before Drew said, “Of course.”

Joan felt a hot flame of indignation. Not against Drew. There was nothing else he could do, was there? But Rose shouldn’t have asked him. She had such a calm way of claiming him. Of setting Joan aside, though she knew of the engagement. Drew had said she did. “She’s an old friend, and interested.”

Joan had decided that Rose was more than interested. It was not that she, Joan, was jealous. But there were rights which belonged to a fiancée on which no other woman should encroach. And Rose did encroach. But there was nothing to be done about it. And Joan, on the surface, seemed serene and acquiescent.

After dinner she went at once upstairs, and it was nine o’clock when she came down. Drew had not arrived. Nancy and Adelaide were already playing bridge in the card-room. Adelaide wore the costume of a French marquise—much rose-color, and panniers, and diamond buckles, and her white transformation further supplemented by curls and puffs. Nancy, as Night, had managed to invest the costume with a touch of her own individuality—midnight blue chiffon with rhinestone stars twinkling amid its draperies, and a comet of them crowning her copper locks.

Joan was, very simply, a naiad—in a shimmer of pale green and silver, with crystal beads dripping. She wore the new slippers and a wrap of silver net. The old slippers had not come. Farley had asked for them at the office, and had been told that no parcel had been delivered.

Joan stopped for a moment by the bridge table, then made her way to the porch. A faint light still lingered over the harbor, and a little moon sailed high. Waiting for Drew, she sat down in a big chair not far from the steps, and it was as she sat there, wrapped in her web of silver, that Giles Armiger saw her.

She was leaning back in her chair, her cheek against the cushioned back, her eyes gazing unseeing into the night.

“Miss Dudley,” he said.

She looked up surprised, then recognized him. “You’ve brought my slippers?”

“Yes. Am I too late? I was unavoidably detained.”

She stuck out a foot. “I bought these today in Boston. So I didn’t need the others.”

He handed her the parcel, “Will you forgive me if I tell you I have put in with the shoes a little book which I thought you might like. It is an abridged history of Granitehead . . . perhaps when you have read it you will understand why my friend Scripps mends shoes and why I am in a bookshop.”

He was standing before her with the ease of a man of the world. He wore white tennis trousers and a white turtle-necked sweater. His head was bare. She was aware that he was very good-looking.

She asked, “Why shouldn’t your friend Scripps mend shoes and why shouldn’t you sell books?”

“Well, people don’t so much in these days, do they? But it is a throwback with both of us to our ancestry.”

“Tell me about it. How is it a ‘throwback’?”

“You will find it in the book.”

“But I’d rather have you tell me.”

She had not asked him to sit down. She couldn’t, of course, Giles decided. If any one came up how could she present him? And some one might be coming up at any moment. He wanted her to himself. He resolved to put it to the touch.

“Will you walk with me a bit, while we talk about it?”

He felt her surprise, and added, “I know I am asking an unconventional thing. We haven’t been properly introduced. But all Granitehead will give you my credentials, if you want them.”

She laughed and rose at once. "I think Keats made us properly known to each other, don't you? And if he didn't, you are Giles Armiger and I am Joan Dudley. And that's enough formality, and I'll go as far with you as the pavilion."

He swung along beside her as they followed a path which led to a small eminence from which the pavilion overlooked the harbor. It was a still night with a slight mist drifting in. Through it the lights on the boats shone like pale stars. "There was a time when there were no pleasure craft in the harbor," Giles explained, "only fishing boats and great ships—loaded with teas and spices and silks. It was the masters of those ships who built some of the big houses which are still standing, and most of us have in our homes some reminders of their voyages—ivory, porcelain and lacquer. You'll find them in the humblest cottages—for the big ships were manned by our men—upstanding sailors, fine fellows. It is said that the sailors of Granitehead rowed Washington across the Delaware."

He stopped, "Am I boring you with this?"

Her voice came out of the dark, eager, interested. "Oh, no. Go on."

"The Revolution took most of our men away, and other towns got the trade. Shipping declined, and smaller boats began to go to the Grand Banks. Those were the days of storm and stress for the women, of weary waiting. But there was money in it all, and our men defied the dangers, until the day came when they turned to making shoes."

"Making shoes?"

"Yes, except for a few of the old aristocrats the whole town made shoes. Each house had its own little shop and the finished products were sent to the great factories which supplied the materials. And no one lost caste because he was a village cobbler," he gave a short laugh, "Scripps' little place is the last outpost of the old order. Granitehead works no more with its hands. When the yacht clubs were built and the hotels, new ideals came in of luxury and high living. The sea and the little shops satisfy our people no longer. They have turned their backs on shoes and ships—and keep summer boarders."

She was not sure he was in earnest. "Oh, well, why shouldn't they?" she demanded.

"There's been a loss of sturdy independence," he asserted, "perhaps it is the trend of the times. But who am I to set myself against it? Scripps and I were college classmates and went overseas together. When we came back, I had no ambition left, only my taste for books, and Scripps was broken, in body

and soul . . .” and his face was set in stern lines, “so we decided to do what our grandfathers did . . . and are rather liking it.”

There was silence for a moment then Giles spoke in a lighter tone: “But the world moves, and we can’t look back. I might shout to the stars, but I couldn’t change things, could I?”

“Perhaps you wouldn’t if you could.”

“Perhaps not . . .”

A change of wind cleared the harbor suddenly. It seemed to burst on them like a spectacle, its lights wavering against the dark sky and in the darker waters. Along the shore on both sides the illumined windows of the clubs and hotels and great houses formed an almost unbroken line of brilliance. At the far end of the peninsula the great globe of the lighthouse hung like a moon among the clouds.

“My cousin lives in the lighthouse,” Giles told Joan, “or rather, in the little house next to the light. It’s a bit lonely for her with that wide strip of sand between her house and the summer cottages, and in winter there’s not a soul for miles.”

“But what makes her live there?”

“Her husband is the keeper, and she has hens and a garden . . . and a baby, and she is altogether a very happy little Dilly.”

“Oh, I’m sure I shouldn’t like it.”

“Why not?”

“There’s the loneliness.”

“But love lives there—with Dilly.”

In the silence which ensued the music drifted up to them from the hotel. “I am afraid I must be going down,” Joan said. “They’ll be expecting me, and I have promised some dances.”

She would dance of course with—Apollo! Giles grew a bit desperate with the thought of it. He dared not ask if he might come and see her. So he said: “Will you drop into the shop some day, and let me show you my treasures? And if Scripps is out, I’ll introduce you to old Peter.”

“Peter?”

“Our pet gull.”

“Why must I wait until Scripps is out to meet Peter?”

“Scripps shrinks from meeting strangers. He was in aviation during the war, and fell with his plane, he has been very slow in getting back . . .”

They had come to the hotel steps. The porch was deserted, everybody was in the ballroom, for the costume dance was on.

Joan held out her hand, “Thank you for the little book. I will return it when I have read it.”

“I’d like to have you keep it.”

“Oh, may I? And may I come and thank you?”

Joan, making her way to the ballroom, wondered why Drew was not waiting for her. Surely he must be back by this time! She stopped at the card table to ask, “Have you seen Drew?”

Mrs. Carter who was playing with Adelaide said, “They telephoned. Marion wasn’t ready and they’ll be late.”

It was nearly ten. In the ballroom people were going about between dances with pencils and pads of paper. There was much hilarity as they listed titles. As Joan appeared in the door, a little group broke up and hurried to meet her.

One of the men whispered, “Undine?” and wrote that down, and one of the women guessed “Mermaid?” out loud and was chagrined when Joan shook her head.

And still Drew did not come. Joan had promised him every other dance. Hence at alternate intervals she was left high and dry. In one of these intervals a voice at her elbow said: “May I have this?”

She turned, and gave it to the man who asked. She danced beautifully, and as she made the rounds of the room with him, there came to her a sudden resolve. Since Drew was not there to claim his dances, she would not keep them but give them all to others. She would have a good time in spite of this deadly sense of desertion. Drew should not have stayed away. Everyone would see him when he came in with Rose. And it wasn’t fair that she would have to seem neglected. Drew should have telephoned direct to her, have made his excuses, not have left her with his name scratched against all those dances, to sit them out alone.

And why shouldn’t she play the game, since Drew was playing it? She looked up at her partner from under drooping lashes. “How well you dance,” she said. That was the way the game began. She had heard other women say that. And had always thought it silly!

It was nearly eleven when Drew arrived. She saw him in the door with Rose and Marion Stickley. Marion had on a most amazing costume. A futurist affair of purple and red, and over her own hair was a wig of red silk. She looked like one of the lanky dolls one sees in the gift shop windows. Everybody rushed towards her. Everybody but Joan, who stood talking with her partner.

She saw Drew leave the others and come towards her. "Sorry we were so late. But Marion couldn't get into her costume when it came. We had a hilarious time fitting her wig on her, while her maid did things to the dress. Did you ever see anything so original? She'll get the prize, of course."

"It's original," Joan agreed, brightly, "but it's a shuddery sort of thing. She's like something out of a bad dream."

The music began again. The partner drifted off, and Drew put his arm about Joan. "This is ours, isn't it?"

She shook her head, "I didn't know you were coming, I have promised it to someone else, Drew."

He held out his hand, "Let me look at your card."

She gave it to him. He read the names, "This isn't the one I filled. What did you do, get another?"

"Yes. When you didn't come—I tore the other up."

He looked at her, then laughed, teasingly, triumphantly, "You did?" he shredded the card he held into tiny pieces and tossed them into the air. "That's that, my darling, you are going to dance all the rest with me."

She found herself dancing with him. He was saying things in her ear. Things that made her blush and tremble. She was *his*, and didn't she know it? "Mine, *mine* . . ." was his reiteration. It seemed to beat with the music.

And later, when the dance was over, he took her with him to a far end of the porch and had it out with her. "Don't you know that Rose means nothing to me?"

"But she takes you away from me."

"She can never take me so far that I won't come back. And you can never go so far that I won't follow you. You know that, Joan, don't you?"

He put a hand under her chin and turned her face up to him. "You know it, don't you?"

She whispered, "Yes," and with a sudden movement his arms closed

around her. "Say you love me, say it, say it . . ."

When she went upstairs at last, she was, she told herself, happy. Drew loved her, why doubt him? And she must not expect to have him to herself as she had had him in Maine.

When she was undressed she sat for a long time by the window, looking out over the harbor. Darkness had taken the place of the almost fantastic illumination of the earlier hours, but at the end of the peninsula the great globe on the lighthouse glowed steadily.

It was this steadiness which stilled gradually Joan's pulses. The words of the man who had talked with her in the pavilion came back to her. "Love lives there with Dilly." She wondered about this Dilly who lived there, serene, content. If only her own life could be like that with Drew.

It was almost morning when she went to sleep. The dawning light showed tears on her cheeks. And she sighed a little as she slept.



CHAPTER EIGHT

DILLY ENTERTAINS

“William,” said Dilly to her husband, “I’m a whited sepulchre. Here I am eating one of my darling old hens and enjoying her.”

“Which is what you should do,” was William’s response, “and the dumplings are delicious.”

Dilly came around the table and kissed the top of his head, “Oh,” she told him, “you are so nice and steadying . . . and you simply won’t let me weep crocodile tears, will you?”

He laughed, “Not over a setting hen.”

The dining room of the lighthouse cottage was a charming place because Dilly had made it so. White paint, the blue of the curtains matching the blue of the sea outside, nasturtiums in bowls, on a shelf some queer old porcelains which had belonged to William’s grandfather, and in a corner cupboard some fine old Chelsea which had belonged to Dilly’s grandmother, and Dilly who had cooked the dinner with her own hands, was crisp and cool in primrose gingham, with short sleeves which showed her plump arms and a round cut which showed her pretty neck.

Standing beside her husband’s chair, Dilly ruffled his hair with thoughtful fingers. And presently he turned and looked up at her. “Well, what’s on your mind, Dilly?”

“Giles.”

“Why?”

“William, he has changed so in the past two weeks.”

“Changed? How?”

“Oh, he’s more like a boy than he has been for years.”

William drew her down to his knee. “What has changed him?”

“A girl.”

“Surely not.”

“Yes,” impressively, “and I met her yesterday. She came into the shop while I was there, and after that, while Giles was polite to me and all that, I simply didn’t matter.”

“Who is she?”

“Joan Dudley. She’s staying with her aunt at the Wind and Wave and has loads of money, and she’s engaged to a New York broker, Andrew Hallam. Everybody in town is talking about them and here’s Giles quite mad about her and he doesn’t know it.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Oh, after she had gone he talked a lot about friendship—as if there could be such a thing between himself and that girl. It’s come too late for him, Billy. She’s engaged, and he has to think of Scripps and Amélie. And it’s tragic. Things have never worked out for Giles, and I want him to be happy.”

“Did he talk about the girl before Scripps?”

“Yes, and Scripps wasn’t very nice about it. You know how cynical he can be when he’s upset.”

“He owes a lot to Giles. I should think he’d realize it, and try to make things easier.”

“Poor Scripps. And Giles is so brave, Billy. He doesn’t pity himself. And he won’t let life beat him. Yet he wants what you and I have . . .” she laid her cheeks against her husband’s, and after a moment she said, “Sometimes I’m fussy, and sometimes I’m discontented, but I know there’s always—you.”

He smoothed her hair, and said nothing. He was a quiet, inarticulate man, but he adored her.

She got up presently and removed the plates and brought berries and cake for their dessert. And it was when she was eating her last berry that a little cry floated down from above.

“It’s baby,” Dilly said, “and she wants her bottle, and there’s the table to clear and the dishes to wash, an’ everything. And at five o’clock Giles is coming over.”

“Giles?”

“Yes. All this has been just a prelude, William. Giles is coming over and he is bringing the girl.”

“What for?”

“Oh, he’s told her about the Light, and she wants to go up and look at it, and I’m to have tea with them, and I should have been thinking about it instead of sitting here and talking with you.”

“I hope,” William remarked as he rose, “that she won’t be as silly as most of them are about the tower stairs.”

Dilly laughed, “Oh, it’s nuts to you, William, their being frightened and begging you to help them.”

“It isn’t nuts,” he retorted, “and you know it.”

“Perhaps I do,” she agreed, “and now it will help a lot if you will take the baby her bottle.”

The dishes were washed, Dilly had changed her dress, and the baby was spick and span when Giles’ boat came up to the landing. The tide was out and William, helping Joan to bridge the distance between the boat and the pier and lifting her with strong arms, was aware of her youth and slenderness. She was nothing but a child, he decided, this heiress to millions, and she was very simply dressed, more simply even than Dilly, in a white flannel skirt and a pale violet sweater.

Dilly served tea from a gay painted table set out on the sands and shaded by a big orange umbrella. The waves spread themselves in a thin green wash over the hard beach, and Dilly’s small Susan, barefooted and ecstatic, splashed about in the warm water, or dug hopefully for clams with an infinitesimal tin shovel.

Dilly’s prying old hens, coming up to share the tea, were a source of much amusement. “William says they ought to lay Plymouth rocks instead of eggs,” Dilly stated, “to be in keeping with their environment. I don’t know what I’d do without them. They are such good company.”

Joan was finding it all delightful. Here was Dilly, pleasant, pretty, unaffected, and her William, sturdy and rather silent, but at his ease, and there on the sands was that fluttering bit of loveliness.

“How happy you must be,” she said to her hostess.

“Oh, well, now and then we get a bit fed up on solitudes, don’t we William?” But William wouldn’t admit it. The look which flashed between

husband and wife made Joan's heart stand still. How sure they seemed, and—safe!

When they had finished their tea, William took Giles and Joan to see the Light. As they came into the stone tower, it was cool and dark in contrast to the bright sunlight outside. Going up and up was a spiral staircase, an iron structure that turned and turned until as one followed its height the brain grew dizzy.

“Going up is nothing to coming down,” William said, as they began the ascent, “But I'll lead the way and Giles can bring up the rear, and that will give you confidence.”

But Joan was not afraid. It was great fun, she declared. She talked to Giles over her shoulder, and the thick walls gave back her words in hollow echoing sounds.

Giles, with his hand on the rail just back of hers, hardly heard what she said. It was, he felt, nothing short of a miracle to have her here, and to know he had her friendship. For he had it! He exulted in the thought.

In the weeks which had followed their talk at the Wind and Wave, Joan had come often to the shop. First to tell him what she thought of the little book, and after that to look at the things he had to show her. She had stopped in as a rule during her morning walks when Drew was on the links. If Giles had a customer she would sit contentedly in a corner, reading quietly and waiting until he could talk to her.

Giles was half afraid to think what those talks were beginning to mean to him . . . There had grown up between them a relationship which was on his part protective, on hers confiding. She treated him as if he were an elder brother. She discussed with him her affairs, frankly, and without self-consciousness.

She had told him she was to be married. And to whom.

And he had said: “You danced with him in the woods?”

“How did you know?”

“I could see it in your eyes when you spoke of him.”

She had drawn a quick breath: “Sometimes it seems so wonderful I can't quite believe it.”

“Because you love him?”

“Because he loves me.”

“Why is that ‘wonderful’?”

“Oh . . . he’s seen so much of the world . . .”

“Haven’t you seen the world?”

“No . . . I have never travelled.”

He had wondered a little at that, it did not seem to fit in with her position as her aunt’s heiress. But one morning when Scripps was out, they had gone down into the shoe shop, and there had been a conversation which had enlightened him with regard to her circumstances.

Old Peter had welcomed them, and Joan had been told his history. Of how Scripps had found him one morning, crippled on the rocks, with the rain beating on him, half-dead. And now he seemed happy, and relieved Scripps’ loneliness.

“But why should he be lonely,” Joan had asked, “doesn’t he live with you?”

Giles had been reticent. “Yes, but his history is tragic . . . and there’s a loneliness which comes from—longing.”

He had deliberately turned from the topic, and had showed her the shoes on the shelves—seamen’s boots and sailors’ sneakers, and women’s down-at-the-heel Oxfords, and young girls’ pumps, and the stout stubby footwear of the children of Granitehead. “There’s a history in every pair, and some poetry, though Scripps says not. You should have seen your silver slippers shining among them.”

“My silver slippers . . .?” She had flashed at him a startled look, and after a moment she had said: “I threw them away.”

“Threw them away?” his voice had showed his astonishment.

The red had come up in her cheeks. “I shouldn’t have told you that, should I? But I did throw them away. It was a grand gesture . . .” her eyes had a faraway look and there had been silence for a moment.

Then she had said. “You see, Drew and I . . . had a misunderstanding about them—and I hated them. So the morning after you brought them I went out alone to the rocks and threw them as far as I could, and at first they floated, and then they sank, and I was glad to see the last of them.”

He had smiled: “We’ll hope the mermaids are wearing them.”

“Perhaps they are . . .” the tenseness had gone out of her voice, and she had smiled back. And when they had climbed the stairs again and were among his

books, she returned to the subject. "Do you mind if I talk it over? You are so wise. You see Drew thought it was rather miserly for me to have them mended. And he said so, and my feelings were hurt. But perhaps he was right."

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, well, all my life I have had to save and scrimp, and I can't accustom myself to spending lavishly. I am always thinking that some day I may need what I have thrown away."

"But surely you have no reason to fear that."

"Yes, I have." In a few words she had sketched Adelaide's attitude towards her. "You see," she said, at the end, "I am really not sure of anything."

He had found her story surprising. He wondered if Hallam knew the situation. It seemed hardly like the man, as he read him, to tie himself up to a financial uncertainty.

He had asked, then: "You want my opinion?"

"Yes."

"It seems to me that in all such matters you should be free to do as you please. There is such a thing as encroaching too much on another's personality. Whether you spend your money or not is your own affair, isn't it?"

"In a way, perhaps. But in a way it may be my husband's affair."

It had been like a blow to hear her speak of Hallam as her husband. Oh, the thing was unspeakable!

There had been another day when Joan had come, and there had been trouble in her face. She had sat very still in a corner where she was screened from customers by a bookcase, and had let Giles talk to her. And it seemed to him that half of the time she did not listen.

At last he had said, "Tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"The thing that is on your mind."

"How do you know there is something on my mind?"

"You have lost your—radiance."

Her voice was very low—"Perhaps I shouldn't speak of it. But you are my friend . . .?"

"You know I am."

“It’s because I’m not used to things I suppose—but it hurts me to share Drew with . . . other people . . .”

He had known she meant with “other women.” He had recognized Hallam’s type, had seen him now and then with a tall girl in an orange cap. “Does he ask you to share him with—other people?”

“Oh, he laughs at me if I protest. He says it doesn’t mean anything . . .” she caught herself up. “Oh, I mustn’t . . . I mustn’t speak of it . . . even to . . . you . . .”

He had seen her distress, and had said, gently, “What you say to me is sacred. You know that?”

“Yes.”

He had let his hand rest for a moment on her shoulder. Then they had talked of other things.

Giles, going now up the lighthouse stairs, thought of those meetings. He thought, too, of the words he had written in his Journal—*If I saw a ship headed for the rocks*. Some way must be found to save Joan’s little ship of life. But as yet he had not found it.

They came at last to the top of the spiral staircase, and there was the Light, its prisms catching the rays of the afternoon sun, its brasses gleaming, and on all sides blue skies, blue seas, and gulls flying. William explaining the mechanism of the lamp was at his best. “My grandfather tended the Granitehead Light and my father. Things were more dangerous then, and the work harder, but the Light was always a living thing to them as it is to me.”

They stood looking down now from that great height to where Dilly’s orange umbrella was like a mushroom on the sands. Near the umbrella, Dilly, feeding her hens, was dwarfed to the stature of a doll. The baby in her pink dress might have been a rosebud tossed up by the waves.

Along the road which led across the moor and thence to the houses of the summer colony and to the causeway which connected the mainland and the end of the peninsula, a car was coming. It was running at high speed and seemed to the watching eyes of the people in the tower like a mechanical toy wound up and working like mad.

William said: “Not many cars come this way. It may be some one who wants to see the light.”

“Shall we go down?” Giles asked.

William looked once more from the window. “Dilly’s there,” he said, “She’ll show them the way.”

Dilly, having fed her hens had turned at the sound of the motor, and had seen the car stop in front of the orange umbrella. A woman’s voice said: “Think of serving tea in these solitudes.”

And a man’s voice, “Why not, Rose? Isn’t tea served everywhere?” He leaned out and spoke to Dilly. “We’d like to go up in the lighthouse. Are visitors allowed?”

She said, “Yes. My husband is over there now with some people. You will find him at the top if you don’t mind climbing the stairs alone.”

She went over to the lighthouse and opened the door for them, and as they began to ascend she stood watching them. She thought to herself that the woman was handsome in that orange cap, and the man was good-looking.

Their voices echoed and re-echoed. Then at last they were silent, and the echoes ceased.



CHAPTER NINE

ON THE STAIRS

Halfway up the lighthouse stairs, Rose had complained of dizziness. “I’ll have to sit down a moment, Drew. This is dreadful.”

He was just above her, leading the way. “I’m sorry. Perhaps we shouldn’t have started.”

“Oh, that’s all right. I’ll be ready to go on in a minute.”

Looking down at her, he laughed, “Shall I hold your hand?”

“It wouldn’t be the first time.”

Their eyes met. Then Rose said, slowly, “Do you remember, Drew, that old tower in France? This makes me think of it.”

So that was why she had stopped on the stairs! He had thought it strange. Rose had, as a rule, a steady head. As for the old tower, there had been a romantic moment. But it belonged to the past. And the past was dead. There must be no revival now of the burned-out ashes of an ancient fire.

Yet he let himself say, “I remember. It was a high moment, Rose.”

She looked up at him, “Are we never to capture it again?”

“How can we?”

“We might . . .” There was a long silence, out of which she said, feeling her way, “But I mustn’t poach on your little Joan’s preserves, must I?”

He thought it extremely bad taste for her to bring Joan’s name into it. “Why should you think you could poach on her preserves?”

“Sometimes I have fancied she was a bit jealous, Drew.”

“Of you?”

“Yes.”

“She needn’t be.”

“Flatterer.”

“Oh, well, you know what I mean, Rose. You and I like the game and we play it. But Joan is—different. She is mine in a way that very few women are in these days to men they are going to marry. She never sees anyone else, never thinks of anyone—but me.”

“And you aren’t bored by it?”

“Not at all.”

Rose’s chin went up. “It may not bore you now. But it will, some day.”

“I think not. You see I’m rather sold to the idea that she’s the last and best, Rose.”

It was a brutal thing for him to say, and he knew it. But . . . she had brought it on herself . . .!

It was then that the echo of their voices had ceased. Rose, staring up at the snake-like evolutions of the stairway, had broken the silence: “You go to the top. I’ll stay here.”

“Oh, come along . . .”

“No,” petulantly, “I like my own company best.”

He knew Rose’s moods. She wanted to be coaxed back to good temper. To have him sit on the stairs beside her, and play the game. But he didn’t want to play it. Not here, in the dimness and silence . . . and with the memory of those moments in the old tower.

So he said: “I’ll run on and be down again before you know it.”

He did not run, however, as fast as he had anticipated. The stairs were steep. He was out of breath as he ascended the last of them and emerged into a dazzling glass-enclosed space, which looked out on sea and sky, and gave one a sense of sailing in some celestial ship straight through the blue.

Three people were in that space. Their backs were towards Drew, as they gazed forth to where on the far horizon was the rare sight of a four-masted vessel, with all her canvas set and flashing in the sun. Of the three people one was Joan. Drew recognized her at once. The man on her left was, he judged, the lighthouse keeper. On her right was another man, slender and in white flannels and sweater, with a thatch of bright hair ruffled by the wind.

Not one of the three had heard Drew's step. He wore rubber-soled shoes, which had made no sound on the iron stairs.

It was Joan, who turning suddenly, discovered him. "Drew," she cried in astonishment, "how did you get here?"

He smiled at her, "How did you?"

"Mr. Armiger brought me."

"Mr. Armiger?"

"Yes. You've met each other, haven't you? In the bookshop?"

Drew nodded to Giles, who was now facing him. He was aware of a sense of intense irritation. Joan had spoken now and then of her visits to the bookshop and of her pleasure in them. But he had not linked this pleasure in the least with this man, Armiger. Yet here he was, under a new aspect. Divorced from the dingy background of the shop he seemed to take on importance, with his look of youth, his grace and slenderness, the air with which he wore his correct, informal clothes. By what right had he constituted himself Joan's escort on this adventure?

He found himself saying with some coldness, "I didn't know you cared to come Joan or I would have brought you."

"I know. But I hadn't thought of it until Mr. Armiger's cousin invited us to tea. She is the wife of Mr. Tucker, the lighthouse keeper." Joan interrupted herself to present William, "we had such a delicious tea. And you should see Mrs. Tucker's funny old hens and the adorable baby."

"I have seen them. Rose and I stopped to ask if visitors were admitted to the lighthouse."

"Rose?"

The surprise in her tone, brought from him a rather halting explanation, "I left her . . . on the stairs. The height made her . . . dizzy."

"Really?" Joan's voice was incredulous. "I didn't mind it a bit," she began to laugh, "How *funny* . . . to think of . . . *Rose* . . ."

Drew didn't see anything funny about it. He had a raging sense of the indelicacy of Joan's mirth at this moment. The stairs had not been easy for him. He felt furiously that he and Rose must seem like a pair of middle-aged and lumpy individuals out-of-breath and overcome by obstacles which these two took on winged feet.

He began to show his temper. "I don't see why you should laugh."

She was serious at once. "Oh, I shouldn't. I'm sorry."

He turned from her and spoke to William. "It's a great view isn't it? While I'm up here you might as well let me see all there is to see."

Joan stood where he left her, the color drained from her cheeks. She knew he was angry, and she dreaded his dark moods. She said to Giles who was watching her, "I shouldn't have laughed, should I? But Rose has always been so sure of herself . . ."

He said with a certain roughness, "Why should you apologize? It is he who should ask your pardon for bringing her here."

"But I am here—with you. I am afraid he doesn't like my having come with anyone but him."

"You had as much right as he . . ."

Her eyes were troubled. "I never dreamed that I shouldn't come. We are such good friends, aren't we?"

"Yes. And my friendship is always at your service. Will you remember that?" He did not know why he was saying all this at such a time. But he was led on by that look of trouble in her eyes, by the whiteness of her cheeks.

She said, "I'll remember," and turning from him stood looking out over the sea. She could hear Drew's voice as he asked questions of William. His questions were intelligent. Drew knew a lot about such things . . . about many things . . .

He came over to her at last and said: "It is time we were going, I will take you home, Joan."

She had to tell that to Giles. "Mr. Hallam has his car, and I will ride back with him."

Drew preceded her down the stairs. Giles was back of her, and William was ahead of them all. It was William and Drew who reached Rose first, and steadied her on the stairs. There was much laughter, and Rose's inconsequential chatter. When Joan and Giles joined the others, Rose said: "I've been all kinds of a fool in my life, but never quite like this." She surveyed Giles with some curiosity, "What a joke that Drew should find you up there. I bought a book of you the other day, didn't I, Mr. Armiger?"

"Two books. I told you they weren't worth reading."

"I read them and they suited my type of mind."

He laughed. “Really? I am sure I could have found you something better.”

They went out into the sunshine. Dilly joined them, and when she heard of Rose’s vertigo offered tea. “Sit down all of you,” she insisted, “while the kettle boils.”

But Giles wouldn’t. He must be getting on, he said. He bade them good-bye and went lightly along the path to the landing. They saw him leap into the gray boat and heard the quick start of his engine. Then in a wide circle he swept out to sea. He was standing up, steering, white and slender against the clear blue. The wind ruffled his hair. He waved his hand. But only Dilly waved back at him.

And it was Dilly who said, out of an intuitive knowledge of the attitude of the newcomers towards her cousin: “Giles is the last of his family. There have always been Armigers in Granitehead—rich ones and poor ones. Giles belongs to the rich branch and I to the poor,” she laughed and flicked a crumb or two from the table with a small napkin, “but nobody cares for such distinctions in Granitehead, rich or poor we’re all one family.”

Drew demanded, “If Armiger is rich, why does he work?”

Dilly gave him a sidelong, twinkling glance, “Because he likes it. He adores books, and money really doesn’t mean so much to people who have always had it.”

Driving home, later, Rose said to Joan. “Your friend is frightfully attractive.”

Drew flung out irritably, “If you mean Armiger, I wish you wouldn’t call him Joan’s friend.”

“Why not? He is that, isn’t he, Joan?”

Joan said, quietly, “Yes.”

Drew drove like mad. Rose flashing a glance at him added to the flame of jealousy which was consuming him. “He is marvellously good-looking. And younger than I thought.”

Drew refused to answer. He would, he decided, have it out with Joan when they got back to the hotel. He must seem like a fool to Rose. Not an hour ago he had been telling her, “Joan never sees anyone else, never thinks of anyone else—but me.”

And now he had been made to eat his words. And Rose was laughing at him. That was the worst. Rose was laughing!



CHAPTER TEN

IN THE PAVILION

It was on the day after his adventure with Joan at the lighthouse that Giles found a note from her when he stopped for his mail at the post-office.

He was staying late at the shop to go over certain accounts, and had dined at one of the restaurants in the town. He waited until he was back at his desk to open Joan's note. It was very short, and when he had read it he sat there, staring.

"Drew doesn't want me to come any more to the shop. So I must not. But I shall always be your friend, even if I may not see you. Will you believe that? You have been so kind and wise. And it isn't easy for me to say 'Good-bye.' "

That was all. She had done what she had to do. She couldn't know, of course, that the words stabbed him like a knife.

He wrote later in his journal. "He has, undoubtedly, brought pressure to bear, challenged her love, perhaps, her constancy. He would be like that. If I were free I would win her from him. But I am not free. And I love her . . ."

"She must not," he wrote on, after a while, "marry Hallam. I must save her from shipwreck . . . at any cost I must save her . . ."

He dropped his pen and leaned his head on his hand, thinking it out. In a few minutes he would close the shop and go back to the island where Amélie would be waiting. And Scripps and José and Margarida would be glad when they heard his step, because of Amélie.

That had been the story of the past eight years—the island his prison, the shop, the prison yard. He had not thought of it that way until he had met Joan Dudley. He had been content to follow the daily round of self-sacrifice, not calling it sacrifice because it was for Scripps . . .

But now?

He stood up. He had no time for self-pity. He had time for two things only—to see old Scripps through, and to keep Joan from becoming the wife of Hallam.

Having locked the shop behind him, he started for his boat. Then changing his mind suddenly, he walked rapidly up the boardwalk towards the hotel. He was drawn irresistibly towards Joan. He must see her. He would not try to speak to her. He would gaze from afar off, hear her voice. Catch perhaps, the echo of her laughter.

He went to the little pavilion, from which in the dark he could look towards the hotel porch, faintly lighted, and with people coming in and out from the ballroom, where tonight there was dancing.

But Joan was not dancing. She was playing bridge with Adelaide. Her adventure of the day before had brought down on her head not only Drew's wrath, but Mrs. Delafield's.

"Rose says you went to the lighthouse with that book man, what's his name?"

"Giles Armiger."

"What under the shining sun made you go with him? You don't know him, do you?"

"I've met him in the shop, and he's a gentleman."

"How do you know? You have no worldly experience. I won't have you doing such things, Joan. Women of your class aren't supposed to be—clandestine."

Joan had flamed at that. "It wasn't clandestine. And nothing I could do, Aunt Adelaide, could match the things I see about me here, among your friends and Drew's and Nancy's."

"Don't you like my friends?" Adelaide demanded.

"Some of them."

"If you don't like them, you know what you can do. You can go where you find people you like better."

Joan felt as if she had been struck in the face. "Do you want me to go?" she faltered.

The room was very still. Mrs. Delafield walked to the dressing table and sat down with her back to her niece. Her ravaged old face was reflected in the mirror. When she turned, finally, a tear was trickling through the rouge and

powder.

“No,” she said, “I don’t want you to go. But I won’t have you acting upstage.”

Her hands were shaking as she reached for a powder puff and dabbed it futilely against her thin old nose. “We won’t talk about it any more, Joan. But remember, there must be no more making friends with people out of your class . . .”

“Aunt Adelaide,” desperately, “he’s not out of my class . . .” Joan was yearning to argue. She wanted to justify herself, to tell the truth as she saw it. But the sight of those shaking hands stopped her. She was aware, all at once, that Adelaide had lost the glamour with which Joan’s illusions had surrounded her. She sat there now, a pitiful old creature, needing tenderness rather than blame.

She went over and put her hands on her aunt’s shoulders, “Let’s not fuss about it, darling,” she said and laid her cheek against the curled softness of the waved white head.

Reflected thus in the mirror they smiled at each other, and Adelaide content with her conquest, forgot the incident for the moment. But Joan did not forget. There had been in her surrender something which savored of weakness. Both with Adelaide and with Drew she had been beaten. She had given up Giles Armiger because they asked it.

Drew had been utterly unreasonable. In the end she had cried in his arms, and he had soothed her with the gentleness which so often surprised her. But he had stuck to his point that her friendship with Giles Armiger must cease.

And now tonight they were playing cards with Adelaide because Drew had said they must run no further chance of incurring her displeasure. “She likes me for a partner, and we might as well do all we can to please her.”

Joan played, of course, an uninspired game. She felt sorry for Nancy who sat opposite, and when after an hour of martyrdom, Mrs. Carter came up to the table, Joan offered her hand. “I’ll sit and watch. It will be much nicer for all of you.”

So Mrs. Carter played, and Joan looked on, and then as the others became increasingly absorbed, she wandered along the corridor and into a small music-room which was used by the orchestra for morning concerts, and which was completely deserted at this hour of the night. It was lighted by a low lamp or two, and there was a piano in one corner. Joan sat down and ran her fingers over the keys, then played softly, this air and that, a bit of jazz, a nocturne, a

sonata. She was not conscious of what she played, she was thinking, thinking . . . her head thrown a little back, showing the pure curve of her white throat. Her arms were bare, and the slender lines of her rose taffeta frock ended in a petalled skirt which folded about her like the leaves of a flower.

Thinking . . . thinking . . . of herself in a straight brown dress, with stout brown shoes, showing a flock of tiny children how to play—“*Oranges and lemons, said the bells of St. Clemens; You owe me five farthings, said the bells of St. Martins; When will you pay me? said the bells of old Bailey; When I grow rich, said the bells of Shoreditch.*”

Her fingers were following the tune which sang itself in her head: “*Here comes a candle to light you to bed, and here comes a chopper to chop off your head.*”

How gay they had been, the children! And how they had loved her. And after school, they had all gone down the road together, and had stopped in an orchard, and had picked red apples . . .

She was overwhelmed suddenly by a deep sense of depression. Things had gone wrong with her of late. She was not sure just what had happened. But there had been since she left Maine, a gradual loss of enchantment. Her aunt among her Granitehead friends had seemed more worldly-minded, and somewhat vain and selfish. Drew, too, was less—splendid. He was no longer the stainless knight. She loved him, but she was always afraid now of being hurt—by his anger, his affairs with Rose, by his insincere attitude towards Adelaide.

She rose restlessly and went out on the porch. It was very dark, and the air was heavy with the threat of an impending storm. Now and then the black waters and the black skies were illumined by a broad blaze of lightning.

Joan descended the steps, and took the path up towards the pavilion.

Giles saw her coming—a swift lighting of the sky showed her, standing out like a painted girl against the golden background, her petalled skirts of pink taffeta, her floating scarf, her dark little head, her white neck and arms . . .

He had not hoped for this! He stood up, but as he was in the somber clothes he had worn at the shop, she did not know he was there until he spoke:

“Joan . . .!”

She saw nothing strange in his calling her that. The only strangeness was in his presence. “How did it happen,” she asked, breathlessly, “that you are here?”

He told her the truth. "I wanted to be near you, even if you did not know. I had your note. It seemed incredible that it was the—end."

She said, unexpectedly, "I am glad you came."

"You are?" eagerly.

"Yes . . . I" she stopped, then spoke with a note of pathetic appeal, "I . . . need . . . help . . ."

They sat down in the dark pavilion. White flashes of light showed them opposite each other on two rustic seats, intent, earnest. Two young souls trying to reach conclusions that fate had already settled for them.

She told him rapidly and frankly of the things which confronted her. Loss of self-respect. "I am conceding things I knew I shouldn't. That I wouldn't concede if I were not dependent on Aunt Adelaide."

She hesitated. "Drew doesn't see it as I do. He thinks I am foolish . . . perhaps I am."

"No, you're not."

"His life has been so different. He says that I split hairs, and that it isn't worth while. That I should take the good the gods provide, and let it go at that. But I can't. I have a stifled feeling sometimes . . . Tonight I got to thinking about my children, the little ones I taught in school, and how gay we were . . . and how I belonged to myself . . ." her voice died away.

Giles held himself quiet. She was revealing more than she knew . . . her disillusionment with her lover, her loneliness of soul . . . a heart restless because it had no real abiding place . . .

And she had come to him for help! His pulses throbbed with the thought. Yet he set himself steadily to advise her. Oh, poor little ship, headed for disaster.

He said: "Why not go away for a bit? Let them miss you? Let them follow?"

"But if they shouldn't follow?"

"Would it break your heart?"

"If Drew didn't—yes." Her quick breath told her emotion.

He permitted himself to touch her hand: "You love him then so much?"

"Oh, yes. I shouldn't have talked about him even to you."

“Please don’t say that.”

“I am so alone . . . if I had Mother . . . or Daddy.” He thought she was crying.

“I know, my dear . . .” He wanted to crush her in his arms. To say: “Here is your haven, your harbor, against my heart.” But he kept himself steady.

She stood up presently, “I must be going. They will be looking for me.”

She gave him her hand, and he lifted it to his lips. It was like a white rose against them, fragrant. “You have said I must go out of your life. But if ever you call me, I shall come . . .”

As they turned to leave the pavilion, they found the storm upon them. The thunder crashed, the lightning was incessant, the wind shrieked as it tore in from the sea. There was the flap of canvas as sails came down on the yachts which were scudding in, and then, shutting off their way of escape, came the rain—pounding on the roof, streaming from the eaves, blowing banners of wet in upon them. Giles stripped off his coat, and wrapped Joan in it. “You must,” he said, when she protested, “you’ll be soaked through if you don’t.”

They could see the guests on the hotel porch, scurrying to the shelter of the rooms inside. Porters and bellboys came rushing out and tipped up the chairs and carried in the tables. The rain washing across the porch made a little river which ran down the steps and shone in the light of the big lantern which hung above the entrance. Through the windows people could be seen moving about in the crowded exchange, but no one came outside.

The noise of the wind and rain was deafening. The branch of a great tree crashed on the roof. “We must get out of this,” Giles said, “you’ll be drenched, but we’d better take the chance.”

“Aren’t we safer here?”

“No.” The pavilion was in an exposed situation. At any moment a tree might fall. Giles felt he must get Joan back to the hotel. He must get her back not only because she might be hurt in this frail summer-house, but because she must not be found here in the dark with him. He knew how people talked. And if Drew heard, there might be trouble.

