ENCHANTED GROUND

TEMPLE BAILEY

Title: Enchanted Ground
Date of first publication: 1933
Author: Temple Bailey (1885-1953)
Date first posted: Aug. 12, 2019
Date last updated: Aug. 12, 2019
Faded Page eBook #20190822

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

ENCHANTED GROUND

TEMPLE BAILEY

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers + + New York

Manufactured in the United States of America

. . . I saw then in my dream that they went till they came into a certain country, whose air tended to make one drowsy if he came a stranger to it. . . . And Christian said: "Do you not remember that one of the shepherds bid us beware of the Enchanted Ground? He meant by that, that we should beware of sleeping; 'Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober.' "

Pilgrim's Progress

Contents

Enchanted Ground

CHAPTER ONE

"*They Came Into a Certain Country*"

PETER, sitting on the steps of his big house with his dog, Becky, beside him, looked out over a breadth of lawn to his office, where a flame vine was flung like a glowing shawl across the roof. Why should anyone, he asked himself, want more than this—that flaming vine; the wide expanse of Gulf, shadowed now by the clear, cool blue which comes with the twilight; one bright star above it; the burnished copper streak banding the horizon?

Still, a man can't eat beauty, nor warm himself with it, nor pay his bills, nor achieve his ambitions.

"Yet why not," Peter demanded, "if he measures his ambitions to the scale of things as they are?"

Having no answer, he moved restlessly and sighed. Becky laid her long head on his knee and slanted her eyes up at him. There was something world-wise about Becky. She loved Peter and shared his fortunes. She had her moods of affectionate demonstration. But she was at her best in times like this, when she waited on his word, giving close and flattering attention without fulsomeness.

Peter hadn't measured his ambitions to—anything. He knew that. He knew, too, that he had flung away in a moment of mob madness the substantial fortune which had been handed down to him. He had, indeed, been caught in the whirl of that wheel of chance which had made and unmade men in those glamorous days when Florida had trailed glittering garments and had wooed men to disaster.

It had been in those days that Peter had built his big house on the edge of the Gulf. Of Spanish architecture, tile-roofed and cream-stuccoed, it melted into the surrounding green, its great wings stretching back towards the jungle, its upper windows half-hidden by towering palms. He had fitted his office with all modern appliances, had hung out a sign, and installed a nurse. His practice had been enormous—winter visitors who had brought their ailments with them, the native folk who wanted their children ushered expertly into the world, or who had need of operations, and who had found in the young physician a surgeon of no mean skill. For Peter had come of a long line of doctors—wise and distinguished gentlemen. He remembered his grandfather, a splendid giant of a man, whose praises were proclaimed on a bronze tablet set in the walls of a great hospital. He had lived to see his grandson get his diploma, and had thundered his advice: “Don’t get to believing you are God, Peter, or that a knife or a pill will take the place of Omnipotence. It won’t, but you’re not likely to learn it until life teaches you.”

Peter’s father had been less thundering and less certain. But he had gone into the World War at forty, and had died to save others. Which is, after all, something for a son to think of. Peter often thought about it. He had been fifteen when his father died. He was now twenty-eight, and high and dry on the shores of defeat.

He had, of course, only himself to blame. For he had danced to the tune of prosperity—spending recklessly, entertaining lavishly, filling his big house with guests and more guests—people for week-ends, for dinners and dances, tennis, golf, swimming, contract. He had not had a wife to be sure, but there had always been someone to chaperone the crowd and save it from excesses.

Then had come the awakening—when Florida had thrown off her glittering garments and had shown herself in rags! Peter was prince now of an empty palace. No servants left but little old black Nan who came and cooked for him and then flitted off through the shadows to a cabin set somewhere among the palmettos; no guests, for they had all fled like rats before the wave which engulfed them; no neighbors—on all sides were deserted homes, their windows blank, their gardens rioting.

Well, it served them right, he supposed. But it had been a gorgeous gamble. Even now Peter thrilled at the thought of it. “Jove, Becky, I spent my thousands as if they were millions.”

Still rigid at his knee, Becky lifted her lips in a sort of Mona Lisa smile. Peter laughed, then rose and stretched his arms above his head. “Come on, old lady, we’ll have our supper.”

Becky was, however, inattentive—ears up, her eyes looking towards the deeper shadows of the jungle. And presently a man appeared—a slim, boyish shape in white flannels. Becky leaped to meet him, and the two of them came on together.

Peter ejaculated, “Denis . . . ! Where did you come from?”

“You didn’t expect me?”

“Not so soon.”

They sat on the steps. Denis hugged his knees. “Well, I’ve burned my bridges, Peter.”

“You saw Jinks?”

“Yes.”

A moment’s silence. “What happened?”

“She won’t listen. She hates—poverty.”

“So do we all . . .”

“I know. . . .” There was, apparently, no argument. Denis, pulling Becky’s ears, said, “She’s more faithful than Jinks, Peter.”

“Oh, well, dogs—one expects it, somehow.”

Another silence. “One should never expect anything of women . . .” Peter gave a short laugh. Again there was silence. The twilight enfolded them. A star or two blinked above. At last Peter said, “Let’s eat. Old Nan has gone to church. But she’s left a lot of things in the refrigerator.”

“Church . . .” said Denis. “If I were anything else but a preacher . . . !” He let it go at that.

“Jinks won’t marry you?”

“No. She says she wouldn’t be a success as a parson’s wife.”

“Not getting an inferiority complex or anything?”

“No,” Denis said, slowly, “she means it.”

The house as they entered it was all echoes and gloom. The fire on the hearth was dead. A green-shaded reading lamp cast a pallid circle on the floor.

“Great guns,” Peter said, “it’s like a funeral. You build up the fire, while I start the sandwiches. We’ll eat in here and talk. I’m starved for talk. And there’s been nobody since you went away but the ghosts and old Nan.”

“Ghosts of people who have been here,” said Denis, looking about him. “Ghost of Jinks.”

“Ghosts of everybody,” Peter said, with an attempt at gaiety. “Ghost of Lou Gorman. Speaking of women, there’s constancy for you. She has given me up, and with no excuse except that Florida’s a hole and she hates it.”

“You think she cared for your money.”

“Think? I know. When we’ve eaten, I’ll show you her letter.”

Denis, having lighted the fire, came out to the kitchen and hung one leg over the arm of a chair while he watched Peter cut thin slices of baked ham.

“One of the farmers brought this,” Peter elucidated. “He owed a bill.”

“At least you won’t starve.”

“Not while some of my patients have gardens and a pig.”

They made coffee and set the things on trays, which they carried with them into the living-room. Peter ate with an appetite, but Denis was soon satisfied. He drank his coffee and stared at the flaming logs.

“But it isn’t the end, Peter,” he said, as if continuing a discussion. “It’s the beginning.”

“Of what? If you can see a way ahead, it’s more than I can.”

Denis, still staring into the fire, said, “There were five loaves and two fishes—and they fed a multitude. . . .”

For a moment Peter did not speak. Light-hearted and at times light-headed, he was moved beyond words. Here was Denis, hugging his knees like an inconsequential lad, yet saying things that stirred the soul. He knelt to put a stick on the fire. “It’s been ghastly,” he said, “with everybody leaving—and the loneliness. I’ve felt like the Ancient Mariner. . . .”

The flames, leaping up, lighted young Denis’ face—a skin less bronzed than Peter’s, yet showing the touch of the suns of beach and golf-course; dark hair in a tumbled lock on his forehead—eyes gray and black-irised under long lashes. Yet it was not so much his skin or his hair or his eyes which made Denis impressive. It was, rather, a quality of vividness which illumined him, a quality of voice which caught one up with him into the realm of his own winged thought.

He said now, “It’s you and I against the ghosts, Peter . . .”

Peter, on the hearth-rug, looked up. “Sometimes I feel as if we were all

dead together."

Denis' hand dropped to his friend's shoulder: "There comes always—a resurrection. We've that to think of, Peter. Nothing dies but to live again. . . ."

With a restless movement, he rose and went to the window, looking out. "Jinks blames me. She says I'm impractical—that poverty will break me. . . . Yet if she had faith in me—" He stopped there. "I can't go back," he said.

"Nor I," said Peter. "If I go back, I'll have to marry Lou. And I don't want to marry anybody."

He ran his fingers through his burned blond locks. "Becky's good enough for me," he said, and the watching dog got up and moved towards him. "She's good enough. Aren't you, old girl?"

Becky yawned and slithered her body close. Life was at its best with her—a warm fire, her master near at hand. She followed him to his desk. "I said I'd read you Lou's letter, Denis. Here's what she says. . . .

'DARLING PETER:

'I am having to put chains on myself to keep from running down to see you. I know how gorgeous things are in this mid-winter weather, and you are gorgeous, Peter. But if you insist on staying, I shall have to get over feeling this way about you. For you'll petrify if you stay, and I couldn't love a petrified man, could I? And you won't live on my money, and if you can't make money of your own, why, there we are! For no woman in her sane mind could live in that empty town, with all the windows staring, or in your house with the jungle creeping up on it like a wild beast. It was all very wonderful when everybody was rushing about and playing like mad. But now—oh, Peter, you must come back to Baltimore, and pick up your practice. Say you will, darling, and I'll love you to death—say it. . . .

'And are your eyes as blue as ever, Peter? Perhaps I shall have to motor down and see. . . .

'Always and always—

LOU.' "

Peter laughed as he folded the letter. "Are my eyes as blue as ever, Denis?" he demanded.

"Do you care as little as that?"

“As what . . . ?”

“That you can read her letter and laugh at it. . . .”

The light died out of Peter’s eyes. “I care so little, Denis, that I am ashamed to think I ever cared at all.”

“That isn’t love, Peter. Love is what I feel for Jinks. Losing her is like tearing an arm from my body—”

“Thank God I’ve never felt that way about any woman . . .”

“Some day you will—”

“If I do, she’ll never get away from me.”

“You say that, but suppose you were faced by what I am facing? Jinks is so right in what she says. No man should ask a woman to marry him and share such privations. Yet I can’t leave here and keep my self-respect.” He seemed to fling the subject from him as he jumped to his feet, “I must be getting on, Peter.”

“Why not spend the night with me? There are rooms enough in all conscience. And monogrammed linen for your bed. Jove, how I spent my money! Hemstitched sheets, and taffeta spreads. I can house you like a débutante, Denis.”

He stopped suddenly: “There’s someone coming.” He went toward the door, but before he could reach it, a voice asked, “Is Denis here?”

It was Denis who answered, his voice startled: “Jinks!”

The girl who stood in the door was a little thing, wrapped in a nurse’s cape of dark blue, her hair a bright flame under her cap. “A man drove me down,” she said. “I had to come. I’ve changed my mind, Denis.”

Denis had crossed the room, and she seemed suddenly to melt into his arms. And over her head Denis was saying, “Yet people say there are—no miracles, Peter.”

And over her shoulder Jinks was saying, “I’m such a fool.”

“You’re a lovely fool,” Peter told her, and then he went out and sat on the porch. “Of course he’ll marry her,” he remarked to Becky, “and may the Lord have mercy on their souls.”

Later Denis came out with Jinks, and they, too, sat on the steps. And Jinks said, “He thinks we’ll be happy, but he doesn’t know. He’s never been poor.”

“I’ve never been rich.”

“Not what you call rich. But you’ve never been really up against it. Poor. Getting your hands rough with dish-washing, and your face red over the cook-stove, and your temper on edge. You think of life as all new moons and early starlight, and orange groves in bloom. But the real things will be soup from Sunday’s roast, and onions in the stew . . .”

Peter said, “Stop it. Can’t you see what you are doing to Denis?”

Denis, white as paper, raged: “Do you think love is like that? If you do, you can go back where you came from.”

And Jinks said, “I told you I was a fool,” and sobbed with her head against Peter’s shoulder.

And Peter said, “Don’t cry on me. Cry on Denis.” So Denis drew her to him, and her nurse’s cap fell off, and all her lovely hair lay soft against Denis’ cheek, and presently her sobbing ceased and they sat in silence.

And out of the silence, Peter said: “If a woman loved me like that—”

And Jinks said, “She’d tramp muddy roads with you and be happy, as I shall be with Denis—”

Her face was lifted, and the moon shone full upon it.

“Happy,” she said again.

And Peter rose and left them.

CHAPTER TWO

The Lamp in the Jungle

LATER the three of them sat on the steps and talked about it. Jinks, her cap off and her hair blowing, said to Peter, "Tell us how to live on nothing a year."

"Well, there were ravens and manna. . . ."

"Honey and locusts . . . ?" said Jinks.

Denis said, "I've a few bonds in a box up north."

"Keep 'em," Peter advised.

It seemed, however, that they had decided not to keep them. The church gave Denis a house to live in. By careful economy, the money he could get from the sale of the bonds would pay their way for a year. After that . . . ?

A new heaven and a new earth! Denis said it, there on Peter's front steps. "With Jinks I can conquer the world."

"If you were wise," Peter began, but Jinks stopped him. "We are not wise, are we, Denis?"

"Not tonight, or ever—"

Peter's heart tightened. Babes in the Wood—both of them! He hid his emotion beneath a professional manner, "If you expect to get back to your patient tonight, Jinks, you'd better be going."

"Hospitable . . ." Jinks murmured, her cheek against Denis' sleeve.

At last they tore themselves away. "Don't wait up for me," Denis told Peter.

But Peter was not ready for sleep. He got out a book and read it under the green-shaded lamp. It did not, however, hold his interest. His mind was on Jinks and Denis—young Denis whose church, half-built when the boom ended, had been packed in prosperous days to overflowing.

It was in those early days of prosperity that the two men had met. Lou Gorman had brought the young clergyman to tea. "You'll like him, Peter," she had said. "He's different."

At first Peter had not seen the difference. Denis had seemed to be just one of the many good-looking young men annexed by Lou. But there had been a stormy night when Denis had stayed at Peter's invitation. And Denis had sat by the fire, and had said things never to be forgotten. Things that had made Peter's breath catch in his throat, and the room fall away before the vision of a hillside and of a Young Man speaking.

Peter had learned then the Source of Denis' strength, his simplicity. He had learned since the quality of his friendship. For the bond between them was not so much one of common ideals as of faith in each other. "You keep my feet on the ground," Denis told Peter. And it was because of Denis that Peter lived at times among the stars!

Denis' family had been comfortable, if not affluent, for generations. His grandfather had been a great preacher, and the family had hoped that some day his mantle might fall upon Denis. But Denis had had no thought of future honors. He had, indeed, said little to anyone about his aspirations, but the thing he had said to himself was this: "Men must live and die. I should like to show them the way to gallant living—and gallant dying—and not worry about the rest of it." And he had not worried, even when stocks had gone down and had seriously affected the family fortunes. He had no close relatives. His father and mother had died while he was in college, and there were no brothers or sisters.

Lou Gorman might have fallen in love with Denis if she hadn't wanted Peter. She had been perfectly frank about that from the beginning. Her pursuit of Peter had been picturesque and somewhat exciting. Peter had felt as if some bright bird followed him on tireless wings. In a way he liked it, and other men had envied him.

Denis had met Jinks in Peter's office. She had bound up his hand one morning when Peter was out and Denis had been cut by some glass on the beach. That had been the end of Denis' peace of mind. He had loved—as he did everything else—putting his whole mind to it, wooing Jinks with a poetic fervor which had back of it a passionate tenderness. And Jinks, suddenly awakened, had found her defenses going down before him.

In the midst of it all, the crash had come. No money in Denis' church. No money anywhere. Peter, with few patients, had little work in his office for Jinks. But he had given her such cases as came his way. Until tonight she had refused absolutely to listen to any word of marriage—"It would not be fair to Denis."

But now the thing was settled. Or was it?

For Denis' congregation had been swept away on that receding tide which

carried people up from the south of the great cities, the small towns, the countrysides from which they had come, as they had found money growing scarce and scarcer.

Peter's practice had gone the way of Denis' congregation. Many of his patients had left their bills unpaid. The natives, except in poignant emergencies, had returned to their former dependence on patent medicines. The town, two miles away, was practically deserted. In the main street, one was faced by closed shops—shops which only a few months before had been filled with a crowd eager to spend—a crowd which had bought gowns from Paris, hats and jewels, linen and lingerie, perfumes. A crowd, coiffured and manicured and massaged into a sort of pseudo-elegance, a crowd which had lived for pleasure, extravagance and luxury.

Now the public square basked desolate in the sunlight—that marvellous sunlight which turns everything to gold and warms the blood into an ecstasy. That, Peter told himself, was the real wealth of Florida. Oh, why couldn't the world see it—that the rich treasure of this country was in its golden skies and seas, its fragrance, its flowering . . . ?

But the world had not seen it, and had gone! Peter felt suddenly desperately alone. The house seemed haunted—by those ghosts of which Denis had spoken; Lou's ghost dancing in the great dining-room, with head flung back to meet Peter's eyes with her own, the folds of her turquoise taffeta swishing about him. Her gay voice, her gay gown, the laughter in her eyes! That was Lou's "line"—gaiety. At times Peter had hated it. But now, with the thought of Jinks and Denis fresh upon him, he longed for all that Lou could give him of love and life and laughter.

Leaving the shadows of the house behind him, he went out on the wide porch. Before him the spacious grounds stretched to the water's edge. To the right, rounding the curve of the Gulf, were the cleared spaces of the sub-division which had been Peter's investment. Streets had been laid out through the cleared ground, with street lamps placed at the corners.

But now the lamps were dead. There had never been, indeed, any lights in them. Their white globes were ghostly in the faint shine of the moon. Peter reflected that, in due time, the jungle would swallow them up. Nothing could curb its wild growth when man ceased his fight against it. Some day, in the tangle of it all—its creeping vines, its matted palmettos—the lamps would be lost. Perhaps, too, if Peter left the house, the jungle would sweep over it in a great wash of green, hiding it forever, and holding it, with its futile elegancies, like a lost castle in the depths of a soundless sea.

“Perhaps,” Peter reflected with a sense of panic, “it will some day swallow me up.” That was the dreadfulness of Nature. Might there not be, after all, a germ of truth in the belief of primitive peoples that evil spirits inhabit the jungle and must be reckoned with? Or that other belief of our orthodox forbears in the Devil and his works? Moderns jeer at such seeming simplicity, and hide their fears beneath skepticism and laughter. But the fears are there. Every man knows it. Peter had not been long a doctor, but his dealing with patients had taught him this, that Fear stalks with the best of us.

The moon waned, and the world grew dark. The blank white globes of the street lamps were lost in the blackness. The sense of solitude was frightening. Peter couldn’t stand it. He went into the house and got a candle. Then, with Becky at his heels, he made his way to the nearest lamp post. He stuck the candle inside the globe and lighted it. The dead globe became at once alive. Peter went back and sat on the step. It was good to see the light shining. His feeling of panic subsided. In a few minutes Denis would come, and they would laugh it off together.

But Denis did not come. The candle burned down. When it went out, Peter decided, he would go in. Denis could find his way about, and the door was never locked.

The light flickered and flared, and suddenly Peter found himself leaning forward, listening. Had he seen a moving figure beyond the lamp, or was it one of the ghosts which Denis had imagined?

Becky essayed the slight noise which was her nearest approach to a growl. Peter laid his hand on her collar.

Then, as if materialized from empty space, a girl in white appeared under the lamp.

“Is anyone there?” she called.

“Yes,” Peter stood up. “I’m Dr. Ferry.”

She came swiftly forward, “Can you come with me at once? My father has shot himself. . . .”

Peter ran down the steps. “I’ll be ready in a moment.”

As he led the way into his office, she gave him the hurried details. Her name was Mary Hamilton. She lived at White Feathers. She did not know how badly her father was hurt. She had left him with a colored maid. “There’s no telephone in the house, and Julia can’t drive, so I had to come. There was no other way—I had to . . .”

She shivered suddenly with cold and excitement. The gown she wore was low-cut and sleeveless. Peter lifted a coat from its hook in the hall. “Put this on,” he said, “you’ll need it.”

As he held the coat for her, he noted the curl against her neck, a little curl, soft and shining. He noted, too, the way her head was set on her shoulders—nicely. Except for these slight details, his preoccupation was not so much with the girl herself as with the news she had brought.

He got his things together, scribbled a note to Denis, and left it under the light in the living-room, and then went on with Mary to her car. He took the wheel, and they raced through the night.

Peter knew the place they were bound for. A great old house on the bayou. No one could tell whence the name had come; possibly from the huge flock of white herons which, in the early days, had sought the end of the bay. It was a ramshackle edifice, set back from the water, in a grove of live oaks whose limbs were strung with ghastly streamers of gray moss—a desolate spot and a dreary one. For years it had had no occupants. And during those years, a sign hung on the gate had proclaimed that it was for sale or to let. But no one had wanted to live in it.

He asked the girl now, “When did you come?”

“Yesterday. Father bought the place. . . .”

“Bought it?”

“Yes. Furnished. We were frightfully disappointed. . . . It’s so old . . . and dreadful.”

She stopped, unable to go on. Hitherto she had shown an extraordinary composure, but now Peter saw that the tears were streaming.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “It’s been a rotten deal for you.”

“I don’t care for myself—. It’s—father.”

He was aware of her tenseness, and comforted her. “Don’t worry. I’ll fix him up for you.” But his words were more confident than his expectations. One never knew in such cases whether one would meet life or death at the end of the journey.

A curve in the road had brought them to a bridge that crossed the bayou. The water glimmered with a faint silver sheen. Black clumps of mangroves rose out of it, and between these clumps a boat suddenly appeared. A man was standing in it, using a pole to propel it. It was impossible to see his face, but

the tall figure showed strength and grace, and a sort of dark splendor.

Peter said, “Did you see that man?”

“Yes. Who is he?”

“Well, he sold you your house.”

“Boone Musgrave?”

“Yes. Have you met him?”

“No. But I’ve read his letters. Such lying letters—and father believed them.”

“He isn’t alone in being misled by Boone. He’s the only rich man left in our community. He grabbed what the others lost. But he’s picturesque and popular. A sort of robber baron—”

“I hope I shall never meet him.”

“Why?”

“Because if father dies, I shall feel that Boone Musgrave—killed him.”

Her voice was tense. Peter told himself that she was undoubtedly overstressing her sense of grievance. Yet he could not blame her. The sale of White Feathers was a dastardly trick, played on unsuspecting strangers.

There was not time, however, to discuss it, for they had turned into the driveway of the house. When the car stopped, Peter helped Mary out, and followed her through the hall to a room at the back. He heard a man’s voice, and saw the girl bend down, “I’ve brought a doctor, darling. . . .”

Her voice was charming. As he stepped over the threshold, Peter assured himself that the adventure with Mary Hamilton promised possibilities. Then, as he saw the man stretched on the couch, he forgot trivialities in his sense of the seriousness of the case before him.

The patient was raving incoherently. Something more in this, Peter decided, than a wound. Hysteria, or, more likely, a fixed mental disturbance. He would have to stay tonight, and in the morning he would get Jinks.

He said as much to Denis when the latter arrived with the car. “Jinks goes off her case tomorrow morning?”

“Yes.”

“I shall want her here. I’ll stay tonight.”

“I’ll stay with you—”

“You’d better get back and sleep at my house. Old Nan will get your breakfast.”

“Breakfast? Do you think I want to eat, Peter?”

“Why not?”

“I shall thank God—fasting. . . .”

There were moments when Peter could be as understanding as a woman: “For Jinks?”

“Yes.”

Well, it was something to love a woman like that. But it took a man like Denis to do it. As for himself, Peter drew his hand across his forehead in a sudden tired gesture, “Let’s go out and get a breath of air. I’ve given my patient a bromide. He’ll sleep off his hysteria.”

The two men walked to the end of a narrow pier and sat on a rude bench which looked over the water. The water lip-lapped against the wooden piles. Somewhere among the gray mosses a night bird kept up a quavering complaint.

From where they sat, a light could be seen in an upper window of the house.

“Her name is Mary Hamilton,” Peter said.

“The daughter?”

“Yes.”

Denis did not pursue the subject further. Nothing was real to him at the moment but Jinks—Jinks, at the moment of parting, with her wet cheek against his: “It’s not fair to you, Denis. It’s not fair. But I love you. . . .”

The water lip-lapped, the night bird continued its ululations. The two men, busy with their thoughts, sat in silence.

At last Peter spoke, “Her name is Mary Hamilton.”

“You said that before, Peter.”

CHAPTER THREE

"*And the Evil Spirit Departed*"

DAWN came, with Peter sitting beside his patient. A handsome man, pale and dark, his hair worn long in a somewhat affected fashion. He was, Peter judged, in his late forties—his face had few lines except those harassed ones of a man at odds with the world.

Peter knew his type—anti-social, sensitive, demanding everything, giving nothing. Yet undoubtedly lovable, drawing on the sympathies of those stronger than himself. And the girl was stronger. Peter had seen that in a moment. He had, indeed, as they had worked over the invalid, been impressed by her poise, her competency. She had helped him with the bandages, had watched him probe the wound.

Through it all she had seemed unconscious of Peter's presence. Peter liked that. Women were so often aware of him in the sick-room—playing up their charms—and he hated it. He was a doctor before everything else. As yet no woman had ever made him forget what he owed a patient. Not even Lou. It was a thing she had complained about. "You care more for a baby with colic than you do for me."

Well, perhaps he had—and anyhow, that was as it should be. As for Mary Hamilton, she had had no tricks or artifices. She had been glad to have him stay all night, and had said so. In spite of her protests, he had made her go to her room to rest. He had sent the colored maid, Julia, to bed, "You will both be needed tomorrow."

Denis, too, was staying in the house, and was now asleep upstairs. He had called Jinks on the telephone and would go for her in the morning.

Peter, accustomed to loss of sleep, settled back in his chair and surveyed the room. It was evidently the library. There were rows of empty bookshelves, and one great over-hanging bookcase. The couch on which Hamilton lay had been made comfortable with clean sheets when Peter had decided that his patient must not be moved. The faded cushions, piled up on the window seat, matched the faded crimson draperies at the window. A dull and musty room which must have acted on the shrinking nerves of Hamilton like the teeth of a

saw.

“He’s neurotic to the last degree,” Peter decided. He looked at his watch. Almost time to call Julia. He would ask her to make him a cup of coffee and he would drink it here. He must not leave his patient for a moment until Jinks came. He stretched and yawned, then sat up quickly as a cry echoed through the room—

“Mary . . . !”

Hamilton’s eyes were shut, but his head moved restlessly on the pillow. Again he cried out, “Mary . . . !”

Then followed, in ceaseless iteration, his daughter’s name—“Mary, Mary, Mary, Mary. . . .”

And presently, answering that call, Mary came.

She was wrapped in a robe of soft red silk, its sash tied about her. Her feet were stuck into red silk slippers without heels. There was something gorgeous in all that surge of red as she sank down beside the couch, the rays of the rising sun washing over her.

On entering, her eyes had questioned Peter. He had put his finger on his lip, and now neither of them spoke as she sat on the floor beside her father.

Presently his eyes opened.

He saw her in a pool of red, and screamed, “You’re all—bloody . . . !”

“Father, darling, I’ve worn it—often . . .”

He seemed to come to his senses, “Of course. I remember.” His eyes turned to Peter, “What do you think of me?”

“That you’re going to get better.” Peter was smiling down at him.

“I don’t mean that. What do you think of a man who shirks—living . . . ?”

“I think—he’s come to the right place.”

Hamilton drew his brows together in a puzzled frown, “Why right?”

“Because here we are all in the same boat. It’s a rough voyage, but we sail —together. . . .”

A moment’s silence. Then: “You mean you’re all dead broke?”

“More or less. And it’s rather sporting—‘all for one and one for all’—that sort of thing.”

No one could resist Peter in his lighter moods. The invalid smiled reluctantly, and Mary, still kneeling, looked up at Peter. It was as if, for the first time, she really saw him. As if, hitherto, he had been for her merely an instrument for her father's rescue; but now he had become flesh and blood. And suddenly a great load which she had carried on her young shoulders seemed to drop from her. Here was someone to whom she could speak of the thing which she had held so secretly, so shiveringly in her heart. She could talk to this Peter about her father. She had heard Denis call him "Peter." She had never liked the name, but now she liked it. She knew what it meant—"Peter—a rock. . . ." There was strength in that, and she was so tired of weakness.

Denis, coming down a little later, found the patient talking rationally, and Mary, with her satin robe bright in the morning sun, drinking coffee with Peter.

Denis, from the threshold, said, "May I come in?"

He was looking at Mary, but it was Peter who answered, "Of course. Miss Hamilton, this is Denis Colt. Denis is the town parson, Mr. Hamilton. He must tell you about his church—four walls and no roof to it."

"You don't look like a parson," Hamilton said.

"Nobody does in these days."

"And we're not religious, Mary and I. I've brought her up that way—and I've made a rather good job of it."

Denis smiled, "If she's as nice as she looks. . . ."

Hamilton's eyes rested on him for a moment, then looked away. "She's twenty-one, and no man has ever kissed her . . ."

There was a moment's stunned silence, out of which Mary said, "Oh, father . . ."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?"

"Father. . . !"

"Why should you speak in that way, Mary? As if I had said something I shouldn't? You're not in the matrimonial market, and these young men might as well know it. Now—before they fall in love with you. Then they can't say I haven't warned them."

He dropped back on his pillows, a dark flush on his face, "Get out—all of you."

Peter signed to the others to leave. Then he mixed something in a glass. In

a few moments his patient would be asleep. The thing now was to keep his mind free from agitation.

When he went finally into the living-room, Peter found Mary alone. She had seated herself in a massive chair, with a window at her back making a frame for her and showing a shadowed grove. Against the green darkness, the rich color of her robe, the pale gold of her hair, the dead whiteness of her skin gave the effect of a painted masterpiece. She was, too, like a painted figure in her complete repose.

Yet the repose was, Peter discovered presently, only an outward manifestation. Her voice, when she spoke, was sharp with distress. “It was a dreadful thing for father to say.”

“You take him too seriously.”

“Seriously!”

“Yes. You’ve let him have his way in everything.”

“Mother always let him have it. And it’s easier not to argue. He can’t face realities, poor darling.”

“You’ll be a poor darling,” Peter told her, “if you keep on like this.”