“Come,” he said, “let’s run for it. You’ll ruin your dress. But it’s the best we can do.”

He took her hand and they started down the path. Joan had on high-heeled slippers, and at the foot of the path she stumbled. Giles caught her up in his arms and sped on with her.

As he reached the hotel steps, the door opened and Drew Hallam came out, "Joan," he called, "Joan where are you?"

Then he saw them. Giles with bare head and his coat off showing his soaked shirt. And Joan in his arms, the coat wrapped about her protecting her head and shoulders, and beneath it, the rosiness of her taffeta frock dulled by the floods of water which had swept over her, and stained by the marks of her fall.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

JOAN FACES FACTS

Drew and Joan, facing each other after Giles had left them, struck sparks.

"Where did you pick him up, Joan?"

"I didn't pick him up, he picked me."

"Don't joke about it."

"I'm not joking, Drew. And please don't keep me here—My ankle is hurting me frightfully. I sprained it."

"Aren't you going to give me any explanation?"

"Of what?"

"Of how you happened to be with Armiger?"

"I walked to the pavilion as I have a thousand times, and Mr. Armiger was there. He didn't know I was coming. And I didn't know I should find him. It rained and we had to run for it. I turned my ankle and he carried me. That's all there is to it. And you are making a mountain of a molehill."

He stood looking down at her. She was a forlorn little figure with her wet hair plastered about her face, and the taffeta frock limp and dark with damp. He had an impulse towards her of deep tenderness. Yet his jealousy was aflame. He had not felt this way about the men in the hotel. He had known, instinctively, that they would never be his rivals. But this was different—her defence of her friendship with this slender boy, picturesque in his white and with his ruffled hair. Hallam always saw him, as he had in the dazzling brightness of the lighthouse tower—or as he had steered his boat that day against the blue.

"I am not making a mountain of a molehill," he began. Then as he saw her sway and reach for the back of a chair, he demanded, quickly, "Are you in

pain?”

“I told you. I hurt my ankle . . .” her voice was shaking.

“Can you walk on it?”

“I’ll try.”

She took a step and stopped—“It’s rather—dreadful.”

“I’ll get you upstairs and let Farley look at it. Or perhaps you’d better have a doctor.”

He carried her to her room and when he had laid her on the couch he kissed her. But she knew there was a barrier between them, that he did not believe what she had told him, and that sooner or later she would have it out with him about Giles.

Farley having examined the ankle and exclaimed over it, said: “You’ll have to be in bed for a day or two, and it will be lucky if you don’t take your death after such a wetting. I’ll put a hot water bag in your bed, and when you’ve had a hot bath, I’ll bandage your ankle. If it doesn’t get any worse you won’t need a doctor.”

When Joan, limp and exhausted with pain, crawled at last between warm sheets, the maid was waiting with a tall steaming glass of lemonade. “You drink that, and then I’ll tuck you in.”

Joan propped up on two pillows, said, “This is heavenly, Farley.”

And Farley said, with a touch of motherliness in her tone: “You’re such a child, Miss Joan. You need somebody to look after you.”

Adelaide coming up later, stood in the door.

“What’s this I hear about your being brought to the hotel by that Armiger man?”

“Did Drew tell you?”

“No. Rose was looking out of the window, and the lightning showed you. She told Drew, and he went out . . . and when he came back he said you had sprained your ankle.”

“Well, I have . . .”

“How did Mr. Armiger find you?”

“I had been talking with him in the pavilion.”

“You were talking with him after what I had said?”

“How could I help it? We met by chance in the pavilion . . . the rain caught us and we ran, and I sprained my ankle.” Joan felt as if she had repeated this formula a thousand times. She was tired of it. She was tired of everything. She wanted to be alone. Surely this was all a bad dream, and presently Adelaide, in her gold gown with her old hands hooked like claws on the footboard would vanish like some evil apparition of the night.

But Adelaide did not vanish. She stood there looking over the footboard and saying sharply: “I won’t have it, Joan. Do you hear?”

“Yes.”

“When I say a thing I want you to understand that I mean it.”

“But Aunt Adelaide—”

“We won’t talk about it any more. But you must mend your ways, if you expect me to put up with you.”

She turned and went out of the room. Joan made no effort to stop her. Her aunt was offended, but she really didn’t care . . . she didn’t care for anything except to curl among her pillows and sleep . . . and sleep . . .

In the morning she was feverish and Farley sent for the doctor. He ordered complete rest for a few days. “It will help your cold and give your ankle a chance.”

While Joan stayed upstairs, unpleasant matters were for a time suspended. Drew sent flowers regularly with pleasant little notes of sympathy, from which she missed something, as she missed it in his manner when now and then he came to see her. Adelaide’s manner had in it also a stiffness which showed she was unappeased. Only Nancy, sailing in with new books and much chatter was the same. On one occasion she informed Joan that Rose and Mrs. Carter were visiting Marion Stickley for the weekend. “Drew and I are going down for Sunday supper. She wants you to come . . .”

“She knows of course that I can’t.”

“Of course,” said the wise Nancy.

A little later, Nancy proffered a bit of advice. “If I were you I’d make it up with the old lady.”

“Aunt Adelaide?”

“Yes. She has an idea you’re ungrateful. She said as much to Drew.”

Joan with a touch of excitement, flung out, “Perhaps I am.”

Nancy having smoked a cigarette during the long silence, asked: "What about this Giles Armiger?"

Joan looked up at her and said: "Nothing, except that he is very wise and fine."

"Such friendships are dangerous, my dear."

"Drew has them."

Nancy shook her head. "No. Rose isn't wise or fine. She is just a plaything and Drew knows it."

Joan said with some spirit, "They all treat me like a child."

"You are a child," Nancy smiled at her, "a rather darling child . . . and now what did you mean when you said that perhaps you were ungrateful?"

"I meant that I won't sell my soul to Aunt Adelaide for her money."

"You don't need to sell your soul. And you're really not facing things, Joan. You came to your aunt because she had money."

"Oh, *no* . . ."

Nancy was inexorable. "Do you think if she had been poor you would have linked your life to that of a crabbed, vain old woman? You know you wouldn't. You are really not as high-minded as you think."

Joan's cheeks were blanched. "If I am like that . . . I shall hate myself. I wanted more than money. I wanted love . . ."

"But it was love plus luxury. And nobody blames you for it. Only you must get the right slant on it."

"What is the right slant?"

"Oh, now that you have it, don't lose it. You and Drew will need money to be happy. He's really dead in love with you. More in love, I might as well say frankly than I ever believed he would be with any woman. But he will never stand poverty."

Joan didn't believe her. If two people loved each other, they could face anything. The test of Drew's love would be to leave and let him follow. In finding her, he would find himself—that truer self in which she still believed. Oh, underneath the worldliness which she had found of late, there must be the man to whom that day in the fog she had promised herself.

After Nancy had gone, she lay thinking about it. She knew Drew was waiting for her explanation of that meeting in the pavilion with Giles Armiger.

She would never again be wholly his until she had said, "I'm sorry."

And she could not say it, although she cried into her pillow at night thinking of it, prayed her girlish, sincere prayers that a way might be opened.

It was on Sunday night, when the Hallams were dining at Marion Stickley's that things reached a climax.

Nobody played bridge in the hotel on Sundays, and Adelaide with her occupation gone had dragged through the empty day with an increasing sense of irritation.

After dinner she went into Joan's room and found her on the couch, wide-eyed and wistful. Adelaide did not like wistful people. She wanted them gay and sporting. "She owes me everything," the old woman told herself, "in exchange she should at least try to be amusing."

As she sat down in the chair which Farley had placed beside the couch, she observed almost with a sense of injury the richness of the setting which her wealth had supplied—the silken cushions and coverlet, the hangings, all amethyst and blue which had come packed in a great trunk with Adelaide's rose and green. There was the carved ivory on Joan's dresser, set with the silver, the pale flagons of perfume, the painted porcelain boxes, and Joan herself in a blue and silver gown, with a silver rose in her satin cap.

She began at once: "Why haven't you made it up with Drew?"

"There isn't anything to make up."

"You aren't telling me the truth, Joan."

Joan flushed, "Well . . . but it's hard to talk about."

"You are a very silly child. He wants to marry you. I want you to marry him. Yet you lie here and sulk . . ."

"Aunt Adelaide!"

"Don't you suppose I have seen it? You are trying to impress upon us that you have a grievance. When you ought to be telling Drew and me what a little idiot you've made of yourself . . ."

Joan sat up, her cheeks flaming, "How can you say such things? I've been unhappy, Aunt Adelaide . . . I love you . . . and I love Drew . . . but both of you are waiting for me to apologize. And I can't apologize when I have done nothing . . ."

"Except meet a man at night of whom you know we disapprove."

“I didn’t meet him.”

And there it was all over again, the discussion growing hot and hotter, until Adelaide said: “After all I’ve done for you. I’ve treated you like a princess. Those pearls you’ve got around your neck this minute are worth a small fortune.”

With a swift movement, Joan set her feet on the floor and stood up. She unwound the pearls from her neck and dropped them in her aunt’s lap. “Do you think I’d wear them after this?”

She limped over to the dresser, and opened one of the porcelain boxes—there was a diamond clasp, a ring or two—various jewels that her aunt had bestowed upon her. She came back and added them to the pearls. “I don’t want any of them, Aunt Adelaide. I’m going away. I’ve been thinking about it for a long time. If Drew cares enough he’ll come after me. If you care enough, you’ll try to understand . . . that I’ve loved you a lot,” she began to sob with her hands up to her face.

Mrs. Delafield surveyed the shaking figure. “If you think crying will soften my heart, you’re mistaken. I’m glad to have you go . . .” She rose and the pearls like a white snake slid down the length of her black satin gown—the jewels sparkled like fireflies in the rug. “I’m glad,” she said, again, as she reached the door. She opened it and went out. On the other side she stood, still saying under her breath, “I’m glad.” But she knew she was not glad. She wanted Joan to come running after her and say, “I love you, Aunt Adelaide. I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”



CHAPTER TWELVE

BURNED BRIDGES

On the night of the storm, Giles Armiger had been glad of the buffeting of the wind, the beating of the waves, as he had driven his motor boat back to the Island. He was not afraid, and he exulted in the battle with the elements. His soul was in a tumult. When he had set Joan on her feet and had seen the look on Hallam's face, he had wanted to lift her again in his arms and fly with her to his waiting boat, to his old house on the Island, to the fire on his hearth; to kneel at her feet and take off her wet little shoes; to call old Margarida and have warm things brought, and bandages for her ankle; and while doing all this to tell her . . . that with him she could be at peace. Here was love, not with that man with the stern countenance, but by this hearthstone . . .!

But life was not like that! And in these modern days one could not use the methods of the age of chivalry. So he had left her, his heart brooding over her, seeing her assailed by the selfishness of those others among whom she lived; seeing her defenceless because of her youth and gentleness.

It was very late when at last he reached home. José, seeing the lights on the boat came down to the landing. "The Madame has been upset by the storm. She has been scared for you . . . Margarida got her to work, making supper for you. They are in the kitchen."

Giles going at once to find Amélie, stood on the threshold of the shadowy room, with its bright fire in the range, its hanging kerosene lamp overhead, and took in the picture it presented. Amélie, slim and graceful in a pomegranate frock, was piling purple plums in a blue bowl. It was like her, he felt, to select with unerring instinct an occupation which would show her at her best. It was Margarida who cut the bread and buttered it and put between it pink slices of cold roast. It was Margarida who made the coffee, and the mayonnaise for the salad. Amélie, busy with her plums, was content to feed Giles' eyes with color. Beef and bread and mayonnaise and coffee? Such things were not important

. . . most people made too much of them.

Giles spoke: "I am here, Amélie."

She turned and with a little cry ran towards him. "You are safe?"

She reached out welcoming hands, and he took them and kissed her on the forehead. "You must never be frightened, my dear. I shall always come back."

"There was once when you—didn't."

"That was long ago. We must forget it."

They went together into the living room where a table had been laid in front of the fire. Amélie put the dish of plums in the center, brought a silver candlestick and lighted a tall candle.

"Where is Scripps?" Giles asked.

"I told him to go to bed. But he took a walk. I wanted to be alone with you."

"That wasn't kind, was it?"

"Why not?"

"Scripps is lonely, unhappy, and he loves us."

"But why must he always be with us?"

"Because he is my friend, and has no other home." There was a touch of sternness in his voice.

She sighed, and talked of something else, of how long the day had been without him, of her fear of the storm: "What made you stay so late?"

"I had to work on my accounts."

"I wish you didn't have to work."

"I like it." He had finished his coffee, and was leaning back in his chair, basking in the comfort of the fire. Amélie brought a low stool and sat at his feet. There was silence for a while, which was broken by the sudden clamor of rain washing against the windows.

Giles jumped to his feet, "Scripps is out in it."

"He'll be coming in."

"He should have come before this. You run along to bed, Amélie, and I'll look for him."

She went with reluctance, and he watched her as she ascended the stairs, glowing among the shadows in her pomegranate gown. The first time he had seen her she had worn the horizon blue of her overseas uniform. And she had hung on Scripps' arm—such a different Scripps from the one who worked now in the shop—young, dashing, a flyer of the Escadrille—they had been a beautiful pair, radiant, rapturous, newly-wedded.

The three of them had had a great time together, and there had been something touching and tragic in the happiness of the young couple. And one day there had been four of them, when Amélie's twin brother, Raymond, had come from the front, and they had all motored to the country and had dined together at a charming inn, and had drunk to the health of the bride and groom.

Giles, hunting now for Scripps in the rain, shrank from the memory of what had followed. Raymond had gone back to the front, and Scripps had soared to incredible heights, a war-bird looking for his prey, and Giles chafing at the inaction which his orders imposed upon him, had done his best to look after Amélie.

Then one day Scripps had come down with a crash, and Giles had gone with Amélie to see him in the hospital, and had felt her shiver and shake before she entered the room, and had seen her courage as she knelt by the bed and kissed her lover's hand.

Her courage had held all through the dreadful weeks, but there had been sleepless nights, and a bit of nervous breakdown which had made the doctor anxious. "She can't stand much more," he had told Giles, "there's a touch of hysteria. And the war has done things to her."

It was to do more to her, for when news came from the front of Raymond's death, she went to pieces. "The shock has disturbed her balance," the doctor said cautiously.

"Mentally?"

"Yes."

Giles went to her at once. And when she saw him a strange thing happened. For she welcomed him not as Scripps' friend but as the brother she had lost. "They told me you were dead," she said, "I knew they were lying."

The obsession had persisted. Her marriage with Scripps was as if it had never been. When he came from the hospital, she met him merely as a friend of Giles. She tolerated his presence because Giles said she must. But she always protested, "I want no one but you."

The doctors said they had known other cases of the kind. Perhaps a slight resemblance between Giles and Raymond had started it, but more likely the cause had been in her need at the moment for relief from the deadening sense of loss. There was for a time trouble with the name: “You are not Giles, you are Raymond.” But gradually she had come to accept this as one of the topsy-turvy things in this strange world in which she was living. There was so much she could not understand, and which hurt her head when she tried.

And so, when the war was over, Giles had brought her with Scripps to the Island. There had seemed no other way in which to patch up Scripps’ shattered life. There was hope, a great specialist had assured them that the peace and quiet of the island would work a cure. But he promised nothing.

Amélie saw no one except the household group. The people of the town had been told she was the wife of Stephen and a nervous invalid. There was little gossip. Everyone knew Giles and respected him. They liked the fact that he had chosen to live among them, when he might have gone far afield for adventure.

Oh, well . . . Giles wrenched himself back to present realities . . . he had set his feet in a path and he would follow it. He could not now withdraw his strength from these two who needed him—no matter how hard the way, he must pursue it.

He found Scripps in a sheltered corner of the rocks—a dark shape in the gloom. “My dear fellow,” Giles said, as he came up, “you’ve no business to do a thing like this.”

“Why not?”

“It’s cold and wet—you’ll be in knots with rheumatism.”

“If I died what difference would it make?” Scripps’ voice was hoarse with despair.

Giles dropped a hand on his shoulder. “It would make all the difference in the world to me.”

“Do you mean that, Giles?”

“You know I do.”

They walked back together, and found the fire in the living room still glowing. They sat down in front of it and talked of Amélie in low tones. Scripps saw no light ahead. “She cares nothing for me.”

“She is not responsible for what she does.”

"I know. But I still—suffer . . ."

Neither of them wanted to go to bed. The storm, raging outside seemed to shut them away from all the world so that they were led to confidences which are given only at such times. And it was thus that Giles finally unfolded to his friend the story of the friendship between himself and Joan Dudley.

"She's a rare child, Scripps. A lamb among wolves," was the way he ended it. Scripps had been told of her engagement, of Giles' doubts of Drew, of the wicked old witch of an aunt, of Joan's need of a helping hand.

Scripps looking up from the fire with somber eyes, said, "You're in love with her?"

"Yes. But I'm asking nothing for myself."

"Why not?"

"I'm not cad enough to think she'd care."

"But if she did care?"

"It must never come to that."

"Why shouldn't it?"

Giles rose restlessly, and stood leaning on the back of his chair, "I shan't marry."

"That's nonsense. You know you will . . . or if you don't it will be because of Amélie and me . . . because we're a drag on you . . ." Scripps flung up his head in a wild gesture.

Giles said, sternly, "Stop that. And don't be silly. I'm sorry I told you about Joan. She's engaged to the other fellow and will probably marry him . . . It won't be easy for me to see her do it. I'd be glad to prevent it, because she won't be happy. But it's hands off, I suppose, even if I know her life will be wrecked . . ."

Scripps rose and stood beside him, "I'm a poor stick," he said, shakily, "and my troubles go to my head. But I love you."

"I know . . ." Giles put an arm about the other's shoulders, and they stood there together saying little because of the memories which gripped them.

After Scripps had gone, Giles sat in a big chair and gazed at the glowing coals. If he went to bed, he knew he would not sleep. He was still swept by the emotion which had mastered him when he had held Joan close—fragrant and white and exquisite, while the rain poured down upon them.

He reached into his pocket and brought forth a treasure which he had salvaged from that meeting. Going down the steps when he had left her and Hallam he had found a handkerchief which she had dropped. It lay now like a pink petal on his palm. It was a scrap of chiffon which had matched her gown and which carried the elusive scent of white roses which he always associated with her. He wondered if he should return it, then decided that he would not. Surely he might have this one token for remembrance, when Hallam had all the rest.

The next day and the next his restlessness continued. He had no word from Joan. As the week went on and he heard nothing it seemed as if he could not stand it. Scripps was aware of the change in him, and Amélie. “You’re not like yourself,” she said, “you seem to be thinking of something away from me, away from the Island.”

Well, he was thinking of something away from the Island. Day and night. Night and day. Among his books she came walking in, lighting the dim room—only to vanish in a breath, leaving darkness behind her. When the others were in bed she sat by his fire . . . her face turned up to him . . . He bent down to her and she was blotted out . . .

There were times when on his knees he struggled with the thing that possessed him. “God help me. God help me,” he would say, knowing even as he said it that what he asked was for strength to resist the temptation to go to throw himself at her feet, and declare himself her lover.

He had never believed that love would come to him like this. Yet here he was, mastered by it, feeling that his world would end if Joan married Drew Hallam.

The week passed, and it was on Sunday that he decided on a trip to Portland. An old library was being sold, and there were books that he wanted.

He closed the shop. “What do I care for the loss of a few customers,” he said to Scripps. On Monday he put up a sign. “Will return on Wednesday.” He motored up the North Shore in a trim little car. He felt that perhaps if he kept moving it would ease the pain in his heart.

It was on Monday, that a customer came to the shop and saw the sign—“Will return on Wednesday.”

Joan read it again. It seemed incredible that he had gone, when she needed him so much.

For he was her friend. He had told her that. Perhaps if she had not felt sure of it she would not have gone away. The thought of him had given her courage. She had felt his commendation. She had indeed followed his advice. And now he was not here to know it.

She had burned all her bridges behind her. After that interview with Adelaide, she had risen from her bed and had packed her bag. She had put in a little trunk the things she wanted sent after her. She had some money, and decided that she must take it. But some day she would pay it back . . .

She had bought her ticket and knew where she was going, and she had come to give Giles Armiger the address. There was no need any longer to shut him out of her life. If Drew followed her, she would make her own terms with him. He must trust her . . . there must be no more jealousy. Happiness was founded on perfect faith . . .

As she still stood at the window, looking in, she thought she saw someone in the back of the shop. She tapped on the glass, and tapped again. The man inside came to the door and opened it. He stood well back in the shadow. She knew at once it was Scripps.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“I want to leave an address for Mr. Armiger. I am going away.” She said it boldly. He would of course think it was about books.

But Scripps knew it was not about books. His mind was whirling. This lovely thing in her gray coat and little violet hat was Joan Dudley. She was going away, and Giles loved her . . .! Inevitably he would follow!

And some day she would love him. It was ridiculous to think that she wouldn’t. Perhaps she did already. And if she did, their world would crash—Scripps’ and Amélie’s. They wouldn’t be wanted. As for himself, he could stand it. But Amélie? Condemned to Poverty. To some public place of detention . . .! The thing was unspeakable!

He found himself saying slowly. “He is kept at home by illness.”

“You mean,” her breath was short, “that he is ill?”

He shook his head. “No. It is Amélie . . .”

“Amélie?”

“His wife.”

The color went out of her cheeks. She waited a moment, then said: “Perhaps I’d better write—about the books. And will you tell him . . . I am

sorry . . . that she's . . . ill . . .?”

She turned and walked away. Scripps looked after her until she was out of sight. Then he went down to old Peter and his shoes. And it was while his master worked on a pair of seaman's boots that old Peter heard a harsh sound in the silent room. “I'd do it again,” Scripps was saying. “Nothing can hurt those two, as I have been hurt . . . and Amélie . . .”



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DANCERS IN GREEN

The thing happened, Penelope Sears often said, like a miracle. On the third week in August a telegram came to the last of her paying guests, apprising them of the death of a relative. They packed and went at once. Penelope was left, therefore, high and dry in her great house on the bluff, with no one to keep her company. She cared little for that, however, and with characteristic energy decided to begin her fall house-cleaning. She would strip the beds, take up the rugs, wash the curtains. The air was like wine, with the tang of autumn in it. She felt the uplift of it, as she went busily from room to room, the old cat, Muffet, at her feet, and a dancing, prancing quartette of kittens following after.

It was nearly noon, when coming to the east chamber, she saw the fog stealing in. "The wind has changed," she told herself, and watched the gray curtain blot out the sea and the sands, roll above the bluff, past the garden, and towards the house. The sun darkened and quite suddenly and unexpectedly she was aware of her loneliness, of the coming winter, of the deep snows which would shut her in, of the emptiness of her life . . . with all those gone who had once made this old house alive with happiness.

Muffet, the cat, leaped to the sill, to escape the mad rioting of her offspring. "Even old Muffet has something which belongs to her," was Penelope's envious thought, "and I have nothing . . ."

From downstairs came the chime of the hall clock, "I have nothing, I have nothing . . ." was the sound it made in Penelope's ears.

She wrenched herself away from her morbid mood. "It's striking twelve, Muffet. Come on down and we'll have lunch—there's cold fish for you and the kittens."

The pussy cats made a royal meal of it, and licked their chops afterwards and washed their faces and slept in a rapturous heap in front of the kitchen

stove. Penelope ate little, and when she had washed her few dishes, she still felt unbearably the emptiness of the house. She put on her sweater and went into the garden. The day was still dull with the grayness of the fog, all the world was heavy with wet, the bright colors of the flowers were blurred. There was a salt fragrance in the air and a stillness. Now and then from far away came the muffled sound of the fog horns, like the cries of strange beasts.

Penelope set herself sternly to the sweeping of dead leaves from the path. And it was while she swept that a car stopped at the gate.

She could see only the outline because of the mist. Few cars motored over the rough roads through the forest. From the snort of the engine, she decided it was the station taxi from the nearest town.

She went towards the gate, and met the rush of a slender figure which caught at her with eager hands, “Mrs. Sears . . .”

“Joan Dudley!”

“I’m running away from everybody. You told me I might come . . . May I stay with you a bit?”

“My dear child . . . you may stay forever.”

In a moment Penelope’s world changed! The fog was forgotten. Joan’s breathless explanations, when they had dismissed the taxi, the almost aching charm of her in her gray coat and violet hat, the child-like confidence with which she crept into Penelope’s arms and cried on her shoulder, came after the desolate morning, like balm to a wound.

They went finally into the warm kitchen, and Penelope made a cup of tea. “The chances are you haven’t eaten a thing,” she said, and set forth cake and cream cheese and bread and butter.

Joan protested, “I’m not hungry.”

“You know you are. Run up to your old room and take off your coat, and by the time you come down the water will be boiling.”

Upstairs, the fog was rolling against the shut windows. Joan stood very still, with pain knocking at her heart . . . *Drew . . . Drew . . . !* She wondered if she had been wise to come to this place with all its memories.

When she went downstairs, she told her story, with Penelope sitting on the other side of the kitchen table, sympathetic and understanding.

“I had to get away,” Joan said, “you don’t blame me, do you?”

“You should have come before.”

“If they care for me,” Joan said, “they won’t let me go. And I couldn’t keep my self-respect and live with Aunt Adelaide. Nancy Hallam told me I was as mercenary as any of them, I don’t think that is true. I really love my aunt.”

“And you think Mr. Hallam will follow you?”

“Oh, he must—if he cares.”

Penelope’s heart was shaken, “Dear lamb,” she said, “how little you know of life.”

Joan looked at her with troubled eyes, “Do you mean you think he won’t?”

“I think you mustn’t expect too much of him.”

“But is it too much to have him want me for myself?”

“Too much, perhaps, for a man like Drew Hallam.”

Joan had said nothing about Giles Armiger. There was, really, she told herself, nothing to say. As she unpacked her belongings in the late afternoon she came across the little book he had given her, the history of Granitehead. That had been the real beginning of their friendship—and now it was ended. Because he had failed. Yet had he failed? There had been no word of his which a married man might not have said to her. And he had been wise and helpful, setting himself to understand her problems. She felt, however, that she did not want to see him—things would be different . . . with his wife to think of.

When she went to bed that night, the fog had cleared and the stars were bright. Old Muffet sat on the sill and looked at the stars. Joan was glad of the companionship of the little cat. “Lovely thing,” she whispered in the dark, and then suddenly she began to cry. She was not sure what she was crying about—whether it was the loss of her lover or the loss of her friend, or the loss of the life which had been hers when she lived with Adelaide.

She got out of bed, and on her knees, flung her arms across the coverlet, her head bowed on them. She had no prayer on her lips, but there was one in her heart, “Make me brave, make me brave. Don’t let me give up for anybody the best that is in me.”

Back at Granitehead was the gay room with its silken luxury, there were the pearls which had slipped like a white snake down Adelaide’s black gown . . . there was the big car, and Farley and all the rest of it . . . there was Drew . . . there was her friend, Giles . . .

Here was a plain old house, an old cat, an old woman for company . . .

When at last she threw herself on the bed, she sank into deep slumber. She was like a shipwrecked sailor, glad of any haven after the storms.

The next morning she wrote a letter to Mrs. Delafield and one to Drew. There was an appeal in both of them! “I may seem foolish, Aunt Adelaide, but I had to do it. And I really love you and miss you. Yet if I should go back, you would think it was because I wanted what you can give me. You can see that, can’t you?”

To Drew she poured out her heart, “My darling, I know you blame me, but it was the only way. I shall wait for you here. And surely you will come—everything speaks of you and of our first days together.”

A week passed and there was no answer. Another week. Joan grew restless. She wandered over the moor and down to the shore, a gray little wraith in foggy weather. Everywhere she seemed to hear Drew’s voice—in the sigh of the winds, the beat of the waves—

“Say that you love me, Joan . . .”

“But it has been only two weeks.”

“What has time to do—with you and me?”

At night she could not sleep, and Penelope, coming in, would find her propped up on her pillows, wide-eyed, and old Muffet sleeping on the coverlet.

“My dear, I hate to see you so unhappy.”

“I didn’t know it would be so—hard.”

“We never know . . .”

“Sometimes I think I’ll go back on any terms . . .”

“No,” Penelope said, sternly, “never that.”

“Well, I’m not very brave.”

“You are braver than you think.”

“I shouldn’t have come here to burden you with my troubles.”

“My dear, my arms have been empty. You can’t know what having you means to me . . .”

The bond between them grew very close. Penelope, wisely, packed the days full. Joan helped with the house-cleaning: there was old linen to mend and new linen to mark, and then to be laid on shelves sweet with little bags of rose leaves, there were things to be hung on the line in the fragrant air, lovely

old quilts and hand-woven blankets, there were dishes to be taken down from the three-cornered cupboards, and washed and put back again. "How many years I have done all this. But then, that's life, doing things over and over again."

The evenings were the worst. Not the early part of them in front of the great fire in the living room with the kittens playing mad games with each other and old Muffet watching. Joan usually read aloud at this time, but about nine o'clock Penelope would grow sleepy. "If I go to bed what will you do with yourself, Joan?"

"Go to bed, too," Joan would say, with false cheerfulness, "I'll get a book."

Penelope had a library which she had inherited from her sea-captain grandfather. He had had a nice literary taste, but the value put upon his books in later years by collectors would have seemed to him incredible. He had bought first editions not because everybody else was doing it, but because when he liked a poet or novelist he had been eager to read at once what he had to say. Thus it happened that in the dark, high bookcases were treasures over which Joan gloated. There was *Great Expectations*, for example, three volumes in the original purple cloth: "I wonder," she said to Penelope, "if you know how much you could get for this?"

"I don't want to sell," said Penelope, shortly.

"There's a bookseller in Granitehead," Joan stated, "who would be simply mad about these. His name is Giles Armiger."

It was the first time she had spoken to Penelope of Giles. But now she told of the two shops, and of Scripps and the lame gull. "It is really like something out of a story," she said, and stopped there.

But as she read the old books, she thought more and more of Giles. He had seemed absorbed in his shop. Was he as absorbed in his wife? And was he happy? Perhaps he wasn't and had found, in his collecting, an engrossing occupation which eased his heart.

If only she, too, might find some interest as engrossing, and which might release her from her sense of obligation to Penelope. And it was with this in mind that she said, one morning to Mrs. Sears, "You're a dear and a darling. But I must get something to do. I can't be a burden."

"You're not a burden."

"I mustn't accept—everything. And I should like work."

"What could you do?"

“Once upon a time I taught school. I could do it again.”

“There’s only one school near here, and the woman who has it needs the money. Her husband was killed in the war.”

“Perhaps I could go away and find a place . . .”

“Are you so tired of me?”

Then, when Joan had ceased to hope, came a letter from Adelaide. “I am sure that by this time you have repented your precipitation. I sail for France late in October. The Hallams go with me. I think you have treated Drew very badly. If you ask him to forgive you he will take you back, and I will overlook what has happened. You cannot expect him to do more than this. He and I have talked it over. If, however, you persist in having your own way I am sending a check which will tide you over, until you can support yourself. You cannot, of course, expect Mrs. Sears to provide for you forever.”

When Joan finished reading the letter, she sat for a long time staring at it. Then she left the house and went into the woods.

September had come, and the trees were gorgeous in their red and gold. There was, too, the rich green of the pines, and between the black trunks a vista of the sea, darkening to deep blue under the clear, cool sky.

Joan treading with light feet on brittle leaves and brown needles, came to the place where she had danced with Drew. Here—in the moonlight—in her silver slippers . . . Here he had said, “*I want you beautiful always . . . for me . . . for my kisses.*”

Oh, how much had he meant of it? He, who had let her aunt write. Who had talked it over in cold blood and had been sure of Adelaide’s forgiveness before he dared offer his own? She had only to say, “I’m sorry” and he would be here beside her, and they would ride down to the sea, and things would be as they had been before.

But would they ever be as they had been before? If she gave in, would her doubts be stilled? Might she not go back to find more heartaches, more humiliations?

She sat down on a fallen log and considered it. She was torn by her indecisions. She wanted him—she wanted Drew. Oh, why should she care for anything except to see him?

When at last she rose a mood of recklessness was upon her. What did pride matter, or self-respect? The thing she had to do was to tell Drew to come to her. Happiness was of the moment. Why shouldn’t she grasp it?

As she stood for a moment by the fallen log, half-screened by the underbrush, she saw coming through the woods, two children. One of them, a slender lad, carried a basket. He wore a red sweater and his head was bare. The girl who ran along beside him was younger. Her sweater, too, was red and her head bare. Both of them had crowns of thick curled fair hair.

They were not aware of Joan's presence, and she watched them with curiosity. They stopped in the open space where Joan had danced with Drew. The boy set down his basket and began to strip pine plumes from a young tree. The girl made wreaths of them. When they were finished, the boy produced from the basket two green tunics of cotton cloth and the children put them on over their sweaters. They sat on the ground and took off their stockings and shoes. Then rising, they began to dance.

Joan watched them in amazement. There was a certain grace in what they did, because of their youth and ardor. But they knew only a few crude steps. They stamped and turned. Utterly unconscious of anything except the joy of the moment.

She found herself wanting to join them. Yet she hesitated to intrude on their idyll. They had come to be alone, the presence of an onlooker might seem an affront.

At last, however, when they ceased for a moment, she emerged from behind her screen, and spoke to them with an easy air. "May I have a wreath," she said, "and may I dance?"

They stared at her. "Where did you come from?" the boy demanded.

She smiled, "I live in a tree."

"You don't . . .!"

But the girl believed her. "Mother says there are dryads."

A dryad . . . who had called her that . . . Giles!

The boy took off his wreath and handed it to her, "Cilla will make me another."

Joan went behind her leafy screen and removed her shoes and stockings. When she came back she wore the wreath. "Now," she said, "I'm ready."

The boy gazed at her admiringly, "How nice you look. But I don't believe you live in a tree."

"Don't I?" she began to hum a tune and to sway to it, "Come on," she said, and reached out a hand to both of them.

Her feet were white as milk, the pine needles were warm under them. The dance into which she drew the children was wild and rhythmical. They loved it.

When they stopped, breathless, they cried, “Do you know any more? Do you know any more?”

She reached for their hands again, and, feather-light, the three of them circled, cheeks glowing, eyes bright. When they stopped again, the little girl said with her arms extended, “Isn’t life—lovely?”

Joan stood and looked at her, “Do you think it is?”

“Yes. Mother says it is. She couldn’t quite see it when she lost Daddy. But now she does.”

The boy said, “You mustn’t talk about it, Cilla, Mother wouldn’t like it.”

The sun was setting now behind the trees. The three of them were dyed in the red of it.

“Will you dance with us again?” the boy asked.

“I’d love it.”

The girl clung to Joan’s hand, “My name is Priscilla Briggs, and my brother is John Alden Briggs.”

“Heavens, how historical!”

“Yes. We’re proud of our blood. But mother says we’re changlings.”

“What does she mean by that?”

“Oh, John and I want to be gypsies. Forest people. These are the tunics we wore in a pageant in town. Most of the children wanted to be waves of the sea and things like that. But we didn’t. We asked to be pine trees, and we were dressed like this only our sweaters weren’t under them. Mother made us promise today that we’d keep on our sweaters. She says she’s too busy to have us take cold. She teaches school, and that makes her busier.”

“I used to teach school myself,” Joan said, “I’d like to meet your mother.”

“I thought you lived in a tree,” the boy challenged, his face lighted.

“Well, I’d rather live in a tree.”

“So would we, so would we!” the children sang together.

They said, “Good-bye,” at last, and when they had walked on a bit they turned and waved. The sun had gone down and purple shadows filled the

wood. The two children in their wreaths of pine were charming in the pale light.

“You look like Hansel and Gretel,” Joan called after them, “in the opera.”

“We’ve never seen an opera.”

“Next time I’ll teach you one of the songs . . .”

When Joan went back to the house, she asked Penelope about the little dancers. “They’re a sturdy pair, but with such imaginations. Their mother is the woman I spoke about who teaches the school. She is very brave and beautiful. When her husband died, the boy was a baby and the little girl was not born. Life has been very hard for her, yet she seems to be lifted above the hardness.”

Joan did not speak of Adelaide’s letter. She felt that she must make her decision without any help from Penelope. After supper, she went again into the wood. The trees were sighing, and the sky swept by the wind was bright with stars. They showed above the treetops, and Joan, standing in the clearing where she and Drew had danced, looked up at them. In the faint light, her figure in the dark cloak was hidden, but her face showed white, like a silver coin, against the night.

Then, suddenly, she heard a voice speaking, “Joan, Joan, my darling,” and there was a rustle of dead leaves.

She turned and saw him in the starlight. Drew had come back to her.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE SIGN AND THE SEAL

Joan, following the voice in the dark, said, uncertainly, "Drew?"

She heard him come crashing through a barrier of underbrush which divided them. In another moment he had her in his arms. "My sweet . . .!"

She said, breathlessly, "How did you know . . . I was here?"

"The old woman told me."

"Penelope?"

"Yes."

The wind was beating its way strongly through the wood. The branches of the pines swung back and forth above their heads. The sky was bright with clearness. From far away they could hear the roar of the surf. It seemed to Joan that all in a moment her world had changed. Her heart sang with the wind and waves!

She whispered, "It's too good to be true."

"Have you wanted me?"

"More than I can tell."

He led her to a fallen log and they sat down. Her head was in the hollow of his shoulder, the starlight showed her face white as a flower.

"I can't tell you how I've wanted you, Joan. I couldn't get away from the thought of you . . ."

"Why didn't you write . . . ?"

"Oh . . . I was a fool . . ."

"Was it because you wanted to please Aunt Adelaide more than you

wanted to—please me?”

She had come uncomfortably near the truth, but he wouldn't admit it. “No, it was not. Listen, dearest. I tried to get her not to send that letter. She couldn't talk about anything else but how you had treated her. I think she wants you back. Only she won't give in. She insists that you owe both of us an apology . . .” There was silence for a moment, then he said, softly, “But I knew I was the one to apologize . . . I'm sorry, Joan.”

She clung to him in the dark, “Why should we talk of forgiveness, now, my dear?”

He enlarged on Adelaide's state of mind. “She simply raved when she found you'd left her.”

“I know. She had Farley pack up all my belongings and sent them after me . . . In the letter I got the other day she said if I returned anything she'd burn it.”

“She meant it, too. But I think I'm smoothing her down, gradually. I have a real influence with her, Joan. She likes me and she likes Nancy, and she loves you, my sweet, I'm sure of it. But she loves having her own way better.”

The Hallams had, it seemed, been with Adelaide most of the time since Joan's departure, first in Granitehead, then in New York. “And we are invited down to her big house in Baltimore. You lived there, didn't you?”

“Yes. She gave me a party when I first came, to introduce me to her friends. I was scared stiff, Drew. All strangers. I went down into the drawing-room before the other people arrived. There was a long mirror at one end, and I saw myself in it. It was like seeing somebody else. I couldn't believe that the girl in the party dress with the pearls was myself. But after that I wasn't afraid. I simply made myself act like the girl in the mirror would act, not like the Joan who had been a schoolteacher.”

He laughed, “You're a strange little person, Joan.”

“No, I'm not. I was playing a part. Drew, I think I'd like to be an actress.”

“If you were, you'd be the leading lady,” he laughed and kissed her. “You are shivering, my dear, we must go in.”

They followed the path which led to the bluff, and stood looking out over the moor to the sea. In her state of exaltation, the world seemed to Joan like a vast, vaulted cathedral; the stars, its candles; the beating waves, the sighing winds, the sources of celestial music; the deep blue of the canopied night, the curtain which shut them into a holy place.

“Do you remember,” she asked, “what we said when we last stood here together?”

On a muted note, he sent out the call: “*We are coming again . . . we are coming again . . . !*”

“And we are here. Oh, Drew, how wonderful!”

He spoke then of that first day in the fog, and she saw him riding beside her, splendid as a king. And he was splendid. All she had been thinking of him had been unjust. Her doubts fled.

It was a long time before they came to practical things. “Do you think Mrs. Sears can put me up for the night?”

“Of course. You can have your old room. No one is here but the two of us.”

The windows of the house as they turned towards it seemed, against the blackness of the forest, like golden rectangles suspended in space. As they opened the door, the warmth of the great fire met them. Penelope had put on fresh logs. “I was afraid you’d be half-frozen, Joan. I told Mr. Hallam when he went for you to bring you back as soon as possible.”

Hallam laughed, “This is as soon as possible.”

Penelope had set a small table in front of the fire. “I’ve made coffee,” she stated, “and I am going to leave you to drink it. You’ll have a lot to talk about.”

Hallam stood on his feet until she went away. He treated her with courtesy, but she knew he did not consider her in his class. To him she was the boarding-house keeper. Yet she knew herself as the descendant of men better than he.