“I’ll have to keep on—. It isn’t real things I have to fight against. It’s shadows . . . !”

So that was it! Lack of mental balance. Peter had judged it when he first saw Hamilton. And this slender girl had had to deal with it.

“Look here,” he said, “tell me about yourself. And how long you have been fighting shadows.”

Leaning back in her chair, she told him her story. Her early girlhood had been spent on a plantation in Virginia. Her father had practiced law in a somewhat desultory way, and with the yield of his tobacco fields had achieved a small but steady income. Mary was eight years old when her mother died. The maid, Julia, had been her nurse, and there had been other maids and men servants. During the Great War, the value of Hamilton’s property had increased enormously. He had sold the old place, and had invested the money in stocks which soared presently to unheard-of heights. There had been a period of affluence, during which he and Mary had travelled extensively and spent lavishly, until the market broke and their fortune had been swept away.

“It was just before mother died that I began to notice father. He was always dreaming about what he was going to do, and never doing it. Mother talked

with me a lot about it. He's always been afraid of life, and he's made me afraid."

"You're not to be afraid any longer," Peter told her. "I'm going to help."

"Is there any help?" she asked, despairingly.

"Of course. We know how to deal with these cases better now than we did in the old days. You let me have a try at him. I'm getting a marvellous nurse for you, Janet Bowie. She's a little thing, but she has never failed to handle my most difficult cases."

Again there came to Mary a sense of freedom from an intolerable burden. "I can't tell you," she said, huskily, "how grateful I am for—everything."

He let his hand rest for a moment on her shoulder. "Don't try. And you're not to be afraid. Any more. Ever."

Jinks, arriving at last with Denis, was presented to Mary as "the best nurse south of the Mason and Dixon line."

"And her age is twenty-three," Peter stated, "although she feels much older and looks much younger."

"Anybody would feel old who had you and Denis to deal with," Jinks informed him.

Peter laughed, "What about it, Denis?"

"Oh, Jinks . . . ! She couldn't do without us!"

Listening to the light exchange, Mary was aware of a quality of vividness in the three of them which was stimulating and exciting. Jinks was alive to her finger tips, as Peter was alive, and Denis. Held so long in the cold grip of tragedy, she found her soul warmed by this good company.

Jinks, explaining things, said, "I try to be dignified when I'm on duty. And I've asked them not to call me 'Jinks.' " She turned to Peter. "Darling," she said, "remember I am 'Miss Bowie' in the sick-room."

"Right," said Peter. "And you might remember not to call me 'darling.' You mustn't be so free with your terms of endearment, Jinks."

"It's nice to be free with something," Jinks told him. "Perhaps that's why I do it. I can't be free with my money, for I haven't any. Or with my affections, because free love is out of date. It's marriage now or nothing."

They laughed, light-heartedly, all but Mary. She felt as if her heart would burst—not with grief, but with thankfulness that she should be so surrounded;

shielded from the loneliness of the dreadful days just past.

Peter, with a subtle understanding of her mood, spoke to Jinks, “I wish you’d take Miss Hamilton upstairs and put her to bed.”

Mary protested, “Oh, no . . . !”

“Oh, yes. You must relax and rest until noon. Then I’ll rush back and eat lunch with you.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Get her into a hot bath, Jinks, and then come down here and I’ll talk things over with you.”

Jinks, at the door, cast a fleeting glance backward, “I’ll see you later, Denis,” she said, with an effect of casualness. Denis took a step towards her and stopped. “I’ll wait,” he said. “You can find me in the garden.”

He watched her go up the stairs, her arm in Mary’s. Then he said: “We were married this morning, Peter.”

Peter stared at him, “Married?”

“Yes. I got Rowland to do it. We’re not going to announce it until I come back from Washington. I’ve had a telegram calling me there. An old uncle of mine is dead, and I must look after things. I’m his heir, if that means anything. I fancy there isn’t much left of his little fortune. It delays our honeymoon, of course. But Jinks and I—what’s a little delay when we have a whole life of happiness before us?”

Jinks, upstairs, was telling Mary, “I was married this morning.”

“My dear child . . . !”

“I’m not a child. I’m a thousand years old. . . .”

“But who is the fortunate man?”

“Oh—Denis—I thought everybody knew.”

She left Mary for a moment to draw the water for the hot bath. When she came back, she said, “Of course you couldn’t know.”

She opened a dresser drawer, “Are your things in here? I’ll lay them out for you—”

Mary, returning in a few minutes, wrapped in a bath-robe, found the bed turned down, and Jinks holding up a nightgown—of pink as pale as the petals of a rose, with lace like a cobweb. “It’s fit for a bride,” she said.

“I got it in Paris—and when I think of the money I spent . . .”

“Don’t think,” Jinks said. “None of us dares do it. We just live for the moment . . .”

“But you—” Mary said, “aren’t you living for Denis?”

“That’s what I don’t dare think about. You see, we shouldn’t have married. We’re both dreadfully hard up—but Denis is sure the ravens will feed us. Perhaps they will. Perhaps the good Lord will find a way out for us. Denis says that He will. But then Denis lives in the stars . . . !”

Mary, comfortable now on her pillows, said, “May I wish you happiness?”

“Yes. But we’re not having even a honeymoon. Denis’ uncle died suddenly last night, and Denis leaves at noon for Washington. I don’t believe in signs and omens—but a funeral isn’t so deadly cheerful—”

She pulled down the shades and came back to the bedside. “But we love each other a lot—and Denis—oh, the Lord made him out of light, and it shines through . . .”

Her voice was shaking, “I’m such a little fool! Ever been in love?”

“No. Not really . . .”

“What do you mean ‘not really’?”

“Well—at times I’ve thought . . .”

“No woman ever thinks when she cares. What you mean is that men have been in love with you, and that you wanted to love them . . .”

“Perhaps—”

“That isn’t loving,” said Jinks. “But we haven’t time to talk about it.” She smiled, “I’ll call you at one.”

For a moment she hesitated, then suddenly bent down and kissed Mary on the cheek. “Nurses shouldn’t,” she said, “but you’re so—lovely . . .”

“Am I—really . . . ?”

“Oh, my dear, don’t you know it?” And Jinks was off with a wave of her hand from the doorway.

She went at once to the sick-room, where Peter introduced her to Hamilton. “Miss Bowie will take care of you.”

Hamilton’s eyes were unfriendly. “I’m sorry. I don’t want her.”

“You’ll need good nursing,” Peter said.

“Mary can do it.”

“No,” said Peter, “she can’t. She isn’t expert enough in a case like this. You might bleed to death in the night. Miss Bowie would know at once what to do. But not your daughter.”

Hamilton’s lips were white, “You mean it is as bad as that?”

“It is,” said Peter. “I shouldn’t have told you if you hadn’t protested against having a nurse. But there’s an artery involved. And it isn’t a thing to tamper with.”

Hamilton said, sullenly. “It’s a pity I didn’t make a better job of it.”

No one answered him. Peter was giving directions to Jinks. “We can’t move him upstairs,” he was saying. “We must have a bed brought down.”

The bed was brought, and Hamilton found himself, shortly, most miraculously in it, very comfortably propped up on pillows, with Jinks bringing in his breakfast on a tray.

“I don’t want any,” he told her irritably.

She looked down at him, “I made the omelette myself, while Doctor Ferry and Reuben were getting you settled.”

“I have eaten omelettes in France,” said Hamilton. “Why should I eat them in America where they don’t know how to make them?”

“I, too,” said Jinks, “have eaten them in France. And I have not only eaten them, but I have learned to make them.”

“Where . . . ?”

“At L’Etoile Rouge—”

“The Red Star? Madame Roustain?”

“*Mais oui, Monsieur*. Why not? On the terrace. With brook trout before, and asparagus after—”

“How did you get there?”

“I went over just before the boom broke, with a rich patient. We came back on our uppers.”

While she talked, she had set the tray before him. He ate everything. How could he help it, with the toast hot as hot, the coffee piping, and his small nurse swapping reminiscences—?

For Hamilton was an epicure. Thin as a rail, romantic in his looks, he was nevertheless keen for the fleshpots. It was not that he ate so much, as that what he ate was of such importance. More important, indeed, than he was willing to admit. For he still preserved the illusion that life was for him an aesthetic rather than a physical adventure.

He referred now to the flowers which Jinks had put on his tray. “The roses are the best of it.”

But Jinks was aware that without the roses the omelette would still have won him. Without the omelette—!

She refused to follow the thought further!

Julia came in presently for the tray, and Jinks pulled down the window shades so that the room swam in the soft green of the morning light.

For the first time since his misfortunes had come upon him, Hamilton felt that life was good. The black shadows which had encompassed him fled before the cool competency of the little creature in the starched white uniform. He shut his eyes. “If I could sleep . . .”

When he opened his eyes again, an hour later, his small nurse sat by the window, her head bent above a book. At the slight movement he made, she rose and came to him. “Do you want anything?” she asked.

“No. Go back to your book.”

She obeyed, and he lay with his eyes half-closed, looking at her.

At last he could stand it no longer. “What are you reading?” he demanded.

“About David—”

“Do you believe all that stuff?”

“I believe this.”

She brought the book over, and sat down by the bed. “Would you like to hear it?”

He said, with some hesitation, “Yes . . .”

She began to read, and Hamilton lay there, listening: “ ‘And it came to pass when the evil spirit was upon Saul that David took an harp and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.’ ”

CHAPTER FOUR

Expectancy

WHEN MARY HAMILTON waked, it was late in the afternoon. The house was very still. She went to the window and looked out. The bayou was purple with twilight—a half-dozen white herons were like small ghosts in the dimness—fragrance floated up and around her; the scent of roses in the garden; the sharper scent of orange blooms from the orchard beyond. She found in the scene much that fitted her mood. Peace. Loveliness.

But there was more in her mood. Expectancy.

She went to her mirror, pulled the chains of the twin lights at the side, and was immediately enveloped in a rosy haze. She drew a comb through her hair, and was aware of its brightness and beauty. She went to the closet and chose a dress of faint orchid with a silver girdle. It seemed to match the twilight. No jewels. Just the silver of her girdle and the gold of her hair. . . .

As she went downstairs, Jinks met her. “Darling child, did you dress for dinner?”

“Why not?”

Jinks’ voice had a note of awe in it, “Do you—always?”

“Shouldn’t I?”

“Well, Doctor Ferry won’t. He’s had a dreadful day of it—a baby and two operations. He came in about five and said he would try to get back for dinner . . .”

“Oh—he must get back. . . .” Mary had a sense of panic.

“Your father’s all right,” Jinks assured her. “Peter gave me plenty of directions, so if he had to stay tonight at the hospital I’d know what to do.”

Mary went on to the dining-room. The table was set for two.

“Why two, Julia?” she said to the old colored woman who was bringing in the glasses. “Miss Bowie will join us.”

“No, honey. She say she’ll eat later. Then Doctor Ferry can stay with your

Daddy."

So Peter and she would dine alone—or, if Peter didn't come, she would have no company. She passed through the long hall and stood in the front door. The purple of the twilight had given way to the darkening of the night; the gray moss hanging from the trees was silvered by the light on the driveway. Yet there was now nothing sinister in the outlook. There was, rather, a pensive loveliness. If only Peter would come—she could fight the depression which was sweeping back upon her.

Jinks spoke from the hall behind her, "Your father wants you."

She went at once, and bent to kiss his forehead, but he held back from her. "Why are you wearing that dress? You look like a rich man's daughter. And we haven't any money. We haven't any money to pay this nurse, or the doctor, or Julia. You ought to wear sackcloth and ashes."

Mary said, soothingly, "I'll change if you wish."

"Did I ask you to change? Mary, there's something I want you to do for me . . ." He stopped and spoke to Jinks, "I should like to be left alone with my daughter."

Jinks went out—but set the door ajar. And when Peter came a few moments later, she said, "Go in and rescue that poor child. My patient sent me away, and I didn't like to cross him. His temperature's up—and he's flighty."

Peter went in, and Jinks sat on the doorstep and thought that this was her wedding night, and that all day she had had only a few words with Denis in the garden. And now he was far away, yet so near that his arms seemed about her. "Denis," she whispered, "Denis."

At dinner Mary told Peter, "Father wants me to go to see Boone Musgrave. He says he has been cheated, and that he must have his money back."

"Don't go."

"But I had to promise. Father was so excited."

"I see . . ." Peter ate his soup and thought about it. Then he said, "He may treat you civilly. I think he will. He's not often rude to a woman. But I wish you—wouldn't."

"I told Father I'd go the first thing in the morning. He raged when he saw me in this gown. He said I was dressed like a rich man's daughter, and that we haven't any money."

Peter looked at her across the table. He had come in weary with the day's

work, and still wore the clothes he had put on that morning. But now his weariness had fallen from him. The dining-room was a dim and pleasant place. Old Julia had lighted the candles, and there was a bowl of pale sweet peas. Mary, in her faintly colored gown, was like something of which he had always dreamed. He wanted to tell her that, but instead he said, “That gown is a peach.”

“You—like it?”

“Love it.” They smiled at each other across the candles.

“I was afraid you wouldn’t come,” Mary told him.

“And I was afraid I couldn’t. That darned baby—and just an old woman to help me. Gee, how I wanted Jinks!”

Julia served their coffee on the porch, and Jinks came out and sat with them while her patient slept.

“Denis telegraphed,” she told them. “And it didn’t sound a bit like a husband.”

Peter laughed, “What did it sound like?”

“Like—Denis.”

Out of a silence, Peter said, “Jinks, I’m going to give you a party—when Denis comes back. Just the three of us, and Miss Hamilton. At my house.” He glanced at Mary, “Will you come?”

“Will I—?”

“It’s settled then,” Peter said as he passed his cup for more coffee. Mary poured it, and the three of them were again silent.

At last Jinks yawned, “I’ll go to bed, Peter. If you’ll give me three hours, you can sleep the rest of the night.”

She went away, and Peter said, “Her wedding night! She’s a brave little soul. She’s had a hard life. Perhaps some day it will all be made up to her.”

“Her Denis would say—in Heaven . . .”

The slight hint of skepticism in her tone made Peter say, “You don’t believe it?”

“That we get in another world our heart’s desire? No.”

“You think there is no other world?”

“Father thinks there isn’t.”

“And he has taught you?”

“Yes.”

“You are old enough to think for yourself, Mary.”

A quick lift of her head. Peter said, “Forgive me. I shouldn’t have called you that.”

“Why not? Only don’t do it before father.”

“Not before anybody unless you wish it. Just between ourselves?”

“Between—ourselves—” She rose and held out her hand to him, “Good-night.”

He kept her hand in a tight grasp, “Good-night, Peter.”

She said it, smiling, and he watched her as she went up the stairs. Then he went back to his patient, and sat there thinking about it. Men had talked to him of love at first sight, and he had always had a pathological explanation. But there was nothing pathological about his feeling for Mary. They might have been disembodied spirits for all the thought he had of her as a human entity. She was for him, at the moment, the incarnation of the ideals which had been his before the years at college and university had touched him with sophistication—the lily maid of Astolat, the Beatrice whom Dante loved, the Blessed Damozel—at these shrines he had worshipped before real life brought him face to face with the women of his own wise-cracking, gold-digging generation. He had grown, he had to admit, a bit skeptical about the thing called by the old poets “true love.” Doctors, he told himself, were like that. Seeing, perhaps, too much of the seamy side of romance, the workaday aspect of marriage.

And now, in a moment, all of his theories had tumbled in a heap! He wanted nothing so much as to take this exquisite child to his heart, to hold her safe from harm, to shield her from the fears which beset her—from the whims and fancies of the man lying there on the bed.

When the time came for Jinks to take his place in the sick-room, Peter went upstairs to the south chamber which had been assigned to him. He knew he ought to rest, that he needed sleep. But sleep would not come. He sat by the window and looked forth into the night. The moonlight, pouring down in a silver flood, showed far away on the crest of a hill a white house, wide and low, with a row of royal palms casting their shadows sharp upon it.

Boone Musgrave’s house! One reached it from here by a winding path which went through the orange groves. Tomorrow Mary would follow that

path, and Boone Musgrave would be aware of her beauty. Peter hated the thought of it. He wished that Hamilton might have found another emissary. Boone was an attractive man, and knew it, and it would please his vanity if Mary Hamilton might be brought to concede his attractions, to provide for him again the excitement of pursuit.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Orange Grove

IT was in the mornings that Boone Musgrave was at his best. He liked everything that the morning brought—his cold shower, the things he had for breakfast, the serene beauty of his orange groves. He always walked in them in the early morning—as a devotee visits an altar before he begins the day.

For Boone gave to his orange trees an almost fanatic adoration. He had loved many women, but none of them with the mad passion he squandered on his groves. From the moment that, hung in bridal white, they flung their fragrance far and wide, to the poignant season when the golden fruit was stripped for packing, he worshipped and served. A lazy man normally, there was no limit to his energy when directed towards the up-building and development of his groves.

Daily he saluted them, "My beauties, my beauties!" For there was in him something of the poet, though no one knew, not even his mother, and men thought him hard as stone. As, indeed, a Shylock, demanding his pound of flesh of those who did not live up to the letter of their agreements.

Yet he was a young and handsome Shylock, knowing his charms, and knowing, too, his strength. His wide acres were unencumbered by debt. In the banks up north, his securities were lodged, safe against fluctuations of the market. He had come out of the panic rich, and he had come because he had given no man quarter. A poor boy, he had fought his way to affluence, and he would fight to the end. That was the way he was made, a fighter—the way life had made him. And he gloried in it—in his fine house, and the deference paid to him because of his possessions. But most of all, he gloried in his trees—the long, straight aisles of them sweeping back from his house to the bay.

He picked this morning, as always, a pale yellow globe of grapefruit, and carried it with him when he went in for breakfast. At the table, he cut it himself, expertly, with a keen steel blade. Then he ate it with a thin old silver spoon. His man, Alec, brought in presently delicate crescents of fried fish. Boone had caught the fish by moonlight. He often fished at night, and it was on one of these expeditions that Mary had seen him—as she rode with Peter on the night her father had shot himself.

When the servant came in, a cat followed him—one of a small, mottled breed which abounds in Florida, white and orange and black. Boone could never have told why he had chosen this particular kitten from among the others. But it had attached itself to him, and he liked to have it near, although it had no beauty except a certain lithe sleekness. It followed him like a dog, but it did not obey him. And Boone, who demanded obedience from all things about him, was amused by the thought that this small creature chose to defy him. He called it Boots, and laughed at it, and loved it, because in some subtle way it met his own rebellious moods, his hardness, his withdrawal from his kind.

Alec spread a newspaper on the floor, and Boots sat on it. He sat with patience until Boone dropped crisp morsels of fish down to him. Boots ate daintily, and, at last replete, washed his smug little face with an expert paw.

Boone finished his breakfast and rose. The cat trotted after him. Together they went back to the orange groves. The pickers had not yet arrived, so Boone and Boots wandered in solitude. They were both sleek and happy—Boone in corduroy breeches and high-laced boots, a white shirt open at the neck. His head was bare—his hair, brushed back from his forehead, was thick and dark. His eyes, gray and inscrutable, were lighted at the moment by a look that people seldom saw. To the right and left of him were bright trees and bright fruit. The air was clear as wine, intoxicating.

“Great morning, Boots,” he said.

Boots was unresponsive. His eyes were on a stealthy movement in the grass. A snake, perhaps, or, better still, a mouse.

It was a snake—thin, long, and harmless. Boone killed it with a billet of wood he snatched from a pile. The snake writhed in their wake as they went on. Now Boots was stalking a lizard. His hunter’s instinct was never quiescent. Boone had the same instinct. What he wanted, he got. He hoped Boots would get the lizard. He liked to see the battle go to the strong.

But Boots lost the lizard, and again trotted behind Boone. The two of them came presently to a house at the far end of the grove, where lived Boone’s mother. It was the house in which Boone had been born. It had been a shabby place, but now it was white-painted, and the grounds were kept in order by Boone’s gardener. Boone’s own house stood in sight of the road, a fine and stately mansion, but his mother had refused to share it with him. “I’ll stay in a place of my own,” she had said. “I bent my knee to your father, but I won’t bend it to you.” It had been a tribute to his masterfulness, but it was also a declaration of her own strength in resisting him.

Yet she was proud of him, and between them existed a devotion founded

on her pride in him, and his respect for her integrity. For she possessed what he lacked. “No kin of mine ever drove a hard bargain,” she would tell him. “You got your sharp ways from your Daddy.” Yet she loved him, and in a way looked up to him.

He found her now among the cabbages in her garden. She was neatly dressed, and showed still a trace of the beauty which had been hers when Boone’s father married her. She had belonged to a Georgia family of aristocratic traditions, and her elopement with a man of inferior stock had separated her from them forever. She had become what her husband had made her, and it was not until her son’s rise in the world that she had escaped from the heart-breaking hardness of her life.

Boone came to see her every morning. She rose to greet him.

“Hard at work, Mother?”

“Cutting a cabbage for my dinner.”

“Perhaps I’ll come down and eat with you. Nothing tastes so good as your boiled dinners.”

“I’m glad you think so.”

She took off her rough straw hat, and fanned herself with it. “I hear you’ve sold White Feathers.”

“Yes. To a man named Hamilton.”

“From the north?”

“Virginia.”

“What did he pay you?”

He told her.

“Too much, Boone, and you know it.”

He laughed, “Don’t worry about me, Mother. I’ve made my way, and I’ll go on making it.”

“Until the Lord takes a hand in it.”

“The Lord helps those who help themselves. I’ve as good a right to money as anybody. I like the things it brings me.”

“It hasn’t brought you love, and it hasn’t brought you friends. I don’t believe you ever loved anyone but yourself, Boone.”

“Except you, Mother. Believe it or not, I love you.”

She did believe him, and when he went away, she sat thinking about it—of how little she had been able to leave the imprint of her ideals upon him. “His Daddy was too strong for me,” she told herself. “I couldn’t set myself against him.”

Boone’s mind, as he made his way back to the bayou, was on his mother. He rarely dwelt on his emotions. Every morning he visited Margaret Musgrave, and then for the day he was done with her. He had other things to think about. Yet today one sentence of hers remained with him, and he found himself turning it over and over. “I don’t believe you’ve ever loved anyone but yourself, Boone.”

People wondered why he had not married. Boone wondered himself. He had found women to love, but he wanted a wife different from any of them. A wife like his mother. Not in body, for she must be young and beautiful. Nor in mind, for she must be modern, and learned in the things which belonged to fine and distinguished living. But she must be like his mother in spirit—one whom he could bend, but not break. And one who could resist so strongly as to make the bending exciting.

His father had gone too far. Boone wanted softness for his wife. He wanted her lovely in his stately house. He wanted her better than himself, as his mother was better. And what he wanted he intended to get. That was why he had waited.

He came at last to a vista which showed, at the end of a long aisle of trees, the blue of the bayou. He loved that vista, and stopped for a moment to feast his eyes upon it.

Then, all at once, he was aware of a figure not far from him. A figure which, as the sun shone on it, seemed to belong to his grove, as an oread belongs to the mountains, or a nymph to the sea. A girl sheathed in pale yellow, her hair a nimbus of pale gold, stood with her face lifted to the light. Above and about her hung shining fruit. To Boone, she seemed Beauty Incarnate, his trees made flesh—a miracle.

He took a step toward her, and their eyes met. “I’m Mary Hamilton,” she said. “My father wanted me to see you.”

CHAPTER SIX

The Robber Baron

IT had been early in the morning when Mary started on her reluctant errand. Her father had been insistent, sending Jinks up with a message. “I want you to go at once, Mary.”

Peter had been called for just after dawn by a man whose brother had been hurt in an accident, and had not come back. Jinks was busy with her patient, so Mary, after a hasty breakfast, had set forth, dreading what was ahead of her, yet glad to escape the shadows of the old house, the fears that assailed her in the sick-room.

The morning world, as she came into it, was cool and fragrant. Veils of mist drifted like smoke among the trees. A mocking bird was singing in a syringa bush; little bronze ducks were bobbing for their breakfast in the limpid waters of the bayou. White herons, standing motionless in the shallows, seemed like painted birds against the blue. Following a path which led to the right of the house and around it, Mary made her way through a gate, and entered the orange groves on the Musgrave estate. “You can’t miss your way if you follow the path,” Peter had told her, so she went on with confidence.

There seemed to be miles of trees, a limitless expanse of them. As Mary walked under them, she gloried in the serene sense of solitude they gave her. She seemed infinitely remote from the cares which oppressed her, so it was with a feeling almost of resentment that she came upon a house set in that wilderness of trees.

It was an old house, white-painted, with a flame vine over it, and at the side a flower garden, and a kitchen-patch of vegetables. A woman was in the patch among the vegetables. She rose as Mary approached.

“Am I trespassing?” Mary asked.

“Anybody can walk through the groves.”

“I am looking for Mr. Musgrave.”

“You’ll find him ahead a bit. He was just speaking to me—”

“Thank you.” Mary smiled and passed on, and the woman stood looking

after her. She had cut a cabbage and held it under her arm. She wore no hat, and her skin was burned by the sun. The hair of the girl who had passed was like shining silk, and the frock she wore matched her hair—a soft silk sheath of pale yellow. The woman who held the cabbage had never worn a frock like that.

But Mary was not thinking of the woman with the cabbage. She was wondering about Boone Musgrave. What he would be like, and what she would say to him.

It was then that she had come upon him, standing there with his little cat—a vivid and arresting figure, his eyes bold and bright as they surveyed her.

"You are Ward Hamilton's daughter?"

"Yes. The one who bought—White Feathers."

There was an undercurrent of indignation in her voice.

He gave her a keen glance, "Everything all right?"

"Nothing is right, Mr. Musgrave."

"I'm sorry. Shall we sit down and talk about it?"

He led her to a seat under the trees. Boots trailed after them. "What a darling cat," Mary said.

Boone laughed, "He isn't a darling. He's a thief and a murderer. But we're great pals . . ." He picked up the little animal, and it lay purring in the crook of his arm. "Nobody else can live with me. Not even my mother. She prefers to stay in her own house. You passed it as you came along."

"Your mother? The woman in the garden?"

He was aware of her astonishment. "Yes. Cutting cabbages. You're surprised, of course. Most people are, to see her living that way when she might have everything. But it's her own fault. She hides herself. I'd like to have her with me. But perhaps it is best as it is. I'm not easy to live with."

"Really . . . !"

He sat down on the seat beside her. "You're not interested. You think I'm talking too much about myself. Well, perhaps I am. But I'd like you to understand at once what you've got to deal with. I am not easy to live with because I like my own way. And I usually get it. But my way isn't bad, not when people don't set themselves against it. They are happier when they give in."

“How sure you are!” she said, with coldness.

“Why shouldn’t I be?”

“How can you know you are right? I’d hate to have people give in to me just because my will was stronger.”

“Why worry about others? I think only of myself.”

It was a shameless philosophy, yet it held her by its very honesty. “I’m sure you don’t mean it.”

“I do. The battle goes to the strong. What I want, I get . . .”

“Do you always get what you want at the expense of others?” Hot color flamed in her cheeks. “Our house . . . ! You should never have sold it to us, Mr. Musgrave. It’s a dreadful place! The kitchen stove, the plumbing! Cockroaches! Water bugs! And the ceiling of my room is so cracked I am afraid to sleep under it.”

“What do you expect me to do about it?”

“Give us back our money, and let us go.”

His eyes were upon her, noting again the gold and white of her—her stillness, her composure. Except for the flame in her cheeks, she might have been an ice woman.

“No,” he said, “I shan’t let you go . . .”

Then, after a moment, “Where would you go if I gave you the money?”

“Away from here.” But he saw that she wavered.

“You haven’t any plans?”

“No—my father is ill—”

“How would it do if I agreed to fix up the house for you—new plumbing, new stove, fresh paint, a ceiling that would be a benediction to your dreams —?”

Laughter lit his eyes. Mary, looking up at him, was again conscious of his dark splendor. There was, too, a sort of boyish naïveté which modified her dislike of his arrogance.

“You’re laughing at me,” she said.

“No, I’m not. But I could make a charming house of it. I’ve done a lot of that kind of thing. I wish you’d come on up to my house and let me show you. It was a wreck before I bought it, and now it’s one of the show places . . .”

“I’m afraid I haven’t time—”

“Take it.”

She found herself yielding, and presently she was in his amazing house. Amazing because its beauty was so unexpected. Boone had spent his money well. He had had decorators down from New York, and had told them what he wanted. “No old furniture. I haven’t inherited anything, and I won’t have what others have used. Let your men go out into my orchard and key my house to it.”

The decorators had made a good job of it. It was all very modern and spacious and uncluttered—ivory and green and pale yellow. A wide window with straight silver draperies showed beyond the aisles of the orange groves the faint blue of the bayou. There were white roses in black bowls—white iris —

“You like it?” Boone asked her more than once, as they moved from room to room.

At last she said, “I haven’t any adjectives left.”

“You didn’t expect it?”

“No.”

“Not after seeing me—and my mother . . . ?”

She flushed, “You’re not fair . . .”

“I’m used to it—”

Alec came in with frosted glasses on a tray. “It’s orange juice,” Boone said, “with fresh mint and ginger-ale. Nothing intoxicating. I don’t drink myself. I’ve seen too many men go to pieces.”

Mary sat in a chair of old green lacquer and drank her orange juice. “It’s delicious. I must tell father about it.”

“If you had come to breakfast, I would have had fish for you. I caught them myself . . .”

She said, “I saw you the other night, fishing.”

“Saw me? Where?”

“As we passed over the bridge.”

“How did you know it was I?”

“Peter Ferry told me. He’s father’s doctor.”

“I know him.” His voice had hardened. “And he knows me. I hold the mortgages on his house. I’ll bet he didn’t have anything good to say about me.”

Under her flickering lashes, Mary’s eyes shone. “He said you were a robber baron—”

“What . . . !”

“A robber baron—” Then, as the red surged up in his face, “I shouldn’t have told you. But you seemed so sporting.”

“I am—but not when other men are unfair to me.”

She rose, smiling distantly. “Thank you for showing me your house . . .”

“Thank you for coming . . .”

He got his hat, and walked with her through the grove. “I shall see your father in a day or two. And tell him not to worry. He won’t know the place when I’m done with it.”

He held out his hand, “Please don’t be too hard on me. I’m really not as bad as I sound.”

“Is that an apology?” But she laid her hand in his, and he stood staring after her as she went away.

Then he followed the path back to his mother’s cottage. He poked his head in at the kitchen window. “You saw that girl?” he said.

His mother, peeling potatoes for the boiled dinner, lifted her eyes, “The one in the yellow dress?”

“Yes. If she comes this way again, look hard at her. She’s the woman I am going to marry, Mother.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Hidden Face

PETER, as he made his rounds that morning, had his mind on Mary and her meeting with Boone Musgrave. He was eager to get back to hear about it, but the demands of his patients held him until late in the afternoon.

Some of these demands were linked in a somewhat sinister way with Boone. There was, for example, the case of Vance Tyndall's wife. Peter was called hurriedly and went at once. He had made several visits, but there had been no pay for a long time. Tyndall had suffered from the depression, and had taken to drink. Peter was sorry for the wife. She was young and wanted to live, but he was not sure he could save her. She was a frail little thing, and life of late had been hard for her. Peter hated to meet her burning eyes which asked so much that he could not promise.

The house to which he came was somewhat pretentious, but with that air of blight which marked many edifices built during the boom. The door was opened, and, as Peter ascended the steps, Tyndall emerged from the darkness of the wide hall. He, too, was young, and would have been good-looking except for the marks of dissipation which marred his countenance.

He said: "She's worse—"

"Why didn't you send for me sooner?"

"She asked me not to—"

They went into a room on the first floor. It was a great chamber, spacious and rather bare. The sick woman with her dark hair and burning eyes was breathing heavily. She said: "Vance would call you, Doctor."

"Why not, when you need me?"

"But we can't pay our bills—"

"Do you think that makes any difference?" Peter smiled at her, and asked

questions: “You’ve been up?”

“Yes.”

“You shouldn’t be.”

“But I had to let Martha go—”

“And you’ve been doing your own work?”

“Yes—”

Peter sent Tyndall out for a glass of water. “He’s been drinking?” he asked, when he and his patient were alone.

“Yes. But you mustn’t blame him. He’s good to me, and he’s good to Cindy. And he helps a lot around the house. But he gets discouraged.”

“I shall send Martha back tomorrow. And you mustn’t bother about her pay. She’s always wanting me to look after her aches and pains, and she can square her services with mine—”

Later, in the hall, Peter said to Tyndall, “My dear fellow, keep straight if you can. This is no time to make your wife miserable—”

“I know. I ought to be shot.”

“Saying that doesn’t help things.”

Tyndall flared: “It’s Musgrave’s fault—all of it. I haven’t a penny to my name, and he’s foreclosing.”

“You mean he’s putting you out?”

“Yes. I’ve told him how sick Cynthia is—but do you think he’ll listen?”

“Does your wife know?”

“I couldn’t keep it from her. He came here and talked—and she heard him.”

Peter’s face darkened. “I’ll see him, if you’ll give me the facts—”

The tale to which he listened was one not only of inhumanity, but of double-dealing. The whole thing called for legal action against Boone. “But I’ve got no money to sue him, Doctor. And you know his influence.”

“At least,” Peter said, “I can tell him what I think of him. And now, if you don’t mind, I’ll have a look at Cindy. Her mother thought she had a touch of temperature.”

They found the little girl fast asleep on a couch on the back porch, her dark

curls flung over the pillow. She waked at the sound of their voices. “Oh,” she said, “did you come, Peter?”

He picked her up. “How’s my girl?” he said.

“I’m Mother’s girl—and Daddy’s.”

“Not mine?”

She looked at her father, “Am I, Daddy?”

“If Doctor Peter says so—”

“Then I belong to three peoples?”

“Yes.”

Peter left some simple medicine, and warned Tyndall at the last, “You can’t blame Musgrave for everything. You’ve got to be a man—”

“I know—” Vance looked very young and distraught, and Peter’s heart went out to him. Youth and helplessness always disturbed him. He wanted to help—yet found helping in this case difficult.

When he reached the hospital, there was a woman waiting—a woman whose skin was burned by wind and sun, and who wore an old-fashioned bonnet. Peter knew her, and spoke at once: “Mrs. Musgrave?”

“Could I see you for a moment, Doctor?”

He opened the door of his office, and set a chair for her. “About yourself?”

“Yes.” She told her symptoms.

He made an examination, and gave his verdict: “There may have to be an operation.”

Her self-control was remarkable. “There’s no other way?”

“There might be treatments. . . .”

“Would you mind trying them? I could come here. Boone mustn’t know.”

“Won’t he hear of it?”

“I often visit the patients in the charity ward. That would be excuse enough.”

She paid him, taking the money out of an ancient pocketbook. And when she went away, she thanked him. “I’ve always felt that if I were very sick, I’d want you. Boone wouldn’t have let me come if I had asked him. You and he aren’t friends, Doctor Ferry, and you ought to be.”

Peter smiled and let it go at that. One couldn't tell a mother like this that her son was a bounder and a blackguard.

As if she read his thoughts, she said, "He isn't as black as he's painted."

"How did you know I was painting him?"

"Most people do. They don't understand."

She went away, her antiquated skirts sweeping about her. Peter had given her hope. He was glad to do it. Glad he was a doctor. Glad to be alive on this radiant morning.

When at last he left his work behind him and went on to White Feathers, he found Jinks in a state of high excitement.

"Oh," she said, "so much has happened!"

"What?"

"I've had a letter from Denis—and a present from Mary."

She led the way to the living-room, where a huge box was enthroned on a chair. Jinks lifted the cover, "Look!"

Within was a riot of loveliness—this delicate garment and that, laces and embroidery, fragile crêpes and chiffons. "A wedding present, if you please. I never knew people wore such things—real people. And now they're mine—"

"You deserve them," Peter said. "You've had a hard life."

"Oh," she said, "what does all that matter if now I have Denis . . . ?"

She seemed lighted from within. Incandescent. "It was all part of a Plan. The hard part—and now—happiness, and Denis is so—wonderful."

"Not more wonderful than you, Jinks."

"Oh . . . I'm not. But he loves me. And I have all these perfect things." Her arms were full of rosy, floating raiment. "Oh, Peter, do you think I'm dreadfully worldly-minded for a parson's wife?"

"I think the parson ought to thank his stars—"

After dinner that night, Peter said to Mary, "You did a good act."

"When?"

"Today. . . . Your wedding present to Jinks—"

"I adored doing it—and I'm going to find a dress for her wedding. There's a white one that will need only a little changing, and a lace scarf for a veil—"

The two of them were resting at ease on the gallery which encircled the second floor of the house. It overlooked the garden, and Peter and Mary, in deck chairs, lay back and gazed at the moon.

"Denis is to be home on Monday—and I want the three of you that night. Afterwards, he and Jinks will be off for their honeymoon."

"I'm not sure I can go."

"Why not?"

"Daddy's furious because Jinks got married. He says nurses ought to take vows of single blessedness. He'll hate having me go to the wedding party."

"If you can't, there won't be any party. . . . You'll come if I have to run away with you. . . ."

She laughed at that, but liked it.

Out of the silence that followed, Peter said, "You haven't told me about Musgrave."

"He's gorgeously spectacular. Wasn't there a dark angel, Peter? Lucifer? He's like that."

"He's like nothing so splendid. Wait till you know more of him."

"He was really very reasonable. He promised to do all sorts of things to the house if we would stay in it."

"Do you think he's doing it because he's reasonable? He's doing it because you are you, Mary. Something new and lovely for him to get excited about. He's as dangerous to a woman as a tiger roaming in a forest. And he's simply a camouflaged edition of his daddy. You saw his mother? There are still stories of her beauty when she came here. Her husband loved her as long as her beauty lasted—then crucified her."

"Somehow I can't think of Boone Musgrave as cruel."

"I wish you wouldn't think of him at all."

"Sure you're quite fair to him, Peter?"

"No," Peter said, "I'm not fair. I couldn't be where you are concerned. I love you too much."

Mary lay very still. The moon, sailing high, showed Peter raised on his elbow and looking down at her. She said, shakily, "Don't spoil the moon."

For a moment he hung above her, then got out of his chair and stood up,

his back to the balustrade. “I’m sorry. I hadn’t meant to say it. But now that it’s said, I’ll not take it back.”

A long silence. Then Mary said, “Even if I wanted it, father wouldn’t.”

“Why should he spoil your life? He can’t shut you up in a nunnery.”

“He can shut me up with himself.” She rose, restlessly, and joined Peter by the balustrade. “He doesn’t want to share me with anyone. When I have made friends, it has been the same—we have moved on, so that I could not learn to care for them.”

“But he can’t always do that, Mary—”

“Perhaps we’re like the Wandering Jew—going on and on. Father says I’ll be happier single. And it may be true. Not all women who marry are happy.”

“No. But you and I—Mary. . . .” His voice was rough with emotion, “If you loved me . . .”

Her breath was quick. “I feel safe with you, and gay and young, but that’s not love, is it?”

“It might be.”

“No. I want more than that, Peter.” She leaned over the balustrade, looking down into the garden. “I want to be a Juliet—flaming to the moon.”

The moon had gone behind a cloud. They stood in the dark, very close together. And suddenly Peter’s arms went round her, “Mary—”

His eyes were hidden in her soft hair, his cheek pressed hard on hers. She was swept by a rapture which threatened to engulf her.

She heard herself protesting, “Peter—please—”

He released her at once: “Forgive me.”

When the moon came out again, she stood far from him.

“Are you afraid of me, Mary?”

“No—only it’s the first time.”

“You mean no other man has ever—?”

“Yes.”

To Peter it seemed incredible that with all her beauty, Mary had escaped the common lot. A little petting—and who cared? Most girls, Lou Gorman, for example, took such things lightly. Yet it was not a light thing when one faced

the truth squarely. He said now, his voice tense with feeling, “If I dared ask you to promise—”

“I haven’t known you long enough.”

“How long is—long enough?”

“I don’t know, Peter.”

They said a lot of things after that—breathlessly. And when, at last, he let her go, she escaped to her room and shut the door behind her. She lighted the small lamps on each side of the mirror of her dresser and looked at herself. The face that looked back was new to her. A soft radiance veiled it with loveliness —. It was as if, seeing herself through Peter’s eyes, she was transmuted in her own. She leaned forward suddenly, and kissed the girl in the mirror, then extinguished the lights and sat for a long time in the moonlight, afraid to go to bed lest she sleep, and in sleeping lose a moment of her ecstasy.

The next morning Hamilton insisted on seeing Boone Musgrave. Mary, he said, had muddled things. “I don’t want the house fixed. I want my money.”

Peter, to whom the demand was made, advised, “Wait till you are stronger.”

But his patient would not wait. So it happened that just before luncheon, when Boone, having been sent for, drove up to the door in a resplendent roadster, it was Peter who met him. “You won’t mind my telling you, will you, Musgrave, that my patient is running a temperature? It seems best to let him see you, but I’ll be glad if you will avoid excitement.”

Boone said: “I’ll purr like a pussy cat.” Then, as Mary appeared on the threshold, “Ferry’s been warning me not to excite your father.”

They went in together, and Peter sat contentedly on the step and waited. He had had a swim before breakfast, and, spick and span in fresh white linen, was ready for his day’s work.

But not until he had had another moment with Mary.

As she appeared in the door, he stood up. Very good-looking, Mary decided, with his direct gaze, his strong young figure, the ease and grace of him.

“The enemy has come,” he said, “and occupies the citadel.”

She gave him a fleeting glance. “He’s getting along famously with father.”

“He would. . . .”

“Just what do you mean by that?”

“Oh, he’s all things to all men—and women—”

“Jealous, Peter?”

“After last night—? No.”

A little flush stained her cheeks. “Don’t expect too much of me—”

“Why limit my imagination? I’ll run on now and leave you with your—Lucifer. But tonight—you’re mine. After dinner. We’ll take a ride—there’s something I want to show you.”

“Father wouldn’t hear of it.”

“Why not?”

“He doesn’t let me ride with young men.”

“Darling, we’re not living in the dark ages—”

“I am—and so is he—”

He was not listening—“Love me?”

“Peter—!”

“Sorry. But you’re a terrible temptation—”

He touched her cheek with a light finger tip, then ran on, leaving her shy and startled, looking after him.

When Boone came out a little later, the color had not faded from her cheeks. There was, indeed, the glowing touch to her beauty which she had seen last night in the mirror, and Boone was aware of it.

“Your father was a lamb,” he said. “He began by calling me names, and I told him he couldn’t say anything worse to me than I was saying to myself. And now he wants you to go over the house with me, and tell me what’s to be done.”

“You mean he’s willing to let you do it?”

“Yes. I made him a small loan, and that settled the immediate money question. He’s satisfied to stay here, at least until he can look about him.”

They went through the house together. Mary showed him the awfulness of the kitchen, the dreadfulness of the plumbing, the sagging ceiling. “Do you wonder I’m afraid,” she asked, as they stood in her own room, looking up.

“You won’t know it when I get through with it.” His eyes roamed about the

room, noting Mary's luxurious belongings—a dressing-case fitted with gold and ivory—crystal bottles set forth on an ancient bureau; photographs in fine old frames—of a woman in court dress, of a man in uniform, Hamilton himself in riding clothes. "You've got a lot of pretty things."

"Most of them are in storage. We are always on the wing."

He picked up a hand-glass of silver-gilt richly chased and studded with precious stones—"Old stuff, isn't it?"

"Yes. My great-grandmother brought it with her from France."

"My great-grandmother on my mother's side had things like that. Yet here I am—a roughneck."

She smiled at him, "Don't slander yourself—"

"It's when I'm with you that I know it," he said, with earnestness. He laid the glass down, and stood with his hands behind him on the dresser. He was thus reflected in the mirror back of him, so that he seemed to be two men—one looking at Mary with a dark and penetrating glance, the other with his face hidden. Mary, in the months to come, was often to think of that hidden face, to wonder which was the real Boone—the one who showed himself to the world, or the one whose face was turned from it.

He went on, speaking slowly: "It's like this. When I'm with you, I feel like something new and varnished, trying to compete with old mahogany—"

She said, laughing a little: "I've been called everything but that—"

"You know what I mean—. I've got a big house and a lot of things in it, but I've never known people like these in your photographs. Yet a few generations ago, my family was as good as yours. I'd have been like you if my mother hadn't married—my father."

He broke off. "I don't know why I am saying all these things. I'm sorry."

She was standing by the window, and he came and stood beside her. "You can see my house from here—"

The orange groves stretched below them, a sea of shimmering green which seemed to break against the whiteness of the house on the hill. "That's my domain," Boone said, "as far as you can see."

"Monarch of all you survey?" said Mary.

His mood of humility had left him. "Of more," he said, boastfully.

She turned from the window, and he followed her to the lower hall, where

they found Jinks who had a message for Boone. “Mr. Hamilton wishes to see you—”

When Boone at last left the house, Mary went back to her father. “I like him, Mary, don’t you?”

“He’s interesting. But I’m not sure that I trust him.”

“Why should you? Why should you trust any man? I’ve told you that, haven’t I? Boone Musgrave can’t pull wool over my eyes. But he makes me feel alive. And I’m half dead.” He moved restlessly, “Half dead, Mary, and he puts warmth in my blood. And now will you tell that nurse of mine to come back and fix my pillows? I’m going to get some sleep while my mind is at rest. It’s the first time my mind has been at rest since I came to this infernal country.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

"What Are Young Ladies Made Of?"

IT was late in the afternoon when Peter called up Boone's office. Boone had gone home, so Peter drove at once to the house. The door was opened by Alec. "Mr. Boone's in the living-room," he said, and Peter heard the sound of the piano. Boone was playing an old Viennese waltz, his body swaying to its rhythm. As Peter came in, he swung around on the piano bench: "Grand, isn't it?"

"Keep on," Peter said, "it's one of my favorites."

So Boone played, and Peter, leaning back in a big chair, listened. The music was as gay as the morning, and Boone seemed to partake of its gaiety. His head was flung back, and he was smiling. "Great stuff," he said, when, with a sweep of chords, the waltz was ended. "Those old fellows knew something of the joy of living."

Peter had never seen him look so young, so radiant. "What's up, Ferry?" he asked. "Anything happened to old Hamilton?"

"Hamilton? No. It's about Tyndall."

Boone's manner changed in a moment. "Tyndall?"

"His wife is sick, and I don't want her moved. Tyndall says you are foreclosing."

"What does he expect? He can't make his payments."

"The woman's in a dying condition. I haven't told her husband, but she can't last long."

"How do you know she's dying?"

"I'm a doctor."

"Doctors make mistakes. And Tyndall doesn't deserve anything more than he's getting. He's a drunkard, and can blame himself."

"Whoever is to blame, there's the wife to think of. She has gone without food, and has worked when she wasn't fit to be out of bed. And she doesn't

want to die. She's young—and afraid—"

"She may be a long time dying. With all deference to your diagnosis, Ferry, such illnesses are often faked. And, anyhow, it's a matter of business."

"It's a matter of common humanity."

Boone was still on the piano bench and Peter in his big chair. Both were leaning forward, breathing quickly.

Boone said, "I'm sorry, Ferry, but in things like this, I don't allow interference."

"Then you'll turn them out?"

"I'll look into the matter."

Peter stood up, "If you foreclose, I shan't hesitate to tell the world."

"Tell it what?"

"That the things you've done aren't legal, and you know it."

Boone's face was dark. "Let my affairs alone, Ferry, or you may find yourself in trouble."

As Peter left the house, he heard Boone playing the waltz that had been interrupted by his coming. In spite of the Tyndalls and their troubles, the music went on, gay and lilting.

Peter stopped at Tyndall's. "If he turns you out, you can come to me."

"If he turns me out, I'll kill him."

"And kill your wife doing it?"

Tyndall said, sullenly, "He's to blame for everything—"

"Man, can't you see that half the blame is yours? Think of your wife and try to keep straight."

Peter left with Tyndall the money Margaret Musgrave had given him. It seemed one of the small ironies of fate that the mother should be helping those whom her son would doom to despair. Peter was glad he had the money at hand, and went on with his heart lightened.

He was very tired when he reached White Feathers, but a bath and a change rested him, and he came to the dinner table feeling fit as a king. Mary, opposite him, was charming in a satin gown that melted into the gold of the candles.

Peter said, “You look like Midas’ daughter.”

“Do you like it?”

“I liked the other better—”

“The orchid?”

“Yes.”

She laughed, and that seemed the end of it until they left the table. Then Peter said, “I wish you’d change it.”

“Change what?”

“Your gown.”

“Peter—how silly—”

“It isn’t silly. It’s just that you look too affluent for a poor man’s wife . . .”

“But I’m not anybody’s wife—”

“Not yet—”

He was daring, and knew it—“Go upstairs and change—”

She wavered, “But what difference does it make?”

“A lot to me.” Peter was aware that he was putting something to the test. He was not sure whether it was the depth of Mary’s feeling for him, or his own indulgence in a sense of power. But whatever it was, he meant to see it through.

To his great surprise, she ran up the stairs laughing. As he waited for her on the porch, Peter found his sense of triumph waning. Just to please his vanity, he had played the dominant male. Yet, when she came down, he made no apology. He went forward to meet her, “Will you wear that dress when we are married, Mary?”

The color surged in her cheeks, “A man shouldn’t be so—sure.”

“A man must be sure when his whole life depends on it.”

They were standing under the porch lamp, very close together. The quick darkness had come, hiding the rest of the world, and from that darkness Boone Musgrave saw them as one sees the figures on a screen—Mary with her face uplifted, Peter’s eyes adoring.

So that was it! Ferry at his old tricks! All the world knew the gay irresponsibility of the young doctor’s love affairs. And the last had been Lou

Gorman. Boone had met Lou, and liked her. There had been something in her persistent pursuit of Peter which had compelled his admiration. He had great respect for people who knew what they wanted and got it.

Lou Gorman had not, apparently, gotten all she wanted. The report had gone forth that her engagement with Dr. Ferry was broken. And now Peter had moved on to other conquests. Boone felt the blood beating in his veins. Mary was his. He meant to have her.

He had walked down through the orange groves, his little cat at his heels. Since his talk with Mary that morning, he had found his thoughts possessed by her. He visioned her as he had first looked upon her, a nymph among his trees, and again in her own room, against a background of luxurious belongings. He had dared boast to her of his possessions, and had been chilled by her cool aloofness.

And now here she was with Ferry, drifting away with him, even as Boone looked, into the darkness of the garden.

He watched until they drifted back. Peter brought his car around, and they went off together. Then Boone moved on, stopping to look up at Mary's window where a faint light burned, waiting her return. In the shine of her dim lights, she would stand before her mirror and wield her gold and ivory brushes. She would touch her white skin with perfumed waters from the crystal flasks —

Boone remembered an old English rhyme which his mother had sung:

"What are young ladies made of?
What are young ladies made of?
Ribbons and laces,
And sweet pretty faces.
That's what young ladies are made of."

Well, Mary was made of better things than that. Crystal and gold and ivory! He had a whimsical delight in his fantasy. Gold for her hair, ivory for her skin—crystal for the heart of her. . . !

CHAPTER NINE

On a Balcony

MARY, coming in after her ride with Peter, met an agitated Jinks. “Your father wants to see you.”

Going in alone, she found her father sitting up.

“Since when, Mary, have I let you ride at night with young men?”

“It’s such a lovely night, Daddy.”

“You might have asked me.”

She had no defense and made none.

He went on, violently, “Ferry’s in love with you, of course.”

“You think every man’s in love with me.”

“Well, I want you to understand this. No more rides with Ferry. If there are, I’ll get rid of him—”

She had sat by his side and had soothed him, and before she left he kissed her. Jinks, meeting her outside the sick-room, said, “I tried to keep him from knowing, Mary. But he asked for you, and I had to tell him. I was afraid Peter would come with you—and get the full force of it.”

“He had another call to make.”

Mary went upstairs, slowly. All the joy which she had felt in Peter’s presence had departed. There had been a sort of cold fury in her father’s attitude which terrified her. She hoped there would be no scene when Peter came in. Perhaps she ought to warn him. She decided to stay up and see him before he saw her father.

She changed her dress for the red silk robe, and stepped through the window of her room to the balcony, which hung over the garden. She stood by the rail, feeling infinitely small in the immensity of the night. The ride with Peter had been a great adventure. There had been many things to show her—Denis’ church, unfinished. “But he doesn’t need a roof. His people come anyhow. He’s their ‘Little Minister,’ and they look up to him and love him. He

leads, and they follow. It's almost apostolic."

"Do you believe what he teaches, Peter?"

"Why not? His concern is with souls, and mine with bodies. But we work together."

Mary had been thrilled by that. How marvellous to work—with Peter!

He had driven her, too, to the house of an old man who needed medicine. The old man and his wife sold the fruit of their groves, and put up in little glass jars the translucent orange-flower honey. They made a fair living even in these days of depression, and were a cheerful pair. The woman had given Mary a small jar of honey. "People send a lot to brides," she said. "It seems appropriate." She had given Peter, too, a bag of tangerines, and Mary and Peter had eaten them as they went along—Mary peeling off the skins, and feeding the separated segments to Peter. They had laughed a lot, and Peter had said something about ambrosia and nectar. "Food for the gods, Mary."

Mary had brought the little jar of honey to her room, and had set it safely away. She told herself that if some day she was a bride, she would share it with —Peter. Oh, how fast she was going! Peter had made love to her on the way home, not touching her, but saying things—things to which she had made tremulous response—. She had promised nothing. Yet she knew that she had given hope.

They had stopped at his house, and had sat on the steps with Becky beside them. And Peter had told of his loneliness, and he had told her, too, about the jungle—of how it crept and crept, gorging like some prehistoric beast on the things civilization left in its path. He had taken her into the house, and had said: "Some day I want you here. There's a mortgage, and Boone Musgrave holds it. But as long as I can pay the interest, he can't foreclose. And things must take a turn for the better."

He had shown her an eagle's nest in the top of a tall pine—"A pair of them came here years ago, and will be here through all the years we are together—"

"But—I haven't made up my mind, Peter."

"Let me make it up for you."

He had left her at the door of White Feathers—and she had come in happy and glowing, to meet her father's rage, his threat that he would get rid of Peter. . . .

She was struck with a deadly chill as she thought of it—What would she do if the warmth of Peter's protective care were lost to her?

The leaves below her rustled. Leaning forward, she was aware of someone in the garden—a shadow among the shadows. “Who’s there?” she asked, sharply.

“Boone Musgrave. I was walking in my groves, and saw you—like Juliet on her balcony.”

She could see him now as he stood beneath her—the white oval of his face dimly defined.

“If I had the courage,” he said, “I’d climb up.”

“Of course you can’t. You’d break your neck.”

“Do you want me to try?”

“No. I’m going in—”

“Wait,” he protested. “I want to talk to you. And I like you up there! A woman on a balcony! It’s symbolic, isn’t it? Juliet, Roxane, and the rest? Men looking up at them, and wishing to climb?”

She did not answer him at once. She was gazing down at that uplifted face, the dark hair falling back from it, its bold handsomeness softened by the magic of the night.

She felt a sudden fear, as of something sinister, and turned away. Again he said, “Wait.”

In another moment he was beside her, the leaves of the vine up which he had clambered still shaking with the commotion caused by his ascent.

“I told you I could do it,” his laughter was triumphant. “Perhaps I shouldn’t have done it, but you’re such a lovely—Juliet!”

Her anger broke in a sharp retort, “How silly of you to try to play—Romeo.”

If she had struck him, the effect could not have been more devastating. For a moment he bent above her, then flung himself away. “Some day I may not seem so—silly.”

She heard him going down, the vines rattling and breaking as he dragged at them, then his step on the ground, growing faint and fainter as he entered the grove. For a long time she listened. She could not shake off the sense that something significant had happened. Something which was not over and done with, something which must be met in the end and the strength of her soul set against it. At last, with a little shiver, she roused herself, and fled to the shelter of her room.

Boone, striding along under his orange trees, told himself that he had been a fool. He should have stayed and had it out with her. She had made him feel like a clown trying to take the center of the stage. He should have shown her that the stage was his—to tread as he pleased.

Well, he must not go too fast. It was a great game—with Peter against him. By the time he reached his mother's cottage, he was again at ease with himself. A great game—and he knew how to play it. No adversary as yet had stood against him.

The curtains were never drawn in Margaret's little house, and Boone, looking now through the window, saw his mother sitting in front of the open fire. She often read far into the night. She had never lost her love for books, although there had been years when she had seen few of them. It was because of his mother's long-suppressed passion that Boone had been brought to a deep appreciation of the arts. The paintings and etchings on his walls were well chosen, the shelves of his library were filled, and there was the piano in his great living-room, on which he played for hours when the mood was on him.

It was as Margaret sat thus in repose that one discerned traces of the beauty which had once been hers . . . the thin and delicate profile, the set of the head on the graceful neck, the almost classic perfection of the brown braids above her brow.

Her son spoke through the window, "It's Boone, Mother."

She turned at the sound of his voice, her face lighted. "You're walking late."

"Yes." He went round by the door and joined her. "I've been to White Feathers." He stretched himself on the rug in front of the fire, his arm across her knee. "I didn't go in. But I saw Miss Hamilton for a moment, and talked with her. She came out on her porch, and I was in the garden. She had on a red dress, and was lovely in it. But she's more than lovely, Mother. She's disturbing. She does what no other woman has ever done. She makes me feel crude and common. . . ."

"You're not that," his mother said. "You are cruel sometimes, and you're selfish, but perhaps you aren't to blame. You had a hard enough time when you were a boy. But you're not common—even with your daddy's blood in you. . . ."

Boone, looking into the fire, said, "Mother, what made you marry him?"

"He was good-looking, like you, Boone. But that wasn't all of it. He was

eager and young, and all the people around me were old and proud, and living in the past. And I wanted to live in the present. I wanted to feel, and your father made me feel. You can't remember him as I first saw him—his cheeks so red, and his eyes so bright, and his tongue as sharp as a whip, but never to me—not in those days.

"What I didn't know was that back of it all there wasn't a brain. Not a mind of any kind, Boone. He was ignorant, and didn't care. He didn't want to learn. He was willing to live on a little land, grow enough to eat, and let it go at that. And he wanted you to be like him—. It almost drove me crazy.

"I think that sometimes he almost hated me because he felt that I held myself above him. I tried not to show it, and in those first days, I didn't. But after you came, I tried to live a little as I had lived at home. I wanted his manners different, so you might have manners like the men of my family. I wanted to set my table right, and have friends come in, so that you might have them. But I had to give it up. I wasn't strong enough to fight him. He grew harder and harder, and the awful thing about it was that it was his love for me that made him hard. He wanted to be everything to me, and he couldn't be. It wasn't his fault, nor mine. It was just my mistake in marrying him. As you grew up, he and I grew apart. I lost ambition for myself, but I pushed you on. But your daddy was too strong for me. That was one thing he had—strength. And you have it—and sometimes you use it as he did—to get your way, whether it's right or not . . ."

"Where would I have been if I hadn't, Mother?"

"What I wanted you to be—honest and good—even if you didn't own half the town, and make people hate you for it."

He reached up and took her hand in his, "I've been your bad boy, haven't I?"

She ruffled up his hair with her knotted fingers. "Yes. But I love you, Boone."

"Are all women like that, Mother—loving men who don't measure up?"

"They might be—"

"Would Mary Hamilton?"

The knotted fingers were still. "Don't marry her, Boone."

He lifted himself and looked at her, "Why not?"

"You can't make her happy."

He was suddenly fierce, blazing. “What makes you say that? Do you think I’d treat her as Daddy treated you?”

“How do you know how you’d treat her, if you thought she looked down on you? A man can’t stand it, Boone. I tell you that, and I know. You’ve got lessons to learn, son, though you don’t believe it. You can’t go through the world having your own way—”

She saw him then in one of his rare moods of gentleness. “Mary could have her way with me, Mother. When she stood up there above me on the porch, I felt as if she were an angel from Heaven, and that I wanted to go to Heaven with her. . . .”