As she went upstairs, Penelope told herself that this visit of Hallam’s was a sinister thing. She had needed only a look at Joan as the child came in to know that Drew had made out a case for himself. “He would, of course,” said the wise old woman, as she made up the bed in the west wing, “but it will always be her sincerity against his shallowness—always his materialism against the fineness of her spirit.”

When Penelope had left them, Drew’s eyes rested on Joan with delight, “I like your dress and the way the wind has blown your hair.”

“It’s an old dress.”

“But the gray is charming with those ivory beads. You are like a little nun.”

“I’m not a nun.”

“Thank Heaven.”

He made her sit beside him while he drank his coffee. Joan ate and drank nothing. She leaned against him, looking in the fire while he talked to her. He told her that he had motored up. That Adelaide had gone down to her old house in Baltimore to get things ready for her departure in October. Nancy was visiting friends in the mountains. “So I took this opportunity. Neither of them knew that I came.”

“Didn’t Aunt Adelaide?”

“No. Why should she?”

Joan said, earnestly, “I should have liked it better.”

“But it wouldn’t have been politic. We’ll have to humor her, dearest. She’s old and obstinate. And there’s no reason, why we should rub her the wrong way.”

There was a flush on Joan’s cheeks, but she was silent. And after a moment, Drew bent down to her, smiling: “Would it hurt you dreadfully to eat humble pie?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you could write her a letter, saying that . . . perhaps you were wrong . . . It would satisfy her, and it wouldn’t hurt you in the least. I’ve told her over and over again, that I have no grievance. But she won’t give in. And she has made up her mind that you can’t come back except on her terms.”

“I shall never go back except on my own . . .”

“*Joan . . .!*” he put a finger under her chin and made her look at him. “You care more for your pride than you do for me.”

“It isn’t that. It’s something fundamental.”

“Just what do you mean by—fundamental . . .?”

“It’s that I can’t give in to Aunt Adelaide because she has . . . money. If she hadn’t any, I wouldn’t seem to be—selling myself.”

He rose and moved restlessly about the room. Joan’s eyes followed. She felt suddenly very isolated on her low bench in front of the fire . . . as if she were on an island with all about her raging waters of controversy. Yet neither of them had said a word. It was merely that their minds were in opposition, their arguments beating in their brains.

At last Drew came back and stood looking down at her, "There's another way out," he said, slowly.

"What way?"

He drew her up to him. "Shut your eyes, while I say it."

She obeyed, and he brushed a finger across her closed lids. "Listen my sweet. I want you to marry me—tomorrow."

Her eyes flew open: "*Tomorrow?*"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"Why not? If you are my wife nothing can ever come between us."

"What could come between us?"

"Oh, a thousand things. And I want to know you are mine . . . *mine* . . ."

She felt herself yielding to the spell of his wooing. "But Drew—"

"There are no 'buts.' We'll motor off in the morning and find a minister. I'll get you back here in time for supper tomorrow night. It will be just between the two of us. Nobody need know anything."

"Not Penelope?"

"No."

"Then it is to be—clandestine?"

"If you choose to call it that—yes."

He went on to explain eagerly that what he hoped was that Adelaide would listen to reason as time went on . . . "She'll want you to come, perhaps before we sail. And if she doesn't, I'll know you're mine, for time and for eternity."

"But why not tell her?"

"Because while she's in this mood, she'll never forgive us. We might spill the beans."

Joan hated to have him say it like that. It destroyed the illusion. Yet as he wove for her the fabric of his dreams, she wavered.

"My wife! Joan, do you know how lovely you are? I thought I had remembered, but when I saw you tonight . . ."

She felt as if a silken net were being drawn about her. Her conscience, her

common sense were against the thing he proposed, but at last she promised!

“You will never regret it,” Drew told her, triumphantly.

They went upstairs together, and as she went into her room, Drew’s whisper rang in her ears like a chime of bells, “Our wedding-day . . . tomorrow.”

She lighted her candles, and moved about the room, finding the things she would need in the morning. Her mind was in a whirl. It seemed as if she were two people; that one side of her consented to all that Drew had proposed, while the other protested, “I will not. I will not.”

She decided that the gray dress which Drew had praised should be her wedding-gown. And there would be the ivory beads. And the little violet hat.

In the room next to Joan’s Penelope lay wide awake. She had not gone to bed until Joan came up. She had hoped the child might look in upon her and say “Good night,” but the light footsteps had passed her door. She had heard Joan moving about, but now there was no sound.

She had a sense of foreboding. If Joan had been her daughter, she would have gone to her. But Joan was not her daughter . . .

At last she could stand it no longer. She put on a dressing gown and went along the hall. When she reached Joan’s room, she found the door open, and Joan, like a ghost, in her white negligee, standing in the middle of the floor. “How strange you should come, Penelope,” she said, in a breathless voice, “I was coming . . . to you . . .”

Penelope went in and closed the door. She sat down in a chintz-covered chair. Joan sat on the bed. She had lighted a candle and its pale flame showed the two women in strange contrast. Joan in white, with her silky, shining hair, was like one of Raphael’s angels. Penelope’s hair was in kids, and her dressing-gown was made of a red blanket. Her shadow on the wall showed little horns, but there was nothing diabolical about Penelope. She was sane and sensible, and tonight her heart was troubled . . . *If Joan were her daughter . . . !*

“And now, my dear, what is it?”

“I couldn’t—sleep . . .”

“Why not?”

“I had so much to think of.”

“Pleasant things?”

“Worrying things. Penelope, darling, I wish I had a stiff backbone . . .” she

tried to laugh.

“Does that mean you are going to give in to your aunt?”

“No. But I’ve found out that it wasn’t Drew’s fault. He came . . . to tell me . . .”

“So you’ve forgiven him.”

“Oh, yes . . . you see . . . I love him . . .”

Again Penelope had that sense of something sinister. “My dear,” she said, “I don’t know why you should wish for a stiff backbone, but let me say this, that in love as in everything else there are just three things which make for happiness—and they are faith and honesty and courage. If you bring these to your lover and he brings them to you nothing can prevail against them. If you were my daughter, Joan, I would wish only this for you, that the man you marry should hold you to your best.”

Joan sat very still, a little statue in the starlight, and at last she said, with a sigh . . . “We are none of us perfect . . .”

“No.”

They talked after that of other things and finally Penelope rose and stood by the bed, “I must say ‘good night,’ my dear.”

“I shan’t sleep,” there was a quaver in Joan’s voice.

“I will sit by you until you shut your eyes.”

When at last Penelope went back to her room, it was a long time before she slept, and in the darkness she drew near to the infinite source of the strength which was within her. “Help her to choose the best, Lord,” prayed the wise old woman.

Joan waked at dawn, and lay watching the light come into the room. It was a pleasant room, simply furnished with some of the nice old things that Penelope had inherited. Joan’s bed was of the folding type, with a crewel-worked cover and tester. There was a hooked rug, a Jacobean chest, a maple dressing-table with a Queen Anne mirror above it.

On the dressing-table were laid out Joan’s toilet things—the brush and comb and handglass of carved ivory and silver, the pale flagon of perfume, the painted porcelain boxes. These were the only opulent articles in the room. They belonged to the old life.

Joan seemed to see Adelaide sitting beside the bed as she had sat that day in the hotel . . . *After all I’ve done for you . . . I’ve treated you like a princess*

. . . those pearls you have on are worth a fortune . . .

The old voice had had venom in it, the old eyes had been baleful. Joan thought of Penelope's voice and eyes as last night she had sat beside the bed . . . faith, and honesty, and courage . . .!

And set against these—a clandestine marriage!

The sun was up, and as the light poured in through the window, it seemed to Joan that a greater light entered her soul. Honesty and courage, and faith? None of these would belong to her if she ran away with Drew!

She got up and put on the gray dress which was to have been her wedding dress. Then she went downstairs and followed the path which led to the bluff. She descended to the moor and came finally to the sea. She walked up the beach for miles . . . it was a dull morning, and there were flocks of wild birds flitting back and forth across the sands. Their cries were mournful and were answered by the mewing of gulls overhead.

When at last she turned, Joan had made her decision. She knew now that when she faced Drew, he could not sway her. A battle had been fought and she had won.

He was waiting for her at the edge of the bluff, "I saw you coming . . . where in the world have you been?"

"For a walk . . ."

"Why didn't you wait for me?"

"I had to think things out . . ." she lifted her face to his, "Drew, darling . . . I can't do it."

"Do what?"

"Marry you today."

"Why not?"

"Because it . . . isn't right."

"That's silly. Why shouldn't it be right?"

"Because I can't—hide things."

"Don't you love me?"

"You know I do."

"Well, then," he caught up her hands in his, "show me that you do."

She shook her head. He dropped her hands, his forehead frowning. “You know, of course, that you may be cutting yourself off from me—forever?”

“Not if you really love me.”

He saw that she meant it. He stood looking down at her. “You’re a strong little thing,” he said, with a sort of grudging admiration. “But I’ll tell you this. Some day you are going to marry me. On my own terms. And this is the sign and the seal of it.”

He lifted her in his arms and kissed her, and kissed her again. Then he set her down and strode away.

Joan stood where he had left her. And after a long time Penelope came out. “Breakfast is ready. Where is Mr. Hallam?”

“He’s gone, Penelope. He isn’t—coming back . . .”



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE FLAME OF THE FIRE

“Winter,” said Dilly, “is on the way. Even the hens know it. They go around making mournful little noises, and lifting their legs like rheumatic old ladies.”

“It has rained,” Giles said, “for seventeen days. If you hadn’t come this morning, Dilly, Scripps and I would have been drowned in the flood of our own depression.”

Dilly flashed a glance at him, “I didn’t know you were ever depressed.”

“But seventeen days of rain . . .? Dilly, if you’ve brought lunch for us in that basket, I shall fall at your feet in gratitude.”

“I’ve more than brought lunch. I’ve brought chowder, hot as hot, and everything to go with it.”

Even Scripps brightened. “You always make us feel like children at a party.”

“It’s because I like parties myself,” Dilly told him. “You two are such pleasant pals. William calls us the three musketeers of the lunch basket.”

“Nobody by the wildest stretch of the imagination could call me a pleasant pal,” Scripps said, “I commend your charity, Dilly.”

The three of them were in Scripps’ room. The bookshop above was closed. Giles came to it every day, set his shelves in order, worked over his accounts, and spent hours reading the books he loved. But there were no customers. No one used the boardwalk at this season, and a drug store in the town supplied casual readers with magazines and the latest novels.

Giles had taken one or two journeys besides the one to Portland and had added richly to his stock. But the Portland trip stood out in his mind as a great catastrophe, for when he had come back he had found Joan gone. “Fool that I

was,” he had raged, inwardly, “to desert her at such a time.”

For he felt it a desertion. There had been a mystery about her going. The Hallams and Mrs. Delafield had stayed on at the hotel until its closing. But no one seemed to know Miss Dudley’s address. She had, it was explained, simply gone on ahead of the others. There was a rumor that her engagement to Hallam was broken. But no one knew.

Giles had felt that their friendship deserved more than this. Surely she might have written him a line. But she had not written. She had, apparently, not thought of him. He had meant nothing to her, and that was the end of it.

But he knew it was not the end for him. She was in his heart forever. And because of her going winter had, indeed, come to him.

He had done the best to be the same to Scripps and Amélie. Yet there were times when he wondered if they did not note the heaviness which had come upon him. He often saw Scripps watching him, and now and then Amélie complained. “What makes you so quiet?”

So more than ever today, he welcomed Dilly with her brightness and her basket.

She seemed her usual gay self until the feast was over. Then suddenly she stated, “I’m really not as cheerful as I look.”

They demanded, “Why not?”

“Oh, William and I are feeling the weather. We’ve had a royal fight. And we are still in the midst of it.”

“But my dear,” Giles began.

“I know,” she interrupted, “everybody thinks we are cooing doves. But we aren’t. William is playing the heavy husband. Laying down the law. He says I’m not to stay at the lighthouse this winter. That it is too isolated for Baby, and that when the big storms come, we can only be reached by boats. He wants me to live in town, and he’ll come over when he can. And I have said I won’t be separated from him, and there we’ve stuck . . .” She flung out her hands in a gesture of despair.

“Perhaps he’s right, Dilly.”

“No, he isn’t, Giles. How can you say it? It may be better for Baby. But it isn’t better for William. He never thinks of himself. But I’ve never left him since the day we were married. And I won’t now.”

“In other words, it is an *impasse*?”

“Yes, I want you to come over and talk to him. Will you?”

“Of course. But he may throw me out for interfering.”

“No. He’ll listen . . . and I want you to tell him that if I can’t have him and my little house and my old hens, I shall . . . die . . .”

He promised, and presently took her down to her boat. When he came back he said, “There’s a look of snow in the sky.”

“A bit early for snow,” was Scripps’ response.

Giles poked more wood in the round little stove which heated the room, and when the old gull settled himself comfortably beside it he said: “Aren’t you glad you have a warm hearth, Peter?”

It was Scripps who answered, with bitterness, “He’d rather have wings.”

“If only we could have what we want, Scripps.”

Scripps challenged him, “If you could have what you want, what would it be?”

“Oh . . . a thousand things . . .” Giles tried to laugh off the dark mood which had again come upon him. “Just now there are some old libraries in Portland that a man wants me to look at . . .”

“Oh, books . . .! Don’t you ever think of anything else?”

“Sometimes,” lightly. “But anyhow I’ll be running up there again in a few days.”

Scripps hated to have him go and said so. “Amélie is always restless.”

“I know. Yet I sometimes wonder, Scripps, if I went oftener she might learn to do without me.”

“She’ll never learn to do without you. It is growing worse instead of better.”

Giles knew that he spoke the truth. Amélie’s demands were more and more insistent. With the shop closed, she saw no reason why Giles should not spend the days with her. She was urgent in her arguments that she needed him more than Scripps in his shop. Giles humored her sometimes to a greater extent than he feared was wise. Yet he dreaded the moments of hysteria with which any opposition to her plans was met.

He found his island home thus taking on gradually the aspect of a prison. He seemed, indeed, spiritually, in chains. In the weeks of dreary weather, Amélie in her bright gowns, playing out her weird game, seemed like some

fantastic puppet, acting without her own volition. Often as he drove his boat through the waters and the Island rose dark and forbidding against the gray seas, he had a wild desire to leave it all behind him, and to find for himself some separate adventure. Yet he knew that he could not, and would not if he could.

A few days after Dilly's visit, he found his way to the lighthouse tower and had a talk with William. "You can throw me out if you wish, William, but Dilly thought you ought to get an outside point of view."

"I don't see how an outside point of view will help the two of us to come to an understanding. It was very bad last winter, with the baby a wee thing, and all those big storms. And when we couldn't get a doctor, Dilly was frantic. I thought then that it must not happen again. God knows I don't want to be here alone, but I can stand the hardness."

"She wants to stand the hardness with you, William."

"Why should I let her?"

For a moment, Giles stood looking out on the gray of the racing clouds and tumbling sea, "Perhaps that's the mistake we men make. We all want softness for our women. Yet softness never makes for strength. Dilly would rather fight things out with you, William. Some women ask only easy things. But Dilly doesn't. And you are to be envied. If I were you I'd let her stay."

"But if anything happens to the baby?"

"Give me a ring on the telephone, and I'll dash over."

That seemed to settle it, and when at last they went back to the little house and announced the decision, Dilly embraced them both. "You had to make William feel he wasn't selfish," she said, as she stood in the circle of her husband's arm. "I couldn't do it. He has such a nice New England conscience that he thinks anything he likes to do must be wrong."

It was a stormy night, with the rain streaming down the windows and the wind blowing great guns. But within the lighthouse everything was snug and tight. Giles as he watched Dilly going back and forth between the kitchen and dining room, wholesome and sweet, and smiling at her good William as he sat by the fire with the baby in the crook of his arm, was aware of a lifting of his heart. He seemed stripped for the moment of some ghastly garment which in his own gloomy house confined his soul.

"It's so good to be here," he said to Dilly, and followed her to the kitchen and helped her bring in the steaming dishes. They sat down, and when William

said grace in his steady voice, something in Giles answered it like a cry: “What I want is this . . . a wife . . . a child . . . love like this . . .”

After supper they went into the bright living room, and Dilly and Giles sang nursery rhymes for the baby—Oranges and Lemons—and I Had a Little Nut Tree—and What Have You Got For Dinner, Mrs. Bond? and There Was a Lady Loved a Swine, and Dame Get Up and Bake Your Pies . . .

Giles and Dilly had sung the songs as children together, and now as they kept time to the lilting tunes, Giles felt something of a youthful gayety of spirit, so that when they came to London Bridge he caught Dilly up and made her dance it with him.

They finished breathlessly. The baby was in ecstasies. William applauded. Giles, light-hearted, was a boy again.

When it was time for him to go, he said, “I hate to leave. You’ve made such a gorgeous evening of it, Dilly.”

“You made it yourself.”

“No. No mere man can make an evening like this. A man is only the bricks and mortar of a house. The woman is the hearthstone and the flame of the fire and the light of the lamp,” he smiled at her, “and you’re all that to your William and he knows it.”

“And so do I,” said happy Dilly.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHITE ROSES

“You must feel,” Joan said, “as if your feet were flying.”

Small John Briggs said, sturdily, “Feet can’t fly.”

“Mine can,” Joan told him, “like this,” she made a little movement of lightness and grace, gliding upward with upstretched arms like a bird on the wing.

The children of the dancing class watched their teacher with adoring eyes. They thought her wonderful. This was their second lesson, and it was like something out of a book to come through the wind-swept woods to the big house, to find the great living room waiting in a sort of golden stillness, with its rugs up, its low lamps, its glowing logs, and with Miss Joan in a shining silken tunic and with shining sandals on her slender feet.

Today they all had tunics and sandals, twenty of them. For Joan was teaching every scholar from the little district school where Evelyn Briggs taught. Some of the children couldn’t pay, but that made no difference. Penelope met their expenses.

“But you must not,” Joan had protested.

“Why not? I always wanted to dance, and I never had the chance. And these children shall have their chance.”

“You are sure you aren’t doing it just for me?” Joan had insisted.

“And if I did, my dear? Wouldn’t I do it for my—daughter?”

And Joan had said, shakily, “How am I ever going to make up for all your goodness?” and Penelope had answered, “By loving me.”

It was three weeks since Drew Hallam had come and gone. Joan had heard nothing from him. And Penelope had been a tower of strength. Joan had told

her the whole story. "I couldn't do it," she said "and yet sometimes it seems as if I can't live without him."

She had sent back Adelaide's check, "I am done with it all," she told herself, and after that she set herself sturdily to finding some absorbing occupation, "It is the only thing that will save me, Penelope. I mustn't—think . . ."

It was through Evelyn Briggs, the mother of the two children who had danced in the wood that the suggestion came. "What had you thought of?" she had demanded, when Joan went to see her.

"I might have a dancing class," Joan said, "I can do things better with my feet than with my head."

So it was decided. And it was in planning for the class that Joan cemented her friendship with Evelyn Briggs, and found in it a deep and satisfying quality.

Evelyn was a widow. Her husband had been killed in the Argonne, and she lived now with her farmer-father and with an invalid mother. Her father was too old now for heavy tasks, and labor was high, so there were few crops harvested. Old John Leonard tended the garden, looked after the chickens, milked the cow, and helped with the housework. He was always cheerful and was a source of strength to Evelyn. Her meager income as a teacher had to be stretched to meet the expenses of the whole family, but she never thought of her father as a failure. She knew he might have been a successful man if it had not been for his invalid wife. He had sacrificed a career in the city for her sake.

On the afternoon of the dancing lesson, Evelyn and her father walked through the wood to Penelope's. They were to have a cup of tea, and see that the children got home safely.

Evelyn spoke of Joan. "She says very little about herself. But when she was here in the early summer she was supposed to be her aunt's heiress. And now she seems to be earning her living. And she is not happy . . ."

"How do you know?"

"She's so restless, father, and her eyes are sad."

"She is young. Happiness will come."

"It doesn't always come, Daddy."

"It will come, if we look for it . . . but not perhaps in the way we want it."

She tucked her hand in his as she walked beside him. In all the years he

had never failed her. She felt that if she ever lost faith in him she would lose faith in God.

When they came at last into the golden-lighted room, the children fluttered across the floor to meet them, “We’re to have a Thanksgiving pageant . . . Miss Joan says . . . *Miss Joan says . . . Miss Joan says . . .*” they were all talking at once.

Evelyn stopped them. “Wait a minute. Let Miss Joan tell it.”

“Well,” said Joan, standing in the center of the group. “It is like this . . . we are afraid we’ve been too much interested in turkey and stuffing n’ everything, and not enough in being thankful, and so we thought we might bring harvest gifts for the poor on Thanksgiving eve, and make a pageant of it. What do you think?”

The children crowded close, “What do you think?” they chorused.

Old John Leonard said, “I think it couldn’t be better. You see food meant a lot to the Pilgrim fathers, because they knew what it was to go hungry. None of you have ever gone hungry; you have everything you want, and forget where you get it . . .”

Small John Briggs interposed, “I haven’t everything I want.”

None of the children had, it seemed. They flung back as it were at old John Leonard the words he had spoken. In a perfect babel of sound they proceeded to tell the things they lacked.

Joan stopped them. “You tell first what you want, John.”

“Well,” said young John, “I want money. If you have money you can buy everything.”

Then Joan, standing there in her shining tunic and her golden slippers made a speech. “No,” she said, “money won’t buy everything. It won’t buy self-respect. It won’t buy happiness. It won’t buy a mother like you have, John, nor a grandfather like yours. Why, there are boys and girls with money, and I *wish* you could see their fathers and mothers—they are never at home, and when the children come from school there’s no one to meet them but servants. If you children were rich, and your parents like some I have seen, you wouldn’t be going home to a cozy kitchen with your mother dishing up the dinner, and your father coming in to kiss you. You’d be wondering if your mother would let you see her a minute before she rushed off for a party, or whether your father would leave his guests long enough to come in and say Good night. Rich children aren’t always happy, John . . . and money won’t buy . . . everything.”

She stopped for breath, and just then Penelope came in and began to serve simple refreshments, and the children forgot for the moment the things that Joan had said to them. But when a little later, they went rushing through the woods, and reached their homes and opened the doors and found their mothers in the bright warm kitchens and their fathers coming in to kiss them, they remembered.

And it was Old John Leonard who said to Joan, as they watched the children eat, "My dear, you have a great gift."

"Have I? What is it?"

"You know how to reach the hearts of children."

Joan's eyes filled with tears. She held out her hand to old John Leonard. But she had no words for him.

It was on the day after the dancing lesson that a man came to Penelope's front door. Joan had gone to Evelyn's, so Penelope answered the bell.

The man who stood outside, said: "Is this Mrs. Sears?"

"Yes."

"A friend has told me of your library of rare books. I'm afraid I am doing a most daring thing in asking to see it. Am I?"

She hesitated, "I don't mind your looking at them. But if you're thinking of buying it won't do any good. I got them from my grandfather, and I intend to keep them."

He had heard other people talk like that, yet in the end he had gone away with what he wanted. There were subtle methods of approach . . .

So he said, "My own books came from my grandfather. I know how you feel."

She opened the door. "Oh, well, it won't hurt to let you have a look at them . . ."

"I have a letter of introduction from a bookshop in Portland," he offered it, but she waved it away. "I don't need any letter," she said, "I can tell what a man is by the looks of him . . ."

They laughed, and she led the way to the living room. She showed him the high bookcases, "There they are," she said, "take your time . . . I'll have to ask you to excuse me. I'm baking a cake, and I'll have to watch my oven."

His smiling eyes met hers. "You are sure you can trust me?"

She laughed, “Why not?”

As she went towards the kitchen, Giles wished that he might follow her. She reminded him in some respects of Dilly, there was the same wholesomeness, the same housewifely preoccupation. He felt that he would much rather watch her bake a cake than look at rare editions. He was tired of association with dead and gone authors. What he wanted was human companionship.

Yet when he turned at last to the shelves, and read the titles, he was aware of a sense of excitement. Such treasures! Things that his patrons wanted. Things that he could get his own price for. He wondered by what means he could get this pleasant person to listen. She was, apparently, rather prosperous. The thing to do was to take her breath away with the biggest amount possible. Values had been mounting of late. Perhaps no one had told her of the goodly sum that lay within easy reach of her hand.

When she came in, therefore, after a while, to see how he was getting on, he said, “I could make you a corking offer for these.”

“I told you I wouldn’t sell.”

“I know . . .” Then without further argument he named a price.

He saw that she was impressed. But she said, only, “I’ll think about it.” He could not know, of course, that he had come at an opportune moment. With Joan as a part of her household, Penelope had begun to dream a bit. She had thought she and the child might travel—there was a not-too-expensive Mediterranean tour.

She went back to watch her cake, and to turn things over in her mind. And presently Giles came out to her. “There are two volumes of a first edition *Great Expectations*,” he said, “there should be a third but I can’t find it . . .”

“It is there somewhere. On the table under the lamp, I think,” said Penelope vaguely, she was trying her cake with a broom straw. It was a lovely cake, puffy and brown. Giles forgot first editions for the moment while Penelope drew out the straw, decided the cake needed a few more minutes, opened the oven door, and hid the brown beauty in its cavernous depths.

Giles’ eyes took in with appreciation the charm of the shadowy shining kitchen. A big kettle on the stove was bubbling and boiling. Old Muffet was stretched on the checkered linoleum which covered the floor, her gray fur flattered to silver by its blue and white. Her tail waved gently, and the kittens struck at it and leaped back, graceful as leaves dancing in the wind.

“How delightful this is,” Giles said.

“Do you like it?”

“Yes. I sometimes think there was a real æsthetic value in the fine old kitchens of our ancestors. You could put a whole efficiency apartment into one of them, and there was much more of real loveliness than in the cheap imitative effects of much of our time.”

He lingered to talk about it, and went back reluctantly to his books. Penelope called after him that when the cake was done he was to have a slice of it and a cup of tea. “Which helps a lot,” he told her.

He found lying on the table the thin purple volume which he sought. He found, too, a handkerchief tucked between the pages to hold the place . . .

The handkerchief was a wisp of a thing in pale yellow . . . as he lifted it his nostrils were assailed by a faint perfume . . . white roses!

His heart seemed to stop beating . . . *Joan!*

He looked about the room as if to find some further trace of her. He said aloud to the empty air, “Of course it *can’t* be, it can’t.”

With the handkerchief in his hand, he sought the kitchen. “Mrs. Sears,” he said, and held up the wisp of chiffon, “do you mind telling me whose this is?”

Penelope turned from the oven? “That? Oh, it’s Joan’s. Joan Dudley.”

“Where is she?”

“In the village. Why?”

“Because . . . well, I’m Giles Armiger of Granitehead, and Miss Dudley and I were rather good friends. She used to come into my shop.”

“Well, of all things,” Penelope was on tiptoe with curiosity. She remembered that Joan had spoken of Giles. “What made you think it was her handkerchief?”

He laughed, “I recognized the perfume.”

“Well, she’ll be glad to see you.”

“I’m not sure.”

“Why not?”

“She went away without leaving any word, Mrs. Sears. It seems strange that just by chance I should find her.”

“Nothing is by chance,” said the orthodox Penelope, “there’s a plan back of everything.”

“I wish I was sure of it.”

“When you are as old as I you’ll know.”

“Perhaps.” Giles shelved theology for the subject in hand: “When do you think she’ll be back?”

“Joan? Oh, in time for tea.”

“And I’m to have it with you?”

“Of course.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Why not?”

“Because in real life things don’t happen that way.”

“They happen if they’re going to happen . . .” Penelope was a Presbyterian.

He laughed, “Perhaps they do. Who knows?”

He returned to the living room, and to the books. But he couldn’t get his mind on them. *Joan was coming . . . Joan was coming . . .* He went to the window and stood looking out. It overlooked the wood which was lighted at this moment by the sunset. Back of the trees the sky was glittering, hard, like burnished copper. The branches of the pine trees stood out against it in purple masses. The whole effect was unreal, artificial, but supremely beautiful. And the beauty was heightened and intensified as a girl’s figure appeared at the end of the path which led to the house. She wore a coat and skirt of dull red wool, and a close hat of the same color was drawn over her hair. The light flickered over her like a flame, so that she seemed to Giles’ quickened imagination to glow and shine.

As she came on with quick step, he drew back from the window. He heard her voice in the kitchen, and Penelope’s remark: “There’s some one in the living room to see you.”

“Who is it?”

“Go and see.”

Giles stepped forward and met her as she came in. “You,” she said, and he wondered if it was his fancy, or if she really waited a moment before she held out her hand to him. He took it in a close grasp.

“Are you glad to see me?” he demanded, “are you?”

Looking up into his smiling eyes, she knew that she was glad and said, honestly, “Yes.”

“It is a miracle, my finding you. Even now I don’t believe it.”

“Tell me about it,” she dropped into a chair in front of the fire and began to unbutton her jacket.

As she talked he was aware of a change in her. She was thinner, paler. He missed in her the vividness which had been one of her chief charms. She waked into keen interest, however, when he spoke of finding the handkerchief in the book.

“How did you know it was mine?” she demanded.

He reached into his pocket and brought out a wisp of rose-color. “You see?” he said, “you dropped it the night of the storm. And I knew the fragrance.”

“Oh,” she said, and a flush came into her cheek. He wondered what the flush meant. Was she offended?

There was a moment’s silence out of which he said, “Won’t you tell me of yourself? You see I’ve heard nothing.”

“There isn’t much to tell, except that I am not going to marry Drew, and that Aunt Adelaide and I aren’t friends.”

“That seems to be enough,” he leaned forward a little. “My dear, why didn’t you leave a line for me?”

She started to speak and stopped. Oh, why should she tell him? That she knew he had a wife? He might misunderstand her attitude, think her self-conscious.

“I thought it best not to let anyone know,” was her explanation. And just then Penelope came in with the tea. After that the conversation was general. At last Joan spoke of her dancing class. “You should see the children.”

“You should see Joan,” Penelope said, “she’s like a fairy.”

Giles shook his head. “I told her when I first met her she was a dryad.”

When they told of the Thanksgiving pageant, Giles said, “I wish you’d invite me.”

Penelope was eager, “We’d love it. Couldn’t you stay over and have Thanksgiving dinner with us.”

He looked at Joan. "Yes," she said, "why not?"

It was dark when Giles rose to go. "I will walk with you through the wood," Joan offered unexpectedly.

"Won't you be afraid to come back alone?" Giles asked.

"No, I do it often, and there's a moon."

They went through the kitchen, and when the door was opened, old Muffet like a gray shadow slipped out ahead of them and was lost in the gloom. The wind was blowing a gale, and as they walked along in the darkness, Giles took Joan's arm, anchoring her, as it were, against the blast. "I can't tell you," he said, "how glad I am that you are here with that good woman. I suppose I should regret your break with your aunt, but I don't. Not after seeing Mrs. Sears. A year with her is better than a decade with Mrs. Delafield."

"Penelope's a darling," Joan agreed, "but there are times when I miss—the fleshpots."

They walked on for a while in silence, then Joan added, "And there are times when I miss—Drew."

All at once, tumultuously, because he was her friend and because there in the windy dark it seemed easy to give him her confidence, she told him all about it. She began from the moment in the storm when Giles left her with Drew. She told of the pressure which had been brought to make her apologize. "Aunt Adelaide wanted to bend me to her will . . . and I wouldn't." She told of her final rebellion and departure. But she did not tell him that she had been to the bookshop and had seen Scripps.

At the very last, came the confession of Drew's visit and his wish to marry her. "He didn't want anyone to know. And I wouldn't."

"The cad . . ." Giles voice was sharp.

She hastened to her lover's defence, "No, he isn't that. But he feels it is silly to offend Aunt Adelaide, when we need what she has to give us. And he was afraid that if we didn't get married something might come between."

"Nothing could come between if you cared enough."

"That's what I told him."

"And now . . ." Giles asked after a moment, "you have given him up?"

"I'm afraid not . . ." he had to bend to catch the words.

"It still—hurts . . .?"

“Yes.”

“I know, my dear,” he was all tenderness. “Yet when I heard you were to marry him, I felt as if you were a little ship headed for the rocks. That some one ought to warn you. Light a beacon fire. Yet how could I? I had to stand by and watch . . . and wait . . .”

She tried to laugh, “And now the little ship is—wrecked.”

“No. There’s a flag still flying, and the sails are set—for happiness. Joan, I shouldn’t say this but I must. I can’t bear to think that some day you may marry Hallam. I love you too much . . . I love you . . .”

“Oh, please,” she stopped and stood away from him. “Oh, don’t spoil it.”

“Spoil what?”

“Our friendship. Oh, it is—hateful to have you speak of love.”

“Hateful?” his voice was stern, “I am sorry.”

They walked on in silence after that. And now Giles did not touch her. When they reached the place where she was to leave him, he said, “Is this the end?”

“Yes.”

“And I am not to come and see you?”

“No.”

“Not even on Thanksgiving?”

“No.”

“But Joan, why?”

“If you don’t know I can’t tell you.”

She knew that she should have faced him with the fact, “You have a wife.” But she *couldn’t*. And anyhow the thing was ended. She had lost Drew and she had lost Giles. She said, “Good-bye” in a breathless voice, and turned away from him and went back alone under the trees.

When she reached the house and opened the door, old Muffet slipped in ahead of her. The old cat had a mouse in her mouth. She had caught it in the wood, and Joan saw her yield up the limp body to her kittens. Life was like that. Cruel. Muffet had been only a half hour away. Yet in that time something had been killed.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE HAUNTED WOOD

The Thanksgiving pageant took place in the school house. It had been decided that as friends and families were to be invited, Penelope's living room would not be big enough.

There were hangings on the school-room ceiling of blue with silver stars as if the sky were overhead, and on the low platform was an altar, with a brazier upon it in which a fire burned steadily. To the right and left of the altar were screens covered with gold paper. After the audience had gathered, the lights went out, and when they were turned on again, the children were posed classically against the screens, in tunics of green and purple, of blue and red. Each bore some fruit of the harvest, and when the music began they progressed in a swaying march, which brought them to the middle of the floor, around which the audience sat in a wide half-circle.

In the center of the room the marchers separated, and each one stepped forth in an individual dance, which ended in the laying of a gift at the foot of the altar. Then the dancer stepped back, and another dancer came forward.

Behind one of the golden screens, Joan played the piano. A peep hole gave her a view of the children. How lovely they looked . . . there was Priscilla, apple blossoms in her hair and carrying a tray heaped with the luscious fruit; her brother, John, sturdy in brown and yellow, with his wreath of wheat, bringing a sack of fresh-baked bread to set by the side of the combs of honey which a tiny child with a crown of golden bees held high on a silver dish.

Evelyn Briggs said to Penelope, "It's a most wonderful thing."

Penelope knew that it was more wonderful than it looked. It had been Joan's salvation. It had kept her from thinking. When she had come home from her walk with Giles she had said to Penelope, "Isn't there anyone I can trust? He told me he loved me . . . and he is married . . . I can't have him any longer

for a friend.”

And now Joan behind the screen was saying mentally, as she had said so often aloud to her class, “Step, glide, step, swing . . . step, glide, step, swing . . .” Her brain was swept clear for the moment of everything except the necessity for holding the children to the rhythm and beat.

She saw nothing but the children; not even the parents in their pride. Step, glide, step, swing . . . step, glide, step, swing . . . “How lovely they are! How lovely!” Joan exulted. There was little freckle-faced San Sneed, in a burgundy blouse and gold sash, with a green bowl heaped with cranberries. “He’ll never see himself freckled-faced again. He has had a glimpse of something better.”

Step, glide, step, swing . . . “And Minnie Pratt—she is simply heavenly with that old ermine muff of Penelope’s and that sled of pop-corn balls . . .”

Step, glide, step, swing . . . a group of brown gnomes now, with their sacks of potatoes; two ivory-clad figures with celery making an Indian head-dress; a fat line of silvery onions; a thin line of yellow-clad carrots; squat, green-gowned maidens, cabbage-bonneted!

Step, glide, step, swing . . . This time last year Joan had been with Aunt Adelaide in the great palace on Mount Vernon Place . . . there had been a play and a dance afterwards . . . and Joan had worn white tulle and the pearls that Aunt Adelaide had given her—the pearls which had slipped down like a white snake on Aunt Adelaide’s black . . .

Step, glide, step, swing . . . This time last year she had not met Drew Hallam. She had not met Giles Armiger. This time last year she had believed in love and constancy and things like that . . . friendship . . .!

The gifts about the altar were piled high, so that its flame was almost hidden. The end of the program was in sight . . . seven roasted turkeys, borne aloft by seven white-clad cooks . . . a melting and marvellous *finale*.

Then Joan came out from behind the screen and made a little speech and thanked everybody, and smiled, and received congratulations, and only Penelope knew how hard it was for her. “Her thoughts aren’t with us,” said the wise old woman in her heart.

The Leonards and the Briggses were to have supper at Penelope’s. Old John Leonard drove his rickety car back to the farm to get his invalid wife, and Penelope and her guests went through the wood.

Joan and John and Priscilla lagged a bit behind Evelyn and Penelope. A great moon rolled up over the ocean. “The sky looks like our gold screens,”

said Priscilla. And John said, "The trees make black stripes on it."

They came to the place where Joan had danced with Drew, and suddenly she felt as if something gripped and held her there. "Run on ahead, children," she said, "and help Penelope with the supper. I'll follow you in a moment."

They asked no questions and sped on their way, and Joan stood alone in the cold, moonlighted wood. And suddenly it seemed to her as if she heard the beat of the tune Drew had whistled . . . and the air seemed filled with dancing silver slippers . . . up and down in front of her eyes . . . like birds in flocks . . . until she put out her hand to push them away and found nothing there . . .

She leaned against a tree. "I must get away from here," she heard herself saying, "this place is—haunted . . ."

She began to run. When she reached the house she stood for a moment on the steps before she dared open the door. She felt that her face would show what she was feeling. Yet when she was safe within the kitchen, its warmth and friendliness seemed to enfold her.

"Can I help?" she asked, with her breath still short.

Penelope who was stirring gravy, shook her head. "Not out here. You can fix the table and light the candles."

Joan tried to speak with lightness, "You insist on my being simply ornamental."

Evelyn, who was mashing potatoes, commented, "Why not? You do it so well."

The candles on the table were yellow, the linen was ivory, and there was purple and yellow fruit in a Chinese bowl. Joan wore a dress of purple chiffon, one of the sheer things Adelaide had insisted on sending after her. There was a gold band about her hair, and over one ear a tiny bunch of golden grapes.

"Such state and elegance," said old John Leonard as he came in with his wife on his arm, "I don't know how we are going to live up to it."

The children were in raptures: "It is like the Arabian Nights."

Penelope remarked: "Joan makes a feast of the simplest meal. She refuses to yield to the commonplace."

"It is you who make the feasts," Joan told her, "I haven't seen such a chicken pie in a thousand years."

"Really a thousand?" asked young John earnestly.

Joan laughed, "Perhaps I ate one in a previous incarnation . . . but never one as good as this."

Throughout the meal Joan laughed and talked and told stories. And who could know that in the back of her mind was the vision of a cold moonlighted wood, and of silver slippers dancing . . .!

For dessert there were small and spicy pumpkin pies, and coffee in Penelope's Chinese cups. And it was while they were drinking their coffee that the telephone rang.

Joan went to answer, and called back presently that it was "long distance."

"For me," she added.

When she returned to the dining room her face was white. "Aunt Adelaide is ill," she said, "she wants me."

"My dear . . ." Penelope rose and looked at her.

Joan answered the unasked question: "Yes, I'm going."

Priscilla got up from the table and flung herself upon Joan, "Oh, you mustn't go away, you mustn't."

"Cilla," her mother admonished.

"But you'll come back for Christmas? You will, won't you? We were going to invite you to our house to dinner. It wouldn't be like this, with the candles and everything, but it would be nice. We planned it all, didn't we, mother? John Alden and I are saving our allowance . . . for the oysters . . ."

Joan gathered the weeping little figure in her arms, "My darling," she said, "I must go. But I'll come back, and we'll have our Christmas dinner . . . and you shall buy the oysters, and I'll eat 'em all up."

On Penelope's loving heart was printed indelibly the picture of Joan in the purple dress bending down to the weeping child. She had a frightened feeling that Joan would not come back for Christmas. That when Adelaide had her again, she would not let her go. With no sign, however, of her inner disturbance, she spoke of trains. "There is none you can take until tomorrow morning."

But Joan could not wait. "I'll motor to Portland and get the midnight express. Aunt Adelaide is very ill . . . they think that she is . . . dying . . ."



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IN THE OLD HOUSE

Adelaide Delafield was dying in her old house in Baltimore. She had been born in that house, and it was, perhaps, fitting that she should come to it for the end.