It was extravagant language, but she understood it. In certain ways, he was as old-fashioned as she. His assumption of modernity was thin veneer, hiding the poetic quality of his mind.

She said, with a touch of quaintness, “I don’t care who takes you to Heaven so you get there.”

He laughed and looked up at her. “Mothers. . . ! The good Lord made them to pray for us.”

“No one can save you, Boone, but yourself.”

He jumped to his feet. “As if I needed saving. Life’s ahead of me. I’m going to make the most of it.”

Yet, seeing the look in her eyes, he had a moment of contrition. “Mary’s like you,” he said. “I haven’t seen much of her, but somehow I know it. She’ll hate the things in me that you hate, and love the things you love. And perhaps some day she will be unhappy about me, as you are unhappy. But there’ll be times when I can make her happy—happier than any other man could make her. It’s worth a try, isn’t it, Mother?”

She shook her head, yet was glad of his strong arm about her, the kiss that he gave her before he went. And when she was alone, she found herself smiling into the fire, remembering his eagerness and youth, the strength and fire of him, but most of all, those moments of rare gentleness in which he had revealed his heart.

CHAPTER TEN

The Swine of Gadara

PETER was very late, and Mary, restless and waiting, went down finally to the kitchen. Jinks came in, and they made coffee and drank it.

The kitchen was a cavernous place, with Julia's hand-scrubbed table making a high light under the swinging lamp. Jinks and Mary, sitting at the table, talked of Hamilton. He was asleep, Jinks said, but he had been difficult to handle after his conversation with his daughter. "It took him a long time to settle down. Even now he's just napping. I've got to get back to him. He might wake at any moment."

"Have another cup of coffee?"

"No. You might save some for Peter."

"I wonder what is keeping him?"

"There's a case at the hospital. He said he might have to operate."

When Jinks had gone, Mary spread a place for Peter—a white cloth, and a cup and saucer. Then, as she heard his car, she sped through the hall and met him at the front door, her finger on her lip.

He followed her to the kitchen. "What's happened?"

She told him. "I shouldn't have gone for a drive with you. Father found it out, and was in a dreadful state."

"He'll have to get over it."

"He won't. He's like that, Peter. And I'm—afraid."

"He knows it, and plays on your fears. And there's nothing to be afraid of."

"There is—"

"What?"

"I can't—tell you—"

"Why not?"

"Because—" Her breath seemed to leave her.

He grasped her hand and drew her to him: “Did he ever—hurt you?”

“Please—don’t ask me,” her face was white.

He had had his answer, and let her go. But there were smoldering fires in his eyes. He wondered what Hamilton had done to her to bring her to this.

He said, abruptly, “I’m hungry. I’m glad you made the coffee.”

“Jinks made it.” She turned the switch of the percolator, and at once it began to bubble. “There’s plenty to eat in the refrigerator.” She opened it and handed him a plate of butter and a platter of roast chicken.

She sat, presently, opposite him and poured his coffee. The loose sleeves of her red robe fell back from her arms. The strong color and the strong light above her accentuated her pallor.

As Peter carved the chicken, he said, trying to cheer her: “We’re being terribly domestic, aren’t we?”

“Yes.”

“Like it?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t say it that way. Say, ‘I adore it, Peter.’ ”

She began, “I adore—” and could not go on.

He said, “Child, you’re crying—” and got up and went around to her, laying his hand on her shoulder and looking down at her. And as he looked, he saw against her neck the little shining curl he had seen on the night he first met her, and, the sight being too much for him, he bent and kissed it!

There was a sudden sound behind him—quick steps, the slam of a door!

He turned and saw Hamilton, wrapped in a gray dressing-gown; his back to the door, holding it against Jinks who could be heard protesting behind it.

Mary, too, had turned, and half-rising, said “Daddy—!”

Hamilton laughed—a shocking sound in the echoing room. “So,” he said, “I’ve caught you at it.” He left the door and crossed the intervening space. Peter, attempting to bar the way, was swept aside with a strength that was the strength of madness. Hamilton reached the table, and with one wild gesture stripped from it the cloth Mary had spread. There was a crash of china, and a scream from Mary as the percolator poured its hot coffee over her.

But her screams had no effect on the infuriated man. He pulled her up and

towards him: “This is the way you do things, is it? Behind my back, when I’m asleep—?”

“Daddy—oh, Daddy, don’t—”

And then he struck her!

Peter got to him at last and dragged him away. The older man staggered and fell, and Peter, lifting him, carried him back to bed. “You needn’t think I’m beaten,” Hamilton said, vindictively.

“Doctors don’t think,” briefly.

“So I should judge.”

Peter poured white powder into a glass. “Drink this,” he said.

Hamilton made no protest. But when he had drunk, he flung the glass from him, and it broke against the footboard. “After tonight, Ferry, your services will no longer be needed.”

Peter, picking up bits of broken glass, said, “You’ll be a fool to send me away.”

“Do you think I’m going to let you stay—to kiss my daughter?”

The bits of glass tinkled as Peter dropped them on the tray. Except for that slight sound, there was stillness in the room, a silence which lasted until Hamilton said, “Well, why don’t you answer me?”

“Because I am trying to think how I can save you from—yourself. . . .”

Peter was standing now by the bed. His coat was off, and there was grace and virility in his young body, sternness in his young face. Hamilton felt his scorn. “What do you mean, save me?”

“You need help—and I can give it. I shall be glad to give it for the sake of your daughter. I love her, honestly. I want to marry her. And I’ve asked her. She doesn’t know whether she cares—enough. And that’s the way it stands . . . for you to take or leave. But I can tell you this, that you insult her by your own evil thoughts, as I would never insult her—so much do I respect her youth and innocence.”

Yes, he was good to look at—this young Peter. And, strangely, Hamilton felt drawn to him: “I’m not worth saving.”

Peter had no soft words of reassurance. “I’ll do what I can,” he said. “And now you’ve got to sleep. An alcohol rub may help you.”

Few words passed between them as Peter worked. His hands, flexible and

expert, brought to the sick man's chilled body warmth and relaxation. Before he slept, he said, "Stay if you want to. And tell Mary, I'm sorry."

Peter listened until his breathing was heavy, then went upstairs. He found Mary lying on her bed. Jinks, who sat beside her, rose as Peter entered. "It was all my fault. I thought he was asleep, and I left the room for a moment. He must have heard your car."

He patted her shoulder. "Don't blame yourself. But you'd better go to him. I'll join you in a minute."

She went away, and Peter stood looking down at Mary.

He said: "If love could save you from this—"

"Nothing can save me."

"Did he ever do it before?"

"Once, when Mother was living."

"Of course, you know he's not—accountable—"

"If I didn't know it, I should die."

"He's sorry. He asked me to tell you—"

"He's always—sorry—"

Peter knelt beside the bed. "Let me take care of you—"

"Don't talk about it now—" She began to sob.

"I told him I loved you—"

"Was he dreadful?"

"No. He knew I wasn't afraid. And he is afraid, Mary. I asked him to let me help. I think he will—"

"You mean, he will let you stay—?"

"I mean that I'm not going to leave you, ever."

She reached out her hand to him, and he lifted it to his lips, and kissed it. "Try to rest. Things will be better in the morning."

He went about the room, pulling down the curtains, for the dawn had come, and the sky was pink. When he reached the door, he turned to look at Mary. Her face was hidden, and he could see only the back of her bright head. She seemed very little and young and unprotected. His heart yearned over her.

He told Jinks later, as they talked in whispers on the front porch: “It’s going to be a difficult thing to deal with. It’s a common complex, of course, with fathers. But not all of them go to such lengths of cruelty—”

Jinks, looking forlorn and futile in the dim light of the morning, set herself to prove that the futility was of outward appearance only. “He’ll hate himself when he wakes up. He loves her.”

“Love isn’t brutal.”

“He’s not brutal. It’s a kind of madness, Peter. An evil spirit within him—like the things they talk about in the Bible—”

Peter might have laughed at her, but he didn’t. For, after all, there is in madness that which needs more than physical means to meet it. . . . A possession? What else but a devil would make a man strike his daughter?

“Granting that—what are we going to do about it?”

“Let me try—”

He had let her try before, and always with amazement at the results she obtained. “I hate to have you do hard things.”

“I’ve got to—if I’m going to help Denis.”

“Do you mean you are going to take Denis’ world on your shoulders, as well as your own?”

Jinks considered that. “I think so. And he’ll take mine. And it won’t be difficult if we do it—together . . .”

And so it happened that Jinks, some hours later, having bathed her patient, brought him his breakfast.

“I don’t want any—”

She set the tray aside, and stood beside him. “Don’t think about it—”

“About what?”

“Last night.”

“How can I help thinking—?”

“Because—it wasn’t you who did it—”

His dark glance questioned her, “Not I?”

“No. It was something outside yourself—. I’m afraid I can’t make it clear to you, but it’s all in this Book—”

She had it in her hand, the little black book from which she often read to him.

He said, “Are you trying to preach to me?”

She gave him a fleeting smile. “I’m a parson’s wife. . . .”

He looked at her, standing all starchy-white and ruddy-red beside him. Behind her, the sunlight made a golden square of the window. There were fresh flowers on the table. Last night seemed like a dreadful dream.

He said, “Read to me, parson’s wife.”

She sat in her low chair, and opened the book, and read the strange and moving story of those swine of Gadara which were swept down with their devils to be drowned in the sea, while the man, freed by a miracle from those same devils, sat at the feet of Jesus “clothed and in his right mind.”

“You think I am possessed of devils?”

“I think you need—God.”

God?

It was Jinks who gained Hamilton’s consent to Mary’s attendance at the wedding-party. “You owe her that—”

“I owe her—everything—”

“Then let me have my own way about it.” Jinks’ voice was tremulous, her eyes misty. She was tired and her nerves were shaken. The past two days had been trying, and now came tears, blinding her. She fumbled in her pocket for her little handkerchief.

Hamilton, seeing her tears, said: “For Heaven’s sake, don’t cry . . . Mary can go if it means that much to you.”

“It means a lot—”

When Denis came, she told him all about it—the scene with Mary—Hamilton’s dependence upon her. “I hate to leave him. He’s so unhappy.”

The two of them were in the living-room at White Feathers. Jinks was in Denis’ arms, her hair like a blowing flame against his coat.

He said: “I’ve been with you every moment.”

“I know.”

“Distance can never part us.”

She clung to him, “Darling, darling. . . .”

“Tonight . . .” he said.

“Tonight. . . .”

When Jinks went back to her patient, he had a present for her—a quaint pendant of aquamarines and pearls, set in greenish gold. “I picked it up in Italy.”

She flushed with pleasure, “I’ve never had anything so lovely. How can I thank you?”

“By coming back to me.”

“But there’s the new nurse.”

“I don’t want her. I want you. You’re strong, and you seem to stand in the light, while I am in the shadow. Oh, I don’t know how to say it, but I want you back.”

He lay there, breathing heavily. “I’m old, and you’re young.” He covered his face with his hand. After a long time, he went on, “It isn’t that you’re a young and pretty woman. There have been plenty of other young and pretty women. It’s more than that—it’s the Madonna quality. Some women are born—mothers. And old as I am, I feel sometimes like a little boy—at your feet—”

She was shaken more than she dared admit. “I’ll come back—”

“Good-bye, parson’s wife. . . .”

“Good-bye.”

The evening had come, and it was time to dress. Jinks went up to where Mary was waiting. The white lace had needed little alteration. When Jinks put it on, it molded itself to her slenderness. Its flounces swirled about her feet, almost hiding the silver slippers which were matched by the silver ribbon which girdled her waist. Mary made tight bunches of orange blossoms, which caught Jinks’ veil into a cap-like closeness, showing just the edge of her ruddy hair.

Jinks said: “I have a feeling it will all vanish, and I’ll be found at the party in my nurse’s white.”

Mary smiled at her, “Silly.”

“I’m not. It all seems—fantastic. As if I were not a real bride, but a make-believe.”

“You’ll feel real when Denis sees you.”

“Perhaps.” Jinks turned from the mirror. “Denis and I are going to stop at the church. Peter will come for you when he brings the new nurse.”

“I know.”

Jinks went on, and in a little while Mary followed. She wore a trailing gown of white transparent velvet, with an emerald clip her only touch of color. A little coat of snowy ermine had a high collar which made a background for her bright hair.

She stopped in her father’s room, where old Julia was awaiting the arrival of Jinks’ successor.

Hamilton said, “Run along, Julia, Miss Mary can call you.”

Then, as Mary came up to the bed, he said, “I am most unhappy.”

“Why, Daddy?”

“Because you haven’t forgiven me—”

“I love you, dearest—”

“Do you? Come closer, Mary.”

She knelt beside him. “Don’t let him take you from me,” he said.

“Who?”

“Ferry.”

“But if—I cared?”

“I couldn’t bear it—if you leave me—I’ll die.”

A little later Mary went out on the porch to wait for Peter. But it was not Peter who first arrived, but Boone Musgrave. As he came up, he said, “I am here to present my apologies.”

“For what?”

“The other night. I lost my head.”

“Don’t lose it again.”

“How can I be sure when you’re so—wonderful?” His eyes were appraising her. “Why all this—elegance?”

“I’m going to Peter Ferry’s party. For Jinks and Denis. You knew they were married?”

“Yes. And they shouldn’t be. Nobody has a right to marry on a shoestring —nor to give parties.” Then, as he saw the coldness in her eyes, he said: “I’m sorry. I’m always sinning.”

“You’re not really repentant.”

He was standing close to her now. “If I give a party, will you come?”

“Why should I come—?”

“Because I ask it.”

His dark eyes looking down seemed to draw hers up and hold her gaze. She had never seen such eyes. They had little flecks of gold that danced and flickered. And back of the gold, they were wine brown, and deep and drowning—!

She dragged her own eyes away, and, hearing the sound of a motor, drew a sigh of relief, “It’s Peter.”

Boone waited until Peter came. “If it were not too late, I’d ask for an invitation.”

“Next time, Musgrave.”

“It will be my turn, next time.” He laughed, and ran down the steps, disappearing presently among the shadows of the orange grove.

Peter, helping Mary into his car, said: “Don’t go with him—anywhere.”

“I shan’t. I’m not sure that I like him—and anyhow, he means nothing to me, Peter.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Peter Gives a Party

IT was Denis who had wanted Jinks to go to the church.

"It's our real wedding day," he had said.

They knelt before the altar; and, in the silence of the little chapel, he prayed for both of them. And Jinks, listening, forgot the darkness of Hamilton's days, the hardness of her past. She forgot everything but the fact that Denis was speaking things to her heart and soul that would last until eternity.

When they came out into the moonlight, she said, "I wish there wasn't any party."

And Denis said, "I know. But we've got to think of Peter."

For Denis was aware that Peter's party meant more to him than a gesture of hospitality. It meant that Mary Hamilton would be there, and that Peter loved her. He had told Denis: "She's the only woman I've ever really wanted."

And Denis had said, "In spite of all the others?"

And Peter had said, "If I had known what love was, there wouldn't have been anyone else."

The porch on which Denis now stood with his bride was part of an ambitious structure, begun during the boom and still unfinished when Denis came to take charge of the parish. It was of Spanish architecture, with a tower that rose high above the palms and orange trees of the surrounding country. A small chapel had been completed, and there was a cloistered way which received the overflow of the congregation on crowded days. It was a tribute to Denis' eloquence that even now when the tides of depression had swept people away from the sleepy town, the cloister and lawn were often crowded. The main auditorium had no roof, and the moon, shining on it, gave it the effect of some ancient ruin, whose glory belonged to the past, and for which there was no future.

"There'll be a roof some day," Denis declared at this moment. "And if there isn't, why should I care? We moderns think too much of edifices. There was One who preached with only the sky overhead, and the fields and hills for

rostrums.”

The lawn which stretched in front was bounded on all sides by a low stone wall. On the lawn was a fat ewe whose grazing kept down the grass. She wore a bell which tinkled faintly as she moved about. A path led down to a wrought-iron gate, above which was a gold cross.

As Jinks and Denis stood silent on the steps, a tiny rabbit appeared in the path and sat palpitating, its ears up.

“How peaceful it is!” Jinks said. “If life could always be like this—”

“We would not want it always peaceful.”

“Why not?”

“There’s fun in fighting, dearest.”

She knew what he meant. The triumph of conquest over evil forces—. Jinks had known the practical things of life, but she had known, too, those moments of exaltation when, with her back to the wall, she had refused to surrender to the powers of darkness.

Peter’s party was a more splendid affair than his three friends had anticipated. The table was set forth with the ancestral silver and glass which he had brought from Baltimore. A great epergne, filled with tropical fruit, was balanced by four massive candlesticks. The table was so wide that Mary, at one end, had the space of six chairs between herself and Peter. The four of them, indeed, were like the points of a compass on a very large map.

The dinner was superlative. Judged by metropolitan prices, it would have been an expensive feast. But in this lavish country one could have pompano for a song, young fowls for a pittance, rare fruits for the asking; so Peter’s menu, with all its effect of extravagance, had actually cost him little.

Jinks said: “Oh, Peter, you shouldn’t have done it.”

“Done what?”

“All this grandeur—”

“Why not? Tonight is ours—”

“And tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow—” Denis exulted.

“After all,” Peter proclaimed, “these things are just stage settings. We’d be as happy, the four of us, on a desert island. You love Jinks in that dress, Denis, but you’d love her in a leopard skin. And if we had the stars for a roof, and a cocoanut shell for a cup, we wouldn’t miss what we have here. Luxury doesn’t

make people happy. Sometimes it separates them—" He broke off, laughing a little. "I've said a lot, haven't I? What do you think of it, Denis?"

"Think of it—? Ask Jinks . . . !" He had his arm about her—her misty veil against his shoulder.

Mary felt for the three of them an almost passionate allegiance. How wonderful to partake of their youth, their high hopes, their idealism! The blight of her father's pessimism had left its mark upon her, but here with this laughing group, she was care-free, unconstrained—a little girl again.

It seemed as if the dinner had scarcely begun before it was ended, and Jinks was saying, "I must go up and dress. I'm not sure where Denis is taking me. He's been so mysterious—"

"Why destroy the spell of the unknown, darling . . . ?"

He drew her with him to the moon-lighted porch. Mary, left alone with Peter, laughed, breathlessly, "Would you love me in a leopard skin . . . ?"

"If you'd let our roof be—the stars!"

He was standing by her chair, his hand on the back of it. "Oh, why not marry me, Mary—tomorrow—and tell your father afterward—?"

She looked up at him, lips parted—"It would be—wonderful—"

"More wonderful than you know . . ."

Denis and Jinks came back at that moment, and Mary, following Jinks upstairs, moved in a golden radiance.

Presently Jinks, minus the misty veil, but still wrapped in the glamour of the occasion, said, "Oh, Mary, if you ever love a man, don't let him get away from you. It frightens me to think how near I came to losing Denis."

"What made you change your mind?"

Jinks was nothing if not Scriptural—"It was like something in the Book of Revelations—or Paul on the road to Damascus—. Oh, I'm not being irreverent, Mary. I couldn't be, and love Denis—"

Jinks was ready at last, in a simple frock like a fawn's skin—with a small hat set aslant her flaming head. She flung her arms about Mary. "You've been a darling—and I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't try, my dear." For a moment they clung together, then started down the stairs.

At the first landing they stopped. From where they stood, they could see

straight through the front door to the driveway where Denis' car was waiting. But there was another car—a long, low limousine, with the shadow of a chauffeur's cap against the moon.

Jinks, leaning over the stair-rail, said, "Who can it be at this hour?"

Mary said nothing. She, too, was looking down. A girl in evening dress had run up the front steps, her satin train slipping and slithering behind her. She was wrapped to the throat in a velvet cloak, above which her dark hair was sleek and shining. She paused on the threshold. "Peter," she called, "Peter!"

Peter, who had been standing with his back to the door, turned and stood staring.

"Lou," he said, "Lou Gorman . . . !"

He went forward, and the girl met him, catching both of his hands in hers. "Oh, Peter," she said, "it's grand to see you." She swayed back, looking up into his face and laughing; then swayed forward. "Oh, Peter," she said again, and kissed him!

CHAPTER TWELVE

"I Live in Two Worlds"

TO MARY, standing on the stairs, the scene below had seemed incredible. She heard Peter saying, "Where in the world did you come from?" And the response in Lou's laughing voice, "Tampa. I'm on the Stokes-Arnold yacht. We docked this morning."

"Why didn't you telephone?"

"Why should I? I wanted to surprise you, darling."

Darling!

Well, she had surprised him, Mary could see that. He dropped her hands, "I'm giving a party. Jinks and Denis have been getting married."

Lou's effulgence included Denis: "Oh, why did you? You were such a terribly sweet bachelor."

"I hope to be a terribly sweet husband."

Jinks, from the landing, protested: "If you're going to start like that, Denis —"

Lou turned and saw Jinks and Mary on the stairs. For a moment she did not speak. Then Mary was aware she was asking Peter, "Who's that?"

"Mary Hamilton. She's living at White Feathers."

Mary, following Jinks down the steps, was cold with a deadly coldness which seemed to freeze her heart. So this was the safe and charming Peter! The Peter who had asked her ten minutes ago to marry him! The Peter who would love her in a leopard skin in a world roofed with stars!

Oh, what a fool she had been! Hadn't her father told her? No man could be trusted. Daddy might have twisted ideas about some things, but in this he was right. A man kissed you today, and kissed another girl—tomorrow—

Peter was coming towards her, "I want Miss Gorman to meet you, Mary."

Lou, being presented, said, "I arrived just in time for the rice and old slippers."

"You should have arrived in time for the rest of it." Mary was conscious of the other woman's appraisal of the ermine coat, the emerald clip, the smartness of her gown and grooming. She went on easily, "You spoke of the Stokes-Arnolds—My mother went to school with Mrs. Arnold. The last time I saw them was at Cannes—"

She broke off to say, "We mustn't keep Jinks and Denis waiting. I'm going to let them drive me home, Peter."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I'll drive you over."

Lou looked from one to the other. "Oh, was Peter driving you? Why not let me do it?"

Mary wouldn't hear of it. "Denis and Jinks will be glad to have me."

Peter, taking her down to Denis' car, said, desperately, "You are thinking things that aren't true, Mary."

"I'm not thinking at all—"

"Don't lie to me."

"I'm not lying—"

Then came Denis and Jinks, and there was no time for further amenities! They drove off, leaving Peter standing at the foot of the steps, with Lou's shining figure above him like a hovering and expectant angel!

Mary heard Jinks saying, vindictively, "If that wasn't a Lou Gorman trick —"

Denis made some answer—an answer which meant nothing to Mary. They were, she knew, trying to soften the situation. But they couldn't soften it. Mary knew nothing of modern youth and its philanderings. She knew nothing of petting parties and feminine pursuit. Her life had been singularly sheltered. Hence the shock to her. She was done with Peter. She was done with him—forever.

She slept little that night. Whenever she closed her eyes, she saw Lou swinging back on Peter's hands, swinging forward. . . . She saw her at the top of the steps waiting. Waiting for what? She told herself that in the morning she would beg her father to take her away. She could give good reasons. She hated White Feathers! She was homesick for Virginia!

Of course they hadn't any money. But perhaps Boone Musgrave would buy back the house. Perhaps, if she asked him . . .

She rose early and moved about the room, restlessly. The air had an icy

chill. She went to the window and closed it. It was dark outside, and as she stood looking over Boone's orange groves, she saw the darkness broken here and there by patches of ruddy light. Smudge pots were burning to protect the trees. Frost had been prophesied by the evening papers, and Peter had said, as they drove to his party, "Boone will be out tonight. He never eats or sleeps when his trees are in danger."

If Boone was there, why not see him? Have the thing over? She dressed quickly, and went downstairs. The dawn had come. The world was white with it, and in that whiteness the trees hung waveringly, like shadows in deep water.

Seeking Boone, she came upon him suddenly. He stood with his back towards her, his face to the east, where, at the end of a long aisle which led through the grove, the sun lay like an inverted golden bowl upon the gray waters of the bayou.

She called: "Mr. Musgrave."

He turned, and the look that came into his eyes startled her. There was an eagerness, an expectancy. "Mary . . . !" he said.

He approached her, his hands outstretched. "Well, well! The gods have been twice good to me."

"Twice—?"

"No frost—and now—you—"

"I couldn't sleep."

"Too much party?"

She did not answer at once, and his eyes, keenly upon her, saw something amiss. "What has happened?"

"I want to go away from White Feathers."

"Why?"

"I'm not happy. . . . I hate it. I thought if you could lend us the money—"

He considered that. "I'll let you have it on one condition."

"What?"

"That you wait a month before you go."

"I don't want to wait—"

"That's no reason, is it? Look here—why don't you breakfast with me, and we'll talk it over? I'm having ham and eggs at my mother's cottage, so come

on and eat with us."

"Oh, I couldn't—"

"You could. It's too early for anyone to miss you. And I'm hungry. It's been an awful night. It looked for a while as if frost would sweep the groves. I can't tell you how I feel about my trees. If they were killed, it would be as if live things were dying. Always in the winter, I'm worried about them. It's like loving a woman, and being afraid that some day you'll lose her."

Mary was startled by his vehemence. Not until now had she known the quality of his imagination. She began to see the reasons for his success. Reasons beyond material gain. "Is it because of their beauty—?"

"It's because I belong to them. I live in two worlds—that in my office, where I deal in dollars and cents, and here among growing things, where man was meant to be before God drove him out of Paradise—"

As he stopped, the sound of his voice seemed to go singing through the trees. Mary spoke, with breathlessness: "Why couldn't He let them stay—?"

"Because, being man and woman, even Paradise would have palled."

The glance he flashed at her had in it a touch of impish interrogation. It was as if he challenged her to weigh the emotion of the moment before with the cynicism of his last remark. Yet he had shown her his heart, and she liked him for it. After all, what did she know against him? Only the things that Peter had told her. Peter . . . !

She found herself walking beside him towards his mother's cottage. She had not, in words, accepted his breakfast invitation, yet here she was, going with him, rather relieved at the turn things had taken.

As they entered Margaret's house, Boone called, "I've brought company, Mother."

"I shouldn't have come," Mary said, as Margaret welcomed her.

"Why not? I'm always glad to see Boone's friends. You won't mind my leaving you for a moment? The table is set in the garden. Boone can put on an extra plate."

It was a plain little table—a plain white cloth, plain china and glass, a low pitcher of golden poppies. And all about the orange trees. There was something idyllic in the scene and its setting—the comforting warmth of the morning now that the sun was up, the air's crystalline clearness, the clean whiteness of the table, the heavy gold of the hanging fruit. When Margaret

came, she brought with her an old blue platter, the broiled ham wreathed with a circle of delicately fried eggs, and Boone brought biscuits and honey.

"No depression here," Boone said, as he drew out Margaret's chair. "If Mother were left without a penny, she could still set forth this table."

"Nothing bought but the flour and coffee—" Margaret boasted. "And I could get those in exchange for what I raise if I wanted to. Boone gives me plenty, but I like the feeling that I'm independent. He and I don't always agree about the way he makes his money. And what I don't use, I save."

Boone laughed, "You see? She says what she likes to me."

There was, Mary thought, something almost classic in Margaret's simplicity. Honey from her bees, eggs from her hens, fruit from the trees above her. And there was, too, her honesty. Adoring her son, she refused to condone what she considered his sins. And he laughed at her!

Mary said, "You shouldn't laugh. Perhaps your mother is right about it."

"Of course she's right. But she's not practical. People in these days don't judge things by the moral aspect. They think only of expediency. I'm no different from the others."

Here, too, was honesty of a kind. Or was it honesty? Might it not be as well a spectacular gesture designed to catch her attention and hold it?

Margaret, filling Boone's cup, said, "Boone often brings people here. His friends are mine. But I don't approve of all of them. He knows that, my dear, but he brings them anyhow."

"I hope you approve of me," Mary said, impulsively.

The eyes of the two women met. "Yes," Margaret said, after a moment, "I do. I hope you'll come again and see me."

"May I?" Mary was finding herself drawn to Boone's mother. There was a calmness, a serenity, rare in these restless days. Long afterwards Mary was to remember these first words that had brought them together. How little she and Margaret dreamed then of all that was to come—the many visits, the strange and satisfying intimacy—the sustaining quality of Margaret's faith in the tragic bewilderment of Mary's mind.

Boone was saying, "I was born in this house. But it didn't look much like this when I was a boy, did it, Mother?"

"No." Margaret was seeing the desolateness of it—the sand and palmettos, pigs rooting, and chickens scratching. Her husband sprawling in a patch of

shade. Boone helping her in the garden.

"Mother did her best for me," Boone told Mary. "The only book I ever had she bought with her egg money. I didn't have much childhood. But I guess it molded me . . ."

A shadow seemed to fall on the bright table—the shadow of Margaret's tragedy—of Boone's. The shadow, too, of Mary's memories.

She found herself, surprisingly, confiding to these attentive listeners things of which she had rarely spoken. It seemed so easy, sitting there at that table, to picture to them her own childhood.

"I was always lonely. I had no brothers or sisters, and I was allowed few friends. Daddy didn't believe in toys, or Santa Claus. At Christmas he gave me grown-up things—jewelry and furs and dresses. I remember there was a doll in a pink dress. I wanted her dreadfully. But my father said dolls were silly, and bought me a bracelet. I cried all night. I thought I was crying for the doll. But now I know I was crying because my father wanted me to be grown-up. And I was just a—baby—"

Boone was assailed by a sudden tenderness for the little girl who had wanted the doll. "I thought you'd always had everything."

"Oh, no. None of us has really."

Mary felt tired, dispirited. The glamour which a few moments ago had lighted this little world had fled. Soon she would be back at White Feathers, with its clouds pressing close. Soon she would have to face her thoughts of Peter. . . .

Later, as Boone walked back with her, he spoke of her father: "Better?"

"Yes."

"Ferry still on the job?"

"Yes."

"I saw him last night. He stopped at the orange grove with Lou Gorman. He was riding back to Tampa with her."

Riding back to Tampa!

They had reached the bench under the trees where Mary had sat on the morning when Boone had first seen her. She sank down upon it. "Do you mind if I rest a bit?"

While he waited, he filled with fruit one of the baskets piled at the end of

the bench. It was a big basket, and Mary protested: “You mustn’t rob your trees—”

“I’d rob a bank—for you—”

With his dark face smiling down at her, she had a startled feeling that there was no length to which he might not go if he set his mind to it.

They walked on presently, Boone carrying the heavy basket high on his shoulder. He left her at the door of the kitchen where he delivered the oranges to Julia. “Tomorrow,” he said, “I’ll be off to Atlanta. When I come back, I’ll bring samples of wall-paper. If you decide to stay, you’ll want them—”

Before she could answer, he had swung away from her. As she turned and entered the house, its shadow fell upon her. The shadow of her father’s illness, of Peter and her disillusionment, of her own heartbreak.

She went at once to her father’s room. He was alone, and lay as if sleeping. As she knelt beside the bed, he opened his eyes and reached out his hand to her, “Love me?”

“Yes.”

“In spite of everything?”

“Yes.”

For a long time she knelt there, his hand in hers. When the nurse came in, Mary motioned her away. Her father was not asleep, and the clasp of his thin, nervous hand had tightened. When she tried to draw hers away, he whispered, “Don’t go—”

It came to her, as she sat beside him, that he clung to her because he was afraid—as she was afraid—of life, of death—of everything—

They were a pair of cowards together . . . !

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Other Woman

PETER had, in the meantime, had it out with Lou.

When Denis' car had driven off, he had looked towards the house, at the shining figure framed in the curved archway of the Spanish porch. "Coming down?"

"Why should I?"

"It's late, old lady."

"You mean that you are telling me to go—"

"Well, there being no chaperone."

"Don't be an idiot, Peter."

He ascended the porch steps and stood beside her, "What can I do for you?"

"I came to take you to Tampa. The Stokes-Arnolds are having a dance—. There's to be a four o'clock breakfast on board the yacht."

"I'm a working man."

"Since when—?"

"I've always been, haven't I? You used to complain—"

"About the babies with colic. Of course. Oh, come on, Peter. Be a darling. I'll bring you back by seven."

"I'm sorry—"

She waited a moment. Then she said, "So there's another girl—?"

"Mary? I'm mad about her, if that's what you mean."

"But what about me?"

"We played the game, and you didn't want to go on."

But she did want to go on. She wanted to forget that she had said she wouldn't marry him. She wanted to forget that when his money was gone, she

had gone, too. She wanted to forget that girl descending the stairs in all the glory of youth and loveliness.

“Where did she come from, Peter?”

“Virginia.”

“Rich, of course.”

“No.”

“Then where is she—digging—?”

He said, sternly, “Her gowns are left-overs. Her father lost his money like the rest of us.”

Lou took refuge in tears. “Surely this isn’t the end, Peter?”

“I’m sorry—”

“Don’t say it like the—iceman—”

She stood beside him, all velvet softness and shimmering satin, all fragrance and feminine appeal—all the things that make men lose their heads. But Peter didn’t lose his. He didn’t, in fact, quite know what to do with her. And it was, therefore, with immense relief that he saw a small car drive up and stop behind the parked limousine. A head was poked out of the window, and a voice called, “Dr. Ferry?”

Peter ran down at once. When he came back, he said: “A man has been hurt in Boone Musgrave’s grove. I’ve got to go to him.”

“Let me drive you.”

In spite of his protests, she persisted. At last he went with her, their great car speeding ahead of the little one, and arriving in a few moments at the scene of the disaster.

The hurt man had cut his foot badly while chopping wood for the fires. It had to be bandaged, and while Peter worked, Lou talked to Boone, who had come up and had welcomed them.

“You’re riding late,” he said.

“Or early! It’s morning, isn’t it? I came over to take Peter to the Stokes-Arnold breakfast—scrambled eggs and sausage on the yacht at four.”

“Sounds good—”

“It will be better than it sounds. With the dawn coming in while we dance on the deck.”

There were no tears now in Lou's eyes. She liked Boone, and played up to him. He was picturesque and handsome, and there were all sorts of wild stories as to the extent of his fortune. The only rich man left in the community, Peter had said. Lou's beauty against the background of lighted orange trees was arresting, and she knew it. She met Boone's wisecracks with her own, and they laughed together.

Peter, finishing his job, joined them. He spoke briefly to Boone, and then said to Lou, "Ready?"

He got into the car with her, but he did not ride far. At the end of the road which led to the highway, he said, "I'm sorry, but I'll have to ask you to take me home."

"You mean you aren't going with me?" incredulously.

"I can't, Lou."

"You mean, you won't—" She spoke into the metal transmitter and gave an order to the chauffeur. Then, to Peter, she said: "Some day you'll hate yourself for this."

"My dear, I'm sorry—"

"You're always—sorry."

The car stopped, and the chauffeur was at the door. Peter, saying "good-bye," found his hand held tightly in Lou's slim fingers.

"Love me a little, Peter," she whispered. And his last glimpse of her showed her tear-stained face framed in the fur of her wrap. Then the car went on, and Peter, feeling somehow unjustly responsible for it all, entered his house. The candles were out; all the glow and color gone. He was again alone in an empty palace.

As early as he dared in the morning, he went to White Feathers. He found Mary in the living-room, a basket of mending on her lap. When he entered, she greeted him calmly, "You see I'm being domestic."

He was not calm. "Don't begin that way."

"What way?"

"Keeping me at long distance. I want to explain things, Mary."

"There isn't any explanation."

She was sitting with her back to the bookshelves. Her sheer white frock took on a mauve tinge among the shadows. A shaft of sunlight fell across her

hair. Her eyes were on her work.

"Are you being quite fair to me, Mary?"

"It isn't a question of fairness. It's a question of feeling. I may be old-fashioned, and all that. I make no defense of my—prejudices. Only—for a man to make love to one woman—and another—and another—." Her hands were still, her cheeks stained with color.

"I never knew love before I met you."

"Then—what was it—?"

"Propinquity—anything you choose to call it. Lou and I saw a lot of each other when the boom was on. We were all mad down here together, and I asked her to marry me. I know now it was just a part of the madness. We were pals, and it seemed a pleasant thing to do. When the crash came and I lost my money, Lou gave me up. And I found I was glad. And then you came, Mary, and everything was—different."

"Yet—she kissed you—"

"It meant nothing—"

"It means a lot to me. You see, I've never given or taken—cheap kisses—"

He crossed the room, and, leaning on the back of a chair, looked down at her. "Do you mean that you're letting a thing like this come between us?"

She met his gaze unflinchingly. Her voice was composed and quiet—maddeningly composed, Peter told himself. "It's all my fault, Peter, for not knowing the world you live in. I know just—what my own heart tells me—that love can't be handed from one woman to another like fruit—on a platter—"

"Mary—"

She went on inexorably—"Daddy's right. I'll be happier—not married. So I'm going away—"

"Oh, you can't—Mary—"

"Why not? I've asked Boone Musgrave for the money. I saw him this morning. I went for a walk in the grove, and he was there. . . . I had breakfast with him and his mother."

The picture she presented seemed to Peter fantastic. Mary breakfasting with Boone, while he, Peter, had waited impatiently for the moment when he might go to her. And Boone, giving her—money—

"Mary," he protested, violently, "don't trust Boone Musgrave."

“I don’t trust any man.”

There was a moment’s stunned silence. Then Peter flung out: “I may deserve that, but I don’t believe it.”

For a moment her composure was broken. “I’m sorry.”

“No,” he said, “you’re not sorry. You’re a child with dreams in your eyes, and in a way I’m glad of it. I wouldn’t have you like—other women. I wouldn’t have you know the world—as I know it—But if you don’t trust me, that’s the end of it. I’m not going to force myself upon you. Some day, if you see things as they are, will you tell me? And I’ll come to you. But it is you who must ask me to come—Mary.”

The room was very still. At last she said, “You won’t let this make any difference with Daddy?”

“You mean you want me to keep the case?”

“Yes. Or he’ll—ask questions—”

“I see—” He came up to her and took her hands in his, “What a hard little thing you are—!”

“Not hard—only unhappy—” Suddenly, scalding tears streamed down her cheeks.

“My dear—.” He tried to draw her up to him, but she resisted.

“Don’t,” she said. “Don’t touch me—I can’t bear it—”

She flung herself back in her chair, her face against its cushions. For a moment, he stood uncertain, then leaned down and brushed her hair with his lips. “Good-bye,” he said, and left her.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A David with his Sling

IN his week of honeymooning, Denis had learned a lot of things.

There was, for example, the washing of dishes. He and Jinks did them in their bathing suits, with a bench set on the beach, and Denis bringing kettles of hot water from the cabana at the end of the island, which he had chosen as their refuge from the world.

There were no other cabanas near them. They had the glorious solitudes all to themselves. The sunsets lighted their dinner table, set out of doors; the quick twilight saw their small duties done; the night sky, arching from one horizon to the other, found them stretched lazily on the sands.

"What," Denis demanded, "would your grandmother have said to see you doing housework in a bathing tunic and cap?"

"My grandmother was a wise woman."

"Do you mean she would approve?"

"Perhaps not. She belonged to her time, as I do to mine. But she used plenty of suds and hot water, and she didn't pity herself because she had work to do. That's the heritage she gave me, and I'm glad of it."

He laughed and drew her to him, "Satisfied?"

"Yes. I didn't think it would be like this—"

"Marriage?"

"Yes."

"Happy, dear heart—?"

"Happy—"

From far away came a sound foreign to these solitudes . . . the muffled beat of an engine.

Denis stood up and saw the great golden light of a motor blazing across the sands. The light shone, presently, upon himself and Jinks. Then the motor

stopped, and a voice said, “It’s Peter.”

He got out and came towards them. “How’s the old honeymoon?”

“Grand,” Jinks told him.

“I’m sorry to interrupt it. But Mrs. Tyndall is worse, and she wants to see you, Denis.”

“I’ll be ready in a moment.”

The three of them went into the cabana. Peter dropped into a chair. “Tyndall’s in a dreadful state. He blames Boone Musgrave for everything—They are to be put out tomorrow—”

“Oh, surely not—”

“I did my best. But Boone’s man served the notice.”

Denis was ready. “You’d better go with us, Jinks.”

“Not unless I’m needed. I’ll have something hot for you when you get back. You’d better come with him, Peter.”

“I will if I can. We may be late.”

Denis kissed his wife. “You’re not afraid.”

“Not with you to think about.”

He kissed her again, “Good-bye, parson’s wife.”

“Good-bye.”

Peter, as they drove on, said, “Lucky fellow.”

“Jinks? She’s wonderful.”

“Mary’s going away. It’s Lou Gorman, of course. . . . That scene she staged. Mary’s taking it seriously. Won’t listen to any explanation . . .”

When they came to the Tyndall place, Martha, the negro maid, met them. “Mr. Vance say I must keep Cindy ‘way from her mother. Miss Cynthia’s awful bad, doctor.”

Peter went in and found Tyndall at his wife’s bedside. Cynthia lay very quiet on her pillow, her eyes shut. Peter bent down to her, “I’ve brought Denis Colt.”

She opened her eyes, “Oh, may I see him?”

Peter drew Tyndall out of the room. “Colt will call us,” he said, “if there’s

a change—”

Tyndall, white with anguish, talked of Boone. “I’ll get it back on him—”

“Don’t think of that. It’s over and done with—”

“It will never be over—”

“There’s the child to think of—”

Denis was at the door, “You’d better come at once.”

They reached the dying woman in time for Tyndall to take her in his arms. “I haven’t been a good husband, Cynthia.”

“I love you.”

Denis, kneeling by the bed, prayed silently for the soul that was passing.

Later, in the hall, he said to Tyndall, “Your wife asked me to take the child home with me until everything is over. And I promised.”

And so to Jinks, waiting on the beach, came Denis, a great burden in his arms.

“What is it, Denis?”

“Come into the house—”

There was the light of the lamp, and the light of the fire. Denis threw back the shawl in which the child was swathed.

Jinks said, “The darling!”

And Denis said: “The mother died.”

The next Sunday Denis preached from his pulpit. Jinks sat in the parson’s pew. She did not think of him at that moment as her husband. She thought of him as a prophet of the people. As a leader. He was speaking simply. Of everyday things. Not theories, or denunciations, or arguments. Just of work and love and the thought of one neighbor for another. He was not critical. Criticism, he believed, made men lose faith in themselves. The trouble with America, at the moment, was that she was being told what was wrong with her; not what was right. She was floundering in a morass of doubts—when she should believe in herself and press on.

He spoke of the garden in which God first put man—“We are here, too, in a garden. Nothing can drive us out of it, if we believe it is ours. Nature has given us everything that is lovely. Man can do no less. He can match the

beauty of this garden with the beauty of his own humanity, his own faith, his own love for his fellowman. And he can show this love by sharing with those about him, until no one soul shall go unfed, not one be sick, or in prison, without succor and sympathy."

Jinks knew that not all of those who listened would agree. Not now. But Denis would never give up. Jinks felt she knew better than anyone else what Denis would mean to them all. He was a David with his sling, going out to meet the giant Depression. He was Christian prepared to slay Apollyon—

She said none of these things to Denis. It was enough that she knew them. And so today, when the service was over, she slipped away to the parsonage, and left the others to crowd about him as he came down from the pulpit.

Tyndall's child, the small Cindy, welcomed her at the parsonage door. "Dinks," she said, wrinkling up her small nose in a smile—"Where's Denny?"

"Coming in a minute."

They joined hands and went through the great hall. The parsonage was out of all proportion to the needs of the young couple. It had been built when money was plentiful, and the former occupant had had furniture to fill it. Denis had brought down a few things and would send for more now that he was married. For the moment, there was Martha to take care of Cindy. Tomorrow Jinks would go back to White Feathers. She had to keep faith with Hamilton—but the new nurse would be on at night.

"They can pay for two now," Peter had told her. "Boone's giving them the money."

Jinks had seen Peter once since the night he and Denis had brought the child. He had not talked of Mary, and Jinks and Denis had respected his silence. Jinks had hopes, however, that she might play good angel. "Do you think I'll dare to get into it, Denis?"

"Why not? You know Lou—and Peter doesn't deserve such punishment —"

They talked of it again that night. They had asked Peter to supper. "He wouldn't come, Jinks. I believe he dreads seeing our happiness—"

"Poor fellow—"

"Mary's making a lot of a little thing—"

Jinks said: "I'm not so sure. Men don't know how women feel. There's Tyndall. He loved his wife, but look what he did to her—"

From the room beyond came a little cry, “Dinks—”

Jinks went at once. “She needs another blanket, Denis.”

“It is growing cold—the air is like ice—”

“Will it freeze the orchards?”

“God forbid.”

But the God who rules the world has his reasons. The frost came, but not that night, nor the next, nor the next. It did not come, indeed, until Boone Musgrave got home from Atlanta.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Pink Doll

THERE was a pool in the garden at White Feathers which had once held goldfish. A pair of marble dolphins, streaked and stained with age, disported themselves somewhat drearily in the dark waters. Above the pool was a live oak, festooned with long streamers of gray moss. The effect would have been funereal except for the brightness of the morning sun, and the blaze of the hibiscus in the hedge.

It was in this garden that Lou Gorman found Mary on the Sunday morning when Denis preached. Lou had timed her visit so that she might not meet Peter. She had, in fact, telephoned him before breakfast, pathetically demanding that he come to see her. He had tried to be polite, but had made no promises: "I am very busy—"

Lou, raging, had hung up the receiver, borrowed the Stokes-Arnold car, and taken the road to White Feathers. She had asked for Mary at the door, and had been directed to the garden.

Seeing Mary, she had asked, "Am I in the way? So early in the morning—"

"It doesn't seem early to me," Mary said. "I've been up for hours—"

Lou sat down on one end of the marble bench beside the pool, and Mary on the other. Lou said, "Of course I've come to talk about Peter. You see, I've known him so long—and I'm worried about him."

"Worried?"

"He's working too hard—killing himself because he's too obstinate to go back to Baltimore, where there's a good practice waiting. That's why I broke our engagement. I wanted to bring him to his senses—"

"Did you bring him—?"

"No. But I might have, if it hadn't been for you. You won't mind if I tell

you the truth about it? Peter has treated me abominably. He made love to me—he made me—" Her breath was coming quick. "Oh, I can't talk about it—"

"But you—threw him over."

"I told you—I was trying to bring him to his senses—I never dreamed there'd be another woman—"

To Mary it seemed incredible that she should be sitting here in the garden, letting Lou Gorman say such things to her. Lou herself seemed unreal. She was so sleek and lacquered in her knitted silk frock, with a tiny triangle of red hat showing her shining hair.

She heard herself saying, "What are you asking me to do?"

"To give him up."

"He's not mine to give."

"You mean—you're not going to marry him?"

"No. Why should you think that?"

"He told me that he cared a lot."

"Why should we talk any more about it? It is really not my affair at all, is it? It's yours—and Peter's. You can settle it between you."

Something in her poise, her dignity, brought from Lou a half apology. "If you had seen his letters. If I were that kind of woman, I could bring action for breach of promise—"

"Aren't you—that kind of woman?" Mary hated herself for saying it.

Lou laughed, a hard little laugh—"Perhaps I am. Perhaps a woman has a right to make a man marry her when he has—broken her heart—" She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, then put the handkerchief in her pocket. She had gotten what she wanted out of the interview—that no promise had passed between Peter and Mary. She said "good-bye," and went on, seeing in Mary's clear eyes that which made her seem to herself something less than she had ever been.

Mary, left alone, felt an intolerable sense of desolation. A cloud had come over the sun and the gloomy garden. The gray moss, the dreary dolphins seemed keyed to her mood. Oh, what a world to live in—a world of fear and futility! She might run away from White Feathers. She could never run away from her fears—

A cold wind was blowing from the west. She went into the house, wrapped

herself in a warm coat, and spoke to the new nurse: “I need some exercise. If Daddy asks for me, tell him I’ve gone out in the boat.”

The dull surface of the bayou, as she came down to it, was ruffled by silver waves. Mary, pulling at her oars strongly, threaded her way between the clumps of mangroves—seeking in physical effort an outlet from her thoughts.

For nearly two hours she rowed and drifted among the mangroves. She wished she were shut up between four blank walls, like a nun, where she could tell her beads and say her prayers.

But she didn’t believe in prayer. Denis did—and Jinks. And they seemed to get something out of it. But how long would they feel that way about it? And how long would Denis love Jinks? And would Jinks’ heart be broken if he ceased to love her?

There were two pelicans on the pier when she came back to it, and a dozen gulls overhead, in a wind-blown flight. Otherwise, everything was as it had been, except that it was growing colder.

When she reached the house, luncheon was served. Mary ate little, but drank a cup of coffee. Mr. Musgrave, Julia told her, had been there with the samples of wall-paper. “He went upstairs, Miss Mary, and lef’ them on yo’ table.”

Mary was not in the least anxious to see the samples. The new nurse, who was eating with an appetite, said, “I shall miss Julia’s good cooking. Miss Bowie comes back tomorrow.”

So Jinks’ honeymoon was over! Mary wondered if there had been disillusionment. . . . And if so, what then? Would Jinks and Denis have to live out their lives—together? Denis didn’t believe in divorce. Probably Jinks didn’t. And if they did or did not, what did it matter?

The new nurse was saying, “I’m afraid you tired yourself. You were out so long.”

“I’m not tired—”

“You look it. Why don’t you let me come up and give you an alcohol rub? Your father’s asleep.”

Mary, declining the rub, wondered if the nurse’s world was bounded by things like that—bed-baths, and massage, and electric pads, and aspirin, and ether.

But why be superior about it? The nurse’s mental horizon was probably as

wide as anybody's. At least she did some good in the world—much more than a little cat like Lou Gorman—

Oh, what was the matter with her? Saying such things? But Lou was a cat—sleek and shining—like Boone Musgrave's Boots—and just as cruel. Boone laughed at Boots' cruelty—but Mary hated to see it stalking timid things in the grass—and getting its claws in them.

The nurse returned to her patient, and Mary went upstairs. She entered her room to find there evidences of Boone's presence in the rolls of paper laid out in front of the mirror on her dressing table. Some of the rolls were open, showing rose and blue and silver garlands—and one, in a motif of oranges, fruit and flower conventionalized, was charming.

But there were other evidences of Boone's occupation. Enthroned on a cushion, set in the very center of her bed, was a doll in a pink dress. A gorgeous doll—all silken flounces and silver lace; her hair, pale gold. A note was pinned to her dress. "Here she is! And is it too late to love her?"

Mary gave a gasp of pleasure. For a moment the blackness of her world receded, and she was a little girl again.

She gathered the doll in her arms. "You beauty, you beauty," she whispered, and laid it down on the bed, and lay beside it—finding a certain comfort in its nearness, a certain comfort, too, in Boone's thought of her.

How kind he was—how considerate! Not many men would have remembered—

She read his note again—"Is it too late to love her?"

Cradling the doll in her arms, a sudden wildness seized her. Oh, darling doll, is it too late? Are you the only thing left for me to love? Oh, Peter, Peter . . . !

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The White Frost

ALL that day Boone had kept his men steadily at work. Frost was predicted, and the fight was on. Wood was piled at intervals along the aisles in the groves, and the smudge pots were ready.

He went home to dinner to find a note from Mary. He read it, smiling.

> "You were darling about the doll. And she is such a beauty. I shall always keep her as a token of your kindness, and because of the little girl who wanted her so much. I have talked to Daddy about going away, and I think he likes the idea. And he believes we can buy back our old place in Virginia. Perhaps some day we'll be seeing you there, and I can show you the doll in the room the little girl once lived in."

Boone, folding the note, reflected that he would not see Mary in Virginia. He wanted her here—and what he wanted, he got. How easily the formula rolled from his tongue. What he wanted, he got; and nobody could keep him from it.

Yet, as he went back to his grove, fear was upon him—one might fight men, but what was man against the forces of nature? The thermometer was going steadily down. Only a miracle could save the orange groves.

Well, he would work a miracle. He spurred the men to extra effort. More wood. More smudge pots.

He went to bed that night with a thermometer and a flashlight on the chair beside him. He was dead tired and slept heavily. He was waked towards morning by a light tap at his door. Alec, coming in, was apologetic. "They's telephoning from the grove, Mr. Boone."

Boone flashed his light on the thermometer—twenty-five, and the room in

a deadly chill. He threw on his clothes, and ran down the steps, hot with anger. “Why didn’t you call me sooner?” he demanded of his foreman, as they met under the cold stars.

“There wasn’t any use. We’ve done everything.”

The fires were burning, the smudge pots glowing. There was a good smell of pine smoke, and a grateful warmth. On the lighted trees not a leaf stirred. They might, indeed, have been made of metal—copper balls pendant on bronze branches. To Boone there was something ghastly in their rigor. For he knew what had happened. His precious trees were dead. The beauty with which they shone was that of corpses with the last effect of life upon them. In the morning, disintegration would begin. When the sun came, there would be over all a silvery whiteness, then a shrivelling and curling—at last the falling fruit.

The little cat, Boots, had followed him, and mewed at his feet. Boone picked it up, and was glad of the heat of its small body. He held it in the crook of his arm while he talked to the foreman. “Nothing more can be done, Dawson. Keep a watchman or two for the fires, and let the rest of the men go to bed.”

He still had the cat in his arms when he came to his mother’s cottage. She was awake and dressed.

He asked, “Did you pray for me, Mother?”

“Yes.”

“Much good it did me. They’re dead.”

“Oh—they can’t be—”

“They are—. Next time, ask your God something easy—”

He went on, and she gazed after him. Her heart bled for him, yet, with a strange sense of prophecy upon her, she told herself, “He’s got to have things go against him, or he’ll think he owns the world.”

Dawn came, and Boone still sat in his grove. His little cat left him and went up to the house for his morning’s milk. Alec came down to ask about Boone’s breakfast. “I want none, Alec.”

Boots came back, his little belly fat and round with his satisfying repast. He stretched himself beside Boone—a Sphinx in miniature, his paws straight out before him.

It was thus that Mary found them. She had fled from the house to avoid

Peter. It was bad enough to have Jinks back—Jinks who, having arrived promptly, had met the new nurse in the hall.

"Your patient is awake and waiting—"

Jinks had gone in to find Hamilton's face lighted by his welcome. "It's good to see you again. Come here and let me look at you—"

"You haven't changed a bit," he said, as she stood there, smiling.

"Yes, I have. I'm happier than I've ever been in the whole wide world."

"Hold on to it—it won't last—"

"I didn't come back to hear you croak like a raven—"

To Hamilton the room seemed suddenly filled with light and fragrance. It was as if Jinks' coming had swept it clear of shadows. And when she had said, "Hungry?" he had answered, "Yes—for one of your omelettes."

She had left him to go to the kitchen, but had instead crept upstairs.

Mary was still asleep. Jinks, looking down at her, was shocked at the change. Mary lay there inert, her long lashes sweeping her pale cheeks. Within reach of Mary's hand lay a doll in a pink dress.

Jinks whispered, "Mary," and Mary opened her eyes.

"Where did you get the doll?"

Mary, half-asleep, murmured, "Boone Musgrave—" Then, waking, she sat up, confused and explanatory—"It's sort of a joke—between us—"

She reached for Jinks' hand, and drew her towards her. "I'm glad to have you back, darling. And it was dear of you, leaving Denis."

"I haven't left him," Jinks assured her. "We're always together. We would be if he were in—China."

Mary, too, felt, as had her father, that the room was swept clear of darkness. "Oh, Jinks," she said, "you look so—shining—"

Jinks laughed, "I can't say the same of you. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing—"

"You have. You've been letting Lou Gorman make you miserable—"

"Did Peter tell you?"

"Oh, Denis and I knew—and Peter dropped a word. You don't know Lou,

Mary."

"I know that after we left that night, Peter rode with her to Tampa. He didn't have to do it—Jinks. Not after—all he'd said to me—"

Jinks was incredulous, "I don't believe it—"

"He did—Boone Musgrave saw them—"

Jinks said, slowly, "Boone told you?"

"Yes."

"There's a catch in it somewhere. It doesn't seem like—Peter. And anyhow —"

Mary stopped her. She was sitting up in bed, very small and childish. "It's all very well, Jinks—but suppose it had been Denis—"

"Oh, it couldn't be—Denis—"

"But it could be Peter? You see—that's the difference."

Jinks was still unconvinced. "You're the only woman in the world for him, and you know it."

"I don't know it. Would you know it if Denis—" She broke off. "Lou Gorman was here. She came and sat in the garden—and cried. She said she had Peter's letters. That if she chose to use them, she could prove breach of promise—"

"And you believed her—darling? She wouldn't have him when he lost his money—"

"She gave him up, didn't she? How do I know he had stopped loving her? How do I know—anything—?"

Her voice was hot with passionate protest. "Did Peter tell you we are going away?"

"Yes. Mary, it's a great mistake you're making."

"It's the only way—. I'm not like you, Jinks. You've never let life beat you. But Daddy and I—oh, we'll go back—and get through things somehow."

"Darling, you're morbid—"

"Perhaps. Why shouldn't I be?"

"Mary, let me speak to Peter when he comes?"

"When is he coming?"

“After breakfast—on his early rounds.”

“There’s nothing you can say to him, Jinks, or to me. And now—let’s not talk about it. Tell me about yourself, and Denis.”

Having shifted the topic, she kept resolutely away from it. And Jinks, going down presently to make the omelette, wished that Denis were there and she could ask him what to do.

When she took the tray in to Hamilton, Mary was with him. “I’m going for a walk—”

“But you haven’t had breakfast—”

“I don’t want any.”

So Mary made her escape, going out in the chill of the morning with a coat of camel’s hair pulled on over her frock of pale yellow. She swung through the grove, and, coming on Boone, saw him before he saw her.

He was leaning forward—his elbow on his knee. There hung about him a kind of desolateness that struck at her heart.

She was unaware of what had happened. She saw no change in the aspect of the grove except the piles of glowing ashes—the wisps of smoke from the smudge pots. To her the trees seemed as they had always been—gold and green in the morning light. It was, indeed, a heavenly morning, with a wide clear sky, and a light breeze blowing.

As she stopped before him, Boone looked at her with unseeing eyes. “Oh,” she said, startled, “what has happened?”

“Can’t you see—the frost came last night. It killed them!”

She saw then that the trees were different. The leaves were beginning to blacken.

“You mean—they’re—dead?”

“They might as well be. It will be years before they’ll bear again.”

She stood uncertain. “It’s dreadful,” she said, at last. “I’m sorry—”

He made a despairing gesture. “I can’t talk about it. If I do, I’ll say something I regret. I am regretting now what I said last night to my mother. She had prayed for my trees, and I told her what I thought of her God for not answering her prayers.”

There was bitterness in his tone—a bitterness which Mary’s own heart echoed. She said, “If there is a God, why should these things happen?”

He looked at her with clearing eyes. “Oh, sit down, sit down. You’re the first person who hasn’t tried to smooth things over.”

She sat beside him, and for a long time no words were said.

At last Boone turned and spoke to her: “Look here. I want you to marry me. I know this is no place to say it—but there couldn’t be a better. I’m not sure that I love you as I’ve always thought of loving a woman. It’s something more than that. You’re what I need in a wife—you’re beautiful and distinguished. And I can do everything for you—set your father on his feet, and wrap you in velvet. And I want you now! If I can’t have you, I’ll go crazy, thinking about all this—” His hand swept out towards the blackened grove. “I’ve got to have something else to think about—something—like you—. Someone who will understand when I speak of the things that are hidden in me. The things that made me say ‘good-night’ and ‘good-morning’ to my trees, and love them. As I shall love you—as I shall teach you to love me.”

It was a strange wooing. But Boone was in deadly earnest. No one could doubt it. Mary felt once more the dark spell of him, drawing her towards some amazing adventure.

She sat without speaking, staring into the distance. Presently his voice went on, “No one will ever need you as much as I do—. I’ve told you things already that I’ve told only to my mother. We could be married at once—. Why not?”

“We’d have to tell Daddy—”

For a moment he waited, with breath suspended, not daring to believe. Then he put a finger under her chin, made her meet his eyes.

“You mean it?”

Her face was bloodless, but she did not flinch—

He spoke gently, “I’ll fix your father. I’ll see him—at once.”