It was a huge brown stone structure built in the days when Baltimore entertained in state and elegance for months at a time, without those flittings to Florida and California and Southern France which now made its hospitality intermittent. Since the Great War there had been less formality and fewer servants, not because Adelaide could not afford them, but because she didn't need them. Yet there were enough left to make this business of dying a well-attended affair; besides the regular staff there were two trained nurses.

Nurses and servants had no power however to protect Adelaide from the wave of awful loneliness which swept over her when the doctor told her that the end was near. He had to tell her; there were business matters, the lawyers said, which must be settled, and Adelaide had not settled them.

"Is there any one you wish to send for?" the doctor asked.

"No," the old woman said with bitterness, "I'll die alone."

Yet when she was really alone with Farley and the day nurse, she found herself wanting more than that. Was there anyone in the world who really loved her? She lay there thinking of the life she had lived in the old house. She saw herself a lonely little girl with a gay and widowed mother, who came in rustling black silk and shining jet, with creamy shoulders and a coronet of braids, and who leaned over the bed and kissed her, then went away to dinners and things, and at last to a wedding with a man who didn't like Adelaide, and whom Adelaide hated. So she was sent away to school, and came back to be married off so that she might be away from her stepfather, and that she might not make her mother seem old by comparison with a tall young daughter.

After that Adelaide had worn rustling silks and earrings, and had showed her own creamy shoulders, and had gone to dinners and cotillions, and after she had been married five years, her husband ran away with another woman and broke her heart.

“Since then I’ve been a hateful beast,” said old Adelaide, lying in her bed. And she didn’t know whether it was her own fault, or the fault of her mother, or the fault of the man she had married.

But late in the afternoon, as darkness came over the room, she whispered to herself, “If I had loved more . . . I might have been loved . . .”

It was perhaps, as near to repentance as Adelaide ever came. Yet the good Lord knew what was in her unhappy old heart.

It was then that she sent for Joan. “You know where she is, Farley. And say that she must come at once.”

When Joan arrived Adelaide lay in the great French bed with silken hangings. The hangings were rose-color and so was the silken spread, and Adelaide wore a lace cap with a rose in it, and a little jacket which matched the rose. All the things about her belonged to youth, yet there she was with her old, old face and her old, old heart, and her longing for love.

She put up her arms to Joan. “Do you love me?”

“You know I do.”

“Then . . . stay with me.”

Joan knelt beside the bed and Adelaide closed her eyes and after a while she said, “I am leaving you all my money. I made my will this morning.”

“Dearest . . .”

“I am going to make you a rich woman, Joan. I’m not sure whether you will be any happier for having money. Perhaps if I had been poor . . . I might have been different,” the tears ran down her old cheeks.

Joan drew the thin old body into her arms, “My dear,” she crooned, “my dear . . .”

That night Adelaide died. There were many matters she had intended to talk over with Joan. She had wanted to talk about Drew Hallam. To say that he’d make as good a husband as any of them, and that Joan might as well marry him. But she didn’t say it, she simply died with all the rose-colored lamps in her room lighted, and with Joan’s hand in hers.

And now Farley looked after Joan as she had looked after her mistress. She

installed her in a suite of two rooms all done up in French gilt and ivory, with garlands on the walls, and with satin draperies of faint pink and blue. The suite reflected Adelaide's taste twenty-five years ago after a year's residence in Paris.

Farley laid out Joan's things for the night, and drew the water for her bath, and while she brushed her hair, she talked about the plans for the funeral. "You'd better let me have some black dresses sent up early. You'll have to see Mrs. Delafield's lawyer, and Mr. Hallam and his sister will arrive on the afternoon train."

"Mr. Hallam . . .?"

"Yes. Mrs. Delafield had invited them for the weekend, before she knew how bad things were with her. Perhaps you won't want them?" The question seemed an innocent one, but Farley was watching Joan's face in the mirror.

It was a quiet face, with no sign upon it of self-consciousness. "I think you'd better get them long distance, Farley, and tell them what has happened. And ask them not to come until the day of the funeral."

"Yes, Miss Joan."

"And Farley . . . I am expecting Mrs. Sears tomorrow. I talked with her over the telephone, and she's taking the midnight train. She will stay with me for a time. You remember her, don't you?"

Farley remembered. She thought it rather foolish of Miss Joan to clutter up her new life with people like that. Farley knew that Joan was to have Adelaide's money. All of the servants knew it, and the nurses. Farley had been the only person in the room at the time of the drawing of the will. She had heard what Adelaide said to the lawyer, and after Adelaide's death there had seemed no reason why she should keep to herself what she had heard.

It was Friday night when Adelaide died. The funeral was to be on Monday. There were relatives to come on from the West. Adelaide had left explicit instructions as to what was to be done. The lawyers carried out the instructions, but Joan had enough on her mind. All day Saturday dressmakers and milliners came with the things Farley had ordered. The black clothes they brought hung like glorified scarecrows on hangers, and the black hats were perched everywhere like birds of evil omen.

When Penelope arrived, Joan lay exhausted on the *chaise longue* with Farley hovering over her.

"She is very tired," Farley said to Penelope, "I am hoping she can get some

sleep.”

“I don’t want to sleep,” Joan protested, and held out her arms to her good friend. “Oh, Penelope, how good to see you.”

Farley left them with reluctance. She went into the next room and began to unpack Penelope’s bag. Penelope followed her. “I’ll do that,” she said, and when Farley had gone, Penelope took off her travelling dress and put on her red blanket wrapper and went back to Joan. And Joan said: “Penelope, darling, how wonderful to see you look like that.”

She did not try to explain why it was wonderful. She could hardly have told herself what she meant. It was only that in the big house she moved in a dream, and that all the people were dream people. And now Penelope had come and was real . . .!

Safe in Penelope’s arms she cried and cried. “I don’t know what makes me,” she apologized, “I don’t think I am crying for Aunt Adelaide. I—I think maybe she’s happier. She was sweet at the last. But I’m afraid. She left me all her money—this big house is mine and everything in it, and all the servants. And the thought of it frightens me, even though I like it in a way. I wouldn’t be human if I didn’t. But it changes—everything. And you’ve got to stay with me, Penelope. I must have you. You will stay, won’t you?”

Penelope promised. Yet in her heart she was saying, “She won’t want me always. There’ll be somebody else . . . Hallam, perhaps. Everybody will be after her. I can only pray the good Lord . . .”

She voiced none of her doubts, however. She spoke of the children. “They all sent love, and Priscilla said you had promised to come back for Christmas.”

“Oh, I will. And we will carry presents to all of them,” Joan sat up and began to plan for it, “I won’t have to stop to think about what it will cost.”

The two of them dressed presently for dinner and went down. The drawing-room was a frosty place with glittering prisms like icicles hanging from the chandeliers, and with long mirrors like frozen lakes. The Moquet carpet had a pearly glimmer, and the furniture was in pale brocades. The pictures were etchings and pastels. The whole thing had a spectral aspect. Penelope thought of her golden-lighted living room, her bright, and beautiful kitchen. “Money couldn’t make me live here long,” she said.

In the great dining room, the old butler drew out Adelaide’s chair at the head of the table for Joan. He knew what was due the new mistress. He thought she suited it well, and told Farley so afterwards.

“It’s the black chiffon and the pearls,” Farley said complacently, “and the way I do her hair.”

But old Jason knew it was more than that. He saw in this child, dignity and simplicity. She was more of a great lady than Adelaide had ever been.

That night before they went to bed, Joan spoke to Penelope of the Hallams. “They are coming to the funeral. I am not sure they know I am here,” she hesitated, “Penelope, it’s going to be a little hard to meet Drew.”

“Why, my dear?”

“Because, he’s treated me very badly.”

“I know.”

“If he had really loved me, he couldn’t have kept away, and now I have all this money. Oh, Penelope, he’ll want to do it, and I mustn’t.”

Her face was white, her voice tense. Penelope said, soothingly: “Don’t think of it, my darling.”

“But I must think.”

When the Hallams came on Monday, Joan was in the library at the head of the great stairs, where the family was assembled. The gathering was an imposing one. The relatives were, most of them, distant ones, but without exception they were prosperous, and against the setting of rich dark woods, and old portraits and leather bound books, they took on an air of formality and conservatism which made Nancy’s russet hair and somewhat spectacular attire seem out of place. The pair attracted much attention as they came in, and Joan was aware that Drew’s good looks were intensified by the somber clothes that he wore and in which she had never seen him.

There were so many people about that their meeting could be only a conventional one, yet the clasp of Drew’s hand was tight on hers, and as always she was thrilled by his touch. But she gave no sign of it. She was very pale, and the whiteness was emphasized by the close black hat that she wore. There were shadows under her eyes. Watching her, Drew said in his heart, “My sweet.”

Nancy, who sat beside him, whispered, “Adelaide left Joan all the money.”

“How do you know?”

“Farley told me.”

All through the services Drew had that to think of. That Joan was rich. And that she had had no welcome for him.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE INTRUDER

Joan, on the night of the funeral, in Adelaide's place at the head of the table, was aware that in the eyes of the major portion of her guests she was an intruder. Just before dinner, the will had been read, and the assembled relatives had learned she was heiress to her aunt's estate. While it was not unexpected, they had felt, almost without exception, a sense of resentment. Joan was, perhaps, the logical legatee, but it seemed a bit absurd, that this child with her short skirts and her modish bun of dark hair at the back of her head, should be taking precedence of them all.

The exception to those who resented it, was one of Adelaide's own cousins. She remembered Adelaide as a loving little girl. She remembered her before the days of her marriage and of the display of creamy shoulders. She remembered her when the two of them had dreamed together, and because of these dreams, the little old lady said to Joan: "I know why she left everything to you, my dear. She wanted to live in your heart as she lives in mine. None of the rest of them have hearts to live in."

And Joan, looking into the faded eyes had said, "I am sorry I didn't know how much she loved me. I might have been kinder."

"You were kind enough, child. In these later years she shut herself up in a shell of selfishness. But that was not the real Adelaide. The real one was the girl I knew."

The Hallams were dining with the rest of them, and they were to spend the night in the big house. Nancy had asked, casually, "Have you room for us, Joan?"

"Of course."

"Then we'll stay here if you don't mind."

Joan and Drew had had a moment alone on their return from the funeral, and he had said, looking down at her as she stood with averted eyes, "Haven't you forgiven me?"

"Please, let's not talk about it, Drew."

He had tried to take her hand, but with a very definite gesture of refusal, she had stepped back.

"Are you as hard as that, my sweet?"

Tears had filled her eyes. "I am not hard . . . but you hurt me dreadfully. And Aunt Adelaide's death makes everything different."

Other people had arrived just then, and there had been no further opportunity for private conversation. Yet now at dinner, Joan had to admit she was glad Drew and Nancy were with her. Their presence saved her from a sense of utter desolation. Penelope had elected to eat upstairs. "I shall be much happier, my dear, than with that bunch of stiff-necks."

"But after this, Penelope, you're not to stay away."

"As you please, but tonight I'd rather."

Nancy's russet head shone brightly amid the gray coiffures and shining baldness of the elderly guests. She and Drew, expertly and pleasantly, helped Joan carry the dinner through successfully, so that she had a sense of gratitude and coöperation, as if the three of them were divided against the hostility of the others.

For now there was no exception to those who resented her presence. The old cousin who had loved Adelaide had gone home. "I shall have tea and toast and memories in my own big house, my dear. Come and see me some day. I want no one else who is here, but you."

After dinner they all went into the frosty drawing-room, and coffee was served. To Joan the whole scene seemed utterly unreal—with Jason moving about in the frigid light of the crystal chandelier, with the men in their black coats and the women in their sedate gowns, and with herself the center of it all.

There had been some bequests to the relatives, but the house with all its furniture was Joan's. She did not really want it, but there it was, and the chances were that she would live in it. She found herself wondering what she could do to lessen the effect of frozen monotony—flowers, perhaps, loads of them . . .

An old gentleman was telling of balls and dinner parties when Adelaide

was a belle and a beauty.

Joan asked idly, "Why aren't there any belles in these days?"

"The type was different, my dear, more imposing, if I may say it." The old gentlemen remembered Adelaide's coming-out party—her sweeping train of pink satin, lace flounces, rose garlands, white gloves and bracelets, a necklace and fan, a shawl and head-dress. Things had been more spectacular in the sixties. This child was charming but,—his mind went inevitably to Tennyson for comparison—"as water unto wine."

It was Drew, watching Joan from the other side of the room, yet not seeming to watch—who saw her potentialities. "With the right dressmaker in Paris . . . with a year or two of Continental residence . . . she'll come back to take the world by storm."

He knew what he wanted—to have her take the world by storm as his wife! He wanted to be the head of this old house. Jove, how he would like to do it all over in the magnificent Spanish style. That was the idea—a sojourn in Spain for all of them—himself and Joan and Nancy. Nancy was a whizz at interior decorating—and some of those gilded leathers, with all this pale stuff swept out, those glass monstrosities which hung from the ceiling replaced by girandoles—richness and color—that was the thing!

He saw himself in the midst of it all, his friends about him, and Joan the lovely *chatelaine*—he would dress her to suit the part! The thought thrilled him! He would win her yet . . . though he might have to go slowly. The reward was worth the waiting. He wondered what she had meant when she had said: "Aunt Adelaide's death makes everything different."

The guests who were staying out of the house departed early. Some of the others sought their rooms. Drew went with a half dozen men to the library to smoke. Joan and Nancy, the last in the great drawing-room, ascended the stairs together.

Nancy said, "Come in," as Joan stopped at her door, "and tell me about yourself."

"There isn't much to tell, Nancy."

"Have you any plans?"

"Only that I am going to stay here for a bit and keep Penelope with me, and then I shall go back with her to Maine for Christmas."

"Go back?" Nancy's tone was incredulous.

“Yes. I promised.”

“But surely you are not going to shut yourself up in that ghastly place for the winter?”

“It isn’t ghastly, and I have some good friends there.”

She wondered what Nancy would think of those friends—of old John and young John, of Evelyn and Priscilla, of the plain farmhouse, and of the oysters which would be bought with hoarded pennies.

“Oh, I couldn’t disappoint them,” she said, with a break in her voice, “there are some darling children.”

Nancy was practical. “The thing you have to do is to get the most out of your money. The world is before you, my dear.”

“But what kind of world?” Joan’s eyes were troubled.

“Heavens, child,” Nancy bent her head and kissed her, “don’t begin to ask yourself questions. Just live from day to day, and thank the gods for youth and the capacity to enjoy.”

Joan’s eyes were wet. “I think I’m tired,” she said, “I can’t imagine myself just now enjoying anything.”

Nancy gave her a shrewd glance, “Run along and let Farley give you a massage and tuck you into bed. Do you know how lucky you are, my dear? To have a maid to yourself? I’d sell my soul for some one to do my hair and draw my bath.”

“Farley’s a dear,” Joan said, “but I’m not used to having people always about. I like being alone, and looking after my own things.”

She went away, and Nancy getting herself into a black satin robe with green and gold dragons writhing over it, waited for Drew.

When at last she heard him, she opened the door between their rooms. “Can you talk to me for a minute?”

“Of course.”

She went in, sat down, and lighted a cigarette. “Drew,” she said, “this is the moment to get busy.”

He leaned on the back of a chair and looked at her. “What do you mean?”

“I mean to make up with Joan. She is low in her mind. She won’t have much resistance.”

He shook his head. "You saw her manner. She would hardly speak to me."

"I don't blame her. You made an awful idiot of yourself, when you tried to force a clandestine marriage."

He blazed back at her: "I was an idiot to tell you."

"You always tell me everything."

"You drag it out of me . . ."

"I don't . . ."

"Oh, well, why quarrel? We've got to stick together!" Nancy's pointed finger nail tapped the polished wood of the dresser as she took stock of the situation. "Look here, Drew, did you know Adelaide was going to leave Joan her money?"

"She said something that made me think she might."

"So you decided to take the gamble?"

"Yes."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I told you at the time you and Adelaide were making a lot out of nothing. Between the two of you, you drove the child away . . . and now you've got to get her back."

He was moody. "It's not as easy as it sounds."

She crushed her cigarette in a bronze dish. "Of course I want you to marry her, Drew. It will mean financial salvation for us, and she will be as happy as with any other fortune-hunter."

He was furious, "Cut that out . . ."

She lit another cigarette, "Don't get so fussed about it. Some one will marry her for her money if you don't."

"I shall marry her for more than that."

"You still insist that you care?"

"Yes. You can believe it or not . . ."

She touched his arm lightly with the tips of her fingers: "Then you have my blessing, such as it is. And now, I'm dead for sleep. Good night."

When she had left him, Drew waited a few moments, then went into the hall. He descended the stairs, and found Jason in the drawing-room setting things in order for the night. He had turned out the lights of the crystal

chandelier, and the place was now illumined only by a Chinese lamp. "Will this be enough light for you, sir?" Jason asked, as Drew entered.

"Yes . . . shall I turn it out when I leave?"

"I'll be in again, sir."

The old butler went down the hall, to the little room where he sat when he was not busy. If he wondered why Mr. Hallam sought the frigid formality of the drawing-room at this hour, he made no sign. Jason was discreet and well-trained. Adelaide had seen to that.

Joan had found Farley ready to coddle her. "When you've had your bath, I'll give you a good rub."

"Not tonight, Farley. I'm going in to talk to Mrs. Sears. And you needn't stay up. This won't be the first time I've put myself to bed."

"There's no reason why you should now, Miss Joan," Farley felt cheated. She had hoped for a bit of gossip. Adelaide had always talked to her maid. Farley wanted to hear about Drew Hallam, and what Joan thought of him. She trusted there would be no question of marriage. She had talked the matter over with Jason: "He hasn't a cent to his name."

"She ought to take a house in London," Jason said, "and marry a man of rank and title."

"She'd better leave Mrs. Sears behind," Farley said, vindictively, "a person like that don't fit into fashionable life."

"She's not so bad," Jason decided, "I've seen duchesses with no more dignity. She'd get by with the right people better than that Miss Hallam."

Joan stayed for some time with Penelope. They did not speak of Drew, and the older woman was aware of the significance of Joan's avoidance of his name. "He's on her mind," she told herself, shrewdly.

Joan spoke of her conversations with the old gentleman and the old lady. "It seemed so strange to see Aunt Adelaide through their eyes, as young and beautiful, and kind and sweet. It is dreadful, isn't it, to know that age can make such changes."

"It isn't age, my dear. It is the way one meets life."

"I know," Joan sat thinking about it, and at last she rose. "I'll have my breakfast in bed. Will you have it with me? Most of the women are having

trays sent up.”

“I’ll want mine early. You’d better sleep as late as you can. You are more tired, child, than you know.”

Tears came suddenly to Joan’s eyes, and she buried her face in Penelope’s shoulder. “I *am* tired,” she sobbed, “and oh, Penelope, darling, I’m so glad to have you.”

When at last Joan went to her room, everything was laid out for her. But Farley had, according to instructions, gone for the night. Joan wrote a line for her on a tablet under the telephone: “I want to sleep late, Farley. Don’t disturb me.”

She sat down at the desk in her sitting-room and began to open the letters piled neatly on her blotter. Most of them were from Adelaide’s friends—messages of sympathy, written on paper with crests and monograms and smartly engraved addresses.

Out from them all she chose a note which old John Alden had written:

“Don’t sentimentalize your sorrow. So many people do that. Scourging themselves with regrets. Trying to give to the dead what they withheld from them in life. You may be saying to yourself that you should have stayed with your aunt in spite of everything. Yet you did what at the time seemed right. It would seem right now if she were here again. I should not speak of this except that I remember the day you gave me your confidence. Old age makes one wise, and you thought I could help you. I think I did, and I want to help you now. The great and fine thing you can do is to remember that you loved your aunt. You must go on strongly to meet the future. That is what we all have to do, no matter what our circumstance.

“We are not sure, of course, whether you will come back to us. If you do not, we shall have great loneliness of heart. The children miss you. We all miss you, and pray that courage may be yours, and wisdom.”

How wonderful to grow old like that! Joan laid the letter down and thought about it. Old John Leonard’s age and the age of Adelaide Delafield: One finding joy and peace in a world of sorrow and sickness and poverty, the other selfish and miserable in the midst of plenty.

It was very still in the house. Joan rose and went to the window. It was

snowing heavily. The street lights showed the whirling flakes. An early winter . . .!

Up at Penelope's the woods would be heavy with white, the breakers would rise and crash and run back into a leaden sea—the sea which had been silver-gray last summer under the fog.

And with that memory her thoughts returned to Drew. She had tried to put him out of her mind but she had known she must come to it. All day long his figure had detached itself from the background of ancient relatives and other guests at the funeral. And in that one moment when she had been alone with him he had let her know how his mind tended.

"You haven't forgiven me, Joan? Are you as hard as that, my sweet?"

She was very honest with herself. She knew that she wanted more than anything else in the world to be with him at this moment, to be sheltered by his arms, soothed by his caresses. Yet there was bitterness back of her need of him. He had been willing to let her suffer . . . he had not dared to come out in the open against Adelaide, he had tried to bring her to terms by his silence . . . and all this he had done because he had wanted an old woman's money.

And now the money no longer belonged to the old woman, but to the girl he hoped to marry.

Joan flung up her head. Why should she accept a tardy devotion? Surely she had pride enough to hold her own against him? To surrender now would be to court humiliation.

She returned to her bedroom and sat down in the chair in front of her dressing table. In the mirror she saw herself, all in black with her white pearls and her white face. She had a feeling that the reflection was not her own, not the Joan Dudley who had taught school and faced hardships, been broken-hearted. This was, rather, a changeling heiress, owner of this great house, mistress of millions, a woman whose hand would be sought in marriage not because of what she was but because of her possessions.

She began to take off her pearls, but stopped suddenly, her hand still wound in the milky beads.

Had someone called?

She went to the door. Listened. Heard nothing. Not with physical ears. Yet through the air . . . insistent . . . compelling . . . came the echo of Drew's voice: "Joan, Joan."

With all the strength that was in her she fought against the insistence of

that ghostly summons. How silly to go down and find nothing. Drew was, undoubtedly, in bed. Everybody was in bed. Her sense of being called was simply a hallucination.

Yet she found herself presently in the hall, descending the stairs. Lights were burning below. The stairway was an imposing one, curving from the second floor, with statues in niches along the way, and a marble Mercury on the newel post. It was heavily carpeted with velvet and Joan's steps were noiseless. The pearls which still hung about her neck made a gentle clicking as they swung against a small jet buckle which fastened her dress. The sound was the only one in the vast silence.

When she reached, finally, the first floor, she stood very still, then moved on like a person in a dream to the dim drawing-room. The glow of the Chinese lamp made a great moon on the wall behind it. Joan found herself walking towards that moon. And then, suddenly, a voice said, "My sweet," and she saw Drew standing beside the lamp.

She looked up at him, "I didn't know . . . you were here."

"Yet you came . . .?"

"I thought some one—called."

"I called you, Joan."

"No." It was almost a cry.

"Yes!" His laugh was triumphant. "My dear, I couldn't sleep without seeing you again. You are mine, I brought you here that you might say it."

"How can I say it?"

"Why not?"

"After everything that has happened."

"What has happened? Only that I was a fool. I'm willing to admit it. I know what you are thinking of me, that I failed when you needed me . . . and that I am trying to crawl back. But it isn't true. Heaven knows I'd do anything to set myself straight with you, but my conscience is clear. I've loved you and I tried to work things out so that we might be happy. If I made mistakes, I made them. And now all that I ask is that you'll give me a chance to serve you. I won't hurry you, dearest. I simply want you to let me prove myself. To be your friend. To help you over the hard places."

She had listened with her face turned away from him, "How can we be—friends?"

He put a finger under her chin, in the old familiar gesture, and made her look at him. "Why not, Joan?"

Her voice was cold and self-controlled, "Do you know what Browning says of friendship after love?"

"What should I care what Browning says," roughly, "it is what I say, Joan."

"Bluest outbreak—blankest heaven; lovers—friends!"

She had drawn away from him. But he would not let her go. He dropped a hand on her shoulder and held her. "Do you mean that you don't care?"

She tried to meet his eyes and could not to say, boldly, "It's all over . . ." But she knew it was not all over. She was fighting with all the strength that was in her not to let him know the spell his presence wove about her.

And then it came . . . the thing she dreaded . . . "My sweet . . ."

"No . . . Drew . . . *no* . . ." For he had lifted her in his strong arms, "*Mine* . . ." The old question! The old enchantment . . .

Far back in the hall the telephone rang, with Jason's controlled voice answering presently: "Miss Dudley? Just a moment, please."

"Drew . . . it's for me . . ."

He released her, and she went into the hall: "I'm here, Jason."

Drew, listening, heard her say: "Yes . . . where are you?" . . . A long silence while some one spoke at the other end . . . "Yes . . . great changes," and then, after a time, "I—I am glad you said it . . ."

He heard the faint click of the receiver as she hung it up. In a moment she would fly back to him. He would not keep her long. He knew now what he had wanted to know. That he could still play upon her emotions, and that she cared.

It was not Joan, however, who appeared presently between the velvet curtains, but Jason: "Miss Joan told me to say she had gone upstairs. She will see you in the morning."



CHAPTER TWENTY

CONSPIRATORS

Joan, running swiftly and silently up the stairs had a wild sense of escape. If Giles Armiger had not been moved in some miraculous way to telephone her at that moment, she might have promised Drew—anything.

And she had not wanted to promise. She had been like a bird wooed by the fowler's pipe, "My sweet, my sweet." Safe in her room, she shut her door and stood with her hand on her heart. Giles Armiger had saved her! She had found it incredible to believe when she had heard his voice. He had spoken to her from his island across all the miles of storm. He had read of Adelaide's death in the paper and that Joan was at her bedside. He had expressed his sympathy, and then, quite simply and naturally, he had asked her to look up a little verse which he had found for her. Such things helped sometimes. And would she believe that he was always her friend?

There had been no more than that. Yet as she had listened, something of her old faith in him had revived—there had returned to her the sense of peace which his presence had always brought. For a moment she had forgotten the things which had separated them in the days since she had sought his advice in the dim bookshop. And when the brief conversation was over, she had given Jason the message, and had fled from Drew.

When she reached her room, she found herself trembling. Where was Drew? What was he thinking? Had he come upstairs? She listened at the door until she heard the muffled sound of his footsteps on the thick carpet. After that she undressed, and putting on a padded dressing-gown, curled up in the window seat. She searched in her shabby old Bible for the verse Giles had chosen for her . . . "*for in the time of trouble he shall hide me . . . in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me . . . he shall set me upon a rock . . .*"; and as she read, it seemed to her that Giles spoke—as if she had come through him to some island of serenity in the midst of the storms which shook her.

With the little book on her lap, she looked out of the window. The snow was falling heavily. She thought of Adelaide asleep under that white blanket. Yet only the frail old body lay beneath that pall, somewhere Adelaide's thwarted soul was finding rest and fulfilment.

Adelaide had lived and loved, and now it was all over. Some day it would be all over for herself and Giles and Drew. As she crept into bed, Joan felt very young, very helpless, very unequal to all that was before her. Yet she fell asleep comforted by the words she had read . . . *in the secret of his tabernacle he shall hide me.*

When Farley came in the morning, Joan said: "Farley, I am going to spend Christmas in Maine with Mrs. Sears. I won't need you up there. Have you any relatives you can visit during the holidays, or would you rather stay here?"

"I'll stay, if you please, Miss Joan. Mrs. Delafield always let the servants that were in the house have a feast for themselves. I thought maybe you'd want to keep on with that."

"Of course. Shall I give Jason the orders?"

"It will be best, if you don't mind, miss. He was asking last night if you'd be here."

"I shall be in Maine for a time. I am not sure about later plans. Perhaps Mrs. Sears and I will go abroad. And you will, of course, go with us."

"Jason was saying if you'd take a house in London."

Joan shook her head, "Too grand and gorgeous for me, Farley. If we go we'll travel a bit on the Continent."

Farley wished she dared ask if the Hallams would be asked to join the party. They had been included in Adelaide's plans. "It wouldn't be the thing for Miss Joan to help pay their way like Mrs. Delafield," Farley speculated shrewdly, "but there's no telling what they'll get out of her."

What they would get out of her was one of the things about which Nancy Hallam was much exercised at the moment.

Drew had burst into her room the night before, raging, "Well, you've done it," he had said.

Nancy, reading in bed, with a rose-colored light on the headboard making a flaming sunset of her hair, had rebuked him: "Drew, don't be so noisy. What will people think?"

"I don't care what they think."

“What happened?”

He told her, and was maddened by her laughter. “She left you standing on the hearth-rug?”

“Yes.”

“And sent a message by Jason?”

“Yes. Nancy, don’t be a—fool.”

“I can’t help it. You’ve always been such a—conqueror.”

“I’ll be a conqueror yet,” grimly.

Nancy lay looking at him, “How are you going about it?”

“Try to keep her near me—we must manage that. I love her, and I’m going to have her, Nancy.”

“She’s going up to Maine to eat Christmas dinner with that Sears person.”

“How do you know?”

“She told me.”

He meditated on that for a moment, “If we could get her to go away with us . . .”

“We can’t afford it. Adelaide was going to foot most of the bills.”

“We must manage somehow . . .”

Nancy remarked, “We sound like conspirators. We’re a worldly pair, Drew.”

“Why keep putting it that way?”

“Because I am willing to face my sins and you aren’t.”

In the black satin gown with the writhing dragons Nancy found her way the next morning to Joan’s room. “Want me?” she asked from the threshold.

“Yes. Had your breakfast?”

“All I’d let myself eat. Its not the easiest thing to preserve my elegant thinness. I suppose you had hot chocolate and buttered toast. I adore them, but they’d add a pound.”

She sat down. “Beastly storm.”

“I rather like it.”

“I shall be glad to get away from the cold. Drew and I were planning with Adelaide for a winter on the other side. But now we’re not sure . . . Drew wants—Spain. He’s quite mad about it. Says its a magical country and not spoiled by tourists. You’d adore it.”

“Would I?”

“Yes. Why don’t you join us? Think of it, Joan, you’d be away from all this,” she waved her hand towards the window where the snow thudded against the glass like the wings of frightened birds. “Have you any other plans?”

Joan hesitated; “Not definite ones.”

“My dear, will you take a bit of advice from a worldly-minded old maid?”

Joan smiled at her, “Are you that, Nancy?”

“Yes. You’ve got a chance now to make of life a corking adventure. So don’t sit back and let everything go by you. With your money, the right clothes, everything . . . ! Joan, there’s a new heaven and a new earth before you, if you want it . . .”

Joan caught fire from the flame of her enthusiasm. “It sounds marvellous.”

“Think it over, and remember this, that if you bury yourself now, you may never dig out.”

Nancy let it go at that, and went down presently to Drew. “I’ve given her something to think of.”

Just before luncheon a box of violets came to Joan, with a note from her lover: “Let me see you for a little moment, before I leave. I shall ask nothing but that moment. Last night when you fled from me my world was dark.”

When she went down, later, to the drawing-room, Joan found some of her departing guests assembled. Drew detached himself from the others and came towards her. “Can’t we run up to the library?”

She shook her head.

A quick light flamed in his eyes. “Joan, you’re afraid of me.”

“Perhaps I’m afraid of—myself.”

“Then, why not?”

“Because . . . I must wait. Think it all out reasonably when I’m away from you.”

“Why be reasonable? Why not be—happy?”

“Because to be happy I must be—reasonable . . .”

He saw that further argument was useless. “How cold you are.”

“Not that . . . and you know it.” She turned away from him and went towards the others.

When a little later, she said, “Good-bye,” Drew kissed her hand, “I shall write,” he said, “and some day I shall come.”

She had no answer for him. She stood quiet and composed in her black dress, her face white as her pearls, and with no sign of the emotion which shook her.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ON THE WINGS OF THE STORM

The storm sweeping over Baltimore was raging also over Giles Armiger's island. For twenty-four hours, with Scripps and Amélie and José and Margarida, he had been shut in. The sea was a black surging waste of waters. José coming back from town on the first day of the storm, had reported a perilous voyage . . . He had brought supplies to last a month. "If we're shut in," Giles had said, "we won't have to worry."

They had, indeed, made the best of it. Amélie, happy in having Giles at home had been gay as a child. They had played bridge, popped corn, read aloud. Giles and Scripps had even built a snow-man for Amélie, and she helped them, looking like a snow maid herself in her white wool coat and knitted cap.

On the night that Giles had called Joan, Margarida had made the dinner a festive affair—spending much time on it and producing rather superlative effects in soup and roast and salad . . . with a pudding for dessert that was rich in fruit and almonds—it was in fact a Christmas pudding, prematurely served since the occasion seemed to warrant it.

After dinner, Giles and Amélie had danced to the music of the radio. Amélie was slim and glowing in her pomegranate frock. "I haven't had such a good time since Paris," she said, when she stopped.

The two men had looked at her, startled: it was the first she had spoken of France or of the things she had done there. Yet now it came as naturally from her lips, as if that strange silence about it had never been.

Giles, feeling his ground, tried to say carelessly, "Those were great days. Do you remember the little restaurant where we tried to get you to eat snails?"

"Don't ask me to remember anything," she said wearily, and put her hand to her forehead.

So the light which had flickered for a moment went out. And when finally Amélie went up to bed, the two men did not speak of the thing which had happened. Scripps stood by the window and tried to pierce the gloom outside. "Such a night and such a sea—do you hear it booming, Giles?" He turned away from the window, and began to climb the stairs. "There was that old petition—God help the sailors on their ships—one feels like saying it tonight."

When Scripps had gone, Giles opened the papers José had brought that afternoon. One of them was the little weekly Granitehead sheet. His eyes glancing idly over its pages were caught by a headline and held. It told of the death of Adelaide Delafield at her home in Baltimore. Her grand-niece, Joan Dudley was by her bedside when it happened. Granitehead would remember that Mrs. Delafield and her niece had spent the summer at one of the big hotels.

So the worldly old woman was gone. He wondered if she and Joan had been reconciled before that passing. He wondered, too, if Joan would have the money. If she was at last what everybody had thought her—the heiress of a rich woman.

Oh, well, if she were, it would not spoil her. She would be the same Joan—sincere and sweet and simple in the midst of her wealth. His heart yearned over her. He longed to comfort her. She had not wanted his love, but was there not some way in which his friendship might meet her need?

Leaning back in his chair, he listened to the storm. All the tumult of it was in his soul. Back of him was the tragedy of those years in France, ahead of him all the tragedy of a thwarted future. Yet . . . one must not think of that . . . one must dwell, rather, on the deep significance of suffering. Gethsemane? And the world found a saviour! Out of travail came strength, purification. It was old-fashioned to speak of such matters, but wise men knew them.

He rose, impulsively, and went to the telephone. He got long distance, gave the number. While he waited for the call, he looked at the clock. It was late—after eleven . . .

The bell rang sharply. He picked up the receiver. The operator's voice: "Just a moment." Then, thrillingly, another voice—Joan's.

The blood pounded in his temples. "Joan, this is Giles Armiger . . ."

After that, the all too quick interchange of words, and then the wide, still space of silence between them.

As he hung up the receiver a great wave of emotion engulfed him. He dropped into a chair in front of the fire and found himself breathing as a man

who has run too fast.

He sat there for a long time thinking about her. Going back and back . . . : *you're not a dryad? . . . it was a heavenly dance . . . and for a partner Apollo!*

And then those later days when in the shop she had revealed to him her fear of disillusionment . . . that dark night in the pavilion . . .

The fire was dying. The storm raged and roared. And suddenly in the midst of it the telephone rang.

Giles sprang to it. Joan again? Joan? Who else at this hour?

But the voice at the other end was a man's—William's. "For God's sake, Giles," he was saying hoarsely, "help us out. The baby's desperately ill, and the sea has covered the causeway. The doctor says he can't drive over and there's no one to bring him in a boat. I'd go in a minute, but I can't leave the light. And Dilly's half crazy. I knew how it would be. I told her . . ."

Giles stopped him, "Don't dig up past history. Tell me this. Is the doctor willing to go in my boat, if I'll take him?"

"Yes. But I don't believe you can make it. It's an awful night . . ."

"I can try."

"It's a new doctor, Giles. His name is Macdonald. The old man is in Florida. They have the same office. I don't know a thing about him. But if we don't have some one, the baby will die."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll get Macdonald over."

"I hope you can make it."

"I shall. Tell Dilly to hold tight, and we'll be there."

He snapped the receiver on the hook and going out through the kitchen ascended the back stairs and woke José. The two men spoke softly together. Then José asserted, "It will take two. I will go with you."

"No. There's enough risk for one. I shall be all right, and don't tell anyone I'm away. You might go down to the kitchen and lie on the couch. Then you can hear the telephone. I'll call up as soon as I get to the lighthouse."

José showed his perturbation: "May the blessed Virgin guide you."

The two men on their way to the boathouse stumbled through drifts of

snow. The wind beat and buffeted them. "Don't worry," Giles said, as he stepped into the boat, "and tell Margarida I shall want a whale of a breakfast."

Giles driving his boat in the wild night was aware of a strange exaltation. His battle with the elements gave him an outlet for the excitement which had stirred him since his conversation with Joan.

Yet in spite of his exaltation, he knew the danger he was facing. The great waves lifted the boat to staggering heights, then plunged it down to incredible depths. He felt the sharp sting of the snow in his face. The darkness was like a thick curtain, except when the wind blew the whirling flakes away from William's big light, so that Giles saw it and steered by it. The cold was intense, the distance great. Making Granitehead would be harder than he had anticipated. But he meant to make it.

He was halfway there now—three-quarters. He swept around the peninsula and into the harbor. As he came to the quieter waters, he knew his fatigue. He tied his boat to the pier and went through the deserted streets. The water that had swept over him had frozen to his cap and coat. He chose to make a joke of it when he reached the doctor's door and was admitted. "I'm not sure," he said as he stepped into the lighted hall, "whether I am Charon or Santa Claus."

The doctor held out his hand, "My dear fellow, you've had a hard pull. The lighthouse keeper telephoned you were coming, and my wife made some coffee."

The doctor's wife, a pretty little woman in a pink dressing gown, said: "It is awful you two should be called out on such a night. And the chances are that all the baby has is the colic."

"No," Giles told her, "she has a sensible mother. Things must be bad or William wouldn't have been so insistent."

"But it's a dreadful storm—and dangerous."

He saw what she feared and tried to soothe her, "The worst of it was getting here from the island. We'll have nothing to do now but cross the harbor and round the Point."

But he knew and the doctor knew that rounding the Point was a thing not to be talked about.

When Giles had finished his coffee, the doctor kissed his wife and they went out. "If it wasn't for our women," the doctor said, as they went away, "things would be easy. It's because we hate to hurt them that we lose our nerve."

Giles quoted: “ ‘He travels fastest who travels alone . . .’ ”

“Yes,” the young doctor agreed, “but how much he misses . . .”

Giles thought of that as he again fought with the elements . . . how much he misses . . . how much he misses . . . !

The doctor was a cheerful and courageous passenger. He raised his voice above the howling of the storm and tried to carry on a conversation. Yet when they came to the Point he was silent.

They were furiously assailed now by the outside seas. Giles holding his boat to its course as best he could linked himself in his mind with a moving picture he had seen some years ago. There had been a man caught in a storm like this . . . it seemed to Giles that he was that man . . . his boat buffeted by the waves . . . the snow in a wild dance . . .

Suddenly the great light shone out just above them . . . stabbing the dark like a flaming sword.

They swept into a quiet cove, and found the landing place. The doctor leaped out and Giles followed him. There was a wild run up the sands to the little house, its warmth and glow as the door was flung open, and William’s great voice shouting: “Dilly, darling, here’s the doctor.”

But Dilly bending over the baby in her arms said, with heaviness, “It’s too late.”

It was not too late. The young doctor knew a thing or two. New things they had done to the babies in hospitals . . . at the eleventh hour. In a second he had all three of them helping him—Giles and William and Dilly.

An hour later the baby was sleeping naturally, and then the young doctor said to Dilly, “We shall want something to eat, all of us. I’ll sit here by the child.”

Dilly understood why he had sent her away. To be busy would steady her. As she worked off her hysteria in a wild beating-up of eggs, she marvelled at the doctor’s skill. Such a man was next to God. Such healing was a miracle! As much as the laying on of hands!

Giles telephoned to José and to the doctor’s young wife. “We will stay all night,” he said, “and hope for better weather in the morning.”

Dilly had a royal meal for them—savory sausages and griddle cakes and maple syrup. The doctor ate ravenously, but Giles was not hungry. “I’m dead for sleep,” he said, “if you don’t mind I’ll turn in, I can’t keep my eyes open.”

Dilly took him to the guest room. “The doctor wants to stay close to the baby. Oh, Giles, if it hadn’t been for you, my baby would have been dead.”

“You’d better say, if it hadn’t been for the doctor.” He saw her tears and kissed her on the cheek.