A voice which did not seem to be hers said, “Don’t go too fast, or I can’t follow you—”

“The faster we go the better, Mary.”

She knew what he said was true. She, too, had thoughts to get away from—of Peter on the balcony, his face bent down to her—of Lou swinging on his hands—of the low car speeding towards Tampa—.

Faster and faster with Boone to an unknown future—!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Great Gods Laugh

THE day had been, as Jinks told Denis later, a dreadful one. The fact of the frost was bad enough, with the frozen fruit thudding to the ground. With their winter crop gone, Denis' parishioners would be asking him, "What now?" and would lean on his faith, or defy it. It would be a difficult time at best, with no chance to earn, and few winter visitors to help speed up trade.

Jinks, talking it over with her patient, said, "Of course if people dared to return to primitive conditions, there would be no trouble. John the Baptist wasn't worried about food and drink. He had no beefsteaks, or cocktails, or caviar. Yet I think he got a lot out of life—"

"He got his head cut off—"

"I don't think that counted—. What did it matter about his own head, if he had proclaimed the Christ?"

She was a little breathless, and Hamilton told her, smiling, "You're made of the stuff of saints and martyrs."

"No, I'm not. But Denis is."

She had risen to shut the window, for the wind was blowing hard from the south and bringing with it a heavy drift of rain. It was much warmer. "If it had been like this last night," Jinks said, "the orange groves would have been saved."

Hamilton was not listening. "Where's Mary?"

"She went for a walk."

Mary, arriving a little later with Boone, entered the sick-room alone. "Mr. Musgrave's here, Daddy. He wants to see you."

"Tell him to come in."

Mary and Jinks stayed in the hall while the two men talked. Mary, her back to Jinks, stood by the window and watched the rain pouring. "It's a dreadful day, isn't it?"

But it was to be, as Jinks had said, more dreadful!

For presently Boone called Mary, and the door was shut. Jinks waited. At last Boone and Mary emerged. There was a short whispered conversation, and Boone ran down the steps. It seemed to Jinks that he flew, rather than ran, like a man whose feet are winged. And Mary, having summoned Julia, went with her up the stairs.

When Julia descended, with an armful of lingerie, Jinks followed her to the kitchen to plan for her patient's luncheon. "Anything in the icebox, Julia?"

"They's cold roast chicken, and salad, Miss Bowie. And you can give Mr. Hamilton eggs, though if he has any more of them omelettes, he'll be cackling like a laying hen."

Jinks laughed, "I'll surprise him with some hot muffins. I'll make them. You've got enough to do, Julia."

Julia gave her a sidelong glance, "Too much, honey—"

Her manner was mysterious, but she refused to say more. Hamilton, too, was non-committal. When Jinks went back, he lay with his eyes closed, but Jinks was sure he was not asleep. There was a flush on his cheeks, and his hands and arms twitched as they often did when he was nervous.

The storm was increasing. The water gurgled in the drainpipes, and splashed against the panes. The wind shrieked, and the waves of the bayou boomed. Jinks, turning from the window to view her patient, found his eyes open. "What time is it?"

She told him. "Your lunch will be ready in a moment. I have a surprise for you."

"Two surprises," said Hamilton, "might be too much in one morning."

"Two—?"

"Yes. Mary's going to be married—"

"Married—!"

"Yes. She asked me to tell you. She's going to marry Boone Musgrave—today."

Jinks forgot herself completely. She forgot her nurse's technic, or etiquette, or whatever one chooses to call it. She said things to her patient that no nurse has a right to say. She said she simply couldn't believe it. That no father should consent to a thing like that. That Mary must not—

Then something she saw in Hamilton's eyes stopped her. He said, "Do you think it's easy for me? Do you?"

"Then—why—?"

"Because—Musgrave's got everything to make a woman happy. He's just told me—he's worth a million—"

"Millions don't make women happy—"

Hamilton ignored that. "He's got a home for both of us. And Mary's bound to marry somebody—I've seen that. I was afraid it might be Ferry. And we'd all be as poor as church mice—together—"

"Denis and I are church mice," Jinks said, "and it isn't as bad as you think it—"

After that, she couldn't talk about it. Tears were too near the surface. When she had brought Hamilton his muffins and had gone into the hall, the tears overflowed. Mary found her with her head on a table, sobbing.

"Jinks—"

"Oh, Mary, Mary—"

"Jinks—you mustn't cry—I'm really happy." Mary's eyes were lighted by a clear and eager look. She was dressed in gray, with bands of fur about the wide sleeves. "I want you to stay with father. Boone and I are to be gone for a month—. Daddy's been wonderful about it. I was afraid he wouldn't be—"

"No man is wonderful who sells his daughter—"

Of course Jinks shouldn't have said it. She knew that, but she couldn't help it. "Not if I'd known I was going to be shot the next moment," she told Denis that night. "I thought it would be the end of things between Mary and me. But it wasn't. She just put her arms about me, and stood there holding me while I cried and cried—"

But Mary did not cry. She spoke quietly of what Jinks must do. "We're going to shut this house up at once, and Daddy will have a suite at Mr. Musgrave's. And there'll be two other nurses. But Daddy wants you with him—and we'll make it as easy as possible—"

Jinks, getting control of herself, wiped her eyes. And when Boone came, there were, except for her red eyes, no signs of agitation. Boone's big car was outside, and his chauffeur went up for Mary's bags, which Julia had packed. Then Boone and Mary went away together, and Jinks went back to Hamilton.

He lay with his arm across his face. "Have they gone?" His voice was

muffled.

"Yes."

There was a groan, and his arm fell back. His burning eyes were deep wells of misery. "I've given her up," he said, "and I want her."

Jinks had little sympathy, but she did her best. She read to him, and sang. At last he slept. And Jinks sat there, thinking. Of Boone and Mary, but most of all of Peter. Of Peter who must soon be told. She wondered who would tell him.

Peter got the news at a wayside gasoline station. He had driven to a roadhouse in the country to pick up young Tyndall, who had been drinking. Peter, loading the derelict into the car, had said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. But you're too drunk to know what I'm saying, so I may as well save my breath."

On the way home, he had stopped at the gasoline station to replenish. The man in charge had his bit of news and was eager to impart it. "Boone Musgrave's married."

"Married—?"

"Yes. He just drove by with his bride. It's that Miss Hamilton, of White Feathers."

Peter, the blood draining from his heart, stared at him—. Such a thing couldn't be true—. It couldn't.

The man went on: "Dr. Rowland married them, and they stopped here to telephone Musgrave's mother. I heard him tell her, 'I'm married, Mother, to Mary Hamilton—. I'm bringing her over.' "

Peter heard himself saying the proper things, but the blood had not come back to his heart. He climbed into his car and sped once more through the storm. The rain swept by in sheets; the wind shouted. It was as if all the great gods had let loose their laughter. The drunken man in the back seat had waked, and was singing weakly. But Peter heard only the cry of his inner spirit. "Oh, Mary, my beloved—"

When he reached home, he carried Tyndall up the stairs. Becky followed and kept close while Peter went back and forth getting the bath ready, calling on old Nan for coffee and clean linen. Becky was still in devoted attendance when, the ablutions over, Tyndall was tucked in bed, and was soon snoring his way towards ultimate sanity.

Peter, having stripped off his own wet clothes, wrapped himself in a dressing-gown, and sat by the fire which old Nan had built in the hall. The dressing-gown was a left-over from more affluent days—a Japanese thing in blue brocade, with black hieroglyphics on shoulder and sleeve. The blue intensified the whiteness of Peter's tired face. He lay back in his chair, his eyes closed.

Old Nan came in, set a small table in front of him, and served his dinner. He ate what she put before him, giving Becky tidbits now and then.

Old Nan rarely talked, but tonight she said, "You ain't feelin' well, is you?"

Peter tried to smile at her, "I'm all right, Nan."

"Well, you do'an look it, Mr. Peter—"

She went away at last, and Peter held out his hand to the blaze. In spite of the heat of the logs, he was cold with a coldness that seemed to freeze his bones. He wondered if he were going to be ill. And if he were, what matter? If he died, Jinks and Denis would be sorry, but they had their own happiness—and there was no one else to care.

He moved restlessly, and Becky pawed at his knee. He looked down at her. What was it Denis had said?

"She's more faithful than Jinks, Peter."

And he had replied: "Oh, well, dogs—one expects it somehow—. One should never expect anything of women—"

And now what was he going to do about it? Go back to Baltimore, pick up his practice, and marry Lou? The thing could be done with great state and elegance. There were plenty of patients waiting for the son and grandson of his famous forbears; there would be his father's friends to finance him until he was on his feet; a background of family and social prestige.

Then some day, with success assured, he could come down and show Mary!

Show her what? Theatrical claptrap? The kind of thing one read in books. And what difference would it make to Mary—the Mary who was off with the old and on with the new? Who had done the very thing of which she had accused him.

The other alternative was to stay here and see the thing through. Seeing it through meant throwing in his fortunes with Denis and Jinks, and with such

men as Tyndall, and such women as Margaret Musgrave. Margaret's malady was obscure, but Peter felt he had found the source of it, and that he was making headway. He had wanted her to go north to some of the big specialists, but she had said with serenity: "I have faith in you, Dr. Ferry."

And now Margaret's son had broken his life—forever.

Peter's head went down on his hands. Oh, what mysterious force had swept him and Mary away from all that love might have meant to them? Surely not Lou, with her trivial endeavors. The thing went deeper than that to some pattern of life woven relentlessly by the hand that held the thread of men's destinies.

It was in this mood of despair that Denis found him.

Denis had left Jinks as soon as she had finished her story of the Dreadful Day. "I must go to Peter," he had said.

Hearing his friend's step, Peter sat up. "Hello, parson . . ." He tried to smile, but could not.

Denis' hand rested for a moment on Peter's shoulder. Then he flung himself into a chair. "You've heard, of course?"

"About Mary?"

"Yes."

Peter spoke feverishly. "Denis, how could such a thing happen?"

"Jinks simply can't understand it. It all seems too fantastic to be true."

"But it is true, and that's the tragedy. Mary must have been mad—"

"Jinks says she was very calm, but that there was a look in her eyes as if she were seeing out and beyond the world about her—a look, Jinks says, she has seen in the eyes of patients with hallucinations."

"Boone rushed her into it, or she would never have done it. She's married to him. But she's mine, Denis. And some day she'll know it."

"You don't want her to know it, Peter—ever—"

"Why not?"

"She's Boone's wife."

"Oh, don't preach—. If I ever found she loved me, I'd—take her—"

"You wouldn't—"

Peter's laugh was not pleasant: "You don't know me."

"I know you better than you know yourself." Then, after a pause: "Jinks told me to bring you back with me—"

"I can't go. Tyndall's upstairs—drunk."

"He'll sleep till morning."

Peter was standing now on the hearthstone, his arms wrapped about him as if he were cold. "I can't talk to Jinks now. Give me a few hours to get over it. This thing has hit me hard." His voice broke on the last word. "I'd ask you to pray for me—but it seems to me God's been rather—rotten—"

Denis said, after a silence: "There was another Peter—"

"Yes?"

"Who denied his Christ."

Another long silence, then out of it, "You're right. I'm sorry, Denis."

An hour later, when Denis had left him, Peter sat on the porch steps. So he had sat on that night when Mary first came to him, and now she was gone.

Yet was she gone? Had she not given him a knowledge of love as it might be? A knowledge that would hold him back in the future from anything less than all this had meant to him?

His talk with Denis had done him good. Denis had a way of helping a man —not always by soft methods, but by stimulating ones. And he had prayed, sitting there in his chair, "God, save him—for thyself—"

Peter was not sure he was saved for anything. But at least he could carry on with some semblance of courage. And he was going to stay here and do it. Why leave this enchanted ground for any other? He wanted no walls of cities —no smoke and grime—no clamor of traffic—He wanted the moon and the stars, the seas and wide sands. He wanted the sunsets and the dawns—the color of his flame vine, the misty white of the herons, the sweeping flight of the gulls—.

He wanted, too, his work. These people were his people. They leaned on him and loved him. Even Tyndall, not a moment ago, when Peter had looked in on him, had waked and clung to his hand. "I'm not going to try to thank you, doctor. But you're the whitest man I know."

Why not have Tyndall and the child, Cindy, live with him? They would help relieve the intolerable loneliness. There wasn't much money, but they'd manage somehow, and Jinks must not be burdened with the care of the little

girl.

Thinking of these things, he was no longer appalled by the thought of that pattern of life which Fate was weaving. He must take what came, though he might never again drink the wine of love to warm his veins. Well, a man could do without wine, and live. Life seemed very long to Peter as he sat there alone and looked up at the stars.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Fool's Paradise

On the first Sunday after they returned from their honeymoon, Boone and Mary went to church. Mary had been astounded when Boone suggested it, "I didn't know you ever went—"

Boone laughed, "I want to show my wife to them."

"Boone!"

"Why not? I want to show you to the world."

It was heady wine that he gave her. Worship. From the moment in the dying orange grove when she had promised to marry him, he had swept her along on the high tide of his adoration. It had been an amazing experience—an adventure possible only in these modern days of speed and efficiency. They had travelled by airplane, by boat, by motor. Yet they had not seemed hurried. There had been, indeed, an effect of leisure—arrivals at serene, spacious hotels in the tropics in time for a bath, an hour of rest, and another hour in which to dress for dinner. Arrivals, too, at quaint inns, where, without luxury, there was much comfort.

Not for a moment had Mary been bored or tired. Not for a moment had she had time to think. Boone had been tender, protective, imperative, possessive, as the mood seized him. And with it all, there had been an almost pagan quality of youth and gaiety which had lifted her to winged heights above fears which had for so long possessed her—above that sphere which had been bounded on all sides by the unreason and selfishness of her father's demands upon her.

So now when Boone said, "Let's go to church," she knew she would do it. Not because she wanted it, but because Boone would in some way manage to make of her going a vivid enterprise.

"What shall I wear?"

"That white thing you got in Havana."

"I'll look too much like a bride."

“Well, you are a bride, aren’t you? My lovely, lovely bride—” He caught her to him, and, his dark face bent down, swayed to the rhythm of the words, swaying her with him, “My lovely—lovely—lovely bride.”

“Boone, we mustn’t dance—on Sunday!”

“Who says so?”

“All the old people who go to church—”

“Well, we’re not old, and we’re happy. I’m going to church to show you off, show you off, show you off—” He was singing now to the tune of “Here we go round the mulberry bush.”

“Boone, stop laughing—”

“You’re laughing, too, darling—”

“I know. But I mustn’t. You’re too—incredibly—silly—”

He caught at the word. “Remember when you first called me that?”

“Silly?”

“Yes. Didn’t want me to play Romeo, did you?”

“No.”

“Want me to play Romeo now?”

She backed away from him, “Boone, I’ve got to dress for church—”

He laughed again and let her go. He never in any way coerced her. Masterful, yes, when he chose to be, yet reading her so well that he never made masterfulness a thing to be afraid of.

Mary, getting ready, called from the next room, “You’ll have to square things with Daddy.”

“What things?”

“Oh, taking me away from him on this first morning—”

“He has Jinks—”

“Oh, has she come?”

“Yes. Two hours ago. While you were up here eating strawberries and cream like Curlilocks in the nursery rhyme—”

He came and stood in the doorway. “Pretty room, isn’t it?”

Mary was aware that he had shelved, definitely, the subject of Jinks. It was,

indeed, an embarrassing subject for both of them. Mary had not dared face it. For Jinks meant Denis, and Denis meant Peter, and when Mary's mind arrived at Peter, it was as if something stabbed her and sent her back bleeding to Boone for a magic draught which would lull her to forgetfulness. And Boone, as if guessing her need, had never failed her.

He did not fail her now. So Jinks was shelved. "How do you like your room, Mary?"

"It's charming."

It was charming—on the walls a landscaped paper, a translucent green with a delicate tracery of trees; much white and silver furniture and draperies; more tender green in cushions and silken spread. And Mary in the midst of it, a nymph or a dryad—

He said: "The decorators made a good job of it. Just a month, and everything ready on the dot."

"It doesn't seem a month."

"Doesn't it?" He crossed the room, and put his arms about her, "Love me?"

It was the first time in all the month of their marriage that he had put that question definitely. It was as if he had been afraid of some doubt on her part that would lead her to voice a denial. His own song had been, "I love you, love you, love you—" He had contented himself with that. But now he was demanding, and Mary, the fire of his own love lighting her, whispered, "Yes."

For if this was not love, what was it? To be gay and joyous. To forget everything but each other—to laugh with Boone, to be swayed to that dancing measure for which he set the rhythm. To know that henceforth no breath of fear should touch her, no care for the future. "I get what I want," Boone had told her, and she had come to believe him. And, because her life had been lived amid a fog of futility, Mary found herself glorying in his atmosphere of power and achievement.

When they came, a little later, to the church, the cloistered porch was filled with chairs, and there were seats also on the lawn. Denis' pulpit was above the steps, so that the shadow of the porch roof was above his head.

As Boone and Mary made their way to seats in the cloister, next to Margaret, there was a rustle of curiosity. Musgrave and his bride were figures of importance. Few of Denis' parishioners had seen Mary. The marriage had been romantic, and the bride was a beauty.

Margaret had not been told they were coming, but she showed no surprise.

Nothing Boone did had ever surprised her. Even his marriage. She had known that he had set his mind upon it. That he had come to it so hurriedly was, of course, unfortunate. She had said on his wedding day: “You should have waited, Boone.” And he had answered, “It was the moment, and I knew it.”

She laid her hand now on Mary’s. She was glad to have a daughter, and prayed for happiness for both of them. Yet she did not think that praying would bring it. She knew Boone so well. She wondered what Mary would think when she, too, knew him.

Mary was glad of Margaret’s hand. She was feeling a bit strange in this sacred environment. She had rarely gone to church. Her father had not wanted it, and her mother had acquiesced in her husband’s decision. Mary did not know the order of service. When to kneel and when to stand.

Boone was, on the other hand, supremely at his ease. His father had kept up a desultory habit of church attendance, and the boy had gone to church with his mother, and to Sunday School, until the years when he had broken away from all things that bound him. He didn’t want to be told what he must or must not do. Such prohibitions as the church imposed were outworn. Man was not his brother’s keeper. Why listen to such doctrines, when you knew they were not true?

He had gloried in his apostasy as he had gloried in his success. When his mother had warned him, he had said: “That which I am, I am—” quoting Byron with a recklessness and triumph which had appalled her.

So now he guided Mary through the intricacies of the service, loving to see her head bent beside him.

When the sermon began, Mary composed herself to listen. She had not thought the sight of Denis would so stir her heart. In his black gown, with the light striking across the pulpit, he was a figure to lift the imagination. Even in that modern setting, he seemed to capture the air of simplicity which had belonged to the early fathers. He seemed, too, to have borrowed from them a certain robust understanding which made him concede to men a human side as well as a spiritual.

It was this human quality, Mary decided, which raised Denis above the average preacher. It balanced so well his mysticism, took men for what they were, not for what they ought to be. And, having thus admitted their limitations, he spoke of their hopes and fears; and of One who could quiet the fears, and make the hopes come true.

As he talked, Mary began to be ashamed of herself and Boone. Oh, why

had they come—like this? Denis was speaking to people whose mortgages were not paid, whose orange groves were blasted, who were out of work, whose courage was waning, who had come to pray, “God help us!”

Boone had come to show off his bride, and the bride had come to be shown! And there they sat in pride of their high estate, while about them were men and women stripped of everything.

Denis met the need of his congregation by his own faith and resoluteness. He had chosen as his text, “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow, nor reap, which neither have storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them. How much more are ye better than the fowls?”

He spoke of primitive days in other times, in other lands. Had their homes been unhappy—those early New Englanders with a bit of salt fish and a handful of corn? Was luxury needful for man’s content? Were stocks and bonds? Machinery? Might not one find instead, in this fertile country, frugality a virtue, simplicity a joy? Might he not find, too, spiritual values outweighing material ones? That a new car or a new radio was not as needful for happiness as a new attitude towards one’s husband or wife, or a deeper tenderness for one’s child? A family with its mind set on harmony within itself? A neighborhood? A state? A nation? What might they not achieve with this goal set beyond all others?

“As he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Denis had no pessimism to impart. He gave, rather, to his people his own high-hearted belief in life—in the future.

He ended with a challenge to fear. “Why should we be afraid? Are we not travelling the road—together? If we are beggars all, are we not, too, comrades? We can share and not starve, and if in a little time, we shall share not the lightness of our purses but the heaviness of them, we shall have known the richness in poverty, the poverty in riches. We shall have found understanding of each other. We shall have found understanding of—God.”

After the service, Boone guided Mary quickly through the crowd. When they drove off, his face was dark. “Why should he call us beggars—?”

“Oh, Boone—he was marvellous. But we shouldn’t have gone.”

He spoke sharply: “Why not?”

“We have so much—and they—so little.”

“All the better for you, my dear—” Then, as he saw her shadowed face, he demanded, “Do you mean it? That we shouldn’t have gone?”

She nodded, tears blinding her.

He spoke with a touch of fierceness, “We won’t go again. I can’t have you upset like this, Mary.”

They were beyond the town now and on the lonely road. Between them and the chauffeur was the thick glass of the screen. Boone put his finger under Mary’s chin and tilted her face up to his. “Forget it. You can’t take on your pretty shoulders all the burdens of the world.”

She blinked the tears away and smiled at him. Yet the smile was on the surface. Things had happened in that hour in church that she dared not tell Boone. As Denis had stood in the pulpit, Peter had seemed to stand beside him. To look down at her where she sat by Boone. It had been, of course, a hallucination, but it had shaken her.

They were to eat the mid-day meal with Margaret, and by the time they reached her cottage, Mary swayed once more to the rhythm of Boone’s high spirits. He made her take her hat off, and lean her head against him. He kissed her. When she warned him of the chauffeur’s mirror, he said, coolly, “Any man can kiss his wife. And besides, Alec’s a figurehead—he doesn’t see and he doesn’t think—”

Margaret, hating motors, had taken the shortcut through the woods, and was ready for them. Boone helped her to serve dinner. There were stewed chicken and dumplings, and vegetables from the garden.

Margaret said grace, and said it beautifully. More and more Mary marvelled at this woman with rough hands and rough skin, who had kept inviolate her delicacy of mind, her refinement of spirit.

With a tact which did her credit, Margaret steered the conversation away from the church, the sermon. She made Boone tell of his travels. She asked Mary questions about the house, the servants. And when she was not asking questions, she filled the pauses with a laughing account of her experiences with Mary’s father.

“I found him most interesting. I went up every day—. One day I carried him some of my boiled dinner. He ate it with an appetite, and said he was going to get well so he could come down and see my cabbages.”

It was when Margaret was serving, at the last, a delicious, fruity pie, that Boone said: “Mother, what are all the people saying?”

“About you and Mary?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t listen to gossip.”

He laughed. “Sometimes you have to listen. Tell me—”

She asked Mary, “Shall I?”

“Yes.”

“I think the town is divided between your friends and your enemies. Mary might as well know it. Some of your enemies are my friends.”

“What are my enemies saying?”

“That you had no right to go away for a month and let your agents foreclose mortgages.”

“What mortgages?”

“Well, there’s Tyndall, for example. His wife is dead. He and his child are living with Peter Ferry—”

Boone’s eyes grew hard. “Tyndall doesn’t deserve sympathy. He drinks and gambles—”

Margaret let it go at that. “Denis and his wife took care of the child until Dr. Ferry made a home for it.”

Boone laughed, “Perhaps he’d better pay his debts before he opens an orphan asylum—”

Mary felt chilled—frozen. She heard Margaret saying, “Dr. Ferry’s debts are not of his own making. The depression caught him.”

“It didn’t catch me, did it? Don’t be sentimental, Mother. And now—what are my friends saying—?”

“That now you have such a lovely wife, you should run for office.” She smiled at Mary.

Boone said: “I’ve been telling Mary—I want to get into things—politics. So she can be proud of me—”

“Or you be proud of yourself—?” Margaret’s eyes held a spark of malicious light.

Mary, leaning back in her chair, listened with amazement. Margaret’s frankness had in it something almost repellent, yet it was, perhaps, her defense against her own intense adoration of her son. Without approval of many of his acts, he was yet the apple of her eye. It was as if she said, “The love I give him is not blind. I know his faults, and tell him. Perhaps some day the telling will hold him back. I do not know. But if that day never comes, he cannot blame his mother.”

Mary was sorry that Margaret had said things. She did not want to think of herself as living in a fool's Paradise. She didn't want to think of Boone's faults. In the month of their marriage, he had shown none of them to her. Perhaps he had none. Perhaps his mother's standards were a bit narrow. And then there were the things Peter had said—but why should one believe Peter?

Mary didn't want either to think of Peter in his big house with a drunkard and a child for company. And she wished Boone had not said that about Peter paying his debts. It had sounded hard and cruel, and had hurt her. But Boone hadn't known that it hurt, or he wouldn't have done it. And she couldn't, of course, tell him. She felt that she could never, never speak to Boone of Peter.

On the way home, she said: "I'm afraid your mother isn't always fair to you."

"Yes," he said, "she is. I have a lot of egotism, and she holds me down. She loves me in spite of all my faults and failings. Will you do that, Mary? Love me in spite of everything?"

The quick twilight had come and gone. The night was dark. Boone gathered his wife in his arms, and held her close. "Promise—"

What could she do? His voice sang in her ears—"Promise—"

The vision of Peter faded. Oh, the real thing wasn't Peter with his poverty and his affair with Lou Gorman. The real thing was this fragrant night with Boone's arms about her! The real thing was happiness—today, not yesterday or tomorrow.

When they reached home, Boone gave Alec orders about the supper. "Have it served in front of the fire in the living-room. Late. Say nine o'clock."

He turned then to Mary. "Run upstairs and rest a bit. Then get into something comfortable and come down."

It was delightful, Mary thought, to have him plan for her. For so long she had been burdened with responsibility. And now she leaned on Boone for everything. She hoped she would always lean.

When she came to her father's room, Jinks was still on duty. There was a low light, and Hamilton's face, against the whiteness of the pillow, had a serenity that softened its ravaged lines.

Mary said, " 'lo, Daddy," and came in.

Jinks rose, standing away from the bed as Mary approached it. She was very tired and wanted to go home. Her wifehood was, she felt, as important as

Mary's. Yet here she was, held by a sense of the sacredness of her vocation. There might be money in it, and there might not. But a promise was a promise. Hamilton had begged her to stay, and she was staying. The thing was not easy now that Mary was back, but she knew that more than ever her patient needed her.

That very afternoon he had said to her, "Boone's first, and I'm second."

"Husbands should be first, shouldn't they?"

"You say that because you don't know anything about it. A woman may have many husbands, but only one father—"

Jinks had refused to follow the futile argument. But Hamilton had continued to complain. "I sometimes wish I were back at White Feathers. There at least I was master of my own house—"

Jinks knew what he meant. Hamilton, in his charming rooms in the south wing of Boone's mansion, had been made physically comfortable. But mentally, he was held within bounds. He couldn't storm and rage at Boone's perfect servants as he had stormed at old Julia. Julia was now Mary's maid. Now and then she came into the sick-room, but there was a new air about her in her smart maid's uniform. Hamilton had told her: "You'll be spoiled if you stay here, Julia."

"Yes, Mr. Hamilton, I reckons I will. I ain' got enough to do."

"You'll have enough to do when Miss Mary comes back."

"An' glad I'll be to have her—"

And now Mary was back, and, standing there in the door, seemed to light the shadowed room with youth and beauty. Jinks, being human, was swept for a moment by a sort of wild jealousy. Why couldn't she and Denis forget the rest of the world like Boone and Mary? Why couldn't she, Jinks, wear lovely clothes and spend her hours in rapturous idleness?

Yet, would the idleness be rapturous? And could life give her more than that moment with Denis last night when he had read his sermon to her, as she sat at his feet and listened. When he finished, she had said: "Oh, darling, darling," and had laid her cheek against his hand, and had found herself sobbing, not from sadness, but from a kind of ecstasy that he was hers, and that she could help him.

For as the weeks had been spent together, she had become increasingly aware of Denis' quality of mind and soul. Each day he had seemed to her more satisfying. All her life she had been a Martha with many cares. Denis refused

to interpret life in terms of worry. They were, he said, two pilgrims starting out with scrip and staff—to find such adventures as the road might bring. They had practically no settled income. Their parishioners gave what they could, but the amount was meager. Some men might have been daunted. But not Denis. "It's a medieval situation, Jinks. We've got to meet it that way. If there's a fowl for the pot, boil it. If there's only dry bread, we'll make it a fast day."

Not so bad when one came to think of it! Jinks had known poverty, but not poverty worn so glamorously—like a shining cloak, tattered, perhaps, but none the less shining. And, indeed, one could not feel poor when Denis moved throughout it all with such lightness of heart, such joy of living. "What do we need, Jinks, when we have so much?"

No, Jinks envied no wife. And in the fullness of that thought, when Mary went on presently to her own room, she followed.

Standing on the threshold, she said, "May I come in?"

Mary turned towards her, "Of course."

There was a touch of aloofness in her tone. For a moment Jinks hesitated. Then she said: "I want to give you a real welcome, Mary. We haven't had a moment alone."

Mary crossed the room swiftly, and enfolded the slender figure in her arms, "Jinks, you darling—"

They sat side by side on the *chaise longue*, and talked about everything—arriving at last at Peter.

"Jinks, why did Peter stop coming to see Daddy?"

"There's a fine doctor down from the north—"

"Not any finer than Peter?"

"No."

"Then—was it because of me?"

"I don't know. He never speaks of you, Mary."

"Mrs. Musgrave says he's taken a man and a child to live with him."

"Yes. Vance Tyndall and his little girl Cindy. Peter shouldn't afford it, of course. But he's following out Denis' theory—if you have two crusts, give one to your neighbor. If you have one crust, give him half."

Mary did not speak for a moment. She didn't want to think about one crust or two. She didn't want to think of Denis or Jinks—or Peter. She wanted to

think of Boone—to be lulled again to a forgetfulness of all hard and heavy things—

She said, suddenly, “Happy, Jinks—?”