William who was behind her received her then in his arms and she clung to him, crying.

When they had gone, Giles threw himself on the bed, and fell into disturbed slumber. All night long in his dreams he fought the storm; he saw the man in the movies, who was himself, struggling in the icy grip of the elements. All night long he was aware that the thing he was fighting for was not to save Dilly’s baby but to save Joan . . . who was being wrecked on the rocks . . .!

In the morning he staggered up to find that it had stopped snowing and that the sun was out. Dilly, white but smiling, was busy in the kitchen. “William has taken the doctor over to see the light. They’ll be back for breakfast.”

“I thought we’d had one breakfast.”

“At four in the morning? And you didn’t eat anything.”

He didn’t eat anything when again they sat at the table. The young doctor casting on him a speculative eye said, “Aren’t you feeling fit?”

“I’ll be all right when I get rested.”

The gray boat, as they returned over the route they had taken in the storm, rode now through sparkling waters. “There is something cruel in a morning like this,” Giles remarked, “after a night when men have fought for their lives.”

“Nature is always cruel,” the doctor agreed, “and it is only when man gets away from her and finds the grace of God that he is kind.”

Giles glanced at him in surprise. He was a round faced little man, skilful and scientific, but he had grasped at a great spiritual truth.

When they reached Granitehead, the doctor took Giles up to the house with him, “I’m going to give you something to set you straight. You’ve a bit of hoarseness that I don’t like, nor your loss of appetite.”

The doctor’s wife was waiting at the door. She kissed her husband and clung to him. Giles remembered Dilly in William’s arms. He thought of Joan. If only she might be there to welcome him on the island!

The sea was still rough, and Giles was almost exhausted, when at last José helped him land at the island pier. Giles staggered as he stepped out of the boat. José was solicitous, “You sick?”

“A bit of cold, José. I’ll drink something warm and go to bed.”

But before he went to bed he gave an account of the night to Scripps and Amélie, making light of his adventures. Amélie knew Dilly, but since she shrank from meeting strangers, had seen little of her. “Why should you risk your life for other people’s children?” she demanded, coldly.

“It wasn’t much of a risk, and other people’s children mustn’t die if we can help it.”

“You are always taking chances,” she said, passionately, “there was old Peter . . . you went over that windy day and brought him back.”

“Why not? There was no one to look after him in the shop. He might have starved. And now he adores Margarida’s kitchen. She is always stuffing him. If he doesn’t look out we’ll be having *pate-de-fois-gras* without going far afield for it.”

He laughed, but his head was splitting. “I’m sorry,” he said, “but I’ll have to turn in. I’ll be as right as rain when I’ve slept this off.”

But he was not as right as rain. Before night he had a raging fever, and now it was José who drove the gray boat to town, and brought back the young doctor.

“He’s in for pneumonia,” was Malcolm Macdonald’s verdict, as he came down to the living room, leaving José with the invalid, “I must get some nurses over.”

“I’ll nurse him,” Amélie said.

Macdonald shook his head, “Sorry, but I must have experienced people.”

“He’s my brother,” Amélie spoke with tense insistence, “nobody else shall take care of him.”

The doctor’s shrewd glance studied her. “Of course, he’d want you,” he said, at last, soothingly, “but doctors have to settle these things.”

She yielded to the finality of his tone, and went away to consult with Margarida, and when she had gone, Scripps said, “He’s not her brother. And she is my wife. The war . . . did things to her . . . mentally.”

He gave a brief history of her case. The young doctor listened attentively. “I’ve had some success with people like that,” he remarked at the end. “When things are better with young Armiger, I’ll take her case in hand. But I don’t dare give much hope.”

“You’ll open a new heaven and a new earth,” Scripps said, “if you can bring back to her eyes the look that I remember.”

The nurses came, one for the day and one for the night. Giles’ condition was very serious. The young doctor going back and forth in the gray boat with José dared not speak of the fear in his heart. Scripps would beg: “Is he better?” and sit brooding by the fire. Dilly telephoning, frantically, said to Scripps, “I feel as if it were our fault . . . for calling him out in the storm.”

“He would never have been satisfied if you had not called him.”

Amélie had no fears. Giles would get well. But she hated the nurses. She grew a bit excitable about it. “It is my place to be there.” Scripps was glad the nurses were in the house. Their quiet competency gave him a sense of safety, not for himself, but for Amélie. “If she gets for a moment out of hand,” Macdonald advised, “they will know what to do.”

But the most dreadful thing that Scripps had to deal with was not Amélie’s excitability but the things he heard when now and then he stood on the threshold of Giles’ room and looked in. He saw his friend lying straight under the bedclothes, his ruffled hair dark against the pillow, his cheeks burning bright with fever. His eyes were shut, but his lips moved, as heavily and painfully came the reiteration, “*Joan, Joan, Joan.*”

“I have robbed him of the thing he wanted,” Scripps accused himself, “after all he has done for me and Amélie . . .”

In the watches of the night he tormented himself . . . if he wrote to Joan, confessing all? Asked her to come? He had heard that such things sometimes turned the tide towards recovery. He said to the doctor: “There is some one he cares for. Do you think if she came?”

The young doctor shook his head. “Not yet. And today he seems a little better . . .”

And now they knew that the worst was over. The nurses relaxed a little. Amélie and Scripps standing in the door were cheered by a smile from the invalid and a weak wave of the hand. But it was not until Christmas Eve that Giles sat up. He had, then, a little tree, which José had cut and which Amélie had trimmed, and it was brought to his bedside. Amélie wore her pomegranate gown, and the lights of the little candles shining on it made her seem like the spirit of the season, not the Christ-spirit, but a mad spirit of revelry and riot such as ruled in certain sections of the land. She had brewed a steaming bowl of punch and she brought it in for Giles and the nurses. She had a wreath on her head of mistletoe. Giles smiled at her, but when at last she went away

satisfied, he said to the night nurse, whose hair was gray and whose hands were wrinkled: “Read to me about the Star . . .” And she read *“And lo the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was . . . and when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, . . .”*

And Giles murmured, “Thank you,” when she had finished . . . and fell peacefully asleep.

It was not until the middle of January that Scripps told what he had done. Giles had been up and about for days, and now in front of the fire with Amélie in bed Scripps began his hard confession.

“Giles,” he said, brokenly, “I’ve been a traitor.”

Giles smiled at him, “You sound ominous.”

But he stopped smiling when he heard Joan’s name. That she had come to the shop one morning, had asked for him, had wanted to leave her address . . . “I told her you were away . . .”

“I was, of course. But why have you kept all this from me, Scripps?”

“Because . . . I told her something else.”

“Yes?” Giles was leaning forward, intent, puzzled.

“I told her . . . that Amélie was sick . . . that you were taking care of her . . . that she was—your wife . . .”

Dead silence. Then, “You told her—that?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I was afraid to have you—love her. I was afraid she might take you away from—Amélie and me . . .”

“You knew me so little . . .?”

“Oh . . . you can’t know such fear as I had of your caring for her. You are my life, Giles. I knew that I had lost Amélie, and it seemed if I lost—you . . .” He struck his hand against his forehead, then leaned on it, the figure of despair.

There was no word from Giles. He sat there with a stern look on his face, his eyes on the fire.

“When you were ill,” Scripps went on desperately, “You called her—called and called.”

Giles turned at that, “I called—Joan?”

“Yes. It was dreadful. I wanted to write to her. To tell her what I had done . . . to beg her to come to your bedside. But the doctor wouldn’t let me.”

“I am glad,” Giles said, “that you waited. It is I who must tell her.” He drew in his breath and stood up.

Scripps, too, got to his feet, waiting with hanging head, like a prisoner at the bar. Then he felt Giles’ hand on his shoulder: “My dear fellow, you did it because you loved me.”

Scripps broke down, sobbing.

“Stop it,” Giles said, “you must not. It isn’t as if I couldn’t tell her . . . you don’t know how glad I am . . . this explains things I haven’t understood.”

“You’ll write to her?”

“Yes.”

Giles wrote that night, dealing gently with Scripps. “We must not blame him. He has not been himself since the war. May I come to you, Joan? I shall have so much to say. Things I cannot put on paper.”

He addressed the letter to the house in Baltimore, and gave it to José to mail. Then he waited for an answer. But none came. So January passed, and February was on the way, and still he had no word from Joan.



CHAPTER TWENTY - TWO

THE CHANGED PRINCESS

“Do you think,” young John Briggs asked his mother anxiously, “that she will come for Christmas?”

“I am sure she will.”

“But she hasn’t written.”

“Dear child, she has a thousand things to think of.”

“I want her to think of this.”

“We must have patience.”

But young John had no such word as “patience” in his lexicon. He talked about it with Priscilla. “If anybody had asked me to Christmas dinner I’d think it was important.”

“Maybe she has more important things than just us.”

“Why aren’t we more important?”

“Well, she has a lot of friends. And now she’s rich.”

Her brother stared, “Who’s rich?”

“Joan. I heard mother telling grandfather . . . she’s going to have all of her aunt’s money. It was in the paper.”

Young John considered that. He and his sister were in the barn. It was bitter cold, but they were wrapped up warmly. They were getting corn for the chickens, and presently they would go across a stretch of snowy ground to the chicken-house and shell the corn, and feed it to the waiting fowls. Young John, laying yellow ears in a basket, said, “Now that she’s rich she can have all the oysters she wants. I’m not going to save my pennies.”

“Oh, John . . .”

He flung out, frowning, "And she'll be different."

"How different?"

"Oh, she'll have diamonds all over her, and hold her head in the air . . ."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, you ask mother."

After they had fed the chickens, the children went into the big kitchen and put the question up to Evelyn. "Will Joan be different?"

"Why should she be?"

"Because she's rich. And John says she'll hold her head in the air . . . and he says he isn't going to save his pennies, because she can have all the oysters she wants without ours."

Evelyn breaking eggs into a bowl, said, "I'm ashamed of you, John."

"Why, mother?"

"To think that money will change Joan Dudley."

"But it will change her," he insisted, with almost uncanny prescience, "you'll see when she comes, mother."

But when she came over on Christmas morning, she seemed just the same, holding out her arms to them and saying, "You darlings, how glad I am to see you." And when she took off her coat there were no diamonds, but just a black dress and a long string of pearls.

And she tied on one of Evelyn's big white aprons and went out into the kitchen to help, sending Penelope in to talk to old John and his wife. And the children hanging about, entranced and eager, showed her the oysters, cool in a blue pitcher set in the pantry window, and waiting to be made into soup, and Priscilla said, triumphantly, "We bought them," and young John rebuked her, "You shouldn't say so much about it."

"I want you to say it," Joan insisted, "and say that you love me, both of you."

"We do—we do . . ." they threw themselves upon her. But young John, presently, voiced an almost vanished skepticism, "Do you love us, Joan?"

"Of course."

"As much as ever?"

"Yes, why not?"

“Mother says you’re rich.”

There was a startled silence, then Joan asked slowly, “What if I am?”

“Well, it might make a difference,” young John told her.

“What kind of difference?”

“Well, you might be stuck up.”

Cilla broke in, “He said that to mother, and she said he ought to be ashamed of himself.”

“He ought . . . oh, Johnnie-boy, don’t you know that I’m the same?” She bent on him her earnest gaze.

“You want to be the same. But can you?”

She flamed at that. “I can be. Why not?”

“Oh, well. I wondered.”

She wondered, too. Was still wondering as she helped Evelyn serve the dinner. Her mind went over and over the old ground. What did it mean, after all, this inheritance? It had for her as yet no reality. She had no sense of adventure in it. The adventure she had wanted was that of high romance. The thought of affluence had for her no enchantment. Without fulfilment of her dreams it would be a weight upon her.

Evelyn was saying, “My dear, I can’t imagine the heiress of millions beating up mashed potatoes. But I am letting you do it because I know you’d hate me if I didn’t.”

“I should. Oh, Evelyn, the children were afraid I might be changed.”

“Yes. I rather think they expected to see you draped in jewels and drawn by ostriches like Rosamund in the fairy tale.”

The two women smiled at each other. Joan’s smile was wistful: “I’m terribly afraid of it all, Evelyn.”

Evelyn understood, “I know. But you mustn’t be. Ever. Things can be so beautiful for you, my dear. You must think of that.”

Beautiful? With Drew? Without him? Which? Oh, it was all such a—muddle!

As she went finally into the dining room, the clicking of her pearls against the buckle on her black dress reminded her of the night when she had gone down the stairs to meet her lover. He had called . . . and she had obeyed . . .

But Giles' call had been stronger . . . coming through the storm . . . She had found strength to leave Drew because Giles had called . . .

The oysters were delicious . . .

And Joan said to the children, "Do you know why this is the nicest soup in the whole wide world?"

They said together, "No."

"Because it is seasoned with self-sacrifice, and flavored with love . . ."

The children sighed with contentment. Dear Joan was the same . . .!

Old John Leonard carved the turkey. It dropped away in melting slices from his knife. He served first his old wife, for whom his life had been spent. She sat beside him. Now and then she laid her hand on the sleeve of his rough coat in a little gesture of tenderness, and always he would turn to her, "My dear," and would touch the thin white fingers.

Joan, watching, felt a pain at her heart—Would Drew ever be like that—all tenderness? Would he and she grow old together . . . loving? Would he have for her then the look in his eyes that came into the eyes of old John Leonard when he turned to his wife?

She knew he would not. If she were old and frail and sick Drew would want none of her. Drew liked her youth, her loveliness. Most men were like that . . .!

But not men like old John Leonard . . .!

Not men like young Giles Armiger . . .!

His name leaped in her mind like a flame. Why had she linked him with old John Leonard? What did she know of his tenderness? His constancy? Nothing—except the memory of the things he had said in the dim old bookshop and that dark night of storm in the pavilion . . .

And the memory, too, of the verse he had found for her . . . *in the time of trouble he shall hide me* . . . The words had comforted her in the days of stress and readjustment which had followed the funeral. They had been like a kind voice speaking . . . a kind hand held out . . .

When dinner was over, Joan said, "Now everybody help clear away, and then we'll open all the boxes."

She had brought dozens of parcels when she had arrived, and they were

shut in the sitting room, the children having had instructions not to look at them. "And really," Joan had told them, "you can't tell anything from the outside. The big ones aren't the most interesting. It's the littlest ones which are the best."

The clearing-away was most exciting. Even old John Leonard went back and forth with dishes. Penelope had pans of hot suds, and Evelyn had relays of fresh towels, and before they knew it the dishes were done, young John had put fresh logs on the sitting-room fire, and there they all gathered in a circle.

And Joan said, "Will somebody play Santa Claus?"

And old John Leonard said, "You must play Santa Claus yourself."

And Joan said, "But I haven't a red coat or a white beard."

And Cilla said, with eagerness, "You could have a red wreath," so she and Joan ran away together, and when they came back, Joan's head was bound with a red ribbon, with a bunch of holly berries at each side, and as young John said, from her neck up she looked like Christmas!

Then the boxes were opened and out from them came books for old John Leonard; a warm light rug of imported plaid for his wife; for Evelyn a beautiful fur to set off her simple suit, and for the children everything that was lovely and gay and that they had wished for all their lives.

"Oh, darling, darling," Cilla sang over her wrist watch, and young John, bright-eyed and solemn with happiness laid his cheek against Joan's and said, "You're nicer than a princess."

And Joan was very happy in her wreath of red and in the happiness she was giving to others. And it was not until she was going home with Penelope that she grew afraid again. It was growing dark as they neared the house, and a gray sky hung over a sullen sea. Joan knew that when she entered the house she would have to face her thoughts. To look into the future. To plan—with that awful feeling of doubt. That awful feeling of futility. They had said she was unchanged, but she knew it wasn't true. She would never be the same again—never—never!

They descended from the car, and walked up the path together. They opened the door and went in. Joan moved about the living room, lighting the lamps, while Penelope mended the fire.

Then, suddenly, Joan found herself clinging to Penelope, and crying as if her heart would break.

"My dear, my dear, what has happened?"

“Penelope . . . I’m afraid.”

“Of what, my dear?”

“Of life.”



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DESOLATION

Giles' convalescence was slow: "You need a change," the doctor told him, "why don't you go south?"

Giles shook his head. "I must stay by things here."

"You mean, Scripps and his wife?"

"Yes."

Macdonald considered that. "She's no better?"

"Sometimes I think she's worse. Of late she has had a grudge against the old gull, Peter. She flies into a rage when I pet him."

"Better keep him out of her way. She might hurt him."

"Surely not."

"One never knows . . ." he smoked for a moment in silence, then asked: "You're not hard pressed in money matters?"

"No."

"I'd like to try an experiment. But it will be costly."

"I have enough and to spare. My tastes are simple. I don't use half my income."

"And yet you sell books?"

"Why not? It's an ancient and honorable profession. And an outlet for my energies. Since the war I've been tied here. Hard work helps to keep me contented."

"Some men would have taken to sports—golf."

"And run with the summer crowd, the country club set? I prefer the

townspeople. They are like my forbears—sturdy folk and busy ones.”

The doctor leaned back in his chair, his shrewd eyes narrowed in thought. “If you were free—what then?”

“You mean if it were not for Scripps and Amélie?”

“Yes.”

“I wouldn’t be here.”

“Where would you be?”

Giles hesitated, then told the truth, “I’d be fighting for the woman I love.”

“Joan?”

“How did you know?”

“You talked about her when you were ill.”

“Scripps said that I did. Well . . . it’s a long story. There’s another man who wants to marry her. He’ll get her if he can, and my hands are tied.”

Macdonald leaned back in his chair. “Don’t be Quixotic. Your life is your own. If this girl belongs to you, you’ll be a fool to let Scripps and his wife spoil things for you.”

“Scripps would do more for me than I am doing . . .”

“Granted. But why take self-sacrifice as inevitable? There may be a better way out. I’ve wanted to suggest it for some time. That’s why I asked about your finances. What I have in mind is that you should take Amélie to Paris.”

“To Paris—why?”

“I’d like to re-create the old scenes for her, and work on that. Have Scripps wear his uniform—take her to the same restaurants, the same places of amusement . . . reconstruct the war atmosphere as much as possible, and watch for evidences of memory.”

“Do you think there’s the slightest chance?”

“More than a chance.”

Giles was eager. “There’d be a new heaven for Scripps and me, if Amélie could be herself again.”

“We must be careful not to hold out too much hope. What I want is to find the right nurse to go with you—someone mature and sensible. You could say to Amélie that you felt it best to have a woman companion to travel with her.

And the nurse would be always on the alert. She wouldn't seem to watch, but nothing would escape her. A little later my wife and I could come over, and I could note the effect of the experiment. In the mean time there would be wonderful specialists within reach whom you could consult."

They talked about it for a long time, and when at last the doctor departed, the plans were fixed. "This house is deadly and depressing. You need to get away from it."

Giles knew that he needed it. When the doctor had gone he sat thinking of it all. If Amélie could be cured and he could fight for Joan! He found himself beating his fist on the arm of his chair. Even if Amélie was not cured, he must fight for Joan. Hallam would be after her hot-footed now that she had money. And he must not have her.

When his letter had remained unanswered, Giles had tried to get in touch with Joan by telephone. He had called up the Baltimore house, and Jason had answered guardedly that Miss Dudley was out of town. Giles, hanging up the receiver, had thought with bitterness that the heiress must, of course, be protected. Her address must be given only to those who had the right to know it.

He resolved to write to her again, at Penelope's, and if he had no response to go and find her. He must find her. Rich or poor . . . poor or rich . . . he would seek her and show her his heart.

The house was wrapped in silence. Amélie and Scripps had gone upstairs. José was taking the doctor home across the moonlighted seas. Margarida was asleep in her room above the kitchen. There was no sound in the serene night except the soft swish of lazy breakers on the beach and the clear musical clang of a bell-buoy as the waves rocked it.

Then suddenly across the silence came an astounding clamour . . . cries that were not human . . . cries of a bird in distress!

Old Peter!

The lame gull spent most of his time in the kitchen. Margarida had made a great pet of him, and he had a warm corner to himself. It was from the kitchen that the cries now came. Giles covering swiftly the intervening space, flung open the door to face an incredible scene. Margarida had left a faint light burning for José's return, and by that light Giles saw Amélie, a wild figure in a flame-colored negligee, with old Peter flapping and screaming in her arms.

Her fingers were at his neck, and Giles when he reached her had to use all of his strength to release the frightened bird. He held Amélie while she struggled, and at last she relaxed, sobbing: "I don't like him, Giles. I don't like him. He is lame. And Scripps is lame. And I want things about me that are well. I want things that can fly and run. I want to run away with you, Giles . . . and leave all this behind me . . ."

"Hush," he said, as he saw Scripps in the door and Margarida.

He made no explanation. Why lie when they knew the truth? But he sent Margarida up with Amélie, and took Scripps with him into the living room.

"My God," Scripps said, when they were alone together, "she was trying to kill him, Giles."

"Yes. The doctor warned me."

"You didn't tell me."

"You had enough to bear."

Scripps dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands. Giles' arm went about his friend's shoulders: "Shall I tell you what Macdonald said?"

"Yes."

Giles was cautious: "Of course we can't be sure of anything," but when he had finished, he asked, "Are you willing to go through with it?"

"I'd go through hell if I might have her back."

For a long time they talked about it. When Giles went upstairs Amélie was asleep. Old Margarida sat by the bed. The old woman was a tower of strength. "I will lie on the couch tonight," she whispered, "I gave her something to keep her quiet."

That night old Peter slept in Giles' room, and the next day José took him over to stay with Dilly. "You'd better get away at once," Macdonald advised, "the monotony is bad for her, and a change may work wonders."

A nurse was found and she and Amélie went back and forth to Boston, buying things. Amélie would come home gay and interested, and when the boxes arrived would open them and show their contents to the two men. "I'm leaving a lot to buy in Paris. But I adore my travelling outfit and my lovely shoes . . . I have six pairs of them. Am I too extravagant, Giles?"

"Get what you like," he said, smiling.

"You're a darling."

Later when she was alone with him, she sighed: "I wish Scripps were not going."

"Why?"

"Oh, if it could be just you and I."

"We must not think of ourselves. And Scripps is lonely."

It had been decided that the two shops were to be closed indefinitely. And it was in settling up his own affairs that Giles found business to take him to Portland. He had written to Joan at Penelope's, and had had no word. Well, he would seek Penelope himself. He would tell her the truth, frankly. He found himself keen to talk to the wise and gracious woman, to have her counsel.

Before he went, however, he found himself confiding in Dilly. "You remember Joan Dudley?"

"Yes. Where is she?"

"I can't find her. I've written and had no answer. And now I'm going up to Maine to see the woman she stayed with before she got her money."

"I read of her aunt's death. Is Joan very rich?"

"Too rich for her own happiness, perhaps."

There was a moment's silence, then Dilly asked, softly, "You love her?"

"Yes."

"And you will find her and tell her so?"

"Sometimes I wonder if I should. What have I to give a woman like that? She has everything."

"A woman has nothing who hasn't love. And, oh, Giles, tell it to her. So many men don't tell their love, and they let a woman weary for it. They think her so far above them . . . a star in the skies . . . and they let her go . . . because they are proud . . . and don't understand. And the woman's heart aches to the end of the world."

There were tears in her eyes. Giles said: "Dilly, how do you know so much about it?"

"Because there was a time when William didn't tell me. He was afraid . . . and I waited and waited . . . And at last, I had to tell William . . ." she was trying to smile through her tears, "he had loved me all the time and I knew it . . . but I had to do the telling. It wasn't easy, Giles. And some women would have been too proud . . . but I couldn't be proud—with William . . ."

He reached out a hand to her, “Dear child . . . He adores you.”

She nodded. “I know. And perhaps I shouldn’t have told you this. But men are so—stupid . . . and I didn’t want you to be stupid, Giles.”

When a few days later, Giles motored along the North Shore, Dilly’s words kept coming back to him. “They let her go . . . because they are proud . . . and a woman’s heart aches to the end of the world.”

Would Joan’s heart ever ache that way for him? Well, please God it should not ache for any word unsaid.

He came to Penelope’s house at noon. He had left his car in the town and had walked through the woods. It was mid-February and warm for the season, so that the snow had melted in spots, and there were clear brown patches of dead needles ringed round with white, with a soft dampness in the atmosphere which spoke of spring. The slight heat brought out the aromatic fragrance of the pines, and beyond the woods the clouds floated like pale gold galleons on an azure sea.

The house as he approached it was lighted up and glowing with the sunshine which washed over it. Yet as he ascended the steps, he saw that it was deserted. The windows were shuttered, dry leaves were in high drifts on the porch, and there was snow in the colder corners. He saw no signs of life except where the pigeons preened themselves on the barn roof, and the squirrels showed like fleeting shadows as they sought their hiding-places.

In spite of the sunshine, Giles felt the chill of desolation. He took the path to the barn and came upon an old cat who pattered on quick feet towards him, her tail waving.

He greeted her, “Where are your people, Puss-cat?”

She answered with an eager cry, and as he went on into the wood she followed him.

And so it happened, that when young John Briggs and his sister, Priscilla, walked in the wood, they saw a man standing by a tree, with a gray cat curled comfortably in the crook of his arm. He was looking down at her and did not see the children until they were upon him.

They said, “Hello,” and stopped.

“Oh, hello . . .” he smiled at them, “I came to see Mrs. Sears.”

“She’s away,” young John stated “and the cat is the barn cat. We are keeping Muffet and her kittens at our house. But this cat lives in the hay loft

and likes it, and we come over every day and feed her and feed the pigeons and feed the squirrels, and Joan gives us each a dollar a week for doing it.”

Giles’ voice thrilled: “Joan? Do you mean Miss Dudley?”

“Yes. She lives with Mrs. Sears. And she’s got more money than the President.”

Priscilla rebuked her brother, “John, you mustn’t say such things.”

“Well, she has got more money.”

“But mother says we are not to talk about it.”

“If you don’t mind,” Giles said, “I’d like to talk about Miss Dudley. I know her, and I came to see her.”

“Well, you can’t see her,” young John said, “she isn’t coming back.”

“When did she go away?”

“In January.”

“And Mrs. Sears is with her?”

“No. Aunt Penelope’s uncle is sick. He lives in the south. And his wife died. So she went. And Joan stayed here. And she didn’t like it. So one day she came over and told us ‘Good-bye.’ And she isn’t coming back for a long time . . . and she took her maid with her . . . and a lot of trunks . . . and . . .”

But Giles was not interested in extraneous details. “Where did she go?”

“To Spain.”



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

ROSE TO THE RESCUE!

Joan, having crossed the frontier from France to Spain, was racking along with Farley in a lumbering “Diligence” into which the passengers had been bundled when an accident happened to their train. The ark-like vehicle was cramped and crowded and bitter cold with the piercing winds which blew down from the Sierras.

Farley, sitting straight and disapproving beside her mistress, commented, “You’ll catch your death.”

Joan shook her head, “I’m as warm as toast with this rug over me. You’d better take my fur coat, Farley.”

“I don’t want it, Miss Joan. I wear red flannels. I don’t hold with those wisps of crêpe in winter time.”

Joan flashed a smile at her. Farley was a great delight. The Englishwoman’s lack of humor and her unawareness of it made her seem perpetually like one of the figures in a comic sheet, who while playing out their own drama of life with seriousness, are side-splitting to the spectator.

“We’ve got to eat at an inn in the next town,” Farley stated with a sort of breathless indignation, “and stay all night. We can’t get a train until morning. I never heard of such management.”

“But you’ve never been to Spain,” Joan reminded her, “Farley, look at that girl down near the door, with the crescent curl on her cheek. She’s like somebody out of a book.”

“Bold and brazen, I call her.”

Joan’s laugh rippled, and then the two of them ceased to talk as they watched the animated scene about them. Everybody else was talking, and there was a wealth of gesticulation, much showing of white teeth, much coquettish

tossing of heads. Crowded thus into the lantern-lighted wagon, the Spaniards showed a picturesqueness which they had lacked in the more modern setting of the train—and their faces were like those in the paintings by Goya—the women with a certain dark sweetness, the men saturnine, clean-shaven, mahogany-colored.

No men here like the men in Maine—like old John Leonard—rugged of build, their faces chiselled with the fine lines of stern purpose, their eyes lighted by the laughter which is their Yankee inheritance. No women here, like those slender Puritan goddesses, silver and white and blue, who come to old age as a birch tree comes to its winter, still slender and straight, though stripped of their summer charm.

These women and these men—a whole world of difference between them and Joan's own people. Romance here was guarded by iron *grilles* and shut away by high walls. Love-making was a matter of secretive signals; a flash of the eye, the wave of a hand, a rose tossed from a window, a guitar serenading in the night. Hot blood was held in leash by the presence of a duenna. Yet everywhere there was an awareness of the passionate adventure. Joan felt as if she moved in a medieval world . . . "It's a sort of Canterbury pilgrimage," she said to Farley. Then laughed as Farley said: "I wish it was Canterbury."

They arrived at the inn to find it a dusky place, with clean rooms whose windows showed a shadowy mountain range, its peaks reaching up towards a star-spangled sky. When they had made themselves ready for dinner, Farley and Joan went down to eat at a long table with other passengers from the coach. There were big dishes of fruit on the table, and coarse but heavy napery. Joan had an egg poached in oil, a bowl of lettuce, crisp, sweet bread, and at the end golden-skinned grapes and fresh figs. Other people at the table ordered heartier foods—roast meats and platters of vermicelli, partridges dressed with burnt sugar, duckling with Guava jelly, veal delicately breaded and with a distinctive sauce, but Joan was satisfied with her more delicate choice, and felt a sense of esthetic repletion.

Later when she got into bed, she found a hot water bag at her feet. "You'd freeze before morning without it," Farley informed her mistress.

"Would I?"

Then as the maid opened the window for the night and let in a stream of icy air, Joan curled down into the warmth of her nest. "It's heavenly," she said, and smiled sleepily, and Farley, tucking her in, said, adoringly, "You look as snug as a kitten."

When Farley had gone, Joan lay gazing out through the open window into

the night. So she was really in Spain! She had come because of a letter from Nancy Hallam—a letter which had arrived when Joan was feeling desolate, with Penelope gone, with the winter winds howling about the house, with the winter snows drifting high.

Penelope's old uncle had begged her to stay with him for a time. "Since his wife's death," Penelope wrote, "he seems feeble and ill. I cannot desert him."

Farley had come to the house in the woods to keep Joan company. There was also a cook brought from Portland, because Farley did not belong in the kitchen, and Joan could not, of course, play chef to her maid. And with these formalities had come a lessening of the charm of the old house in the woods. Penelope's sturdy and strong personality had, while she was there, pervaded everything. She and Joan had seemed to preserve together the unities of simple living as they had swept and dusted and cooked and washed dishes. But now with Farley's eye as it were upon her; with meals being served to her alone in state and elegance, there came a sense of incongruity. Farley did not fit in, the cook had no real field for her culinary talents, and the place needed its mistress to make it something besides a solitude.

And just as this sense of solitude had begun to weigh upon her, there had come to Joan a letter from Nancy Hallam. It was written from Barcelona, on the paper of a famous hostelry:

"Will you tell me, my dear, what you think you are doing? Shut up there in the woods, like a nun in a cloister? When over here, there's such a world for you to live in? Of course I know that you are bounded on the north and south by Penelope Sears and your own small town traditions, and on the east and west by your romantic ideals and your mid-Victorian conventions. But over here, my child, people live just to be living. They worship the gods of a good time, and if they lose their Edens, they find thrilling interests outside of the Garden! I have always felt that Adam and Eve before the fall dwelt in a somewhat restricted area, and that when they passed out through the gate of Paradise they must have welcomed the chance to frolic.

"Am I shocking you, my little Joan? Oh, well, I want you to come over here and eat the apple . . . to share with us for a time this glad gay world, and if you don't like it, you can go back to your Penelopes and your prunes and prisms.

"But joking aside, I want you to come for Drew's sake. He is absolutely miserable. He watches every mail for a letter and when none comes he is so depressed that it is pitiful. Why be so stingy, Joan, with your little notes? They give him no hint of what is on your mind. Are you trying to punish him? And

if so, why? Surely you can't think that he wants to marry you for your money? There are plenty of rich women in the world. And Drew could have any one of a half dozen. But for him there is just—you. Won't you believe it? Joan, he isn't perfect. I told you that in the beginning. But neither is any man . . . and he cares such an awful lot . . .

"I wouldn't say this if I thought you were happy. But I am sure you are not. And I know that if you shut Drew out of your life, you will hurt yourself horribly. So why crucify yourself? When Drew worships the ground you walk on?

"And now, do come. You'll adore it. You are too young to live up there alone with Penelope and your pussy cats. And Drew and I both love you. Not for what you have, but for what you are. You can believe it or not, but it's true."

It was a very subtle letter. Joan re-read it until certain of its sentences seemed burned in her mind: "Drew is miserable . . . he worships the ground you walk on . . ."

Since she had last seen him in Baltimore, her correspondence with her lover had been intermittent and unsatisfactory. She had refused to let him come to her. "Why keep going over the same old thing?" she had said in reply to his constant reiteration, "I want you for my wife." And when he had urged that she let him come to Maine, she had said: "I'd rather you wouldn't. Something within me seems dead. The old glamour is gone. I don't know whether I can ever recapture it."

At last he had written that he and Nancy were leaving for Spain. "I am to look into some Spanish investments which Nancy and I made some years ago. And since you won't see me the ocean might as well be between us. We must go at once. Joan, won't you take the next boat and join us at Barcelona? I'll promise to be good and not worry you, and perhaps you'll let me try to win my way back to your heart."

His letter had thrown her into a perfect panic of loneliness, but Penelope's safe presence had saved her from flinging everything to the winds and following. "My dear, you must not. Give yourself more time."

But now Penelope was not there to save her, and after reading Nancy's letter, Joan wrote, impulsively, "I am going to Spain, Penelope, to be with the Hallams. I know you won't approve of it, and perhaps I shouldn't have gone if you had been here. But I want to try my wings! Perhaps I'll fly back to you, but I am restless and unhappy. I want something that life isn't giving me. I may find it in Spain. Who knows? Perhaps I'll never find it. But I shall go and

look.”

Farley’s delight when she was told Joan’s plans was unbounded. She frankly hated the woods. She would have preferred London or Paris to Spain, but anything was better than a place where the storms shrieked like lost spirits, and where there was nobody for company but a Portuguese cook and a cat.

So here they were, and Joan, gazing out of the window thought of the morrow and what it would mean to her. She had not told Drew or Nancy that she was coming. She had felt a sort of childish glee in the thought of their surprised delight when they saw her.

The moon shone now above the mountains—a great heavy-hanging moon, like a disc of copper sunk in a sable sea. Joan sat up to look at it. The air was cold and she wrapped her shoulders in a blanket. She felt very much alone in that wide still world. A little afraid of what was before her.

Yet why should she be afraid? Drew loved her and she was going to him. And things would be as they had been at the beginning. Once more the king would come into his own and the queen would be happy!

Yet—would she be happy? Joan got out of bed, went to the window, and stood there with the cold air streaming in upon her. Her face was lifted to the golden sky; her eyes were closed, her hand on her beating heart. She prayed like a child: “Lord, tell me what to do.”

The morning brought sunlight, a courtyard crowded with people as picturesque as a musical comedy chorus, and Farley in an optimistic mood when she entered her mistress’ room with thick hot chocolate on a tray.

Joan, turning away from the window where she had been watching the crowd, said, “Some people have just come in by motor. That’s the way to travel, Farley.”

“Mrs. Delafield always did.”

“Could we get a car here?”

“I can ask.”

“Would it be very expensive?”

“Why should you mind that, Miss Joan?”

Joan laughed, “I keep forgetting.”

“It’s best to remember,” Farley reminded her, “there’s no reason why you

should be stingy.”

Stingy! The word struck Joan with the force of a blow. Drew had called her that on that August morning in Granitehead. And since then things had never been the same. Would they ever be—the same?

Her mind dwelt heavily on that memory until Farley came back, and the two of them were occupied with their new plans. They could, it seemed, ride in the car that Joan had seen in the courtyard. It was a hired conveyance, and the driver had only two passengers—American ladies. He could take two more—he had asked the ladies and they had consented. They were at breakfast, having started early for Barcelona.

When Farley finished her story, Joan said: “What luck! Have you seen the ladies, Farley?”

“No, Miss. But I fancy they’re the right sort. And I asked about the driver. The people here at the inn know him, and he’s safe and respectable.”

When a little later Joan went downstairs, she stood for a moment looking in at the door of the dusky dining room. Everybody was eating breakfast, so that the tables were crowded, and plates were heaped with fried fish and bacon and eggs, and other hearty foods were being eaten in a hurry.

Joan was aware of eyes upon her—steady, appraising eyes. She was still wearing mourning, and her face was framed by a helmet of black felt and by the black fur collar of her coat, which gave to her skin a cameo-like clearness. Her eyes under their long lashes had the deep blue of sapphire seas, and the hair which showed beneath the helmet was soft and shining.

As she moved on, feeling uncomfortable under the steady gaze of the men, she heard some one call her name: “Joan . . . Joan Dudley!”

She turned back to see a woman standing up at one of the tables and waving. A young woman in an orange coat which was like a splash of sunlight in the dusky room. Joan had a confused sense that there was something familiar about that orange coat. Something which had happened a long time ago.

For the woman who wore the coat was Rose Carter!

Joan threaded her way between the crowded tables, and Rose leaned across her own to say, “My dear, how amazing to meet you here.”

“Isn’t it? When did you come? You were not on the train.”

“No. We motored up this morning.”

Mrs. Carter who had shaken hands with Joan said: "We motored up here for breakfast, because they told us the food was good. We had an atrocious dinner last night at the hotel where we stopped."

"The food here is marvellous," Joan agreed. "Last night I ate things that were quite different and delicious, and the chocolate this morning was heavenly."

She hardly knew what she was saying. For it had come to her as she stood there that these two were the Americans with whom she and Farley were to ride. Could anything be more incredible and more irritating. She hated the thought of it. And why was Rose on her way to Barcelona?

She said: "I fancy we're to share your car. Farley made the arrangement . . . there were two American ladies the man told her."

Rose laughed, "Queer thing our all happening to meet here, isn't it? But we shall be glad to have you. Mother and I are being terribly bored by each other. We've been in Paris for weeks. In a ratty little pension. And you will have so much to tell us. My dear, what a change in your life."

"You mean—Aunt Adelaide's death?"

Rose was blunt: "I mean—your money."

"Oh, *that* . . ." Joan put that aside with a gesture. "I really don't know what to do with it. And I haven't spent much. I asked Farley this morning if motoring would be too expensive."

"Nothing is too expensive, if one can afford it," Rose said. "Drew and Nancy should teach you that."

She hesitated for a moment, then: "I suppose you are going to join the Hallams?"

Joan countered, "Are you?"

"Yes. Drew wrote that Barcelona was deadly. It sounded like an S.O.S., so we jumped into a car and came."

All the blood in Joan's body seemed to surge and retreat. She was dizzy with the reaction. An S.O.S.—Rose to the rescue! The two of them arriving—together!

She tried to speak with calmness. "Drew and Nancy don't even know I'm coming. I decided at the last minute."

"Drew will be thrilled."

Joan blushed, and hated herself for blushing. And she hated the thought that she was going on with Rose to Barcelona. Had she come all the way for this? To ride neck and neck with Rose Carter for Drew's favor?



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE NIGHT MAIL

It was on the way to Barcelona that Rose said, bluntly, "Have you and Drew made up?"

Joan stiffened, but she managed to say lightly, "Who told you we had fallen out?"

"Drew did . . . or at least he said the engagement was off. And everybody is saying that when you came into a fortune you threw him over."

Joan seething within, gave a careless laugh, "I am sure Drew did not tell you that."

Rose glanced at her, weighing the calmness and coolness of this still, white maiden against the unsophistication of the child she had met at Granitehead. "No, he didn't," she admitted, and then, presently, "Your money has made a difference in you, Joan."

"In what way?"

"You have more poise."

"Have I?"

"Yes. And you aren't taking yourself so seriously. Or Drew."

Which was of course all Rose knew about it. Nothing had ever been so serious to Joan as this matter of meeting her lover. But Rose must never know it—never.

She was glad when they reached Barcelona and could separate. She had had a feeling all along the route that Rose and her mother, as she sat between them, were dragons, ready to pounce upon her if for a moment she lost her head. Which was silly, of course. But none the less disturbing.

She and Farley went at once to the big hotel, and Rose and her mother rode

on to where they could get cheaper quarters.

As soon as she reached her room, Joan called up Nancy, and when she got her, she announced breathlessly, "This is Joan . . . Joan Dudley."

"My dear . . . how unexpected . . . and splendid! How did it happen?"

"I've come—to eat the apple . . ." Joan's laugh tinkled across the wire. She had a sudden uplift of spirits. "Nancy, where's Drew?"