Jinks was a bit shy about it. “Denis is—wonderful—”

“So is Boone—”

Jinks wanted to cry out against such comparison. Boone Musgrave wasn’t wonderful in any fine and stable sense. He was a rich and dangerously-attractive man. But some day Mary would find out things she didn’t know now. And when she found out, what then? Did women love men for their virtues? Hate them for their faults? And did it not all, in the last analysis, depend upon the woman?

When Jinks left her, Mary reflected that she was glad they were friends again. Mary had known few women intimately. But now she had Jinks and Margaret Musgrave. Instinctively she recognized in both of them qualities which would sustain her in any need.

Curled up presently on the bed, she slept for an hour. She was waked by the sound of music—Boone was at the piano. No novice this at the keys! The music surged through the house.

She rose and got into a negligée Boone had bought for her in Miami. It was a chiffon of so faint a green that it was like the first leaves of his orange trees in the spring. It was caught up at the high waist-line with a flat white flower. Boone had said it fitted her rôle of nymph or dryad, and he had made her wear it instead of the Paris creations she had brought with her. Mary was finding that her husband dominated her in matters of dress, as well as in other things. When she protested, his demands took on the effect of felicitous appeal—“In nothing else are you so lovely.”

So, wanting to hear him say it now, she went down to him. Half-way to the foot of the stairs, she stopped. For Boone was singing!

He had chosen a song so old-fashioned that it had become a new fashion. It was a song which brought out all the richness and range of his voice, and Mary was thrilled by it—

"Rocked in the cradle of the deep,
I lay me down in peace to sleep.
Secure I rest upon the wave,
For Thou, O Lord, hast power to save.
I know Thou wilt not slight my call,
For Thou hast marked the sparrow's fall.
And calm and peaceful be my sleep,
Rocked in the cradle of the deep."

The room was very still when he finished. Boone, turning from the keys, saw Mary on the threshold. "Didn't know I could sing like that, did you?"

"No." She was beside him now, his arm about her. "Boone, how can you sing words that you don't believe?"

"I can feel them. And why believe anything?"

"It would be wonderful not to be afraid in a storm."

"Are you afraid?"

"Frightfully. Even a summer shower sends me into a panic—"

"I've never been afraid of anything—"

It was a simple statement, made without the least effect of swagger. Mary was aware of a sense of security. In her husband's courage, she would find her own.

Alec set a table for them in front of the fire. Boone sat beside Mary, drank coffee from her cup, buttered her muffin, peeled fruit for her. "Only you really shouldn't eat anything," he told her. "You ought to feed on air and sunshine like the rest of the dryads—"

"Boone—don't call me that. It sounds soulless."

"We don't believe in souls. And if you're a dryad, I'm Pan—piping—"

"But you can't always pipe—and I can't always feed on air."

"I'm not so sure. You and I can make our own world, Mary—"

Heady wine, indeed! What woman could resist it? Mary was swept along on the tide of Boone's amazing confidence. He could bring things to pass! He could challenge fate!

Then, quite unexpectedly, when Alec had removed the table, and Mary lay with her head in the hollow of her husband's shoulder, he left the realm which his fancy had created for them, and came to practical things: "I'm going to

give you an allowance, Mary. I don't want you to ask me for every penny. So decide what you'll need, and I'll see that you have it."

"I don't know, Boone. You tell me, and I'll keep within it."

He named a sum which seemed to her incredible, "Enough—?"

"Enough—? Oh, Boone, I didn't know there was so much money in the world."

He kissed her. "Glad you married me?"

"Darling—not because of the money—"

He caught her to him. "Mary—what made you marry me?"

"Because—I couldn't—help it—"

"Why couldn't you—?"

"I—don't know—"

"Did you—love me—?"

"I'm not sure—"

"But you're sure now—?"

"Yes."

He was silent, holding her close. Then he said, huskily, "May nothing ever take you from me—"

And how could she know that he, who had never been afraid, was afraid now? Afraid of the loss of that which he had at last won from her. Afraid of himself, lest he bring her to disillusionment.

Lying against his arm and looking into the fire, Mary said, "Speaking of money, there's Jinks' bill. I wish you'd pay it."

"When she presents it, of course."

"I think she'll hesitate to present it."

"Why should she?"

"Well—Daddy and I—She knew when she came we didn't have the money. But she insisted on staying."

"You mean, she was working for nothing?"

"Yes."

"Rather—philanthropic—" His tone was significant.

Mary sat up: “What do you mean?”

“Report has it that she rather likes to work with Ferry.”

“Boone—but she’s married to Denis!”

He shrugged, “I am only repeating the gossip.”

Her cheeks were flaming, “I’m sorry you felt you had to repeat it.”

He was not prepared for the reproof her words implied. He, too, flamed: “I told you——I say what I please.”

“Even when I don’t like it?”

“Why shouldn’t you like it? Is it because you are such a friend of Ferry and Miss Bowie?”

She turned on him her startled glance: “Boone—please—”

The hot mist of jealousy which had blinded him cleared suddenly, and he saw himself as she was seeing him. Reaching out, he gathered her to him, “Don’t look at me like that—”

He whispered that she must forgive him. “I always see red when I think of Ferry.”

“Why should you?”

“Because I was afraid he’d get you. I saw you one night with him on the porch—the night I climbed up on the balcony.”

Mary remembered that night—not because of Boone on the balcony, but because of Peter on the porch. And she must not remember Peter. Boone was her husband. He was holding her in his arms. He loved her.

She said, a little breathless with the saying: “We mustn’t let anything come between us—”

“Neither life nor death, my darling.”

But she was afraid of death—“If we could live—forever—”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A Darling Wife

SINCE BOONE MUSGRAVE'S return, Tyndall had been growing restless. "He ought to hear the truth. He killed my wife, doctor. You know it, and I know it. And now he comes back here with a wife of his own, and gives her the world on a platter."

"There's not much to be done about it," Peter said. "If there were, I'd do it."

"If I should tell his wife what kind of man she has married, it might wipe that smile off her face."

Peter said, sharply, "Cut that out, Tyndall. There's no reason why she should suffer."

"Reason enough. Didn't my wife suffer? My child?"

"Cindy's happy now."

"And why? Because you and the parson's wife are looking after her. Musgrave wouldn't care if she were flung into the streets."

"It's not as bad as that. And listen to this. I want you to keep away from Mrs. Musgrave. Whatever has happened, she's not to blame for it. And I won't have her worried."

Peter talked Tyndall's case over with Denis. "I ought to get him out of town. I'm afraid he'll make trouble."

"He's in the mood," Denis said, "but you can hold him down. He adores you."

"I can hold him down," Peter agreed, "when he isn't drunk. He goes off periodically, with sober spells between. I am trying to make the periods farther apart. The thing is, of course, to keep him from discouragement. But just now he's nursing his grievance against Musgrave, and I'm afraid of an explosion. He's young and bitter, and he loved his wife."

The two men in bathing trunks were lying on the beach. Jinks had brought Denis to Peter's with her, and had gone on to make some purchases in town.

They would all stay to supper. The child, Cindy, in a scrap of sun-suit, was having a gorgeous time with Becky in the shallow wash of the waves. Sunset was making the water red, and Cindy's small body was black against the brilliance. Tyndall was in the garage cleaning Peter's car.

Peter said, out of a long silence, "Denis, do you think she's happy?"

"Mary?"

"Yes."

"Do you want the truth?"

"Yes."

"I think she may be. The kind of happiness that belongs to youth and care-free living. For the first time, she is leading a gay and thoughtless existence. You know Boone's capacity for that sort of thing. He's the eternal boy."

"Cruel—like all boys—"

"Cruel. Yes. But not to her—"

"Some day he will be. It's bound to come, Denis." His voice was broken. "He can't love her as I do—he can't—"

"Perhaps he does," said Denis, slowly. "Perhaps love is going to mean for him something bigger than it has meant to you. Who knows? Life has a queer way of working things out for us."

Cindy was running towards them. When she reached Peter, she threw herself upon him, "Listen, Peter," she said, "listen—"

She had in her hand a frail curved shell. She held it against his ear. "Listen —"

The shell roared and rang in Peter's ear. He found himself relaxing. "What does it say?" Cindy was demanding.

He sang a little song to her as if the shell were singing. She lay close in the curve of his arm. "Oh, dear," she sighed, when he finished, "do it adain—"

"No," he said. "Jinks is coming."

Jinks' roadster had stopped in front of the house. Denis went towards it. Peter stood up, the child in his arms, "Love me?" he asked.

She threw her arms about his neck. She patted his cheek. And presently he threw back his head and smiled at her. "My little girl?"

"Yours and Daddy's."

Peter, going on to meet Jinks, sighed a little. It was all right for Cindy to love her father, but Peter wanted a love of his own.

Old Nan had supper ready, and while Denis and Peter got into their clothes, Jinks dressed Cindy, and wrapped her in a warm and colorful bath-robe. She had cashed Boone's check which had come that morning, and was feeling affluent. She had a present for each of them—frivolous things for Denis and Peter, and a new tie for Tyndall.

Tyndall was pleased and said so: "If I lived with you three, I'd amount to something."

"You are living with us."

"Somehow I feel it won't last."

"Don't you believe it," Peter told him. "Do you think I'm going to let Cindy go? I wouldn't have anybody to pick up my shells for me."

Two weeks later Tyndall came home drunk. Peter put him to bed and looked after him during the night. "I ought to stay with you," he told him the next morning, "but I can't. I've got an operative case at the hospital. I'm taking Cindy over to Jinks and Denis. Try to be good, old fellow, 'til I get back. It will help a lot if you'll promise."

Tyndall promised, and Peter left him. He had to go, and the worst that could happen was that Tyndall would go out, get another drink, and go to sleep again.

But Tyndall did more than that. In the late afternoon he awoke, and lay thinking about Boone Musgrave. It was all very well for Dr. Ferry to put off things. But they weren't to be put off. He, Vance, had suffered enough. Somebody else had to suffer. And the one to suffer was Musgrave. And the way to get at Musgrave was through his wife.

He had seen a lot in the papers about the bride and groom. They had been having a grand time, while the man whom Boone had robbed didn't have the price of a drink. . . .

Mary had driven over after lunch that day to see Margaret. She and Boone had given a big dinner party the night before, and she wanted to tell his mother about it. She had worn a new dress of silver tissue, and Boone had said that not a woman could match her. It had been a dinner for important people. The man at her right had come down from Washington, and was high in affairs of state. There had been a Senator and his wife—

“I should never have dared have them here,” Boone had told Mary afterwards, “without you at the other end of the table. Socially, I’m never quite at my ease—”

“Boone, you were lovely—”

He was pleased at that. “Weren’t ashamed of me?”

“How could I be? You’re so brilliant—so much yourself. The others seemed artificial.”

“What a darling wife you are, Mary!”

She was glad she was a darling wife. She had slept late that morning, and had had her breakfast in bed while Boone had sat and talked to her. Then he had gone to meet the distinguished statesman for a few rounds of golf.

She drove to Margaret’s in Boone’s big car, and found her mother-in-law sitting under the orange trees with her hands folded in her lap.

“Not working, Mother?”

“No, my dear. Resting.”

Mary had a great bag of knitting. She settled herself near Margaret and took out her needles and yellow wool.

“That’s pretty work,” Margaret said, as she watched the flying fingers.

“I love to do it. It’s like weaving a web.”

Margaret said, “I used to knit. But never anything as nice as that. I made socks for my husband and for Boone.”

“I think I’d like to do things for Boone,” Mary told her. “Practical things. But there’s nothing—. He has so much. Sometimes I wish I were like Jinks and could bake a cake or broil a steak—”

“You are doing things for him, my dear. Making his house the kind of home I want for him. You’re a lady, Mary. And he loves you for it. . . . And I love you. And if anything should happen to me—”

She stopped, and Mary looked up, startled: “Mother,” she said, “what could happen—?”

“I’m not well. And I’ve been having Peter Ferry for my doctor. Boone doesn’t know it. He doesn’t like Peter. But there’s no one I have more faith in —”

“But surely—Boone can’t object to your having the doctor you want—”

“He’d feel he knew best—and it might make trouble. And I don’t want to do that. It will be time enough for that if I have to go to Baltimore. Peter thinks I may have to see one of the big surgeons. Perhaps I shouldn’t have told you—but I felt that I must talk to you a bit about Boone. He’s not easy to understand. But I want you always to try to understand him—to try not to be impatient—”

“Impatient? How could I be when he lets me have my way in everything—?” She hesitated. “No, perhaps I shouldn’t say that. He does make decisions for me, but they always seem the right ones.”

“Some day they may not seem right. But you mustn’t doubt his love. And that’s the legacy I want to leave you. My own knowledge of his faults, and my own understanding of them—”

Mary was kneeling beside her now. “I don’t want a legacy. I don’t want to believe that anything is going to happen to you. Boone adores you. And will you give a message to Peter—that I want him to make you—well—?” Her breath was coming quickly.

“No. Not even Peter must know I have told you. This is between ourselves. Promise me, Mary. You won’t say a word to a soul.”

Mary promised, yet she felt subdued and shaken. She refused to think of Death and Margaret. If you didn’t admit a thing, you could sometimes keep it from coming true. She wished she might talk to Boone about it—borrow of him strength and confidence.

She had dismissed the car on her arrival, and when she had told Margaret “good-bye,” she walked back through the orange grove. The trees were showing signs of resurrection. There was a mist of faint green. She reached the bench where Boone had sat on the day of the frost when she had come to him. She thought of him as she had seen him then, broken and despairing. She thought of him, too, as she had seen him the night before at the head of his table—his dark splendor, his laughter, his wit as keen and flashing as a Damascus blade.

It was too early to dress for dinner, so she took out her knitting and began to weave her web of yellow wool—weaving, too, the web of her fancies. So much of life was before her, so much of hope—and oh, surely that couldn’t be true about Margaret—

Then, suddenly, breaking across the silence, came a child’s voice, “I didn’t know you were here.”

Mary, raising her head, saw not far from her a little girl in a brief blue frock.

“Dinks bought my dress,” the little girl said.

“Oh, are you—Cindy?”

“Yes.”

“How did you get here?”

“I runned—”

“By yourself?”

Cindy shook her head. “No, Daddy and I runned away together. He came to Dinks and got me. He’s back there.” She waved a hand towards the bayou. “He’s coming—”

But Tyndall did not come at once, and Cindy sat on Mary’s lap and talked about Jinks and Denis and Becky, the dog. But most of all, she talked about Peter. “He sings into my pink shell,” she confided, “and he puts me to sleep.”

Peter—Peter! It seemed to Mary she had heard nothing that morning but Peter’s name. Peter taking care of an old sick woman. Peter taking care of a child—. Well, of course, all doctors were like that, taking care of people. It wasn’t extraordinary. And she didn’t want to think about illness and poverty. She wanted to think of Boone at the other end of the table—laughing, his wit flashing, faces turned towards him. . . .

The child, tiring presently of talk, said: “Let’s go find Daddy.”

But they didn’t have to find him. For up between the aisles of trees came Tyndall. He walked unsteadily, and Mary realized with a sharp stab of fear that he was drunk. He stopped not far from her and called, “Come here, Cindy!”

The child got down and went towards him. She went with confidence. There was, indeed, something rather charming in her lack of alarm. “We runned away, didn’t we, Daddy?”

“Yes,” he said, “and I’m glad we don’t have to run any farther.” He addressed Mary, “You’re Boone Musgrave’s wife?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I have a few things to say to you.”

His tone was threatening. Mary rose. “You can say them to me better, perhaps, in the house.”

“No,” he said, “and you’re not going. Not till I have it out with you.”

She hesitated, but when he said, “Sit down,” she obeyed him.

“Listen,” he said. “My wife died a few weeks ago. Boone Musgrave killed her. My money’s gone. Boone Musgrave stole it. If he hadn’t been as cunning as a fox about such matters, he might have been locked up for it. In prison. Plenty of men are there for less. And that’s the kind of man you have for a husband—a man who takes food from a hungry child—bread from a dying woman.”

Before Mary’s eyes was a blur of faintness—through which she saw the child, Cindy, in her brief blue dress, clinging to her swaying father—through which she saw Tyndall, his face white, his eyes blazing—

Then suddenly getting a grip on herself, she spoke incisively, “You’re drunk. I don’t believe it—”

“You don’t? Well, I’m not asking you to take my word. But I’ll ask you to do this. Go to Peter Ferry. He knows the truth. He’ll tell it.”

She steadied herself, “I’ll go to no one to hear lies—about my husband.”

Again that blur of faintness. Then out of it a vision of Peter, a slim white figure—his hat off and his hair ruffled—as he ran up through the aisle of trees. When he reached Tyndall, he said a few words, sharply. The man turned away, but Peter came on, came on—and faded into a gray fog.

Great waves of unconsciousness washed over her. She opened her eyes at last to find the child and the drunken father gone. She lay where she had fallen beside the bench, and Peter was bending down.

Then the gray fog came again, and far off somewhere she seemed to hear Boone calling, “Mary, Mary—.” Yet it was not Boone who had her in his arms, but Peter.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A Fool—Fighting!

MARY, coming slowly out of the fog, heard Peter's voice as if afar off: "Dear child—we can't have you doing things like this."

"Did I faint?"

"You did. Thoroughly and completely—"

"That man frightened me."

"I'm sorry. He was drunk. He'll do what I tell him. It's when I'm away that there's trouble."

He broke off to say, "I'm going to carry you home—as soon as you feel up to it—"

"I can walk."

"Not if I know it." He lifted her with a strength which surprised her. He was not heavily-built like Boone, but as he bore her swiftly along, he seemed to move in a kind of rhythm to the quickened world about them.

"How strong you are, Peter!"

"Doctors have to be."

When they reached the house, Alec helped carry her upstairs, and old Julia put her to bed. Peter came in then and felt her pulse, and listened to her heart, and sat composed and smiling to conceal his very real concern about her.

"You'd better stay in bed for a bit—"

"Is there anything the matter?"

"There's enough to give you a chance to be lazy."

She accepted his verdict without protest. She was, indeed, still held by the languor of her collapse. It gave to her beauty an ethereal touch—an added whiteness of skin, mauve shadows beneath her eyes. Her hair was a drift of gold across the pillow. There had been a time with Peter when the Idylls of the King had fed his imagination. And Elaine had been the lily-maid of his early

dreams—

But those dreams were dead, and Mary was the wife of Boone Musgrave!

He said, with seeming irrelevance, “Have you any rouge?”

She looked at him, startled: “Why?”

“We must get some color in your cheeks—”

She protested, “Oh, Peter—,” her tension gone.

Julia came in with a bottle and glass. Peter measured and mixed. “Drink this,” he said, and lifted Mary up.

Holding her thus, he had a wild desire to kiss the curl at the back of her neck. But he was Peter, the doctor. Not Peter, the lover. He set himself sternly not to forget it.

“You must get some rest. I told Alec to telephone your husband. I’ll wait for him downstairs.”

Turning away with some abruptness, his eye was caught by the pink doll which sat enthroned among the cushions on the couch. “Pretty thing,” he said.

“Yes. Boone bought her for me before we were married. I had told him about wanting a pink doll when I was a child, and not having one, and of my disappointment. . . . He named her—Juliet—”

She was smiling a little as she recalled Boone’s amusement in deciding on the name. “In memory of our balcony scene, Mary.”

But Peter was not smiling. He lifted the doll and spoke to her: “Don’t let any Romeo run away with you—you’ll be much happier here among your cushions—”

Mary, assailed by curiosity, demanded, “What made you say that? Why shouldn’t she run away with Romeo?”

“Because she might run away with the wrong one—”

She looked at him as he stood there with the pink doll making a splash of color against the whiteness of his coat, his bright hair ruffled, his blue eyes meeting hers with a hint of challenge in them. No wonder women loved him! No wonder Lou Gorman—!

She spoke with a certain faint frigidity, “If she ran away with the wrong man, he wouldn’t be Romeo.”

Peter laid down the doll, and came to the bedside. “Happy?” he asked.

“Peter—of course—”

“Not necessarily ‘of course.’ And I envy Romeo.”

“Peter—please—”

“Oh, I know. One is not supposed to talk about such things. But I may not have another chance to say it. Mary—I want you to be happy—really. And if there’s ever anything I can do—”

It was stammeringly said, and trailed off into a somewhat awkward silence, a silence broken at last by Mary’s tremulous, “What a darling you are, Peter!” She held out her hand to him, and he lifted it and kissed it. Then, without another word, he left her.

Waiting for Boone, Peter walked in the garden. White roses grew in one corner—a beautiful bush with sweet young buds just bursting, and other flowers with leaves unfurled in ivory perfection. Peter linked Mary in his mind with the roses. He had left her abruptly because, if he had stayed, he would have said things he shouldn’t. Such meetings were a test of his self-control.

Boone’s big car came flashing up to the entrance. Boone jumped out and ran towards Peter: “How is she?” he asked with eagerness.

“Better.”

“What happened?”

“Tyndall frightened her. He’s been threatening to come and see you, and I’ve kept my eye on him. But today when I got home, he was gone, and I followed him. He was drunk, of course, and said a lot of things to Mary. I got there just as she fainted and fell.”

Boone interrupted, “You don’t mean that he dared touch her?”

“No. And normally she shouldn’t have been affected so seriously. But I’m afraid it’s her heart. I haven’t made a thorough examination, but there seems to be trouble—”

They were standing in the doorway. Boone looked warm and worried. “Thank you for helping us out, Ferry. There’s a good heart specialist in Tampa. I’ll have him over.”

Peter was being dismissed, and knew it. “The main thing is to keep her quiet.”

“I shall. And in the meantime, tell Tyndall to get away from this part of the country, or it won’t be well for him.”

“If I were you, I wouldn’t stir things up—”

“With Tyndall? Why not?”

“Well, he has a case, you know.”

Boone’s face darkened, “You think so? Look here, you keep out of it, Ferry.”

“How can I keep out? The man needs help. I’ve got to give it.”

Boone’s tone was insolent, “I’m only warning you.”

“Against what?”

“Well, I might make things a bit uncomfortable—”

“For me?”

“Yes.”

Peter stared at him, then began suddenly to laugh—a startling laugh, almost light-hearted. “Of all things, Musgrave! Do you think for the sake of a house and a mortgage on it, I’d let you own my soul?” He started down the steps, but stopped half-way. “I left some medicine for your wife with Julia. When you go up, see that she gets another dose of it, and then let her sleep. She may be all right in the morning, but I’d keep her in bed until the specialist sees her.”

His voice was cold, impersonal. Nothing remained of the air of triumphant challenge with which he had met Boone’s insolence. He was again the doctor intent on his case. He heard the door slam, and found himself again, unexpectedly, laughing. Was the man mad to threaten him? Let Boone take his house. Let Boone take everything. Peter would still be Peter Ferry, with a name to live up to. If he hadn’t a rag to his back, he had at least his “untarnished sword. . . .”

As he passed through the garden, he stopped and picked a bud from the white rose bush, and stuck it in his coat. Then he went swiftly along the path through the grove until he found his car where he had left it. As he drove at high speed towards the town, he told himself that what Boone felt for him had nothing to do with what he, Peter, felt for Mary. Peter could wear her in his heart as he wore the white rose in his coat. As for Boone, the doctors had a word for the kind of man who could give to an adored woman the pink doll she wanted, yet could, at the same moment, cold-bloodedly, condemn to despair and death, the wife of a man like Tyndall.

Tyndall, being salvaged from Jinks and Denis, was fairly sober, but

unrepentant. “I’ve got a case, and you know it,” he told an angry Peter.

“But Mrs. Musgrave is innocent—and you might have killed her—”

“He killed my wife—”

“Stop it,” Peter said. And Denis who had sat in silence during the passage at arms now interfered. “Look here,” he said, “I’ll see Musgrave—tomorrow. Perhaps I can make him get Tyndall’s side of it. And now let’s all go into the garden and have tea with Jinks and Cindy—”

“I’m not fit for tea—” Tyndall mumbled, his young face tired and white.

“Nonsense,” Denis said. “You’re fit for anything if you only think it.” He linked his arm in Tyndall’s and drew him along. And Peter watching the two of them as they went on ahead, saw Denis again as the Young Man who healed and gave men hope.

Cindy was in Peter’s arms, and he found himself soothed by the fluttering hands that touched his cheeks, the brown curls blown against his lips—

Then, too, there was Jinks’ tea, and the laughter of Jinks and Denis, and Tyndall growing gradually less tense in the friendly atmosphere.

When at last the three drove home, Tyndall, in the seat beside Peter with Cindy in his lap, said, with wistfulness, “If the world was made up of people like you—”

“If the world,” said Peter, “was made up of people like me—it would want to kick itself—for being an impractical—fool—”

“We’re all fools,” said Tyndall, “but some of the worst fools are those who want to hurt others. I’m beginning to see that there are just two kinds of people in the world—those who want to hurt, and those who want to help. And God, I should say, is with the helpers—”

Peter’s house, as they came to it, swam in the golden light of the afternoon. The Gulf, too, was golden. Peter was glad to be at home. Cindy was asleep, and Tyndall, also, would sleep until time for dinner. Peter would have time for a swim and a stretch on the beach.

He went in to find a letter from Lou Gorman. He had had several letters since Lou had been suddenly whisked away on the Stokes-Arnold yacht not long after Peter’s party. She had written first to say “good-bye,” and to tell him he must not forget her; the second letter had asked why he had not answered her first; the third letter had been pensive, and had almost brought him to a response; and now here was the fourth—a fat one which must wait until he had

felt the refreshment of the cool deep waters.

The postmark, when he came at last to the reading of the letter, was Tampa, and it had been mailed the night before.

"Here I am again, my darling Peter, with the news just having reached me that Mary Hamilton is married . . . ! How did it happen, Peter? And is your heart broken? And won't you let me mend it?

"Not one of my letters answered, and no answer when I tried to get you a moment ago by telephone. The Stokes-Arnolds are tied up here for a few days. We've been everlastingly on a cruise, stopping at this island and that. But now we're back again, and I want you to come and see me. And I want more than that—I want you to sail on with us to Baltimore. We're all dying to have you, and think what it would mean if you would look about you and finally settle down to your old practice. Oh, why should you be so obstinate, Peter? What does Florida hold for you now that Mary Hamilton is married? There's nothing, is there, really? And all the time you might be making a name for yourself in a stunning practice on Charles Street, with smart patients rushing up in Rolls-Royces. You're just the one for that sort of thing—with two nurses in white linen, and a man at the door, and an assistant to take the uninteresting cases. You'll have all the women mad about you, and all the men jealous—and that's something to think about, isn't it?

"I know what you're saying—that you've got to stay and stick it out, or you'll be going back on some ideal or other. But ideals are old-fashioned, and no one has them any more.

"So come on, Peterkin—"

Peter stopped there—Peterkin . . . ! Oh, Lou was an idiot . . . !

Again he picked up the letter.

"If you don't come to see me, I shall come to see you. I don't seem to have any pride about it. I know so absolutely that I am right in wanting to get you away from Denis Colt and his dreams, to where you'll begin to live—as a man of your age should live. As you lived in those days when I was there and we danced in the moonlight

—do you remember, darling?”

He did remember—one of those white nights when men lose their heads—a night when he and Lou, dancing after dinner, had danced through the hall and down the steps, and, still dancing, had come to the hard white sands. It was the night he had asked her to marry him—. The next morning he had wondered why he asked her. It had been, he knew, a matter of moonlight and madness—for in the back of his mind he had known all the while that Lou was not the One Woman. As Mary had been. As Mary would always be.

Yet, as he lay on his back on the beach and looked up through half-shut eyes at the golden sky, temptation assailed him. Mary was lost to him—forever. Lou might be second-best. But the picture she presented had its attractions. He saw himself in that office on Charles Street, acclaimed by his colleagues; patients pouring in. He saw a white ship sailing—perfect service, perfect everything—Lou in an azure dress dancing under the awning, her hair sleek and shining, her long ear-rings glittering down to her smooth sun-tanned shoulders—! Everybody gay! Everybody laughing! And here he was, working without pay by day, and coming back at night to wrestle with Tyndall and his devils; stabbed in the heart by such encounters as the one this afternoon with Mary; accepting Boone’s insolence—

Why did he do it? What held him?

Something stronger than himself, perhaps. Something that belonged to his father and his thundering grandfather. Something that had nothing to do with success or material considerations. Something that had to do, rather, with those ideals which Lou called old-fashioned, but which seemed to him important because the men of his line had thought them important. Something which had to do with an inner self which would not surrender. Peter, lying there on the sands and looking up into the sky, saw himself as a fool—perhaps. But a fool—fighting.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Bread Line

BOONE, kneeling beside Mary's bed, said: "I'll never leave you again."

"Don't be—silly—"

They laughed shakily, and he stretched his arm out over the pillow above her shining head. "Darling, darling—"

She clung to him. She wanted to tell him everything, and wanted to tell him—nothing. She wanted to be loved—. "Boone, I was so frightened."

"Ferry told me . . . and Tyndall ought to be shot—"

"He said you stole his money, and killed his wife—"

"He lied, of course. I'll see that he gets what's coming to him—"

She protested, "You mustn't be too hard on him, Boone."

"I couldn't be."

She was too tired to argue. Nothing was, indeed, worth an argument at this moment.

Boone saw her whiteness. "I've called a specialist from Tampa," he said. "He's coming over."

"Peter gave me some medicine."

"I know. But the Tampa man is the one for you."

"Did you tell Peter you didn't want him?"

"Yes."

"I hope you said it—nicely—"

"I said it in the only way there was to say it. You know as well as I that Ferry can't be your physician."

She did know it. She sighed a little, closed her eyes, and said nothing. Boone, kissing the closed eyelids, persisted, “You do know it, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Then why are you sighing?”

“Because I like to be friends with—everybody.”

“With Ferry?”

“Yes.”

“You can’t be as long as he loves you—”

She opened her eyes and saw something in his face that made her say, “It’s you I love, darling—”

His arm drew her closer. Enfolded by his tenderness, she gave herself up to it. Why should she need friendship when she had a love like this?

When the distinguished doctor arrived, Boone felt a touch of elation in presenting him to Mary. Propped on her pillows, she made a lovely picture—a bit of lace and chiffon about her shoulders like a drift of pink clouds, her hair a deepened gold among the shadows.