"He's somewhere about. I'll have him paged. And may I come around, and we'll go down and have tea? There are some dancers who are superb. You aren't tired, are you?"

"No. We motored up. I'll tell you about it."

When Nancy came, she found Joan, lovely and remote in her little black hat, a sheer black frock, and her pearls. "Dear child," she said, "you're charming in all that somberness. But if you're going to eat the apple we must have you gay and gorgeous."

"I don't want to seem to forget poor Aunt Adelaide," Joan explained, "for after all she loved me."

"She'll never be the wiser," said Nancy with a touch of flippancy. "If she's in Heaven or the other place, she's not thinking of clothes."

As they went down together, Nancy said, "I've reserved a table. And the boy is looking for Drew."

"Probably Rose Carter has found him."

Nancy stared at her, "Rose Carter?"

Joan nodded, "I motored up with her."

"Rose . . .?"

Joan explained. "She says Drew wrote to her to come."

Nancy said, with calmness, "She lies."

Joan's heart jumped. "Nancy, he must have said something."

"Nothing that she could twist into such a meaning. He adores you, Joan. You needn't be jealous."

"I'm not." But even as she said it she knew that she was jealous . . . horribly so. She confessed, honestly, "It will be deadly, having Rose here. I wanted you and Drew to myself."

“You’ll have us. Heavens, child, haven’t you grasped the fact that there’s no one else for Drew?”

They had come into the dining room and had made their way to a table, which with others encircled a floor cleared for dancing. There were many tables and many people—a brilliant cosmopolitan crowd, Joan had scarcely time to glance at them, when the room was plunged suddenly into darkness, except for a spot-light which shone on the cleared space of polished floor.

And into that space moved presently, to the click of castanets, two dancers—a marvellous pair—she with her wide lace skirt looped with roses, her slender waist, her smooth hair. He slim in his tight trousers of claret velvet, his sash, his gold-embroidered jacket, his black head shining, his saturnine face calm and composed except for his questing eyes.

There was the thrum of guitars . . . a throbbing note . . . the dancers swayed and dipped. The light followed them, caught the faces of the people in the surrounding darkness, and showed them intent, watching that passionate drama in the ring.

Among those who showed in that circle of light was Drew Hallam. Joan recognized him with a quick beat of the heart. He was leaning forward in his chair, his fingers about the stem of his wine glass, his eyes following eagerly the movement of the dipping, dancing figure in the wide lace skirt.

Here was no forlorn lover sighing to the moon! Drew was the picture of smug satisfaction. Why should Nancy have painted him in such somber colors? Despairing? Desperate?

The light travelled on, following the dancers, and now it was Joan whom it picked out, shining full upon her, framing her face as it had framed her lover’s, showing her pure as a nun in her black coif.

Drew saw her and caught his breath. He did not believe in the least that it was Joan. It was of course a hallucination, born of his thought of her . . .

Yet, if it were? He jumped to his feet—and just then a page, leaning over him, gave him Nancy’s message.

He followed the boy, and arriving presently at his sister’s table bent down to Joan, “It is really you?”

She said, with a touch of frigidity, “Yes.”

“And not a ghost.”

“No.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wanted a surprise . . .”

He dropped into the chair beside her, “I saw you from the other side of the room as the light passed you.”

“I saw you.”

“Joan—are you glad?” he found her hand and held it.

Nancy’s voice broke in. “What do you think, Drew? Joan motored up with Rose Carter. And Rose said you had written.”

“I had,” calmly. His clasp tightened on Joan’s hand as she tried to withdraw it.

“She wrote to me asking me to come to Paris. I wrote back that I wasn’t in the mood for Paris. I wasn’t in the mood for anything—that I was low in my mind because of you.”

“She construed it into an S.O.S.” Nancy said, “and came on.”

Drew uttered an impatient exclamation: “She can go back again for all I care. But how did you happen to link up with her, Joan?”

She told him, “Fate—I fancy . . .” she ended.

He turned to her and said, very low, “She made you unhappy? Did she, Joan? Tell me the truth.”

His spell was again upon her and she spoke honestly, “Yes. I felt as if I wanted to turn back . . .”

“You are not going back . . .”

She did not answer him and for a few moments there was silence, as they watched the dancers treading a new measure. In the darkness, Drew carried Joan’s hand to his lips. “You are not going back,” he said, as if there had been no pause, “I am going to keep you here—forever—”

She fought for composure, “You can’t keep me if I don’t want to stay.”

“You will want to stay,” he rose: “You won’t mind if we leave you, Nancy?”

“I shall mind. But I knew from the first that it was inevitable.” Nancy’s light laughter followed them.

As they came out into the lights of the lobby, Drew asked, “Where can we be alone?”

“Why be alone?” Joan demanded.

He laughed a little, “If you don’t know—why tell you?”

A silence while his eyes held hers, then she surrendered.

“I’ve a sitting room. And Farley can play chaperone.”

“Do we need—a duenna? Well, perhaps, in Spain.”

In the hour she had had to herself Farley had made Joan’s sitting room a place of beauty. She had ordered flowers and set them about so that there was the fragrance of them and the color. On the wide seat below the window which looked out on the mountains, she had flung an apple-green cushion, and with the pink of the azaleas which bloomed on a table beside it, the effect was spring-like and charming.

“Take off your hat,” Drew commanded, “and let me see your hair.”

Joan lifted it, and touched her locks lightly, “Am I all right?”

“With these—” he picked up a bunch of violets from a bowl on the table and wiped the stems on his handkerchief. “Come here,” he commanded.

As Joan went towards him he spoke to Farley, who was moving quietly about in the adjoining room, “Can you get me a pin?”

She brought a big one and retired discreetly. She had the effect outwardly of composure, but within she was much disturbed. So here were the Hallams again! And he with his love-making! And Heaven only knew what would happen to the child if she married him.

Drew arranged the flowers in a shoulder-knot, touched them to his lips and pinned them to Joan’s gown. He did it expertly, and smiled into her upraised eyes; “That’s better,” he said, and then suddenly his voice broke and he caught her to him, “I’ve been starved for you, starved.”

When an hour later Drew went away, Joan sought out the maid. “Farley,” she said, and her voice caught, “Farley, I’m going to be married . . .”

There was a short and significant pause before Farley asked, “To Mr. Hallam, Miss Joan?”

“Yes. In April, Farley.”

There was anxiety in the older woman’s eyes, “Are you sure you know your own mind, Miss?”

“Of course.”

Farley moved about the room beating up the cushions, then suddenly she turned and faced her mistress, “I know it isn’t my place, Miss Joan. But you haven’t any mother. And marriage is a solemn thing.”

Joan stared at her for a moment, then she flung her arms about the other’s neck. “Wish me happiness, Farley,” she said, “I want it so—I want it.”

She was crying now, stormily, “Poor lamb,” Farley said, and patted her shoulder, and then presently she suggested her perennial panacea. “You must have a hot bath, and I’ll get out the white dress with the silver.”

“Yes . . . Drew will like that. He hates black.”

More flowers came up presently, orchids and valley lilies. But it was the shoulder-knot of violets that Joan wore with the white and silver. Nancy coming in with Drew to go down with her said: “Joan, you darling . . .! May I kiss my sister-in-law?”

Joan’s voice was startled, “Did Drew tell you?”

“My dear, he’s shouting it from the housetops.”

Joan turned to her lover, “Do you mean we are to announce it?”

“Why not?”

“Oh, I thought . . . it was just our business.”

“Why hide it . . .” he let it go at that, and went on to say, “Joan, you are perfect in that gown.”

“She is perfect in any gown,” Nancy stated, “and now may I break the news gently that Rose and her mother are coming over after dinner.”

“They won’t see us,” Drew announced, “Joan and I are to ride up the mountains in the moonlight . . .”

“I am not sure,” Joan told him, “that I like Spanish moons.”

“You will like this one.”

“You can’t leave Rose high and dry like that,” Nancy protested, “what shall I tell her?”

“That I am going to marry Joan, and that this is our first evening together.”

Nancy laughed. “There’s no reason why I should turn the knife. And you wrote to her, Drew.”

“A desperate man will do anything.”

Joan let it go at that. Why spoil this supreme moment with doubts?

“Put on your fur coat,” Drew advised her, “we are having a closed car but the winds are biting.”

It was amazing the difference in moons! Last night Joan had hated the heavy-hanging copper disc in the sable sky. It had seemed sinister—spectral. Tonight, as she looked at it as she sat by her lover’s side, her head against his shoulder, the moon was like a beneficent goddess—smiling.

It seemed to her as they sped on and on that all the romance of the ages was pressing in upon them. Along these roads of Spain under other moons had come lovers with their ladies . . . vows had been breathed . . . troths plighted . . .

But no lover more wonderful than hers . . .!

“Do you love me—” she whispered.

“Je vous adore.”

When they came very late into the hotel lobby, they found Rose and her mother with Nancy.

“Runaways,” Rose said, and held out her hand to Drew, “Nancy tells me you are to be congratulated.”

His radiance shone upon her: “Wish me happiness, Rose.”

Her reply was cryptic: “I wish you all that you deserve.”

He laughed, and left them to go to the desk for the night mail. Rose turned to Joan, “How long shall you be staying on?”

“Until we are married.”

Rose looked startled. “Is it to be as soon as that?”

“In April. I shall be running down to Paris for some clothes, but I shall come back here.”

Rose drew her wrap about her. “We must be going, mother,” she said, “Nancy wants us over for bridge tomorrow. We’ll see you then, Joan.”

Joan hardly heard her. Rose had no place at the moment in her shining world. Drew was coming towards her, letters and papers in his hands. As she went to meet him, Joan was aware that the eyes of the men in the lobby were upon them. Most of them knew Hallam, but they were wondering about this

white and silver child who seemed to draw light to herself as she moved forward. Her beauty had a spiritual quality which tugged at the hearts of those watching sophisticates. It was as if she embodied some dream of youth which they had lost.

Drew handed Joan a letter: "It seems to have gone the rounds," he remarked.

Joan glanced at it. The writing had a familiar look, but she did not place it. It had been forwarded, apparently, from Baltimore, to Maine, to Paris.

She tucked it into her bag. She would read it with other letters when she went upstairs.

It was late however before she looked at it, then propped up among her pillows she opened it and knew it was from Giles Armiger.

"My dear—

"May I call you that? You are always that in my heart . . .

"I have just learned that you believe me married. It clears away much that has been hard for me to understand. I have been ill, and when I grew better Scripps told me what he had said to you. Amélie is his wife, not mine. Her mind was disturbed by the horrors of the war. She lost a brother, and thinks I am that brother. So I am bound to the two of them in a strange way, of which I will tell you more when I see you. Scripps guessed that I loved you, and feared the desolation and horror which might come if you cared for me . . . You see? How much sorrow has come out of his fantastic imaginings?

"And now I can say that I love you, and you will know I have the right to say it. I ask nothing, dear child, except that you will let me see you. Perhaps you love Hallam. Perhaps by this time you are already promised to him. I hope not. Even if you are never mine, I want something for you that he cannot give. If you are to be happy love will mean for you . . . constancy, gentle living, a God in your little world of home, children, a husband in whom your heart can rest. Hallam's sails are not set for serene harbors. Forgive me for saying this. I could not do it if you had not in my dim old shop opened your heart to me. And always I am your friend. You know that? Surely you know it.

"May I come to you, Joan? I have so much to say. Things I cannot put on paper. But this I will say in all humility, that I believe I could still your heart as Hallam has not stilled it. Don't you know

this is true? Don't you? I pray God I may prove it to you before it is too late."

The letter ended there. Joan lay back on her pillows, shaken and white. Oh, why should this word have come in the midst of her happiness? What had she to do with Giles Armiger or he with her? She was promised to Drew . . .

She thrust the letter from her . . . her thoughts swung to her ride with Drew, to the moonlight . . . to Drew's whisper, "*Je vous adore.*"

What had she to fear? Nothing. She snapped off the light, then groped in the darkness for the violets she had worn and which Drew had kissed. She laid them on her pillow so that they touched her cheek. Presently she slept.

And in the morning, Farley found Giles' letter where it had fallen on the floor.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

JOAN EATS THE APPLE

In the days that followed Joan lived a life of enchantment. Farley shook her head over it. "It can't last—poor lamb." But she dared not speak her thoughts to Joan. The child was bewitched. Changed. She lived in a mad rush. She bought clothes and more clothes. Jewels. With Nancy helping her. She danced, she motored, she dined, she rode. She would come in after a day of excitement and fling off her wraps and say: "I'm dead for sleep, Farley. Will you shut everything out until I can get forty winks," and Farley would put her to bed and cover her up and draw the curtains, and watch over her until she woke refreshed. Then would come the dinner gown, and Joan would go off ecstatic, only to return in the early hours of the morning, flushed and excited, while the maid expostulated, "Dear lamb, you can't stand this life."

"I can stand anything, Farley, when I am with Drew."

Drew and Nancy knew everybody and, with the announcement of the engagement, invitations poured in. Joan having doffed her mourning entered enthusiastically into the social whirl. It was a gay set in which the Hallams moved, a rather rackety set, indeed, but stimulating. Now and then Joan, thinking of the woods in Maine, wondered how she had lived in such monotony. She wrote to Penelope to announce her engagement. "Of course you won't like it. But you would if you could see my happiness."

Then, as was inevitable, there came one day a reaction. Joan, wandering into a quaint old shop with Drew had bought a fan . . . a lovely thing . . . chicken-skin, delicately painted with rose-wreaths and cupids and lovers'-knots. Rare old lace was set in the border and the sticks of ivory and silver were exquisitely wrought. The price was staggering, but Joan bought it. Drew laughed at her but commended her extravagance. "I like to see you spend. I could do it myself if I had the money. The price of that fan would pay all my gambling debts."

She was startled, “Gambling debts?”

“Bridge,” succinctly, “I’ve been losing.”

She had her check book in her hand. A flush came into her cheeks. “If,” she began uncertainly.

He touched her cheek with the tip of his finger.

“I know what you are thinking . . . but you mustn’t. I’ll pay my debts, my darling, even if I’m not made of money.”

That was, apparently, the end of it. But the thought jarred. Who would pay Drew’s gambling debts after they were married? And why should there be such debts?

But there were more debts than gambling debts. She learned gradually that it was Nancy who held the purse strings. “If I didn’t, Joan, we should be in bankruptcy. Drew’s a child when it comes to finances.”

Joan ventured to speak of the Spanish investments. Nancy shrugged: “They are not doing as well as we hoped. But don’t worry about us, we shall weather it, as we have weathered other storms.”

But Joan did worry. She had so much and Drew had so little. With all her generous soul she wanted to help him, and to do it without hurting his pride. She thought a great deal about it, and one night when he came into her sitting room, moody and unlike himself, and stood staring out of the window, she tucked her arm in his, “Don’t you like me?”

He repeated his lover’s formula, “I love you,” but he did not turn to her.

She leaned her cheek against his coat, “What has happened?”

“Oh, a lot of beastly luck.”

“Bridge again?”

“Yes. And other things.”

She stood opening and shutting her fan. “If you’ll only let me help.”

“No. I’m not dependent on your check book—yet.”

His tone was sharp and stung her. She gave him a startled look: “Are you feeling that way about it, Drew?”

“Yes. A man should give, not take.”

“No,” she said, quietly, “not if a woman loves him. My dearest dear, when we are married you shall be the head of the house . . . its master. You know

that . . .”

He put his arm about her shoulders, and they stood there together, gazing out, “You’re too good for me, Joan,” he said, at last.

“No. Oh, Drew, don’t let my money come between us . . . you break my heart . . .” She clung to him, tears on her cheeks.

“It isn’t that. But I’m a weak fellow with a lot of faults. And some day you’ll find me out—and hate me—”

“Never that,” she shivered a little, although the room was hot.

The Carters dined with them that night. Rose asked towards the end of dinner, “What about the bullfight? Can’t we make up a party?”

“We might,” Drew said, “if it wasn’t for Joan. I’ve been trying to make her think she can go. But she won’t hear of it.”

“I’d hate seeing the poor beasts,” Joan explained.

“You’d forget that,” Rose said. “It’s a rather gorgeous show.”

Joan shook her head, “I’ll stay at home, the rest of you can do as you please.”

“Drew will do as you please,” Rose said, with a touch of venom, “he is quite tied to your apron strings.”

“No, he’s not,” Joan smiled with undisturbed serenity, as she waved her lovely fan to and fro.

Mrs. Carter asked, “Joan, where did you get that fan? It’s exquisite.”

“Isn’t it?” Joan told of its purchase, and Drew added, “This extravagant child paid a fortune for it. There are real pearls in the design.”

Rose was critical. “You don’t know how to use it, Joan. Not in the Spanish manner. Let me show you.” She reached across the table and took the fan from Joan, shook it open with a flourish, and held it before her face, her eyes challenging Drew above it.

Joan had watched her smilingly, but now her smile faded, for it seemed to her that Drew accepted the challenge of Rose’s eyes! She did not want to believe it, but there it was, Rose bold and bewitching . . . Drew held by the boldness . . . bewitched by that flashing glance.

She chided herself for caring. But she did care. She wanted Drew’s eyes for her . . . not for other women. Perhaps it was silly . . . in Drew’s world men paid court to charming femininity wherever they found it . . . married or single,

the game went on. She wondered if when she was married she could stand it to have Drew playing the game?

She told herself that she was not really afraid of Rose. Drew treated her for the most part with a sort of easy tolerance. She amused and flattered him.

She was of his world—and that world was not Joan's. More and more she was aware of it. In spite of her love for Drew, she found herself wondering what her life would be with him. Their standards were utterly different.

She was to him adorable, but a bit mid-Victorian. "It adds to your charm, my sweet, and I wouldn't have you like the others."

Yet he did not take her seriously. Her ideals were, he felt, commendable, but not practical. His plans for their future had an Arabian Nights atmosphere—the old house in Baltimore was to be done over—"Not that we'll be in it a great deal—we'll keep it as headquarters." There would be winters in the south of France, and in Florida, summers at Deauville or Bar Harbor, spring in the Carolinas, autumn at the Virginia Springs—hunting, motoring, flying—these were all a part of his exciting program. "We'll make life a corking adventure, Joan."

And set beside this she would dwell now and then on the things Giles Armiger had said in his letter—*I want something for you which he cannot give* . . . Was it true? Couldn't Drew give her all that she craved? Wouldn't he, after they were married?

She brought herself back now to the matter of the bullfight, which Rose and Drew were still discussing. "Please don't let me keep you away."

"Drew won't go if you don't," Rose said, "so that settles it."

She still held Joan's fan, but as she handed it back, "Some day I am going to steal it."

Joan found herself saying unexpectedly, "Why should I tempt you to that? You can have it now, Rose."

They all stared at her, and Rose said, "Of course you don't mean that."

"I do. Really." Her tone was light, "Some day I'll find another for myself."

"Little Lady Midas," said Rose slowly, "how wonderful to be rich!"

Mrs. Carter expostulated, "Rose mustn't take it."

"Oh, yes, she must," Joan insisted. "Please, it seems so perfectly to suit you."

Afterwards she wondered why she had done it. It was a lovely thing and she had liked it. And it had been rather bad taste to thrust upon Rose such an expensive present. Yet Rose had seemed to have no hesitancy in accepting it. And anyhow the thing was done and she might as well stop thinking about it.

On the following Sunday she sent Drew away with Rose and the others to the bullfight: "I think you are all a bit bloodthirsty."

And Rose said, impudently, "You'd better envy us our good red blood. We haven't milk in our veins."

Joan's cheeks flamed, but she said nothing. She was conscious that she had been a bit upstage in sending Rose off with Drew. She had wanted to prove to herself—what? That she could trust him? She must trust Drew or her world would fall.

Yet while they were gone, she was restless. Why hadn't she braved it out and gone with them? She could have shut her eyes when the horses were gored, or when the poor bulls were tormented and tortured. And hadn't she red blood? As red as Rose's? Or Drew's? Or Nancy's? Or old Mrs. Carter's? One could have courage while hating cruelty.

She went off finally for a ride with Farley, and because of tire trouble was late in getting back. She had promised to have tea with Drew and the rest of them, so telephoned that she was delayed, that they were not to wait and she would join them at their table.

When she came in, therefore, she found the room crowded with tables, and many couples dancing in the cleared circle in the center. Everybody had been to the bullfight, and there were gathered together people of all nationalities—a brilliant and cosmopolitan group. A tango was being played, and Joan stopped for a moment to watch the slow and graceful measure. And suddenly as she watched, she was swept by a feeling of loneliness and detachment. What had she to do with this mad world, this restless crowd? She thought of other Sunday afternoons, quiet ones in churches . . . when a child with her mother . . . later when she had gone alone . . . and not so long ago when she and Penelope had walked through the woods . . .

She thought of the children she had taught before she lived with Aunt Adelaide . . . *Oranges and lemons, said the bells of St. Clemens . . . you owe me five farthings, said the bells of St. Martin's . . .* She thought of little John Briggs and of his sister, Priscilla, she thought of old John Alden . . .

Oh, the wind in the pines, the sound of the sea . . . ! Loneliness? Yes. But she was lonely here . . . in the midst of a multitude.

And now as she looked, she saw Drew and Rose swinging and swaying among the others. Rose was a beautiful dancer, exotic in her methods, yet with a touch of reticence which saved her from over-exuberance. She wore a shawl of lacquer-red crêpe, a shining Spanish sailor-hat, and she carried the fan that Joan had given her. The fan was utterly out of place with an afternoon costume, but Rose made it seem in place. Letting it for the most part swing loose from her wrist, she now and then swept it open in time to the music and gradually it seemed to Joan that the play of the fan had a meaning, as if Rose while she talked and laughed and danced with Drew was weaving a spell. The idea was fantastic, of course, but Joan was glad when the dance was over, and Drew joined her.

Later in the evening when she and her lover were alone, Joan said: "I wish I hadn't given Rose my fan."

"Why?"

"Oh . . . I watched the two of you dancing this afternoon . . . and she . . ." she hesitated, then brought it out, "Drew, what was she saying to you?"

He looked at her for a moment, then laughed and drew her to him, "You were jealous?"

"Just for a minute."

He bent his head down to her. She lay very still in his arms. Oh, why should she be afraid of Rose, when Drew adored her?

And now March was well on its way, and in April they were to be married. The days and nights were packed to the brim with engagements, but Drew would often take Joan away for a walk, and they would wander together to the old part of the city near the quay where Columbus set forth on his great voyage. There they would mix with a motley crowd—sailors from their ships, peasant women gaudy in their green shawls—boatmen in scarlet and blue, pigeons flashing against an azure sky.

At times they would stop in an incense-scented church and would kneel together. Drew had no beliefs worth mentioning: "I worship you, my saint," he would say to Joan, and she would thrill to that, and then wish wistfully that he had something more splendid than human love to inspire him. When she told him that, a little breathless because it was all so sacred, he would shake his head: "I'm a heathen, dear heart. And I am afraid I shall never be different."

The nights were marvellous . . . cold and clear and golden . . . packed with romance. As they rode on and on, they could catch now and then the echo of a throbbing voice . . . and stop and listen . . .

“O galleys bound for Cadiz,
Spread out your silver oars,
And bear me to my captive love,
Who waits me on the moors . . .”

It was all very wonderful and perfect, in spite of the doubts, which knocked now and then at her heart. Joan built castles in Spain . . . shadowy, with ivory towers and silver spires . . . and with dim gleaming corridors where she and Drew would wander hand in hand through all their lives and on through countless ages.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE WEDDING GOWN

It was in March that Giles came to Paris with Amélie and Scripps. It was exciting and rather like a play, this resurrection of an atmosphere which belonged to the past. Quarters were found for Amélie and her companion in the same *pension* where Amélie had stayed during the war. They explained the doctor's plan for his patient and asked her to coöperate. "There are times when she may seem strange. We hope you will not notice it."

It was when Scripps first appeared in uniform that Amélie gave him startled attention. She turned to Giles with a pitiful question: "What do I remember?"

"About Scripps?"

"Yes."

"Try to think."

"I wore a uniform, too?"

"Yes."

"With red crosses?"

"Yes."

"And we dined here . . . and had caviar and pancakes . . ."

They had chosen this restaurant—a Russian place on the Seine, because they had hoped she might remember. It was individual and interesting, with the waiters in costume, and music that was typical and at times barbaric. There in a secluded corner, the three of them had dined years ago. They had now the same table . . . and Amélie remembered!

She flashed a glance from one man to the other. "Why did we come—tonight?"

“To have caviar and pancakes.” Giles’ tone was light, though every nerve in him was tense.

They let it go at that, but were startled a bit when she asked: “Why were we all here then?”

Scripps leaned forward. In his eagerness his face took on an effect of youth and good looks. His uniform was becoming, and gave him the well-set-up look of a soldier. “Because you and I were lovers, Amélie, and Giles was our friend.”

A frown fretted her forehead . . . “Why should you tell me that,” she demanded, “when it isn’t true?”

So the moment passed, and they went on heavily to talk of other things.

As the days passed, however, Amélie seemed like a person waking slowly from a dream—there was for example the afternoon when Scripps took her to the American church where they were married. They went alone, and Scripps told Giles afterward how as they had stood in the dimness and darkness she had caught his arm and had said in a strange voice: “With this ring, I thee wed . . . where’s my ring, Scripps?”

He had taken it from his pocket, for it had never left him since she had discarded it, and had said “May I put it on?” and she had held out her hand, and he had whispered, “As long as we both shall live, Amélie,” and for just one moment, she had leaned against him and had let him touch her cheek with his lips. Then she had drawn away, and by the time she reached home she seemed to have forgotten . . .

She continued to wear the ring, but there were days when she refused to have anything to do with Scripps—days when she insisted that Giles should go everywhere with her, when even their most careful plans brought no memories.

Now and then Scripps grew desperate. “I am not the same man and she knows it. She hates weak things. You know what she said of old Peter?”

“Wait,” Giles advised, “she’ll come to it. The real woman in her is sweet and kind. Have patience, Scripps, and it will work out.”

Yet even as he said it, he wondered. It was hard sometimes to keep his faith in life. There was so much that was cruel, so much that was difficult and devastating.

He and Scripps were stopping at a pleasant and quiet hotel, and it was the night after their conversation about Amélie that Giles went for a walk. He had no destination, he was restless, and had felt that physical exercise might help

lift the depression which weighed him down.

The street into which he came from the hotel was brilliant with electric lights. To the right and left were shops, closed now, but with their windows golden and their wares displayed. He loitered to look and found himself caught in a maze of speculation. What would happen to the world of commerce if women ceased for a time to buy the things which were brought from the ends of the earth for their beautifying? All through the ages, merchants had come to cater to feminine loveliness—beasts with their silken burdens had crossed the mountains, ships had sailed with precious fabrics packed in their holds. In later years there had been trains and motors, trucks and air transports. Women's belongings? A world built about them!

He passed a shoe shop and stopped as he saw shining behind the glass a pair of silver slippers. They had buckles like those on the slippers which had first brought Joan to him. He found himself wanting them. A silly idea, perhaps, but none the less one in which he resolved to indulge himself. He would come tomorrow and buy them and set them where he could look upon them and see Joan in all her grace and girlishness.

He had not heard from her. It had been, perhaps, too much to hope that she would write. Yet he had thought her friendship might concede something more than silence.

It had not. There was, however, the chance that his letter had not reached her. He had her address in Barcelona. It had been given him by the mother of the children he had met in the woods. He had wanted to write again but had kept himself from it. After all, why should he? She had gone, of course, to be with the Hallams. He had read in the papers before he left that they were sojourning in Spain. It meant, of course, that Joan was with them . . .

Oh, well, such things must be endured. If only she was happy! If only the little ship had not been lost on the rocks . . .!

He went on and on. A fine mist was dimming the light of the street lamps. He knew he ought to go in, but he knew, too, he could not sleep. When at last he reached his hotel he was cold and wet. As he entered his room it seemed to fairly shriek with loneliness. The wind blew strongly against the window. The sound brought memories of other storms across the sea . . . he thought of Dilly shut in with love . . . of the glow of her hearthstone, of the child in her arms. He thought of his own future. Not much to think of. He would have no other woman in it but Joan.

To have known her and then to have lost her! A man who had lost by death a beloved woman might find peace perhaps in the thought of a reunion. But to

lose her to another man . . . a man like Hallam . . . ! “I could have made her happy. I know I could have made her happy. But if she marries Hallam . . . God help her.”

The next morning he went back to the shop where he had seen the silver slippers. It was a very exclusive shop . . . and the price of the slippers was high. But he cared nothing for that, and presently he had them, done up in a parcel and under his arm. The salesman hoped that the size was right. It was always, he asserted, a risk to buy shoes without fitting them. Giles said with a smile that there would, he thought, be no trouble. He had chosen a pair that were slender and small like Joan’s pretty feet.

Then, as if his thought of her had brought her to him, he came face to face with Joan as he was leaving the shop.

They stared at each other as if they were seeing ghosts, then Joan held out her hand, “You aren’t real, are you?”

He laughed, “I am. But you aren’t. Things like this don’t happen.”

“But it has happened.”

“I thought you were in Spain.”

“I have been. But I came down for a bit to buy things. Farley is with me.”

“And now that we have met? Can’t you lunch with me? Or dine? Surely we aren’t going to be ships that pass in the night.”

“No . . .” she considered the matter . . . “I might dine with you. I have a late fitting of my wedding gown . . . at five.”

He did not let her finish. “Your wedding gown? You are going to be married?” his voice was sharp.

“Yes. Didn’t you know?”

“How should I?”

“It was in all the papers.”

“I rarely read society news.” Then he put a question, squarely: “Did you get my letter?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you answer it?”

Color came up into her cheeks. “I . . . there have been so many things to keep me . . . from writing.”

"I see," dryly.

They stood for a moment in silence, then Giles said: "Perhaps, even now, I am—intruding?"

She held out her hand to him, impulsively: "Oh, no, *please* . . ."

"Then shall I call for you at the wedding gown place?"

"Yes." She gave him the address. "I am getting a lot of things. How would you like to come early and let me show you some of them."

"Your gowns?"

"Yes. The mannequins look lovely in them."

"Not lovelier than you."

He smiled at her, and then went on, with a touch of wistfulness: "Do you know what I have in my parcel?"

"No."

"Silver slippers. Last night I was out in the mist and rain and passed this window and saw them. They were like the ones you brought to Scripps' shop. Do you remember?"

Did she? Her eyes showed it although she was silent.

"I thought of you as I saw you then—lighting my dim room. So this morning I came in and bought them. They were like having a bit of you with me. Do you see? Not having you—I must have something."

Her fingers touched his sleeve, "I am sorry."

"I don't want—pity . . ." then with a quick change of voice. "I'll come for you then? At five."

When later he called for her at the rooms of a famous dressmaker, he was admitted at once and found Joan waiting for him.

He had never been in a place like this, and was amazed at the beauty of the setting—classic draperies in gray and violet, long mirrors set in the wall, violets in low vases. Nothing else, and all this simplicity as a background for the graceful automatons who swept in and out in this gown and that, cool, young, beautiful, perfectly poised, utterly complacent.

"Are all of these yours?" Giles demanded of Joan, as the mannequins came and went.

"Yes. Sometimes it doesn't seem true in the least. I feel as if I were an

actress on a stage, dressed for the part.”

The famous dressmaker appeared now to comment and criticize: “Mademoiselle wears best the simple things,” he said, “it is her type. I shall show you next the wedding gown . . . it is a copy of an old portrait of a lady of Provence.”

He went away, the mannequin trailing after him in draperies of jade and silver, and when Giles and Joan were alone, Giles said: “I always think of you as I first saw you on the rocks.”

“How long ago it seems.”

They sat in silence. Both of them with the thought in their minds of that stormy day, with the wind beating the trees down, the waves reaching up towards the sky, and in Giles’ vision was Joan like a winged visitant high above him, and in Joan’s of the vivid youth, with ruffled hair, his hand upraised to warn her.

She caught her breath in a sigh. “Dear friend, I should have answered your letter.”

He turned towards her with a quick movement. “It would have saved a heartbreak. I have been in the depths.”

She reached out her hand towards him and he took it. “I don’t know,” she said, “why I didn’t write. It is as if I lived in a dream . . .”

“I have tried to understand . . . but it has not been easy . . .”

He said, after another pause: “You haven’t told me when it—is to be.”

“In April.”

“So soon?” he broke off as the famous dressmaker re-entered, followed by a mannequin.

“The wedding gown,” Monsieur announced.

It was an exquisite thing of lace like a cobweb, with pearls dripping down the front of it, and orange-blooms in clusters catching the veil. “Mademoiselle should wear it herself to show it in its perfection,” the famous dressmaker said, “but we have a superstition that the bride must never try on a gown after it is finished. We dare not risk unhappiness.” He smiled at Giles. He believed him to be the blissful bridegroom! Giles wondered what he would think if he knew the truth? That he was nothing to Joan. That she had not cared enough for their friendship to answer his letter . . . that even now she was pitying him. He had an overwhelming desire to break forth into sudden savagery and tear the

wedding gown to shreds. But of course he wouldn't. He would simply sit there saying banal things while within him the red blood was surging.

When they came out, Joan said, "Shall I dress for dinner, or will you take me to some place where I can wear what I have on?"

"I don't want to see you gorgeous," he told her with a sort of desperate bitterness, "Joan, let me have you for a little while as if there were no past and future . . ."

He took her to a charming place in the Bois. They motored through thick woods to a long building with a sweep of garden in front. "I brought you here," Giles said, "because of the trees; I shall never think of you as Mrs. Hallam of Paris and Baltimore. I shall always think of you as Joan of the woods."

They had a table which gave them through a wide window a glimpse under the moon of pale statues set among young poplars. And when Giles had ordered, he said, "Now tell me how you happen to be in Spain."

He listened while she told him more than she knew she was telling. Of Nancy's letter, "She asked me to come over and eat the apple!" Of the glamour of the gay life at Barcelona. Of Drew's devotion, "He really loves me."

"It is an artificial existence," she confessed. "Nobody seems to have any cares, any responsibilities. We all do as we please, and nobody asks whether things are right or wrong. It is just whether it will be 'good fun.'"

"And you like it?"

"Yes . . . one side of me likes it."

"And the other side?"

"I'm not sure," she laughed a little, "but the taste of the apple is sweet."

He leaned forward. "Do you really mean that, my dear?"

The flippancy with which she had been speaking was no longer in her voice as she said: "Oh, don't ask me . . ."

"Why not?"

"Because that's the thing that worries me—whether all my life I shall want—to eat the apple . . ."

He reached for her hand and held it tight in his own. "Joan, when I saw your wedding gown I wanted to tear it to tatters."

She tried to withdraw her hand. "No, let me say it. I can't bear the thought of you as Hallam's wife. My dear, I love you. When you marry Hallam my

heart will die.”

She sat staring at him, then suddenly it seemed as if the world about them dropped away and there was only his illumined face in a sort of golden haze—his strong hand on hers.

She spoke breathlessly—“Giles, dear, I must not listen . . . please . . . And will you take me home?”



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

AMÉLIE COMES BACK

In the days that followed Joan's departure, Giles lived in a dreadful dream. The thought of her marriage was a nightmare. Yet what could he do? In modern times one did not rush in and forbid the banns simply because of a sense of the desecration of such a union.

He tried to throw himself whole-heartedly into the drama of the lives of Amélie and Scripps. There were hopeful signs in Amélie's condition. At certain moments she seemed girlish and normal and like the young Amélie who years ago had lived her brief romance in Paris. Scripps, too, took on an effect of youth. His pursuit of Amélie was that of a lover; happiness revived him and brought light to his eyes—color to his cheeks.

The climax came one afternoon when the three of them had driven to a little inn on the outskirts of Paris, a charming place with a pond where ducks swam in the silver water, and with blossoming fruit trees flinging their pink and white against an azure sky.

Scripps had bought, along the way, a nosegay of spring flowers for Amélie. She was all in white and looked like a bride with her great bouquet. She said as they came to the inn, "I remember this. Raymond was with us . . ." She turned to Giles, "You were not here. It was Raymond?"

It was the first time she had seemed to differentiate between her brother and the man who she had insisted was his counterpart.

"No, I was not here," Giles said gently.

Her eyes were clear and candid. "Raymond went away and left us, Scripps and I, it was our honeymoon."

She spoke no more of the past, but when they had dined and the day had darkened into an amethyst twilight, she was content to follow Scripps to a

charming arbor roofed with spring blossoms, leaving Giles to sit by the pond which was now purple in the gathering dusk, and deserted by the ducks who had settled themselves on the grass, sleepy heads tucked under their shining wings. A crescent moon was reflected in the pool. The night was still except for a slight breeze which swept through the blooming trees and brought their fragrance, brought too the thrill of a re-created world.

In two weeks Joan would marry Drew Hallam. If it had not been for Amélie and Scripps, Giles would have returned at once to his Island. Among his books he felt he might find surcease from the agony which tore him. Deep in his heart he was aware that Joan would never be happy. There was that within her which Drew could never satisfy. She was heading straight for disaster.

There were things, too, he had to think about, which made him uncertain as to the course he should pursue. Many of the men he had met in Paris knew Drew Hallam and from them he had heard the gossip which linked the name of Joan's future husband with a past which was indiscreet, if not stained with dishonor. If Joan had had a brother or a father, Giles would have laid the whole story before them. Yet to go to Joan herself? How could he do it? She would not believe him, and he would seem only a despairing lover trying to force an issue for his own sake.

As he sat by the quiet pool, in the purple dusk, he wondered why he should care what he seemed to others. The thing was to save the woman he loved. He had thought of an appeal to Hallam. Of a challenge to Drew's own sense of the enormity of linking his smirched life with the life of a girl like Joan.

Whatever he did, must be done at once. He rose and stood with his face uplifted to the sky. Above him was a serene world—yet his heart was torn.

And now Amélie and Scripps came from the blossoming arbor, hand in hand. As they approached, Amélie was singing a little French song she had often chanted long ago for Scripps—her voice was like a bird's, sweet and clear in the silent night.

When they reached him Scripps spoke: "Amélie wants to come back here . . ."

"You mean . . .?" Giles looked from one to the other.

"Yes," Scripps said, and his voice was deep with emotion, "she wants to come with me, Giles, alone . . ."

Sitting by the pool the three of them made their plans. They would return to Paris, and as soon as possible Scripps and Amélie would settle down for a

time in this lovely spot. Amélie was radiant. The dark clouds had lifted. She was like herself. Simple, sweet. Giles felt, however, that they must not go too fast, there must be no mistake before Amélie entered upon this new life which was to be an ecstatic echo of the old.

As they drove home Giles knew that freedom had come to him at last. Amélie and Scripps would soon not need him. Yet he knew too, that his release had arrived too late. He would be alone with neither friendship nor love to fill his life. The days intervening between Joan's marriage would soon pass. She would be Drew's wife. Lost to him forever.

That night, as he sat late in the grill room of his hotel, he was approached by an English officer whom he had known intimately during the Great War. They talked over old times, of Amélie and Scripps, and Giles voiced with some vehemence, his sense of restlessness and indecision. "I am not sure what I want to do with my life."

"Why not travel?"

Giles tapped the table thoughtfully, "It was what I wanted—but now that the opportunity is mine, I find myself eager to go back to my Island—to bury myself."

His friend demanded, "What has happened?"

Giles tried to laugh it off, "Perhaps I am growing old."

"Perhaps—you are in love."

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, a man like you should be ready for adventure, for life, for experience."

Giles flung up his head. "I am in love. With a woman who marries another man next week and he is not worthy of her."

"How do you know?"

"You remember him—Drew Hallam."

The Englishman gave a short exclamation, "Remember! He is a cad and a coward."

Giles tone was eager, "You're sure of that?"

"Sure of it," the Englishman settled himself in his chair, "listen to this."

The story that he told was not a pleasant one. "There was Rose Carter. He would have married her in a minute if she had had money. He is always hard

up. If you care anything for the girl that he is going to marry why don't you lay the case before her?"

"But how can I, loving her, do that?"

"It is because you love her that you should do it."

"I'd rather go to Hallam himself."

"Well, why not? Tell him what you know. In the old days you could have had the thing out with pistols. As it is you may knock each other down, but what's the difference?"

They said little after that, and the next morning Giles left for Barcelona. He took the same route that Joan had followed, coming at night to the dusky inn where Rose and Joan had met. He was aware of the charm of it all and of the atmosphere which seemed to belong to medieval days. He was aware too of that sense of romantic adventure which had impressed Joan. He wondered if by any chance he might some day travel this road with the woman he loved. If she did not marry Drew? Might there not come a time . . . ?

As he sat at breakfast he saw opposite him a sailor in a vivid blue shirt, scarlet sash and scarlet handkerchief about his head. He was showing to a companion, as picturesque as himself, the model of a little painted ship. It was a tiny, perfect thing, carved from wood, brilliantly colored and gilded, with its pennants and flags perfect. Giles' eyes rested on it eagerly. He leaned forward and asked in his imperfect Spanish, "Will you sell?"

The sailor nodded and named a price, and presently Giles found himself in possession of the tiny bark. He had a feeling that he would like to give it to Joan. Its spreading sails held the promise of some voyage of happy adventure. If only she did not marry Drew!

When he came that night to Barcelona, he went to the hotel and asked for Drew. He was told that the Hallams and Miss Dudley were spending the weekend in the mountains, a half a day's journey by motor. They had gone away, the clerk informed him, that Miss Dudley might rest.

Giles asked, "May I have the address? I am an old friend."

The clerk gave it, and an hour later Giles was on his way. He would see Drew Hallam and have the thing out. And failing Drew, Joan.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

BY THE FOUNTAIN

The retreat to which Joan and the Hallams had gone was an old monastery, which offered hospitality to those who sought rest and quiet. Joan would have loved it if she could have been there alone with Drew.

"It is a perfect place for a honeymoon," she said, "but why should Rose and her mother have followed us?" Her voice had a note of sharpness, her nerves were on edge. It had seemed incredible to her that Rose and Mrs. Carter should intrude at such a time. "What made her think she could come, Drew?" she insisted.

He evaded her question, "Oh well, you know Rose . . ."

"But—surely you didn't invite her?"

"No—but she adores this place—and asked if I cared if she joined us. What could I say?"

"Will she be following us like this after we are married?"

He laughed and put a finger under her chin, lifting her face so that he could look into her eyes, "Jealous?"

A deep flush stained her cheeks, "You know I'm not. But the thing is so utterly absurd. Rose ought to know she is not wanted."

"Oh well, in a week you and I will leave her behind forever." He laid his cheek against hers, "My sweet . . ."

Joan wandered that afternoon into the garden of the monastery and sat on the rim of an old fountain and watched the doves flying down to the water. One of the brown-clad brothers came out to feed the doves.

Joan said to him, "I love this peace. The world seems so far away."

The brother said quietly, "Yet there is peace in the world, daughter, if we

have it in our hearts.”

“I know.”

There were no further words between them, and when he had fed the birds the brother went away, but Joan thought of what he had said: “There is peace in the world if we have it in our hearts.”

She knew there was no peace in her world. When she was with Drew she was conscious of a sort of tumultuous happiness—he was a marvellous lover and knew how to play on the strings of her emotions. Yet always at the back of her mind was a disturbed sense that some day the glamour would disappear and she would face Drew’s faults and be afraid of them.

In a week she was to marry him! She would go through with it now, although more and more she shrank from it. Drew was unstable, she could not deceive herself, yet it was too late now to draw back. She knew the exact moment when her doubts had crystalized—that moment with Giles Armiger in Paris when he had told her that he loved her.

Dinner that night was served in the refectory, a long room, lighted only by a few candles and the afterglow framed by its arched windows. It was toward the end of the dinner that one of the brothers announced that a gentleman wished to speak to Mr. Hallam.

Drew rose, “Did he give his name?”

He had not. He was waiting in the little office.

Drew went out. After his departure, Rose and Nancy and Mrs. Carter kept up, as usual, a sprightly conversation. Joan was quiet. She had a sense of the strangeness of the moment. She sat opposite one of the arched windows and looked straight into the heart of the setting sun. With its gold and crimson it seemed a gateway into a shining future. She wondered if she and Drew would go through that gate and find their Paradise. Surely there would be no flaming sword to bar them out.

They lingered long over their coffee, but Drew did not return. At last Joan rose from the table and went alone into the garden. She sat again on the rim of the fountain, and trailed her fingers in the quiet pool. The doves had flown to the belfry and settled themselves for the night. A few faint stars shone overhead but in the sky was lingering the rose and gold and green of the afterglow.

Joan heard a step on the cloistered porch and turned expecting Drew. But it was not Drew. It was the brother to whom she had spoken in the afternoon and

he handed her a little parcel, "It was left for you."

She asked, "Who left it?"

"The gentleman who came to see Mr. Hallam."

The brown-clad brother went away and Joan opened the parcel. Within she found a tiny, carved ship, gay with purple and crimson and gold. There was no card. No clue by which she might trace the giver.

The night came on, and the moon rose. Joan still waited, thinking Drew would join her. She wondered what was keeping him. She wondered, too, about the man who had sent the boat. Why had he come, and what business would he have with Drew?



CHAPTER THIRTY

AN ENCOUNTER

The little reception room of the monastery was a bare place, with high windows which framed at the moment oblongs of rose-lighted sky. Giles was standing at one of the windows, and turned as Drew entered.

For a few moments they faced each other in silence, then Drew said: "You wished to see me?"

"Yes. Shall we be interrupted here? I should like to speak to you alone."

"We can go outside."

Drew led the way to a gate which was opened by one of the brown-clad brothers. Beyond the gate was a little grove where seats had been set about for such wayfarers as wished to rest and look at the view. Through a cleared space in the dark cedars was a vista of the peaks of the mountain range, bathed now in the mists of evening, and sweeping back toward the sunset like the waves of a glorious sea.

Standing by a bench, with his hand on the back of it, Giles came at once to the subject in hand. "I am afraid you will not like what I have to say. But I must say it. I want you to release Joan Dudley from her promise to marry you."

Drew's laugh was insolent: "Are you mad?"

"No. I have been hearing things about you in Paris, Hallam. Things I am sure Joan doesn't know."

"Why should she know them? My past is my own. My future is Joan's. You are wasting your time to talk about it, Armiger." Drew was holding on to his temper, but his face was flushed.

"Your past is not your own, unless the woman you are to marry is willing to forgive it. The things I have heard, Joan Dudley would never forgive."

Drew's voice had a fierce note: "Of what, specifically, are you accusing me?"

"Of a gambling record that is not, to say the least—pretty—and as for your affairs—with women—" Giles stopped there, significantly.

Drew took a step forward, "You dare say this to me?" he demanded, furiously.

"I dare say anything that will help to save Joan. I am her friend. I am more than that. I love her . . ."

"I refuse to discuss her with you," sharply. "If you love her that is none of my affair. She loves me. In a week she will be my wife."

"She will not be your wife in a week."

"What do you mean?"

"She shall not marry you, if I can help it. Either you must tell her of your past, or I shall do it."

Drew, flaming, lifted his arm, menacingly. But Giles did not move. "I know, you'd like to knock me down. In the old days we would have settled the whole thing on a field of honor. In modern times we are less spectacular. We might fight it out with our fists, but I see no reason for that. I see only one thing, that if Joan marries you, she must do it with her eyes open . . ."

"Do you think if you told her, she would believe you?"

"I think she would . . ."

Drew threw back at him an accusation: "You want her for yourself."

"God knows that I do," said Giles with earnestness, "but if I can never have her, I shall still do my best to keep her from you."

For a moment there was silence. The wind had risen and the trees about them creaked and rustled. The tops of the mountains were bathed in pearl, the scene was spectral, almost sinister.

When Drew spoke finally, he was sullen: "If I promise to tell her will that satisfy you?"

"Yes. But I must have of course, some assurance that she knows everything."

"What assurance?"

"If she breaks the engagement, there must be an immediate announcement

in the daily press. If she does not break it, I shall write to her, giving her all the facts, and the proofs—”

Drew’s laugh was not pleasant. “I might checkmate you, Armiger. You wouldn’t like to see your little friend humiliated. If she throws me over, I’ll run away with—Rose Carter.”

Giles gave a sharp exclamation. “You cad . . . !”

It was then that Drew struck him. In another moment they were struggling under the trees. They were well-matched. Giles had youth on his side, but he was slight beside Drew’s bulk. They were both mad with anger, primitive . . . They breathed heavily, and their scuffling feet scattered the leaves. This way and that—back and forth . . . a pair of brutes . . .

Suddenly, with extraordinary strength, Giles flung Drew off. “Oh, we are—beasts,” he said, “and she is so high above us.”

He stood there with hanging head. Drew whipped a handkerchief out of his pocket and held it to his face, “You’ve given me an ugly scratch,” he said, “how am I going to explain it?”

“That,” said Giles, very pale, “is the least I have to think about. It is Joan’s happiness, Joan’s future which weighs on my heart.”

“I’ll make a bargain with you,” Drew said, out of a short silence, “if I follow your preposterous program—and if she gives me up, you’ve got to keep off the whole thing for a couple of years . . .”

“Keep off?”

“Promise not to ask her to marry you until then. I’m not going to have the whole world saying she jilted me for you . . .”

“Why should I promise?”

“Because, if you don’t, I swear I’ll marry Rose at once. Then they could say I jilted Joan.”

Again silence, then Giles said, “I promise. For two years I’ll keep away from her.”

“On your word of honor?”

“I’ve said it,” sharply.

Hallam gave a short laugh, “Of course your word is your bond. But you needn’t think I’ve lost her yet. She loves me . . . and I can show her new worlds. You would limit her to narrow things . . . your old sea-town, your

island . . . what would she know of the joy of living?"

For a moment Giles did not speak, then he said with quickened breath, "Such a life as she and I would live together is beyond your knowing, Hallam."

They walked back to the gate. "You think you've won," Drew said, "but you needn't think she isn't going to suffer. She cares for me a lot."

"Better to suffer now, than in the years to come," was Giles' response.

The two men parted at the gate, and Giles made his way to his car which was parked in the road which led back of the monastery. The driver had heard nothing of the struggle in the grove. And it was too dark for him to see the somewhat dishevelled aspect of his passenger.

As Drew went in through the gate, the lantern shone on his face. The lay-brother spoke with solicitude. "You are hurt?"

"I stumbled," Drew lied, "and a branch struck me."

He went on through the office and up to his room. He bathed the dark spot on his cheek, and brushed his clothes. Then he went down to where Joan sat by the fountain.

She had set the little ship on the water, and the moonlight showed it, floating serenely, a tiny shining bark on the still surface of the pool.

She rose as Drew approached. "How long you have been," she said, "I thought you were never coming."

"A man called to see me," he stood looking down at her; but he did not touch her.

She tucked her hand in his: "What man?"

He did not answer, although he lifted her hand to his lips. And presently as his eyes were caught by the shining ship, he asked, "Where did you get that?"

"The man who came to see you sent it . . ."

"He dared . . .!"

"Who was he, Drew?"

He waited for a moment, then: "If you must know, it was Giles Armiger."

"Giles!"

"Yes."

“What did he want?”

“To talk about you. He is trying to make trouble between us, Joan.”

“But how could he, Drew? He knows that in a week I am to be your wife.”

“He’s a Puritan and a prig. He came to tell me that—I’m not good enough for you, Joan.”

She gave him a startled glance: “You mean that he travelled so far to tell you that?”

“Yes. Oh, he wants you for himself—anybody can see it. He would do anything to separate us.”

“But what could—separate us, Drew?”

He held her close. “You love me, Joan?”

“You know it.”

“Then nothing matters.”

He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the cloistered porch where he set her down on a bench in a shadowy corner. There he knelt beside her, “My dear, I have a confession to make.”

She had a sudden premonition of disaster, “Don’t, Drew, I don’t want to listen . . .”

His voice had a note of triumph, “I knew you wouldn’t—but Armiger forced it on me. He said if I didn’t tell you certain things he would write them to you. You know I haven’t been a—Galahad, Joan. But why should you be hurt by hearing things that belong to my past! My future is yours, dearest . . .”

“Yet Giles—said there was something I must . . . hear?”

“Yes. As I have said he’s a prig and a Puritan, why should he set himself up in judgment?”

A cold hand seemed to clutch at Joan’s heart. She knew that Giles was neither a prig nor a Puritan. She knew, too, that he was her friend. She was assailed by an awful sense of foreboding. What was it that Giles had wanted her to know? And when she knew, what effect would it have on her future?

Sitting on the bench beside her, Drew told his story. He told it well, and for the most part, he told the truth. He realized that if he did not, she would learn the facts from Armiger. The thing to do was to put his best foot forward, and then appeal to her sympathy. “I’ve been a black sheep, my darling, but since I’ve known the white soul of you I’ve wanted to be different. I will be different

when you are in my life . . . surely you believe that . . . surely you know it?"

Joan was like a frozen statue. Stripped of the glamour with which Drew tried to surround it, his story was not a pleasant one. All of the doubts which she had tried to suppress swept back upon her. The things she believed in, he did not believe. Her ideals were not his. The men of her family had been men of integrity, they had set standards for themselves of honorable living. The sins of which Drew spoke lightly were not to be treated with flippancy. She had a shuddering sense of a point of view which seemed to her shameful and sordid.

Drew was saying, "I love you, my sweet, does anything else matter?"

Her voice was not steady as she answered, "Oh, I don't know—it is all rather dreadful."

"Do you mean that you are going to throw me over? Joan, you can't . . . If you do, I'll go to the devil . . ."

She stood up: "Please let me go, Drew . . . in the morning we will talk about it."

She went swiftly down the garden path. He followed her and stopped her, holding her, against her will, "Joan, I won't let you leave me like this."

"I must." As she struggled the moonlight shone full on him and she saw the dark spot on his face. "Oh," she said, with a touch of wildness, "what have you done to your cheek?"

She seemed to know before he told her, "We fought—Armiger and I."

"About me?"

"Yes."

The world seemed to whirl about her. "Was Giles—hurt?"

"No. But why should you care? He is nothing to you, is he?"

She said with quickened breath, "No." But deep in her heart she knew that Giles was more to her than she dared admit. He was her friend. And he had come to save her.

She looked up at her lover, and said again, with that touch of wildness, "I can't talk about it now . . . let me go, Drew."

In another moment she had left him. A door opened and shut behind her. With a sharp exclamation, Drew turned on his heel and sought his own quarters. The thing had not turned out as he had expected. But there was still a chance that he could make Joan come back to him. In the morning she might

see the matter more clearly. It was ridiculous to think she could throw him over at the eleventh hour. Or at any hour for that matter.

All night the little ship rode on the surface of the pool. A breeze sprang up towards morning, and when Brother Anselmo came out at dawn, the tiny bark was breasting waves which set it bobbing. He stood looking down at it. For what adventure were its sails set? He had liked the look of the man who had brought it. A better man, he judged, than the one the little girl was to marry. Brother Anselmo had remembered Joan that night in his prayers. He had not believed what Hallam had told him about the hurt cheek. And a liar was no fit mate for the white-souled child who had spoken to him of peace.

He was roused from his meditations by a step on the stone walk and turned to see Joan coming towards him.

“Brother Anselmo,” she asked breathlessly, “is there any way that my maid and I can get to Barcelona this morning?”

“There is a diligence which passes in an hour.”

“We want to take it,” she hesitated, then told him the truth, “I’d rather the rest of the party did not know until we are gone—I am leaving a note.”

She was running away. He saw that at once. And he was glad.

But his face was impassive. “Your little ship rides well,” he said, “may it bring you to safe harbors.”

He smiled down at her as she stood beside him.

“It will bring you to safe harbors, my child, if you sail under the Master’s orders.”

“I know,” she said, simply, “will you . . . pray for me, Brother Anselmo? I am troubled in my mind, and the way is not clear.”

“It will be made clear. And you must not be afraid. Trust life for the best that is in it.”

He went away after that, and she lifted the little ship from the pool and carried it upstairs with her. Later she came down with Farley and found coffee and crisp fresh bread and fruit ready for them in the refectory, and then the diligence arrived, and while Drew and Nancy and the Carters still slept, the two of them were whirled away towards Barcelona.



CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

AN END AND A BEGINNING

Joan's note was carried to Drew's room by Brother Anselmo. He had to knock more than once before Hallam waked. And it was nine o'clock.

Drew had, indeed, slept well. For a time after he had left Joan he had been disturbed, restless. Then his self-assurance had reasserted itself. He knew his power over her. He would make her see reason in the morning.

And now, here was her note. He opened it with a smile on his lips. She had so often sent a line to him like this—a greeting for the morning, perhaps, or a little plea for forgiveness if she had been petulant. Had she been more sophisticated, she would, of course, have given less of herself—have demanded more of him. Yet, he had liked the little notes, and had kept them all.

The smile died, however, as he read what she had to say to him:

“DEAR DREW:

“Before this note is handed to you, Farley and I will be on the road to Barcelona. It is the best way out of it. I must not see you again, for it would mean that we would simply go over all the old ground, and that would be hard for both of us.

“I am giving you up, Drew, and now that it has happened, I know it is what I have wanted to do for a long time, although I did not have the strength or courage. If Giles Armiger had not come, I should have married you. But we shouldn't have been happy. Our worlds are so different. And you wouldn't have liked my world. And I shouldn't have liked yours.

“I know that I shall suffer, and you will, too. We have given so much of ourselves to each other—but it couldn't last, and because I

know it I am going.

“There isn’t much else to say, is there? You will think me hard and I am afraid you won’t forgive me. But it just had to be.

Good-bye,
JOAN”

So this was the end! Drew stood staring down at the little letter. She had gone! He would see no more of her. He crumpled the paper in his hand. He was assailed, suddenly, by an awful sense of desolation. The child had left him—Joan whom he loved.

Later, when he went to see Nancy, she was in her cell-like room, dressed and writing letters.

He handed her the note. She read it and the color rushed into her face. “Oh,” she cried, “what does it all mean?”

“The man who came last night was Giles Armiger. He has been staying in Paris and raked up a lot of old stories about me. He said if I didn’t tell Joan, he would. That she had a right to know my past, and all that rot. We had a hot time and a bit of a fight. I didn’t give her up easily, Nancy.”

“You shouldn’t have given her up at all. Do you mean you told Joan—everything?”

“I had to. He said if he didn’t see the announcement of the breaking of the engagement in the daily press, he would come to Joan and put the whole case before her. Then if she was willing to marry me, he would have nothing more to say.”

“And she was not willing?”

“I thought she would be. I told her my past was mine, and my future hers. That I had been different since I had known her.”

“But you haven’t been different, Drew. You’ve lost a lot at cards, and you’ve flirted with Rose and with that little Andalusian dancer. Joan has tried to shut her eyes to it, but she couldn’t be absolutely blind. I’ve been afraid a dozen times that she’d throw you over. She would if she hadn’t been so sincere herself that she hated to face the truth.”

“What truth?” stormily.

“That you can’t be constant to anybody, Drew.”

“I’d have been constant to Joan. I love her.”

“Because you have lost her?” she laid her hand on his shoulder, and spoke with sadness. “You love yourself too much, my dear.”

He shrank from her touch. “Perhaps if you had had faith in me!”

She shook her head. “That’s the plea of weakness, Drew. A strong man has faith in himself.”

After a heavy silence, he said: “It remains for me, therefore, to go elegantly to the—devil—”

“Don’t be an idiot.”

“I might marry Rose.”

“If you do, we part company. You don’t love her, and she hasn’t money enough to pay your debts. Do you know what the breaking of the engagement is going to mean to our financial affairs? Our creditors have held off until after the wedding. If there is to be no wedding . . .?”

He flung up his hands, “If you can see daylight, I can’t. I might as well get out as soon as possible.”

“Where will you go?”

“Back to New York. You can stay for a bit in Paris.”

“You mean that we are—to part company?”

“For a time, old girl,” he put his arm about her, “I am best by myself.”

Nancy said, softly, “Is it going as hard with you as that?”

“Yes,” he stood staring at the floor, “I love her—and I’ve lost her.”

He went away, and when later they joined Rose and her mother in the dining room, he had regained his self-control.

“Where’s Joan?” Rose demanded.

“She left this morning with Farley,” Nancy stated.

Rose looked from one to the other. “What happened?”

“The engagement,” said Drew, with an attempt at lightness, “is off. I have been discovered, Rose, as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The lamb has—fled.”

That afternoon, as they motored back to Barcelona, Drew told Rose more about it. “I have always had a feeling it would end this way. I am not made for happiness.”

“You would never have been happy with Joan.”

"I shall never forget her."

Rose did not answer. Her eyes were on the distant mountain peaks. She would make him forget Joan. She would have to play a careful game. But she felt that she held a winning hand.

In Paris, Nancy and the Carters parted company.

"Rose will trail Drew back to New York," Nancy surmised, shrewdly, "she knows what she wants, and she intends to get it."

Nancy, in the days that followed, was lonely. She had found a room in a cheap *pension* and kept out of sight as much as possible. Now and then, however, some of her friends carried her off to dine with them, and it happened that on one of these occasions she was entertained at the big hotel where Giles Armiger was stopping.

Giles was dining that night with the English officer, Alan Vincent, who had told him of Drew's past. He saw Nancy come in, and wondered what had become of her brother.

Vincent had offered congratulations: "I read in the London paper that Hallam's engagement is broken. Did you have anything to do with it?"

"I made him tell Miss Dudley the truth."

"How did he take it?"

"Blustered a bit, and then we came to blows—. It seemed a bit beastly to fight over a girl like Joan. But he brought it on himself."

"Did you see her?" Vincent asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I accomplished what I went for. I can wait for the rest."

He said nothing of his promise to Drew. That was between the two of them. He had agreed to Hallam's terms to save Joan. Whether he had saved her for himself had nothing to do with it. It was her happiness which counted.

"She has gone back to New York," he told Vincent, "and Hallam has disappeared . . . His creditors are after him."

"Where's his sister?"

"In Paris."

Alan lighted a cigarette, "I knew her—years ago. There's something rather

fine about her, Armiger. She has had a hard life, but she sees straight, which is more than Drew does. He has been a great drag upon her.” He was silent for a moment, then confessed, “There was a time when I thought a lot of her. But I couldn’t stand Hallam, and she always fought for him, defended him and refused to leave him. That ended things between us. I haven’t seen her for years.”

“If you will look across the dining room,” Giles said, “to that table in the corner, you’ll see her now.”

“You don’t mean?” Alan ejaculated.

“Yes, in the green and silver, with that vivid hair.”

Alan turned, “She hasn’t changed,” he said, after a moment, “she’s the same old Nancy, spectacular, startling; glad to have eyes on her.”

He left it at that, and they talked of Giles’ plans. He was, he said, going into the country a bit, with Scripps and Amélie, and then back to Granitehead —“To my island and my books.”

“And the girl?”

“That is on the knees of the gods, Vincent.”

After the two men separated, Vincent waited in the lounge for Nancy Hallam. “Do you remember me?” he asked, stopping her as she came through with her friends.

“Of course. It has been years, hasn’t it, Alan?”

“Can’t we talk a bit tomorrow? Tea? Here? At five?”

“Yes.” She went on with a smile for him over her shoulder. And the next day she sat opposite him, very handsome in black, with a close green hat, and an emerald at her throat.

“You have changed,” he said. “When I saw you in the dining room I thought you had not. But you are—better-looking, Nancy.”

She laughed, “How like you that sounds. You always made me feel so comfortable, Alan.”

“I am not saying it to make you comfortable. Years ago you were attractive but now you are rather—splendid.”

She liked that. It seemed to her incredible that she should be sitting here talking in this pleasant fashion to the man she had once adored. He had not known she adored him. He had hated Drew, and she had had, of course, to

stick to Drew. And that had ended it.

She found herself confiding in Vincent: “There’s nothing very pleasant ahead of me at the moment. I don’t know whether you have followed Drew’s romance. But it blew up suddenly the other day. He was to have married a very rich girl, but they broke the engagement by mutual consent. It leaves us rather at loose ends—” He was aware of a weariness, a sadness, which was most appealing. She had always seemed so self-sufficient, almost unfeminine in her independence.

“Marriage would have meant a lot to Drew,” she went on. “I had hoped that with a girl like Joan Dudley he would settle down. And I would have a bit of life of my own. You see, I’ve always had him on my mind,” she gave a hard little laugh, “we are a mercenary pair, Alan, and Joan’s money would have helped.”

“You are not as mercenary as you think, Nancy. You have linked your strength always with Drew’s weakness and they won’t balance. I told you that years ago. You could not lift him up—and he would ultimately drag you to his own level.”

“Don’t,” she begged, in a shaking voice, “he’s down and out—and unhappy.”

“I see,” with a sudden impulsive gesture, he laid his hand over hers, “I can’t tell you how sorry I am that you should suffer.”

There were tears in her eyes, “Thank you,” she said, simply, “it’s a great help to have you—sorry.”

It was late when they parted, and Vincent had the address of the cheap *pension* in his pocket. “There’s no reason why we shouldn’t see something of each other, is there?” he asked. “I am going on to London tonight, but I’ll be back in a week and I hope that you’ll dine with me here.”

She promised. He put her in a taxi, and the next morning, flowers came from him—red roses and white heather. Long ago he had sent her flowers like that. The ice around her heart melted a little. She was glad to feel that he was again her friend.



CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A HUNGRY HEART

Farley, packing Joan's trunks in hectic haste at the hotel in Barcelona, had come upon the wedding dress.

She had gone to her mistress, "Do you want to take it with you?"

To Joan, the lovely gown had seemed like the ghost of a dead dream. She remembered what Giles had said, "I should like to tear it to tatters." Well, the dream was torn to tatters—

She said, a sharp note of pain in her voice: "I don't care what you do with it, Farley. So that I never see it again."

Farley, being thrifty, had taken the gown back to the famous dressmaker, who, knowing a good customer, had been gracious. "We can use it in the trousseau of a bride who has ordered from Australia. Yet it is a pity your lady is not to wear it. And that she is not to marry Monsieur. He seemed charming."

Farley had asked, with some surprise, "You saw him?"

"When mademoiselle came for the last fitting—yes."

Farley, puzzled, had asked Joan when she went back to her, "Did Mr. Hallam ever go when you had a fitting?"

"No."

"Monsieur spoke of the last fitting and of a man with you."

"I met Mr. Armiger . . ."

Joan was not quite sure how she felt about Giles. At times she blamed him for his interference—but this, she knew, was in her weaker moments. She had no wish to see him. She wanted nothing but to get away from this strange world of shadows, and find reality, somewhere.

She did not know where she would find it. She only knew that she would hide herself for a time in the old house in Baltimore. She had written to Penelope, “I can’t even come to you, my dear, just now. The moor and the sea and the mists would speak to me of things that happened a year ago. My love for Drew is dead. But the old dream—hurts. I wonder if you understand what I mean?”

Yet when they arrived in Baltimore, the frigidity of the old house almost frightened her. It was spring and there were warm breezes blowing, yet the coldness and emptiness of the big rooms were not tempered by them. “It is dreadful, Farley,” Joan said, when they were upstairs, “I don’t see how I am going to stand it.”

Held in Farley’s comforting arms, she sobbed like a child. “Nothing lasts, dear lamb,” said the wise old woman, “there isn’t any pain that time won’t heal. And you know you’ve done the right thing.”

In the ten days that followed Joan fought her battle of loneliness, and won. She knew the very moment that peace came to her soul. It was on a night early in June when she dreamed again that dream of the man with the cloud back of him, his hand upraised, the wind blowing his hair. She had waked to find the moonlight streaming into her room. It showed on a shelf above the fireplace, the little ship that Giles had sent her. She had often wondered why he had sent it. But now she knew. She had been headed for the rocks, and he had wanted to save her. That was what he had once said, that she was a little ship . . . He had tried to help her make safe harbor.

And suddenly she felt that she was safe, because of what Giles had done for her. He had asked nothing for himself. He had not even written. But he had sent the ship!

She fell asleep quietly after that, and when she waked in the morning, it was to a new world—a world no longer tempestuous—nor shadowed with doubts. She could not have told what had made the difference. She only knew that the old dream was dead and the ache of it gone.

She wrote at once to Penelope. “May I come? And may I leave Farley behind and help you with the work? I want to tie on your big aprons, Penelope, and busy myself in your big old kitchen. And are Muffet’s kittens all grown up? And are the children still missing me?”

She had talked it over with Farley. “You won’t mind, will you, if I leave you here?” And Farley had said, “I know you’ll come back to me, and I don’t fit in up there with Mrs. Sears. And if you are happy, my lamb, nothing else will matter.”

So Joan went back to the house on the bluff, and to the moor and the sea. She went back, too, to the simple friends who loved her—to the little children, and to old John Leonard and his wife, and to Evelyn.

But most of all, she went back to Penelope, whose strength and sanity were a tonic for her tired nerves. It was Penelope who planned the days for her. There were no other people in the house. Joan had insisted that she would pay all that Penelope would receive if there were other boarders and that they must be alone. She and Penelope did all the work. Joan, rising early, would ride alone on the moor. Sometimes as she rode in the fog, there would be a shadowy figure beside her—a figure like a king . . . But she would shake off the illusion and ride on and on until the shadowy figure fled.

Every day, she bathed in the sea and walked in the wood, and visited the neighbors, and came back to help Penelope with the supper—"Your scrambled eggs, Penelope, I'm simply ravenous—and the tomatoes in the garden are luscious for a salad."

Muffet's kittens were in the lank and lean stage which comes between puffball infancy and sleek maturity. They followed Joan everywhere, and were imps of mischief. She fed them and fed the chickens and the doves, and every night Muffet went upstairs with her, and slept on a cushion on the window-sill, and waked her in the morning with a velvet paw and purring presence.

So the days went on—days of serene and quiet living. And it was on one of those days that Joan found herself reading the letter which had come to her in Spain, the letter from Giles Armiger which Farley had found on the floor and had laid away in Joan's desk.

She had discovered it among some papers in a parcel which Farley had put in her trunk. She read it and read it again. Its sentences came to her as freshly as if she had never heard them before:

My dear . . . you are always that in my heart . . . and now that I can say that I love you . . . and you will know I have the right to say it . . . If you are to be happy, love will mean for you constancy . . . gentle living . . . a God in your little home . . . May I come to you Joan? I could still your heart as Hallam has not stilled it . . . don't you know this is true? Don't you?

But she had not known it! She laid the letter down and sat looking out of the window. Under her hand the letter seemed a living thing. So Giles had spoken . . . and she had not listened . . .

Yet, in spite of her silence, he had not forsaken her. He had watched over her, protected her by his tenderness, and in the end he had saved her.

She knew now from what she had been saved. Withdrawn from the glamour of Drew's presence, she was aware poignantly of his weaknesses—adventurer, philanderer, what hope could she have had for the future with a man of such a present and such a past?

As she laid Giles' letter away, she told herself that some day he would come to her. She was not sure when it would be, but he would surely come.

But as the summer slipped by and she had no word from him, she wondered why? Surely he was still her friend? She thought of writing to him, but dared not. Suppose he had changed . . . all men changed . . . and forgot . . .

Yet she was not unhappy. She spent much time with the children—with young John Alden and Priscilla, and with their little friends and neighbors whom she had taught to dance.

They danced on the beach during the summer—mermen and sea maids, nymphs and Neptunes, gay as grigs and looking upon Joan as a fairy princess.

There came a day late in August when there was to be a picnic on the sands, with the children to dance afterwards to the thin music of reed pipes and the deep bass blasts of conch shells.

Joan, helping Penelope beforehand to get the lunch ready, was tied up in a big apron. As she buttered slices of bread, she said, suddenly, "If Drew could see me now."

"You are still thinking of him, my dear?" Penelope, who was frying chickens, turned from the stove to ask the question.

"Yes. He hated things like this. He wanted me to be a grand lady with my head in the air." She was smiling.

Penelope gave her a keen glance, "You can laugh over it, Joan?"

"Oh, yes. And why shouldn't I wear big aprons and butter bread for sandwiches? I did it for years. And I am the same Joan, even if Aunt Adelaide did leave me more money than I know what to do with."

Penelope said, later, to old John Leonard, "She is getting over it."

"Thank God . . ." The two of them were sitting a little apart from the rest of the picnickers. Joan was filling the children's plates with a second helping—"Drumsticks, drumsticks, who wants a drumstick?" she chanted, holding aloft a fork on which was impaled a brown morsel of deliciousness.

“It has been a hard experience,” old John stated, “but she has weathered the storm. My heart was heavy when I thought she might marry him.”

Just then Joan turned towards them, “There’s loads of chicken. May I bring you some?”

She came bearing a heaped-up platter. “How do you like your waitress?” she demanded.

“She’s too good to be true,” John Leonard told her, “we have a feeling that you’ll vanish suddenly, and never come back.”

“I shall always come back,” she said with earnestness. “Perhaps I shall never go away.”

It was at sunset that the children danced on the beach—the water was rosy with reflected light from the west, and the little folk in their sheer garments of green and amethyst and gray seemed to belong to the sky and sea as they skimmed across the sands like birds on the wing, or raced the white-capped breakers singing in time to the triple beat.

Joan was in fluttering blue, her feet and arms bare—a beautiful creature. Her friends, watching her, marvelled. “How can she be content among us here,” Evelyn said, “with her great loveliness and her great fortune?”

“There are times,” said old John Leonard, “when money and beauty do not feed a hungry heart.”

After the dance, Joan wandered away from the others. A curve in the beach brought her to a great sandbank and, sheltered from the west wind which blew cold as the night came on, she looked out over the sea. A single star hung in the sky. The world was at peace.

She was soothed by that vast serenity of sky and sea. She felt that it was good to be here after months of restless seeking. A year ago Aunt Adelaide had lived out her discontented days. And now she was at rest. A year ago they had been at Granitehead, and one morning she had walked into the dim book shop, and had met Giles Armiger.

She wondered where he was tonight. She wished that he were here, that she might talk to him quietly on the sands. He was her friend—her more than friend? She did not know. She only knew that she wanted him beside her, to tell him the things which had happened since she had seen him in Paris. She wanted to tell him that she would never marry Drew. That she did not love him. That the last flicker of his fascination for her had died when he had showed her the dark pages of his life’s story.

Well, perhaps some day Giles would come to her. If he did not, what then? The winter was close at hand, and she must be making plans for it. What plans? Should she shut herself up with Penelope in the snug house on the bluff? Should she hold these simple friends close to her heart and think them sufficient? Or should she go back to Baltimore, and, opening the great mansion, carry on the traditions of hospitality which belonged to it?



CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

REPRIEVE

Giles was back in Granitehead. He had left Scripps and Amélie radiant in their new life. Yet his island as he entered it had not seemed lonely. He liked its solitude. He felt he could live there happily with his thoughts of Joan. Since he had known she was not to marry Drew, he had been released from the horror which had hung over him. He was like a man who, sentenced to death, is reprieved at the last moment.

He spent the days in his bookshop. In August there were many people from the hotel who welcomed him back, and who were glad to buy at high prices the rare and lovely books he had brought from overseas. But there were books he did not show them—books which he had bought for the library which was some day to be Joan's. It was, he had decided, to contain a marvellous collection of the great romances of the ages. He began with an exquisite Abélard and Héloïse, rebound in violet leather, hand-tooled—"I flattered myself," wrote Abélard, "that when I should see you no more you would rest in my memory without troubling my mind; that Brittany and the sea would suggest other thoughts; that my fasts and studies would delete you from my heart. But in spite of severe fasts and redoubled studies, in spite of the distance of three hundred miles which separates us, your image, as you describe yourself in your veil, appears to me and confounds all my resolutions."

So Giles wished that he might write to Joan! Some day, perhaps, when the two years were over! And in the meantime, here was an old Dante, shabby but priceless, to set beside the Abélard. Here, too, were Swift and his Stella . . . were there no romances without tragedy, without sin and sordidness, pain, despair? For stripped of the glamour which the years had cast over them, what of these lovers? Thinking the world well lost—for what? Love?

Oh, not love as he and Joan would know it. On the shelves these old romances would glow with their mad passions—but he and Joan—tenderness

and truth, firelight on children's faces . . . constancy, devotion; yes, and a touch too, of the madness in those old books . . .

Oh, he wanted to be with her . . . to hear her voice . . . to touch her hand. Yet—to see her now, would be to show his heart, and Drew had his word of honor!

So back to his books again . . . to his quiet evenings on the island; to Dilly now and then for supper and a chat afterwards while William tended the light.

Dilly was frankly curious about Joan: “You’re still in love with her, Giles?”

“Of course.”

“And she isn’t going to marry Drew Hallam?”

“No.”

“Then why don’t you marry her yourself?”

“You go too fast, Dilly. Suppose she wouldn’t have me?”

“Any woman would have you if you wanted her.”

He laughed: “You flatter me.”

She knew he was keeping something back: “Where is she now?”

“I’m not sure.”

“And you haven’t tried to find out?”

“No.”

“Why not?” Then penitently, “Oh, Giles, I haven’t any right to be asking these things. But I want you to be happy.”

“I am happy.”

And that was all she could get out of him. After he had gone she talked it over with William. “Perhaps they are engaged and aren’t telling anybody.”

So August ended and September came, and in a week Labor Day would end the season at the hotels.

Giles, facing the winter, found himself suddenly restless. After all, why should he not travel? Bridge the months between his meeting with Joan with adventure? If he stayed on his Island he would have for company only José and Margarida, and now and then Dilly and her William, or the young doctor and his wife.

Yet—what did he need of company, when he had his dreams of Joan? He would read and write and go back and forth to his shop.

So day after day he was busy among his books. Night after night he sat by his glowing fire, seeing in it visions of the future.

Dilly scolded him, “It’s no life for a man. What are you thinking of, Giles?”

“What would you have me do?”

“Oh, wake up! There is all the world before you—you’re too young to stagnate.”

“Perhaps,” he told her, smiling, “I am—hibernating!”

Dilly was getting supper. She had hot biscuits in the oven and now and then she peeped at them. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright. November had come, and a light snow was blowing down from the north. Small Susan in blue rompers, crooned a song to old Peter, who sat beside her on the kitchen floor. Old Peter was happy with the lighthouse family. In summer he had found companionship with Dilly’s hens. And in winter he sought the warmth of the snug little house, and was adored by Susan.

“It’s no way for a man to live,” scolded Dilly, as she split the browned hot biscuits and laid them on a big blue platter, “alone. Haven’t you any ambition, Giles?”

“For what?”

Dilly turned and looked at him, “To get on in the world.”

“What do you call getting on?”

“Making a success of yourself.”

“I am a success,” confidently, “I have money enough, so why earn more? I have an occupation I love. I have a house . . . which needs only one thing to make it—heaven . . .”

Dilly’s busy hands were still. “What does it need to make it heaven?”

“Joan.”

She started to speak, but he stopped her. “I can’t have her now. Perhaps I can never have her. And I can’t tell you why, Dilly. But this is what I think of life. Not as a scramble after vain ambitions, but as a serene and gracious thing, to be spent with the books one loves, with the woman one loves . . .”

There were tears in Dilly’s eyes. “I know . . .” and after a moment, “that’s

what keeps me contented here with William and the light. Our life isn't like yours, Giles. And Joan won't ever have to do the things I do. Cook, and wash and iron, and look after my old hens. But I love doing it because of William and the baby."

They were both rather silent after that, and when supper was served, Giles carried in the big blue platter on which chicken with a rich gravy had been poured over the biscuits, and William joined them at the table and spoke of the storm. "If this keeps up, we shall be shut in by Thanksgiving."

"I'll start back as soon as supper is over," Giles said. But he did not, and when he finally left the lighthouse, the snow was whirling in a wild dance and the wind blowing great guns. All the way home he fought with the elements. But he loved it. He felt young, strong—a conqueror. Nothing could keep him from Joan. She was his . . . and she would know it . . . Some day he would go to her . . . and when at last they were married, they would roam through the world, looking for all the rare and wonderful books which might be found by a man who knew. And then, coming back to his island, he would write a book about these books he had found, and she would sit beside him—a thrilling presence . . .

This mood lasted all through the storm—then when José made a trip to Granitehead and brought back the mail, came the reaction. The little Granitehead local paper had copied an item from one of the big New York dailies. Miss Joan Dudley, the paper said, who had been spending some time in Maine, was sailing in February on a trip around the world. She had closed her house in Baltimore and her stay would be indefinite.

Giles was conscious of a raging rebellion. She was going around the world, and he would not be with her! Oh, what would she see of the things he might have shown her? There were old manuscripts in old libraries, old volumes in old monasteries, stories carved on stone before books were written. There were tombs that kings had built to the women they loved, oases in the desert with all the world away—gardens still redolent with the perfume of long-ago romance. Joan must see these through his eyes—see them with him . . .

And he was bound . . . by a promise to a man who wasn't worth it. The scene with Drew in the little grove, as he looked back upon it, seemed mad and melodramatic. Why should he have promised anything, and having promised, why should he keep it? Drew had had no right to make conditions. There was no reason why Giles should not go to Joan and lay the thing before her. He had tried to save her the humiliation which Drew had declared would be hers if Giles did not agree to his bargain. He would have married Rose. Well, if he married her now, it couldn't hurt Joan. And why should he let Joan slip away

from him, when he might have her?

Yet a promise was a promise. He knew that he would not break it. He was a prisoner, bound by chains of tradition, by gentlemanly codes of honor. He had always respected the integrity of his word. He must respect it now. The world might call him a fool. But he had to be what he was. And Joan would sail away from him not knowing that his heart followed.



CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

A MAD ADVENTURE

It was Penelope who had suggested the sea voyage to Joan. "I can't quite face the thought of the cold of winter."

Joan had been apathetic. She would not have dared confess to Penelope how she hated the thought of facing anything . . . winter, spring, summer—all the years to come.

"I had thought I might open the house in Baltimore, and that you would stay with me."

"I should hate it, my dear," Penelope had said, frankly, "and I think you would. It would mean a lot of entertaining, and you are not up to it."

"No, I'm not," Joan's voice had broken on that, and Penelope had patted her shoulder and had said: "Well, think about the trip—the sea air and the sunshine would put color in your cheeks."

For Joan was as white as a lily. Penelope, worried about her, had talked the thing over with old John Leonard. "There isn't enough here to interest her. She is putting up a brave fight, but she needs something more than we can give her."

"Do you think she regrets giving up Hallam?"

"No. She's glad. But she doesn't know what to do with her life. She has money—everything—but she isn't knit by any real ties to the people who were Adelaide Delafield's friends. They mean nothing to her—and yet her position demands that she take her place among them."

"She'll find herself in time," the old man said, "a way will be opened."

To neither of the two people who loved her, however, had the truth been revealed—that Joan was longing for Giles Armiger—for proof of his

continued friendship—for proof, indeed, of his love. She was not perhaps aware what she wanted—but it was six months since her engagement to Drew had been broken, and in all those months she had not heard from Giles.

She had come, gradually, to a realization of what he meant to her. Her mind had dwelt on the days in the dim old shop, the night when he had sat in the pavilion and had talked with her in the storm. She had leaned then on his wisdom and his strength; she had trusted him absolutely until the moment when Scripps had spoiled everything. Yet, when she had learned the truth, she had been swept away from him by the spell that Drew had put upon her.

And now that spell was broken, she again wanted Giles—for her friend—she would not let herself think beyond that . . .

At Christmas she sent him a note. But no answer came. She had said she would like to see him. Surely if the note had reached him, he would come . . .

So January came and in two weeks she would be off and away. And suddenly one night as Joan lay in bed and the moonlight shone on the little ship, so that it seemed to sail on a silver sea, she made up her mind.

If Giles would not come to her, she would go to him.

She did much of her shopping in Boston and was to have two days for final fittings. It would be easy enough to run down to Granitehead—to look in on the old shop. To speak to Giles about books . . . She need not tell him why she had come—but when she looked in his face, she felt that she would know if he had changed.

Farley came up from Baltimore to stay with her at the big hotel. The maid was then to go back with her to Maine, to pack trunks and get everything ready. Farley would, of course, take the trip with them. She was not anxious to cross the seas, but she would, of course, go anywhere with the child she loved.

It was on the morning of the second day in Boston that Joan said: “I’m going to run up to Granitehead to see Mr. Armiger about some books.”

She said it casually, though her heart was beating madly.

“You’d better wear your fur coat,” Farley advised, “it will be bitter cold down by the water.”

So Joan as she started off was beautiful in silver-colored broadtail, with a wide, warm collar and great cuffs of gray fox, and there was a little violet hat and violet bag, and a soft wool dress of the same color underneath the coat.

She took the train down. The air was clear as crystal. The tide, coming in,

as they crossed the marshes, deepened the shallow waters until they were as dark as indigo against the red and brown of the coarse grasses.

When she reached Granitehead, Joan walked from the station to the boardwalk, meeting few people and none who knew her. The boardwalk was deserted, yet it did not seem desolate, for there was the flash and sparkle of the sea, and the sound of it in a wild and glorious song.

Joan, approaching the shop, was conscious of a thrilling exaltation. In a moment she would meet her friend, speak to him, see his face, and her heart would be stilled.

Yet when she came to the door of the shop, it was shut. A card stuck in the window announced that business was closed for the winter.

So that was that . . .

As she turned away, it seemed to her that the day darkened. The wind blew cold. She shivered in her warm coat.

She walked to the rail and stood looking over the wide stretch of water. Somewhere out there was Armiger's Island. She wondered if he were at home—or had he gone far away—so far that she was forgotten . . .

Below her was a floating pier. Now and then a boat came up to it. One of the boats seemed to bring passengers. It was in charge of a red-faced and hearty seaman in a leather coat and cap. If she asked him, would he take her to the island? It would be a mad adventure. But why not? If Giles were there, she could talk to him of books . . .

Oh, but why deceive herself? She would talk to him of more than books. Of their friendship . . . and of his letter. She had his letter in her bag. She would know . . . if he had changed . . . and if he had, she could come away . . . and he need not know what had been in her heart . . .

She made her way down to the pier. "Can you tell me," she asked the man, "whether Mr. Armiger is on his island? His shop is closed."

The man took his pipe from his mouth. "Yes, he's there. I saw him in his boat this morning . . ."

"Could you—take me over—?"

"I could . . ." he glanced at the sky, "but you might have trouble getting back—there's wind in that sky, and snow . . ."

Joan was reckless, "I'll risk it."

"Just as you say."

She got into the boat and he started the motor. The boat took the crescent curve through the harbor and came out presently into the open sea. The red faced seaman as he drove it through the waves, glanced now and then at his passenger. He thought she was like a picture in all that silver fur, with the violet hat like a helmet framing her lovely face.



CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

A HOUSE ROOFED WITH STARS

The house on the island was so still that it seemed as if it held its breath—waiting. The logs in the fireplace in the living room had burned down to deep-glowing coals. Between the amber curtains of the wide west window, the sky showed a band of orange between gray sky and sea.

Giles, at his desk, saw neither sky nor sea nor sunset. He was absorbed in his task. He was writing a history of the great romances of the ages. It was to illumine for Joan the library he was planning. His interest in it was intense. He felt that his absorption in it would help to bridge the silence of the months ahead.

As the sky darkened, he laid down his pen to light a lamp, then leaned back in his chair to relax and rest. He was aware of the silence. Not a sound anywhere. Just that breathless, almost sinister stillness.

It was a relief when out of the west came a booming blast. The wind was rising, and the waves thundered against the rocks. Giles rose to put another log on the fire. He loved this fire of his as if it were a living thing. It was his comrade now that he had no other. Without it the room seemed robbed of something companionable and comforting. As the log settled into place and the coals caught at it, the flutter of the flames was like little voices speaking. Giles stood looking down at it, a lonely man, seeking to find in this inanimate thing, some surcease for his solitude. Yet, after all, what was a fire to warm a man's heart?

He looked very young as he stood there—with his slender figure, his ruffled hair, his hands in the pockets of his short velvet coat—too young for this cloistered existence. Yet he wanted now no other. With Joan he would go forth to high adventure. But not without her.

The house shook with the assaults the wind made upon it. Margarida in her

kitchen left her corner by the huge hot stove and went to the window to look. What she saw outside caused her to turn and speak excitedly to her husband. "There's Timothy Tucker's boat and a woman in it."

José, who had shared her corner, came out of it, reluctantly, to peer over her shoulder. Then, with a quick word or two to his wife, he snatched up his cap and leather coat and ran down to the pier.

Timothy was making the landing with difficulty. "I told you we'd have nasty weather," he informed his passenger, "now you're here, you'll have to stay."

Joan had a sudden frightened sense of the consequences of her foolhardiness. She had had no fear of the wind and raging waters, but now that she had reached the island, she wanted to turn back. Oh, what would Giles think of her? What did this dark-skinned foreigner think of her as he steadied the boat with one hand and reached out the other to draw her up strongly to the surf-washed planks where he stood?

She waited while the two men talked. "I've got to get right back," Timothy was saying, "we were a long time coming and there are a lot of workmen I'll have to ferry over. She'd better stay till the wind dies down. Can you look after her?"

José nodded, "Sure."

Timothy turned and drove his boat through the tumbling waters. He had been well paid by his passenger. She was a pretty thing. He wondered who she was and why she had been willing to take that wild ride.

José led the way to the house, and Margarida met them at the door. "You are wet," she cried, and ran her hand over Joan's fur coat. "Let me hang it by the stove. And your hat . . . it is ruined . . ."

Joan took off the violet cap and shook the water from it, "It will be all right when it dries."

"And your feet? Are they soaked?"

"No. My maid made me wear galoshes."

Margarida knelt and unfastened the heavy overshoes. "Mr. Armiger is in the living room," she said, "you go in and get warm, and presently I will bring some tea."

So Joan, unannounced, her steps noiseless on the thick rug, entered the living room and saw Giles standing by the fire. He turned with a start of

surprise as she said, "It's Joan Dudley."

He came towards her with illumined face. She was aware of the beating of her heart. He lifted both of her hands and kissed them, and seeing the look in her eyes, drew her to him.

For a long time neither of them spoke. Then Giles said: "Forgive me," and released her.

"There's nothing to . . . forgive . . ."

He did not meet her glance. He placed a chair for her by the fire. "Sit here," he said, "you must be frozen."

"I am not cold. I wore my fur coat. Your maid took it." She hardly knew what she was saying. She had gone to him like a bird to its mate, and now . . . he was putting her from him. Oh, very definitely putting her from him as he said, formally, "I will have Margarida bring tea."

"She told me she would bring it." A pause . . . then Joan looked up at him as he stood on the hearth-rug, "I had to come," her voice shook, "you did not answer my letter."

"No."

"But—you got it?"

"Yes."

Her eyes were shadowed, "Why—didn't you answer?"

"My dear . . . there were reasons . . ."

She was very white. "Oh, I am sorry I came . . ."

"No," he crossed the rug and stood beside her chair laying his hand on hers, "it was a beautiful thing for you to do, beautiful . . . Joan, I am going to ask you to believe in me . . . even when the things I do seem to you strange . . ."

Her hand trembled under his: "I couldn't have come," she said, "if it had not been for the letter you sent me in Spain. I have read it over and over. It said things to me I have been waiting all my life to hear. Things Drew never said—not in all his love-making—things about a quiet heart, and home, and serene happiness. You meant it all then, Giles? Do you still mean it?" She tried to say it calmly, but her strength was not enough. Her tears overflowed.

"My dear—I shall mean it until the end of time."

"Then—why . . .?"

“I can’t tell you.”

He left her and went to the window, looking out at the storm. Joan sat very still by the fire. She had a sense of forces at work which she did not understand. Giles loved her. But he had no word for their future.

Out of the silence, she said, “I am going abroad.”

“I know. I saw it in the paper.”

Another long silence, which was broken by Margarida’s entrance with the tray. She found Joan by the fire and Giles by the window. It was not what she expected. She had her own romantic sense of what the situation demanded. She set her tray on a low table in front of Joan. There was hot toast and a rich dark cake. Giles surveying what was set forth, demanded, “Where did you have your lunch, Joan?”

She confessed, “I didn’t have any.”

“You’d better make some sandwiches, Margarida.”

Joan begged, “Please don’t. I’m not hungry.”

“Then we’ll have an early dinner.”

“I can’t stay to dinner.”

“I am afraid you will have to stay. The storm is increasing.”

She waited for Margarida to go before she answered him, “I can’t stay, Giles. It was silly of me to come.”

“Don’t say that again. And there is no reason why you should not let me put you up for the night. Margarida will look after you.”

“But I left Farley at the hotel in Boston.”

“We can telephone.”

She was troubled: “I don’t think I should . . .”

“It won’t be safe to try to make the mainland with this wind. But why begin to worry now? It may clear before we know it. And now, will you pour my tea . . . two lumps and lemon . . .”

He set himself after that to cheer her. He made her eat, too, a slice of toast and one of the dark rich cake, “It has almonds in it and spice—Margarida will be miserable if you don’t praise it.”

He talked then of books. He told her what he was doing—writing of the great romances of all the ages. “I am writing it for you.” Yet he did not tell her

of his dream that some day they might adventure together, going into strange places to find the old volumes for her shelves.

Night was coming on, and Margarida entered to ask about dinner: "You may set the table for two." Giles said.

After that, Margarida went back and forth in the dining room, bringing in a silver bowl of fruit and flanking it with violet candles. When at last they went in, Giles said: "Trust Margarida to see the eternal fitness of things. She matched your gown, and is probably sighing over the fact that there are no violets on the island to make her color scheme perfect."

When they were seated, Giles said a simple grace. It was a wonderful thing, Joan felt, to be there with him. She found herself saying in her heart, *My beloved is mine and I am his . . .* And suddenly she knew that she wanted to stay here with Giles forever. To be shut up warm and close, away from that opulent and frightening world into which Adelaide Delafield had brought her.

To Joan the island house seemed roofed with stars and encompassed by shining waters. What did she care for this night of storm! She was safe with the man she loved. She would always be safe with him. She knew it. His tenderness would shield her; his quietness would calm her.

She ate little of the delicious dinner.

"My dear," Giles said, "this won't do. You can't keep yourself alive on a cup of consommé and two bites of a chicken."

She smiled at him, "Three bites."

"Margarida has a wonderful pudding which she always serves for company. You must eat that if you eat nothing else."

But when the pudding came, and she tasted it and laid down her spoon, he did not press her. For as he had talked to her throughout the meal, ignoring her silences, supplementing her brief comments by easy discourse on a thousand things, he had found himself entering into her mood. Starry-eyed, dreamy, she sat at his table, in what would, please God, be some day her rightful place. She was his for the asking. He knew that. Yet he could not ask her. But nothing should separate them—neither time nor space. He could not, of course, tell her this, but he felt she must know. For going out from him to her was such a surge of emotion that he felt she must be swept by it into complete understanding.

When after dinner, they went back to the living room, they found that the wind had changed. "The night is wonderful," Giles said, as he looked out of the window, "come Joan, and see."

The rising moon shone through silver veils of cloud. The waves were tipped with white feathers of foam. The scene was exquisite, enchanting . . . "The storm is over," Giles said, "I can get you to the mainland in time for the nine o'clock train."

Quite suddenly Joan knew that she didn't want to catch the nine o'clock train. She wanted to stay in this house roofed with stars and encompassed by shining waters. But not for worlds would she have voiced her thought, and what she said was, "Farley will be glad."

So presently she had on her fur coat and galoshes and she and Giles set forth in the silver night.

The waves were still high, but there was no wind. They made great speed, so that in a few minutes, the island was just a thin dark line between shining sky and shining sea. Once when the boat sank deep into the trough of the sea, Giles asked, "Are you afraid?"

"Not with you."

"I sometimes think," his voice had a touch of exaltation, "I sometimes think, Joan, that it would be marvellous to go out into the night with the woman one loves. To leave life behind and see together the beauty that is beyond the stars. The mystic wonder of it all, my dear."

She was never to forget that moment. The veiled moon and the silver sea, and Giles, his face uplifted—speaking of the things which belong not to earth and its harsh adventures, but to a life linked with eternity—a spiritual enterprise . . .

For the rest of the way they had few words for each other. Later, as she re-lived in the train the ecstasy of that voyage, it seemed to her she might have said something to meet his mood. She had sat in silence, inarticulate because of the emotion which gripped her.

Giles had begged that she would let him go with her to Boston. But she had refused. She had known that her strength was not equal to the strain. Very definitely and resolutely he was putting her out of his life. As he had lifted her from the boat, he had held her close for a moment in his arms. "This is our real 'good-bye,' Joan," he had said, and for a moment they had clung together.

Not a word of when he would see her! What did it mean? Yet he had said he loved her. She knew that he loved her . . .

When she reached Boston, she found Farley strained and anxious. "My lamb," she said, "why didn't you take me with you?"

“Because,” Joan’s voice was shaking, “if I had, I should have had to be sensible, and I didn’t want to be sensible. I did a mad and impetuous thing, Farley. And I’m glad I did it. And I’d do it over again,” she began to weep bitterly. “Oh, Farley, what have I done, that life should work out this way for me?”

“You must wait, my darling. Life hasn’t worked out for you yet. There are years ahead. Of happiness. And you mustn’t cry. I’ll tuck you up in bed, and give you something hot to drink and you’ll feel different.”

“I shall never feel different, Farley.”

But Farley would not listen. She busied herself with drawing Joan’s bath, and laying out rosy garments, and giving orders through the telephone for lemons and sugar and boiling water.

And when at last she had everything off of her competent mind, and was sitting by the bed, with her young mistress propped up on pillows, the maid said, “It might ease your mind to tell me all about it.”

So Joan, tense and torn by doubts, opened her heart to the motherly creature. It was a long story—some of it Farley knew, and some she did not. “It is all so hard to understand,” she ended.

“It may be hard for you, but it isn’t hard for me,” Farley answered with emphasis.

Joan, dabbing her eyes with a wisp of chiffon, demanded, “Why isn’t it hard?”

“Because I know the world better than you, my lamb, and from all you’ve told me, I’ll bet my head that Drew Hallam is to blame. If he can’t have you, he won’t let anyone else. He’s a dog in the manger, Miss Joan. And that’s all there is to it.”



CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

A PRIZE FOR ANY MAN

Nancy Hallam, in the shabby *pension* in Paris, was standing in front of her mirror. She had on a new dress—dull green with touches of gold embroidery, and a velvet turban of the same color wound tight about her copper-colored hair. She looked slim and young and happy as she smiled at her reflection. “Your wedding dress, my dear,” she told the girl in the mirror, “and you’ve spent your last cent for it.”

There were to be no guests at the wedding. She and Alan had made up their minds to that. He had been very masterful in the whole matter. “You are not going to escape me this time,” he had told her, “and as for that brother of yours, give him what you’ve got left of your money, and he’ll be glad enough to have it.”

“But it seems like desertion,” she had protested.

“He deserted you. It will be a relief to him, if he loves you, to know you are happy and safe.”

“Safe,” she had breathed, “I haven’t been safe for a thousand years.”

“Is that why you are marrying me?”

“One of the reasons.”

“And the other?”

“I love you.”

He had laughed and kissed her. “I know you do, my dear.”

So here was the wedding-gown, and she had written to Drew, telling him that all of her little income was his, and would he send her his love and blessing? And she had had no answer.

Well, she was not going to worry. For years she had agonized over Drew,

and her life had been sordid and cheap and insecure. Alan would change all that. He had a country house and a town house, and his friends would take her in. Society standards weren't as rigid as they had been in her young girlhood. She would put behind her the memory of those haphazard and hateful days and live sheltered and serene as Alan's wife.

For she really loved him. She knew that without the town house or the country house she would have married him. She had great capacity for affection. She had lavished it on her brother, sacrificing everything to his weakness, and now she would lavish it on a man whose strength would bear her up. It seemed almost too amazing for reality that she could look forward to the future, without fear of old age and poverty and perhaps disgrace.

In an hour the wedding would be over. Her bag was packed, the wonderful fur coat which had been one of Alan's gifts lay over a chair. They were to spend their honeymoon in northern Africa. They would probably meet a lot of people they knew. As Mrs. Alan Vincent she could hold up her head with the best of them.

When she went downstairs her mail was handed to her. There was nothing from Drew, but she found a letter from Rose Carter.

Rose was in New York. She had seen a lot of Drew. "Things are quite as they used to be between us, Nancy. He says you are going to be married. Well, I think you are wise. You have given Drew so many years of your life, and now, perhaps, your mantle will fall on me. I know Drew's faults, and he knows mine. We ought to hit it off nicely together. And as mother and I have made quite a nice little sum through the rise in stocks, the financial situation is eased . . ."

There was a lot more, and when Nancy had read it all, she dashed off a hasty letter to her brother: "Rose says you are going to marry her. Well, I hope you will be as happy as I am. Alan is such a darling—and you wouldn't know me. I am getting to be as 'domestic as a plate' as somebody puts it. I'll send you a wedding present when we reach Cairo . . . and here's much love, and my heart's wish for your happiness."

It was in Cairo, two weeks later, that she bought a jewel for Rose and for Drew a beautiful and extravagantly expensive box for cigarettes, inlaid with gold and silver and with a line or two in Arabic wishing him long life and love's fulfilment.

"He likes such things," Nancy told her husband, "but I feel as if I were spending an awful lot."

“What you are spending is nothing to what you are going to spend,” he assured her.

She touched the back of his hand with her finger tips, “Alan, I am so happy.”

He looked down at her. “Happy? We haven’t touched the peak yet. Wait until we ride out into the desert . . .”

For that was their dream . . . to spend the remainder of their honeymoon far from the habitations of men . . . alone in a vast solitude . . .

Nancy’s eyes were misty . . . “How I have laughed at sentimental lovers,” she said, “and now . . . oh, Alan, I don’t deserve my Paradise . . .”

Drew Hallam got Nancy’s Paris letter at his club, and when he had read it he called up Rose. “What,” he demanded, “have you been writing to Nancy?”

“Why?”

“She congratulates me on my coming marriage—to you . . .”

Rose’s laugh rippled over the wire. “Well, it is coming, isn’t it?”

“Yes. But not yet. Nothing is settled. And here’s Nan planning to send a wedding present.” . .

“Let her send it.”

“But I’d rather you hadn’t told her.”

“Why?”

“Oh . . . time enough when we’ve done it.”

“You mean that you want to marry first and tell it afterward?”

“Yes.”

“Heavens—how uneconomic. If we let people know, we can furnish an apartment with what they will give us. Nobody gives anything if you just announce it afterwards.”

“Are you serious, or are you trying to be humorous?”

“Come and see,” again her light laugh rippled.

He hung up the receiver and sat frowning, his eyes on the floor. Always when he talked to Rose he felt as if a mirror were held up to the worst of him. Joan had brought out the best. Joan . . . He groaned and dropped his head on

his arm.

The telephone at his side tinkled. He lifted the receiver. "Baltimore is calling," a voice said, "one moment, please."

And then, incredibly . . . Joan! "Could you come and see me here? I have something important to talk over with you."

"You are in Baltimore?"

"Yes. Could you run over tomorrow? I am sorry to ask it. But it is—important."

He found himself saying eagerly, "Have you—forgiven me?"

He was aware of a change in her voice—a withdrawal—"Oh . . . you mustn't think—I have changed my mind. What I want to talk over is something—different."

Yet in the face of that avowal, after she had rung off, Drew found life flowing back into his veins. He walked jauntily to the mirror and squared his shoulders at his reflection. He was looking a bit run down, but he would be his best with Joan. He always was. And she was giving him an opportunity . . . and he knew his power. No matter what she said, when he was near her, he could sway her. And now, with this one last chance . . . well, he would make the most of it.

His eye fell on Rose's picture. There was, of course, between them a sort of understanding. But Rose had brought it about, hanging around, urging things. If he could have Joan back, Rose wouldn't matter. Not for a moment. Nothing would matter—but Joan.

When the next day, he entered the drawing-room of the Baltimore house, he found the effect of frigidity lessened by golden roses in bowls of deep-toned pottery, by cushions and hangings of rich and glowing colors, and by a tea-table set in front of an open fire.

Joan wore a simple frock of yellow wool. She seemed to move in sunshine, although the lamps were lighted against the darkness of the winter afternoon.

He held her hand, his eyes devouring her. "You beauty . . .!"

The old thrilling voice! But it had lost its power. "Please . . ." she protested.

"But you are a beauty."

She laughed lightly and withdrew her hand. "It is my new gown. I bought it to wear on the ship."

“I saw that you were going away.”

“I’m sailing around the world. I shall see everything . . .” she opened her hands in a wide gesture.

“You won’t see anything lovelier than yourself.”

Again she laughed lightly, and seated herself behind the tea-table, barricading herself as it were, against him. Diggs came in with hot water, hot muffins . . .

Joan, pouring, said, “One slice of lemon . . . no sugar?”

He took his cup from her. “You haven’t forgotten?”

“Why should I forget?” coolly. “Aunt Adelaide trained me to remember people’s preferences. She said it was one of the secrets of a hostess’ success to know whether a guest wanted cream or lemon, or four lumps or one.”

“I wonder what she would say if she could see this room,” his eyes roamed about it, “You’ve made a perfect setting for your personality.”

“Have I? Drew, you’re not eating your muffin.”

“My dear child, I must think of my figure.”

He was standing on the hearth-rug, his cup in his hand. He was well-groomed, good-looking. But the glamour was gone. The king was dead . . .! And a prince reigned in his place—a prince with ruffled hair, slender and straight in a shabby velvet coat . . .!

And with the thought of Giles, she said, without preamble, “Drew, I asked you here, because there is something I must know.”

“Yes?”

“What happened that night when Giles Armiger came to the monastery?”

He had not expected that, and paused before replying: “Why do you ask?”

“Because since then he has kept away from me.”

“Why shouldn’t he keep away?”

“We have always been such friends.”

“Men change.”

“Not Giles.”

“How can you be sure?”

She said, bravely, "I was not sure. So I went to him—to his island. Last week. And now I know . . ."

Her eyes were like stars. She had never been so beautiful as in this moment when honestly and openly she showed her feeling for the man he hated. "Long before my engagement with you was broken, I knew that my friendship for Giles meant more to me than my love for you. That is why it was not hard to give you up. My pride was hurt, but not my heart."

He sat there staring at her. So this was the end of all his hopes! He had come, gay and debonair, to essay once more, the rôle of conqueror, only to find his rival occupying the field.

Suddenly the barriers of self-control broke. His face was red and his eyes hard as he bent down to her. "So you went and asked him if he loved you? And of course he said 'yes.' "

"Drew, how dare you . . .!"

"You've got money. You're a prize for any man. I knew that. Armiger knows it. Do you fancy for a moment that if you had been just a little schoolteacher as you were when your aunt picked you up that either of us would have found you charming?"

She rose, her head high, "Please, go away—at once, Drew . . ."

"No. I'm not going till I tell you what I think of Armiger. And when I have told you, I'll go up to his blooming island and tell him to his face. A promise is a promise . . ."

He stopped as she gave a quick cry: "Then he did promise something? To you? What was it, Drew?"

He straightened up and laughed—a discordant, desperate sound. "Do you think I'd tell you? Find out from him. But I'll see him first . . ." He flung himself from the room. She heard him speak to Diggs as the man handed him his hat and got him into his coat. Then the outer door opened and shut. He was gone . . .



CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

A PRINCE REIGNS

For two days snow had been coming down from the north, so that when at last the sun shone, the world was blanketed and blanchd where the waters of the harbor and of the open sea spread blue in startling contrast to the prevailing whiteness.

Dilly, standing by the window of her cottage, surveyed the scene. “Has it really cleared?” she asked her William.

He shook his head. “More snow probably. It’s thickening up already.”

“Giles is coming over,” Dilly said. “He telephoned he had a letter from Scripps. I told him to have supper with us. I’m having a bee-yutiful baked fish, William, and an apple pie.”

“I’ll have an appetite for them, after my day’s work. Everything frozen—and your precious hens having to have their house heated . . .”

“Well, why not,” Dilly demanded, “if their precious old legs are cold?”

“Fowls have feathers to keep them warm.”

“Oh, but you don’t really mind, do you William, putting in a stove? When it makes them so comfortable,” her voice was coaxing.

“I don’t mind anything you ask me to do,” he bent and kissed her.

She sighed, contentedly. “We’re happy, aren’t we? Perhaps we do talk more about pies than poetry. But according to modern psychology a woman must express herself, and when you are on a peninsula with nothing but a lighthouse and some old biddies and a husband and a baby, about the only art by which you can release your frustrated craving for excitement is the culinary one. And being a good cook may, after all, mean as much to my particular population as free verse or a saxophone symphony may mean to Greenwich

Village.”

William kissed her again, “I’ll bet they haven’t anything prettier than you in the whole of New York.”

She laughed and again smoothed his coat with a tender hand. “My very dearest dear,” she said, soberly, “we have to love each other a lot in this shut-in world, don’t we?”

He put a finger under her chin. “Sometimes you’re bored?”

She nodded. “But only for a little minute. When I read things like Joan Dudley’s going around the world . . . I . . . Oh, William, do you think you and I will ever go around the world?”

“Of course,” stoutly, “when Susan is big enough to leave.”

“We won’t leave her. We will take her. William, some day we will charter a tramp steamer, and sail it ourselves. Perhaps we can take the hens . . .” She was laughing and lighted up. Herself again. That was Dilly. Making the best of her isolation. A gallant figure. Gay against all odds.

When her husband was gone, Dilly put her mind seriously on getting the supper. She stuffed the fish, made the pie, set the table, and when Giles arrived she was ready for him.

He brought her flowers. Sweet peas. Pink ones. “As pink as your cheeks, Dilly.”

“Where did you get them?”

“In Granitehead, my dear. I saw them glowing in a window.”

She put them in the center of the table, “And now, read Scripps’ letter. We’ll have time before William comes.”

Giles settled himself opposite her before the fire. “It is rather an amazing document,” he said, “I simply couldn’t resist sharing it with you.”

“Dear old chap,” said Scripps, “we have just had your letter. What a prince you are! To tell us that your home is ours for as long as we wish, and offering to share your book business with me or to set me up in anything else so that I can earn an income for Amélie.

“As if you hadn’t helped enough! Without your generosity what would we have done, Amélie and I, in those dreadful days when we were like children lost in a dark wood—I without heart to do anything but hide in my cobbler’s shop and Amélie living in a world

of shadows?

“But we have thought it out this way, Giles. It is best for us to be on our own for a bit. We can thus get back to realities. To strive and plan and find our way to some sort of success. And this is what we have decided—there’s an old man here who grows flowers for the Paris market. Amélie and I have helped him now and then—you should see her among the violets, picking them and putting them up in bunches and loving the fragrance and the beauty of the work. Old Jules needs help and we have suggested this to him; that we put in a little capital and our combined labor, and share the profits of the business with him. He is delighted, and I am going to ask of you the loan of a few hundreds, with the understanding that I shall pay it back as soon as possible. If you will do this, and come and spend a part of each year with us, our happiness will be complete. Nothing could be better for both Amélie and me than to have the work in the hothouses and out of doors and with her love of beauty satisfied, and with my ability to do the light tasks when my physical infirmities forbid heavy ones, we should find health and joy and an enduring interest. I know you will agree with me and understand.

“Amélie is more beautiful than ever. Old Jules adores her. He has named a rose for her—a gorgeous bloom—and she is as proud as if she had received a decoration from a king. So you see, we shall soon be settled in a home of our own, and you can think of us as busy and content, needing only your presence to round things out for us, Giles.”

There was more after that, and when he had finished it and folded it Giles said: “It is splendid, isn’t it? They have found themselves. A year ago who would have believed it?”

“That’s the trouble with us all,” said Dilly, earnestly, “we haven’t faith that time will solve our problems, and so we worry. And are afraid.”

“Are you ever afraid, my dear?”

“Sometimes. But the years are teaching me, and always when life gets too complicated, I tell William, and we work it out—together.”

“Together . . .” a great wave of longing swept over Giles. To share his dreams with Joan, to have her by his side, his precious companion, his perfect comrade!

He could not speak of his loneliness, however, so he went back to Scripps’

letter and he and Dilly talked of it, and then William came and supper was served, and it was while they were at supper that Dilly spoke of Joan's trip. "She will feel as if she were living in a fairy tale."

"She is probably not as happy as you are, Dilly."

"Why shouldn't she be?"

"She's gone through a year of great disillusionment."

"Where is Mr. Hallam now?"

"In New York, I think."

But Drew Hallam was not in New York. He was, indeed, at the very moment when Giles spoke of him, not a mile away as he rounded the Point in Timothy Tucker's boat on the way to Armiger's island. It was freezing cold and the snow was coming down. He called himself a fool for coming. Yet anger and hate had driven him. He meant to tell Giles what he thought of him. A promise was a promise.

Timothy, having as usual other passengers to ferry across the harbor, landed his passenger and made off at once, "Telephone when you need me, and I'll come for you," he told Hallam.

As Hallam walked up the path the lighted windows of the long low house were veiled by the falling snow. The effect was unreal like a winter scene on a stage. As he reached the door and lifted the knocker, Drew saw himself in a sudden flash of sardonic humor, as an actor in a melodrama.

Margarida, answering the summons, said that Mr. Armiger was away, but would be back by nine. "Will you come in and wait?"

"Yes." He was shown at once into the living room. José brought a fresh log for the fire. It was not yet eight o'clock. "There aren't any evening papers," Margarida apologized, "Mr. Giles will bring them over."

"There are plenty of books. I shall find something . . ."

So the hospitable couple went away, and Drew sat by the fire staring about the room . . . So this was where Joan would come if she married Giles. To this house with its fine old furniture, its rich portraits, its mellow chintzes, its splendid books. It was the home of a gentleman, and Joan would love the life she would lead in it. Happiness for her was not in racketing about Europe, or in giving parties in Adelaide's grim palace on Charles Street. Joan and Giles would travel, perhaps, but always they would come back to this serene harbor, safe from the storm and fret of life . . .

Beating the arm of his chair with a nervous fist, Drew reflected that he had never been safe from storm and fret . . . perhaps if he had . . . He rose and paced the room restlessly, then stopped and listened, as he heard a sound at the front door. Giles' voice. He looked at the clock. It was nine.

As Giles entered, the straight slim grace of him struck against Drew's heart. He said at once, "You didn't expect me?"

"No," curtly, "Margarida told me some one was waiting. Why have you come?"

"Because you went back on your word."

"What do you mean?"

"You said you'd keep away from Joan Dudley and you haven't."

"How do you know?"

"She told me. That she had seen you. I knew then you had broken your promise."

"I haven't broken it."

"You lie."

A slight pause in which Giles found himself breathing hard: "Do you expect me to resent that?" he asked, finally.

"I don't expect you take it lying down."

"I shan't. But I will tell you this. That I love Joan Dudley too much to engage in a senseless fight with a man who is my equal neither in honor nor in integrity. I gave you a promise in Spain to save her from humiliation. I have kept that promise. And that's the end of it."

"But she came here . . . and you made love to her . . ."

"I told her I loved her, which is a different thing."

"Would you love her if she didn't have money?"

"You are making it very hard for me," Giles said, with sternness, "I rather think you are a bully and a coward. I don't know why you came, but the sooner you leave the better."

His head was high as he flung out his fearless challenge. The light of the fire showed his clear-cut features, ruffled hair, his brilliant scornful glance, and, more than all, that boyish grace of figure. Faintly Drew was aware of the thing which had stirred Joan to exaltation . . . *the king is dead . . . a prince*

reigns . . .

The thought maddened him, "If I can't have her, you shan't."

"Just what do you mean to do?"

"Make you keep your promise."

"I shall keep it. In a few days she leaves for a long journey. She will see many people, many men will fall in love with her. And how can I know she will come back to me? I must take my chance. I am taking it solely because of my promise to you. Do you think if it were not for that, I would let her go?"

He spoke the truth and Drew knew it. Then, without pause, Giles went on to say things which seemed incredible. "Look here, Hallam, we both love her. And perhaps all this is harder for you than for me—although heaven knows I find it hard enough. Perhaps some other man will win her and you and I will have to stand back and see her marry him. Well, then, let's not bring into it the sordidness of a stupid quarrel. She's so sweet . . . so dear . . . you know it . . . as I know it . . ."

A long silence, out of which Drew said, hoarsely, "You're right, I love her."

"Then make her happy."

"You mean I shall let her marry you?"

"Yes."

"You are asking a lot."

"I know."

Drew's face was as white as chalk. "I can't live without her. I don't want to live . . ." He got to his feet unsteadily, like a drunken man. "Where's your telephone?" he demanded. "I'll call her up."

Giles stood staring at him, "Call her?"

"Yes. Why not? I'll make a grand gesture. Give her to you . . ." His laugh was wild, "Where's your telephone?" he repeated, then saw it on the table and went toward it.

He asked for long distance, gave Joan's number, hung up the receiver and waited, and Giles on the hearth-rug waited. Presently the bell rang and Drew answered it. "Joan? . . . This is Drew Hallam . . . I'm with Giles Armiger on his island . . . We're staging a great scene of renunciation . . . I'm to release him from his promise and let the two of you be happy ever after. And I'm to

marry Rose . . .! Will you wish me happiness . . . *happiness*, Joan?”

Giles took a step forward. He felt as if he must stop that tortured voice from speaking . . . that wild and tortured voice . . .! But it went on. “So everything is . . . settled. Wedding bells for all of us—Nancy married, you and Giles married, Rose and I—” he rang off suddenly, and stood swaying.

Giles went up to him and laid a hand on his shoulder, “My dear fellow.”

Drew flung off the hand, “Don’t. You’ll make her happy, and I couldn’t. But I hope the gods will rob me of life before her wedding day . . .”



CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE YEARS TOGETHER

"I didn't think," said small Priscilla, wistfully, "that you'd have a wedding without us."

"It was a very quiet wedding."

"Were there any bridesmaids?"

"Not a single one . . . and there wasn't any wedding cake . . . and there wasn't any wedding gown."

"Oh, I shouldn't think you could be married without a wedding gown, Joan."

"Well, I was, and there was no one to see me but Farley. And she nearly cried her eyes out."

Young John and Priscilla stared at her, "Wasn't it a happy wedding, Joan?"

"It was the happiest wedding in the whole wide world, but Farley cried because she was glad."

"If you didn't wear a wedding gown, what did you wear?"

"A little old violet thing that the bridegroom liked."

"Giles?"

"Yes."

"And now you're going away with him. I should think you'd rather stay with us."

"Darling," Joan's arms went round the small girl with the shining eyes, "when a woman marries a man she goes with him everywhere—for better, for worse."

“Shall you like it?”

Joan kissed her, but said nothing. Like it? When her heart was singing!

She was walking with the children through the pine woods back of the house on the bluff. There had been a farewell feast at Penelope's, and presently she and Giles would be leaving for their long journey. She had chosen to have a few last moments alone with these little lovers of hers: “My dears,” she said, as she finally took leave of them, “you mustn't forget me. And when I come back, you must both visit me on my island. It is a wonderful island like something in a book.”

“A fairy book?” the shining child whispered.

“Yes,” Joan kissed her again, and stood watching them and waving until they were out of sight.

As she turned to go back she saw Giles coming toward her. When he reached her, he tucked his arm in hers. “Let's walk a bit,” he said, “I haven't had a minute alone with you since this morning.”

There was a golden light in the wood, snow on the ground, and the trunks of the trees made black stripes against a deep blue sky. As they stood on the edge of the bluff, the sea stretched before them in a sapphire sheet. Yet the horizon line was blurred by an onward moving line of mist. The air was mild for a winter's day, and as they descended the hill, Joan unfastened the fur about her throat. “How warm it is,” she said.

Giles carried her fur for her. “It gives me a queer feeling,” he said, “looking after your belongings. I've your purse in one pocket, a pair of gloves in another, and this fur is like a part of you, with its fragrance.”

Her breath was quick, “You see how soon you've begun to carry my burdens . . .”

The moor as they came to it was all mauve and silver shadows under the sun. “How beautiful it is,” Joan said.

“Everything is beautiful,” Giles lifted her hand to his lips, “but most of all the thought of the years together.”

The years together! Herself and Giles! Joan could scarcely believe it true. There had been the night when she had been waked by the telephone. She had slept so soundly she was not sure the bell had rung. She sat up in bed and listened. The room was illumined only by a tiny lighted flower of rosy glass which glowed in the dimness. It was snowing heavily outside, and the world seemed wrapped in a spell of silence. Then the telephone rang again, and she

rose and went to it.

Drew's voice came to her, that wild, ragged voice . . . telling her he was going to make her happy. That she was to marry Giles . . . that he was to marry Rose . . . Would she wish him happiness? *Happiness?*

As he talked she had had a shivering sense of fear. What was Drew doing there with Giles? And why had not Giles spoken instead of Drew?

Even the knowledge that she was free to marry her lover had not relieved the horror of the moment, so that when Drew rang off, she had stumbled across the rugs to the door which led to her maid's room, "*Farley . . .*"

The older woman came to her at once, "My lamb?"

"I—" Joan began to sob uncontrollably . . . found herself telling Farley all about it. "I don't understand . . . I am . . . frightened . . ."

Farley soothed her, "He has left you free to marry your own true love, my darling . . ."

Yet even this assurance had not brought serenity, and when she returned to her room Joan had been conscious of things happening far away from the shelter of her rose-lighted chamber—things desperate and desolate and despairing.

And even as she thought of it, another call had come for her over the telephone . . . Giles' voice . . . "*Beloved . . .*"

And now, leaning on her young husband's arm she said, with a sigh, "Poor Drew."

"Why think of him?"

"If only he could be happy."

"He'll find a sort of happiness with Rose."

"Will he?"

"Yes. They are two of a kind. They'll play the game . . . gallantly, perhaps . . . who knows?"

As they stood looking out to sea the fog caught them, drifting at first in thin veils, then thickening, until at last they were shut away from all the world.

"Dear heart," Giles whispered, "we belonged to each other from the beginning, you know that?"

“Yes.” Oh, how safe she felt . . . with Giles. His tenderness . . .

They turned presently and made their way upward through the spectral mists—mists which showed here and there a gleam of silver, as if a knight in armor rode among them, or a king . . .! But Joan, unaware of that wistful escort, walked on, unconscious and serene. Life was before her. The future held no fears.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Silver Slippers* by Temple Bailey]