“I’m afraid,” she said, “I’ve been behaving badly.”

The doctor, smiling down at her, said, “We’ll see that you behave better.” He was kind and reassuring, and when he left her at last with old Julia, her fears had fled.

But the doctor downstairs was saying to Boone, “It’s a rather acute condition. She’ll need rest and care. There’s undoubtedly a history which will account for this attack. An illness in childhood which weakened the heart—an infection. I’ll check up definitely later. It may take time to bring her out of it, but in the meantime, don’t worry.”

But Boone did worry. He worried so much that the next morning when he was faced in his office by Denis Colt, he was in no mood to talk to him.

Denis, in an office chair on the other side of Boone’s desk, was not in the least ministerial. He had come straight from the links in sweater and slacks, and without a hat.

“I’m afraid,” he said, “that I’m here on a somewhat delicate mission. I have come to say a word for Tyndall.”

Boone settled back and lighted a cigarette. “Tyndall’s case is closed. I’ve notified him to get out.”

“But how can you? The man has a right to be here.”

“Has he? He threatened my wife. That’s a thing the law takes account of.”

“He was drunk—unhappy—”

“I have nothing to do with a man’s unhappiness—”

“Are you sure of that, Musgrave?”

It was a quiet question, but Boone was assailed suddenly by something akin to fear, which expressed itself in a blustering protest: “If you mean that I made him pay what he owed—”

“I’m not sure that he owed it. Are you?”

Boone wished Denis would stop asking those quiet questions, as if he, Boone, were being called to account. And he was accountable to no man.

“If you are defending a drunkard and a brute, you might be in better business,” he said, violently.

“I’m in the best business I know. I’m defending a man who needs help. Your help and mine, Musgrave.”

Boone laughed, “Oh, look here. We might as well understand each other. Tyndall is going to get what’s coming to him. If Ferry harbors him, it won’t be very good for either of them.”

“Peter harbors everything from a stray dog to a homeless cat. Why punish him for his philanthropy?”

“Because in this instance it has to do with me—with my wife—”

“Tyndall had a wife—”

The room was very still. Then Boone again blustered, “What if he had?”

“She died from privation. She might have been saved if any of us had known. I think you knew.”

Again that stillness. Then Boone once more expostulating: “I’ve given enough, haven’t I? You know my charities. I’m not stingy.”

“Giving is not the test of a man’s attitude towards society. It is easy enough to hand out doles. It is not so easy to deal with all men justly.”

“That’s your point of view,” Boone flung at him. “You’re a preacher.”

“No, I’m not a preacher. I’m a Voice in the Wilderness—” His eyes met Boone’s in a sudden flashing glance, “You know what I mean?”

Boone knew. He had had excellent Biblical training. And Denis was having a peculiar effect on him. The dominance which broke down the resistance of other men would not break down the resistance of Denis Colt. When, a moment ago, he had flashed that sudden glance, Boone had felt that so might David have looked at Goliath as he set a stone in his sling and took aim at the giant's forehead.

And now Denis shot his bolt. "Look here, Musgrave," he said, "why don't you tell your wife the whole story, and get her opinion?"

"My wife is too wise to want to interfere in such affairs."

"Your wife is so wise that if you will let her swing your life to her orbit, you'll be a great man, Musgrave."

Boone fought on blindly. "I am a great man—"

Denis did not answer. And in that silence, Boone's conceit in himself was shattered. He rose. "There's no use going on with this, is there? We'll never get together."

Denis, on his feet, said, "I'm sorry. I hope I haven't muddled things up in trying to straighten them. But by all that is fine and worthy in you, I ask you to consider Tyndall's case. I ask you for your own good, as well as for his—. You said a moment ago that you were a great man. There is no greatness which does not consider—justice—"

He went away then, and Boone sat for a long time at his desk, hearing echoes of the things that had been said. Tyndall had a wife. She died from privation. . . . Your wife is so wise. . . .

And that other crashing reverberation—I am a great man.

Yet, when he left the office, Boone put the whole thing behind him. Why should he let a dreamer like Denis Colt shake his nerve and set him to self-analysis? He had managed his life. He could still manage it. He had but one real worry in the world, and that was Mary's illness.

He drove towards home, to meet, half-way, an imposing limousine. Lou Gorman waved to him from the window, and the two cars stopped.

"How's the happy bridegroom?"

"Happier than he deserves to be."

"What modesty! And from you! I thought you'd be prancing with joy to know you got her away from Peter—"

"She was never his—"

“Wasn’t she?” Lou’s lift of the eyebrows held disturbing insinuations. “Well, you should know—! And anyhow, possession is nine points of—everything—isn’t it?”

Boone laughed. “Are you trying to tell me I can’t hold her . . . ?”

“Well, Peter has a way with him. But I’m on your side. I’m trying my best to get him away from here. He’s wasted on this community. You’re not, because you’re not obsessed by a desire to be of service to the world. You take, and Peter gives—”

Boone said: “Why talk about unpleasant things to a pretty woman? If I weren’t married, I’d tell you how gorgeous you are in red—”

“Shall we pretend you’re not—married?”

“Not for a minute. I’m all Mary’s—”

“You would be—but you’d be glad if I’d get Peter to go North?”

“Not because I’m afraid of him. Only because he’s in my way. Just now he’s fighting me in a business matter which he chooses to mix up with sentiment. If he doesn’t stop, I’ll have a thing or two to tell him . . .”

Lou interrupted, “Let me tell him first. I’m on my way to see him. I thought I might catch him at luncheon. He usually comes home for it, and his office hours—”

“His office hours,” Boone stated, “are a bread line. Nobody pays him.”

Lou said: “What a fool he is—! Well, if I don’t succeed in my dark, deep plot, Boone, I’ll let you have a try at it. And in the meantime, I’m glad you like my red hat. Does Mary wear red?”

“Green,” said Boone, “and white and pale yellow—to match my orange groves. . . . I tell her she’s a dryad.”

Lou laughed: “No dryads in mine. I’d rather be flesh and blood. I don’t want to match orange groves. I want to match bridge games and jazz and cocktail parties—”

Boone replied, “If you match anything, it’s a vineyard with Bacchantes dancing—”

“What a wizard you are!” she told him. “Not many people know me—”

She drove away laughing, and Boone, too, laughed as he went on. The encounter had restored his balance. Life was to be dealt with as he had always done. Without sentiment. Only in that small circle which he drew about

himself and Mary must he permit himself for a moment to forget reality.

Lou found Peter at luncheon. Tyndall was there, and Cindy. Cindy, sitting on two fat books, and eating bread and milk from a blue bowl, looked wide-eyed as Peter rose with a sharp exclamation.

"Lou—of all things—"

"Darling, aren't you glad to see me?" She was ignoring Tyndall, ignoring Cindy, ignoring old Nan, who had come in with a silver tray with the makings of a salad on it and had set it before Peter. She laid her hands on his shoulders and looked up at him, "Are you glad?" she asked again.

He smiled at her, and presented Tyndall, who was on his feet, and Cindy, who at once offered her the blue bowl. "You can have my bread and milk."

"May I? But perhaps you'd better keep it, and I'll have some of Peter's salad." She sat down in a chair which Peter set for her, and pulled off her hat. "Such a hot day—and I shouldn't wear red, should I?"

Again he smiled and evaded. He knew, and she knew, that the flowing lines of the sheer frock took from it any suggestion of torridity—she was like a pomegranate, or a ripe cherry, hanging refreshingly among her leaves—

"I remember once," Peter said, "when you wore blue—"

As soon as he had said it, he was sorry. Yet he had said it only because he could think of nothing else.

"Do you really remember, Peter?"

"I remember a lot of things. And will you for a moment set your mind on this salad, and say whether you like tarragon in the dressing, and whether your system of slenderizing will let me include a spoonful of sugar?"

"Grapefruit?"

"Yes." Peter had a big spoon and was mixing oil and vinegar. "And that's all you get except Nan's hot rolls and a cup of coffee."

"No hot rolls—just the salad."

She was impatient of the food, of Peter's attentions to Tyndall, to Cindy. She was impatient of everything which kept her from the conversation of two which she had anticipated. "How should I know?" she asked Peter when, the meal ended, they walked down to the water's edge. "How could I know you had taken on a household?"

"You couldn't, of course. But I don't see that it makes any difference."

“Only this difference, that you’re such a—fool—”

“You’re not telling me anything I don’t know, Lou. I’ve called myself a fool a thousand times, but not for your reasons. I call myself a fool because I didn’t see long ago what made life worth living. And I tell you now that taking care of Tyndall and taking care of Cindy means something that’s real—as those days were never real when we danced in the moonlight—”

She was petulant. “Oh, Peter, I’m only saying all this because I want to save you from yourself.”

“I haven’t asked you to save me.”

“I know. But I’m here with a life-line and a life-preserver—” She dropped down on the sand. “I want to talk sense—and you’ve got to hear me—”

He turned his wrist to see the time: “Office hours, and there are patients waiting.”

“Boone Musgrave says your office hours are a bread line—”

“When did Boone say that—?”

“This morning. I met him.”

“Will you tell him, when you talk me over with him again, that I’d rather have a bread line at my front door than to steal bread from those who need it.”

“Peter—show Boone what you can do—in Baltimore—”

“I’ve told you my place is here.”

She caught his hand and held it against her cheek. “So you’re going to let me be unhappy, Peter?”

“I couldn’t give you happiness, Lou. You knew that when you told me you wouldn’t marry me. You want me now plus success, plus the life you have planned for me. You don’t want Peter Ferry with a bread line.”

A long pause. Then, “I want you—anyhow.”

“No,” he said, “you don’t. You think you do. But you’d hate it—. You’d hate having me in debt, and having to pay my bills; you’d hate the jungle and the summer heat, and the September storms. And you’d hate it all because there’d be no compensation for you, as there is for Jinks and Denis and me. We have our work—and we love this country. For us, it is enchanted ground. We want to live here, and see things grow better, as we know they will, if we fight through—”

Lou flung his hand from her. “Oh,” she said, “you dreamer—! Why aren’t

you honest? The thing that keeps you here is—Mary Hamilton—”

She began to sob, her head on her knees—a figure of despair. But Peter, knowing the ease with which her tears flowed, was not impressed.

“No,” he said, “it isn’t Mary. I might have thought that if I hadn’t stayed on through everything before she came. And what good would it do to stay on for her sake since she is married to Boone Musgrave?”

“She might get tired of him.”

Peter shook his head, “He’s not a man a woman would tire of easily. Even if she were disillusioned—” He stopped there. “Sorry, Lou, but the bread line is waiting—”

“But Peter!”

He reached down and lifted her up—“You’ve got the wrong idea, old girl. You think I’m the only man because you want to have your own way about it. You’ve got to snap out of it, and fall in love with one of the five hundred, or five thousand, who are at your feet. Any one of them will make you a better husband than I. And some day you’ll thank me for seeing it straight—”

“Some day—I’ll hate you—”

He put his hands on her shoulders. “No,” he said, “you won’t. You’re too good a sport for that, Lou. Aren’t you? And we’re friends?”

She looked at him through wet lashes, “Perhaps. I don’t know. Perhaps I’m your worst enemy.” She turned away, and began to walk towards the house.

He went in with her while she got her hat, and saw her at last seated in her car. Her face was still shadowed as she leaned from the window. Then, all at once, she began to speak rapidly, “Peter, there’s something I want to tell you. Before I left with the Stokes-Arnolds, I saw Mary—and I told her things—that you had broken my heart, and treated me badly. And I found out she thought you had ridden back with me to Tampa, that night after the party, and I didn’t undeceive her—”

Peter said, “Why are you telling me this—now?”

“Because it’s too late for you to do anything. And because I hope it will hurt you to know that she was hurt, and that if it hadn’t been for me, you might have had her—”

If she had thought to find satisfaction in a perverted sense of triumph, she was at once made aware of her mistake. Peter said, heatedly, “You little cat—” and stood back from the car. The chauffeur, taking it for a signal, drove on,

and Lou, crouched back among the cushions, found herself again sobbing—hard, heavy sobs—hysterical, hopeless.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Dark Splendor

IT was not until June that Mary was able to go out. In the meantime, her father had grown much stronger. He no longer needed his nurses, and he motored every day for an hour or two, with Alec driving. Sometimes he stopped to see Jinks, and she would make him stay for luncheon or tea.

He would return to Mary, brisk and rejuvenated. “It does me good to go there. By Jove, it’s like the Garden of Eden. And she and Denis live as if they were the first pair in Paradise.”

“Surely they are not happier than Boone and I?”

“Perhaps not, but it’s different.”

“How—different—?”

“In this, perhaps. That they love each other, but they love also every human being on God’s earth. You and Boone don’t know there’s anyone else in the world except yourselves—not even me—”

She reproached him, “You don’t really think that, Daddy.”

“I don’t know what I think. I shouldn’t talk to you like this, of course. But I’m lonely, Mary.”

She knew his loneliness was that of soul rather than of any outward circumstance—for in the hours in which Boone was away, her father had her all to himself. His complaint was, however, that Boone came first. “I’m not used to second place, Mary—”

Yet why, Mary asked herself, shouldn’t Boone have first place? Her father’s love had been selfish, and Boone seemed to live to please her. Nothing could exceed his tenderness. All through her illness, he had spent with her every moment he could spare. He had showered her with gifts of every kind.

He had made plans to take her abroad as soon as she was strong enough. A long, quiet voyage, then, perhaps, a house in England. “Would you like it, Mary?”

“I like it here, Boone.”

“But not in summer.”

So he settled it, as he settled everything. It was wonderful, Mary told herself, to lean on his strength. She was half-ashamed to admit that at times she felt smothered, as if she were reclining on too soft a pillow, so that some day she would grow inert and spineless.

She had learned, too, that she must not press Boone too far for information. She had asked him about Tyndall, only to have him reply with brusqueness, “He got what was coming to him.” But what Tyndall got he did not say, and she dared not ask.

She rode with him almost every day. Little rides at first, then longer ones. It was in mid-June that one afternoon she rode alone. Boone had an important engagement, and her father had gone earlier in the day to sit in Jinks’ garden. Mary was to call for him, as Jinks had asked them both for tea.

In the summer heat, the stretch of water lay still. On the left were the orange groves, giving way to the cleared spaces of the sub-division beyond which was Peter’s house and office.

They came upon the house so unexpectedly that the car had nearly passed it when Mary said to Alec, “Stop.” She had seen a sign stuck on the front lawn. It seemed to fling the words in her face—FOR SALE. When the car halted, she read the rest of it. Possible purchasers were to apply to the agent, and the name of the agent was that of her husband!

Peter’s house was empty, its windows staring. The little office still flaunted its vines and blossoms, but its air was desolate.

“I want to get out, Alec.”

“They ain’t anybody here, Miss Mary.”

“I know. I’ll sit on the steps.”

Alec helped her out carefully, and spread a rug for her, then went back to his car. He was glad she had asked him no questions. There were things being said about the foreclosing of Dr. Ferry’s mortgage—things not complimentary to Alec’s master. But Alec was loyal and kept his own counsel.

Mary, sitting on the steps, looked out across the lawn. The sun was hot, the water glaring. There was a wildness about the whole scene which was almost savage. Already the jungle was encroaching—its thick growth creeping up and towards the house. What was it Peter had said long ago about the jungle? “Some day it will eat us up—” Had it eaten him up? And where was he?

Sitting there, fear began to grip her. For weeks nothing had been said about Peter. Even Jinks and Denis had been evasive. And Margaret. Thinking back over those weeks, Mary was assailed by the crashing thought that they had all been keeping something from her. Tonight she would ask Boone, and make him tell her. Make him—?

She called Alec, and he came at once. As the car made its way along a road which was cut through the palmettos, they passed a cabin in front of which old Nan was washing clothes.

Mary remembered seeing her on the night of Peter's party. She had a sudden impulse to ask questions. "Drive back a bit, Alec," she said, and when they again reached the hut, she called to the old woman.

Old Nan approached the car, stood by the window, and gave respectful answers to Mary's questions. Yes'm, Mr. Peter was gone. No'm, he hadn't gone to Baltimore. Mr. Musgrave put him out, him and little Cindy and her daddy. Yes'm. Mr. Peter was living on the beach in the last cabana at the end. No'm, she didn't work for him. He couldn't pay anybody much. But she didn't want money—"I goes and does his washings, and cleans up fo' him."

Mary took out a crisp bill, but old Nan wouldn't have it. She had nothing against Boone Musgrave's wife, but she hated Boone, and wouldn't take his money. "No'm, what I needs, I earns."

Mary was aware of the rebuff, and the dignity of it. When they drove away, old Nan went back to her washing. She reflected that she would have something to tell Mr. Peter when she saw him. She would tell him she wouldn't take Boone Musgrave's money. "No, suh, not if I has to starve for it."

Mary went on, and had tea with Jinks and Denis. They sat in the garden, and talked of everything except the thing Mary wanted to hear. Just at the last moment she was alone with Jinks, and her composure broke. "I've just heard about Peter, and I'm sorry. Will you tell him that—I'm sorry?"

When she reached home, she went at once to her room. "I'm so tired, Daddy." Boone had not returned. The sky had grown dark, and the heat was most oppressive.

"Are we going to have a storm, Julia?" Mary asked the maid, who had come in to help her.

"Yes'm. Mr. Boone telephoned he'd be late."

"Have dinner served upstairs when he comes. In my sitting-room. Daddy

can have his tray on his bedside table, or in the sun-room. Ask him which he prefers—”

Comfortable at last in a cool negligée, Mary lay on a couch by a window which overlooked the bayou. The waters were heavy and dull, like a sheet of malachite. The air was filled with a strange green light.

Hamilton came in presently. “What’s this, Mary, that I’m to have my dinner alone?”

“Boone will be late. I didn’t want you to wait—”

“Can’t you eat with me, and let Boone dine when he gets here?”

“I didn’t think you’d—mind.”

“I do mind. There was a time when old people were set at the foot of the table, and given such broken meats as the rest didn’t want—I thought that time had gone by—but it seems not. I am to be sent to eat by myself—in the sun-room . . . !”

“I’ll have Julia serve you here—”

“Do you think I’ll stay where I’m not wanted?”

Mary wished that Boone would come. She knew these moods of her father—moods in which he worked himself into a state where he was unaware of what he was saying, when he did things for which he could not be held accountable—

“My dear,” she said, “you know I want you.”

“How do I know it? When you choose Boone always before me? Yet who is this husband of yours whom you set so high—while I am sent to your—kitchen—? There are things you don’t know about him, Mary. Things you might as well know—”

As he stood there in the green light which filled the room, a tall and sinister figure, Mary wanted to cry out, “Don’t tell me. . . . Don’t tell me. . . .” She had a feeling that, when she was told, things would never be the same between herself and Boone.

Hamilton went on, inexorably, “Everybody’s talking about what he did to Ferry. Foreclosed his mortgage and turned him out, like a landlord in an old-fashioned melodrama. Jinks and Denis asked me not to speak of it to you, but I think you ought to know. Ferry suffered because he harbored Tyndall. Boone issued an ultimatum that Tyndall was to leave, and Peter fought the thing through. There’s gossip that Boone got Tyndall’s house away from him and his

money, and Tyndall's wife died from the shock, if not from actual starvation —"

"Daddy—stop! You mustn't say such things—when they aren't—true—"

"How do you know they're not true? Ask your husband. Perhaps when you hear what he has to say for himself, you'll be glad to eat with me—. Perhaps you'll send him to the kitchen—for the scraps—"

He turned and left her. Mary sank among her cushions, pale and trembling. Of course she must not hold her father responsible. He didn't know what he was saying. He was jealous—insanely jealous. . . . She had hoped that now she was married to Boone, the old obsession would leave him. But it had not left him. . . .

She lay there for a long time—listening . . .

Julia came through the hall, and Mary called her. The maid was carrying a covered tray.

Mary spoke in a hushed voice: "He's eating in his room, Julia?"

"Yes, Miss Mary. He's gone to bed. He said he didn't want nothing but a cup of coffee. But I put on some other things—"

"You'd better stay near him, Julia, and let me know when he gets to sleep. He hasn't been like this for a long time."

"No, Miss, he ain't—" Julia went on with the tray. And Mary once more lay listening—but that for which she listened now was her husband's step. She wanted, yet dreaded, to hear it.

But when he at last came running up the stairs and took her in his arms, nothing else seemed to count.

"Glad to see me, Mary?"

"Always . . ."

He gave her a keen look, "Tired?"

"Yes."

"Ride too much for you? I was afraid it might be."

"It's the storm I think. The air's so heavy—"

"It will be a big one when it comes. It's as black as Hades outside—"

"We're going to have dinner up here, Boone. I thought you'd like it—"

“Great. I’ll get into something cool, and be with you in a moment—”

Alec brought up the dinner. Boots followed and sat on the window sill. The lightning flared intermittently; the thunder rolled and reverberated. Boone ate with an appetite. He was without a coat, and with his shirt open at the neck. He had looked like that, Mary remembered, the morning she had first met him. The morning he had boasted, “No one can live with me, not even my mother.” Well, she had lived with him for a long time, and loved him—

Mary ate little. “Tired?” Boone asked again as Alec entered to take away the table.

“A little.” She waited until Alec had left the room. “Boone, I’ve got to talk to you.”

He drew his chair closer. “About what?”

“Peter Ferry.”

If the storm had broken then and had come crashing about them, the effect could not have been more startling. Boone pushed back his chair and rose. “So somebody’s been telling you things—”

“I drove past his house today, and found it shut up, and an old negro woman told me—.” She dared not speak of her father’s accusations.

“What did she tell you?”

“That you had turned him out, and Tyndall and the child.”

“And you believed it?”

“I won’t believe it, if you say it isn’t true.”

“It isn’t true, not in the way the story reached you. But I’m not going to talk about it to you, Mary. I have done what I thought best. Can’t you trust me for that?”

“But Boone—”

“There must be no ‘buts.’ I want all of your faith, or none at all. I told you that long ago. I told you, too, that a leopard can’t change his spots. You must love me for what I am—not for what you want me to be—”

“But Boone,—injustice—”

He was standing before a mirror hung above a dropleaf table, so that he was reflected in it, as he had been reflected that day at White Feathers. Mary was again aware of two men—the one who faced her, and the one whose face was hidden. She was aware, too, of Boone’s dark splendor.

“I am not unjust,” he said. “Ferry could not pay, and, moreover, he housed Tyndall. I told him Tyndall couldn’t stay, and Ferry chose to defy me. That’s all there is to it. My methods are my own. I have made my success by them. I can’t change, and I won’t—”

“Is success the only thing?”

“It means a great deal to me. So much that even you mustn’t try to take it from me—”

“I’m not trying. Only—”

“Only Peter Ferry means so much to you that you must plead his cause?”

“Boone—!”

“What I am, I am, Mary. You must take it or leave it—”

The two men in the mirror became one again as Boone came towards her. He seemed, to Mary’s excited imagination, to loom threateningly. She began to sob wildly, her face buried in the cushions. In another moment he was on his knees beside her. “Don’t, don’t! Mary—my darling—”

He smoothed the hair back from her face, kissed her, lifting her at last, and cradling her in his arms.

She clung to him. He whispered that he loved her. Didn’t she know that? Didn’t she?

When the storm broke, he rose and shut the windows, then came back and again held her. His voice soothed her. Nothing, he said, could hurt her when he was there. Nothing. She knew that, didn’t she?

Yes, she knew it.

“Love me?”

With the spell of his dark splendor on her, she whispered, “Yes.”

Yet an hour later, as she lay in bed, with the cool reviving winds that the storm had brought blowing over her, she told herself that nothing had been settled. There was still the case of Peter about which nothing had been done. And the case of Tyndall for which there had been no real defense.

She had yielded to his tenderness—had been glad to yield to it. Yet, had she not known, even as she did it, that there was that other man to reckon with—the one in the mirror, the one whose face was—hidden—?

The little cat, Boots, was sitting on the sill, outlined against the moon-lighted sky. A moth on the inside of the screen fluttered its pale wings, and

Boots put out a paw and killed it.

Cruel—! The word rung in the back of Mary's mind—cruel—cruel—cruel! Not Boots alone, but Boots' master. Or wasn't it cruelty, but rather some distorted sense of what life owed him? Some unsatisfied grudge against a world which had treated him harshly, and which in return he must treat with harshness?

Restless with much questioning, she rose and stood at the window, looking out. The storm had passed, and the world lay at rest under the moon. The path which led through the grove was like a ribbon of light. And at the end of that path was Margaret's cottage.

Margaret!

Who else could answer so well those unanswered questions? Margaret knew her son, and loved him. And it was not so late—eleven by the little illumined bedside clock.

The door of Boone's room was open, but he slept heavily. Old Julia's room was in a rear wing. The other servants had gone off to their cabins.

Mary dressed quickly, wrapping herself, at last, in her warm white coat. She assured herself, as she crept down the stairs, that there was surely no harm in going like this to Boone's mother. There was no one else of whom she could ask advice, and she must have it. She was at the mercy of two men—her father and her husband—neither of whom she understood, with neither of whom she had any actual influence. Both of them loved her. They said it, and she believed it. Yet what was a love that had in it no understanding? No tenderness, except for one beloved object? That shut out the rest of the world that she might be shut in?

As she sped through the sleeping grove, she found herself afraid. She had never been out like this alone in the night, and every twig that cracked, every rustle of bush or branch, had in it a terrifying suggestion. Boone's smug cat, Boots, had followed her, and went on ahead, having small adventures with the creatures of the night.

She was glad when she came, at last, to Margaret's cottage, and saw, through the open square of window, the quiet head bent above a book.

Her voice was breathless: "Mother—"

Margaret, raising her head and seeing her, said in a startled voice, "My dear—is anything the matter?"

"Nothing—except I want you—"

She went around to the door, and Margaret opened it. “I had to come,” Mary said.

“Where’s Boone?”

“Asleep—”

“But, my dear, if he should wake?”

“He won’t. Nothing wakes him—and I shan’t be long, Mother.”

She said the word as if it held all for which her heart hungered. “I’ve got to have advice—”

“Sit down, my dear, and tell me.”

Margaret held Mary’s hand and smoothed it, while the story went on. About Peter. About Tyndall. “Boone shouldn’t have done it, should he? It all seems so unjust. I told him that, but he wouldn’t listen.”

“No,” said Margaret, “he won’t listen. He never listens to me. Yet I think that, indirectly, I have had an influence. I think that some day he is going to remember things that I have said to him, and it will help him to get straight with himself. The time has got to come, Mary. I hope it may come through you —”

“But he won’t listen,” Mary said again, desperately. “He just wants me to let him—love me. And it’s—wonderful—! Boone is wonderful. You know that.”

“Yes, I know.”

“But it hurts so to have him unjust and hard. It’s as if he were two men—”

“He is two men,” Margaret said, still with her hand on Mary’s. “And one man is his father. That’s what heredity does to us. Women don’t think far enough ahead when they marry. Or they wouldn’t give their children fathers such as I gave my son. When I married, I was thinking only of myself. That’s why I’ve never blamed Boone. He’s the product of his father’s hardness, and my own weakness.”

“But what is the way out?”

“Prayer.”

“But, Mother—I don’t believe in things like that.”

“Some day you will. Dear child, I’ve seen it work. In my life. Things that seemed hopeless—”

“You mean they’ve come right again?”

“Yes. As Boone will come right. Never lose faith in him, Mary—”

“Haven’t you lost faith in him?”

“Not for a moment. I’ve hated the things he’s done, but somewhere down deep in me is the conviction that the time will come when the hardness will crack, and I’ll find beneath it my own child, not his father’s—”

“But sometimes I feel that if he’s cruel—I can’t keep on loving him—”

“He’s never cruel to you?”

“No, oh, no—”

“Then hold that in your heart. It’s worth a lot to a woman to have a man’s tenderness. I never had it—” She kissed Mary. “And now I’m going to walk back with you. I should be sorry to have Boone wake and not find you.”

“I can walk back alone. I’m not afraid, really. And if Boone should see you with me, he might not understand.”

“I’ll watch from the door—and I could hear you call—”

They kissed again, and Mary went on in the moonlight, glad of Boots’ small company in the fearsome night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Garden of Eden

JINKS and Denis had, that night, eaten supper in their garden—a deliciously overgrown garden, planted with all the seeds and cuttings that Denis' adoring parishioners had bestowed upon him.

Jinks' supper had been a masterpiece of simplicity, with great strawberries on their stems; oranges for the tall pitcher of fruit-cup; honey for the home-made white bread; and a square of cream cheese.

"Fifteen cents, my liege lord," Jinks had informed him, "covers the cost of everything."

Jinks was nothing if not competent. From having been a good nurse, she had become a good housewife. "I had experience enough as a child," she said, "in economy—. But it lacked the fine flavor of this—"

"What makes the difference?" Denis demanded.

"Oh—YOU—" Standing there with her dish of strawberries in one hand, cool in a fresh print frock, her flame of hair matching the flame of the sunset, she might have been a Hebe serving her particular pet god.

"YOU—" she said again, as she set the dish of strawberries in place, and dropped into a chair. "You're so Arcadian, darling."

"Why not? In this country, we should wear our cares lightly. As, indeed, in almost every country. It is because we ask so much of material things that we make slaves of ourselves. You might have spent hours in preparing this meal—yet all we needed was—bread and honey—"

"The Queen—" Jinks said, "was in the garden—eating bread and honey—"

It had all been light-hearted, and when supper was over, Jinks had leaned her head against her husband's shoulder. "Life," she said, "is lovely."

"For you and me, because we make it so."

"But not," she said, after a little, "for Boone and Mary. She's found out, Denis, about Peter."

“I wish it might have been kept from her.”

“I’m not such a saint as you. Boone needs everything that’s coming to him.”

“You’re all for Peter.”

“Who wouldn’t be?”

“But Boone’s her husband. And her love may work a miracle.”

“Oh, darling, just for a minute don’t be a parson.”

“I’m not speaking as a parson, but as a man. A woman like Mary can do a lot for a man like Boone.”

“But think what she could have done for Peter!”

As if the sound of his name had brought him, Peter appeared suddenly under the porch light of the house. “Where’s everybody?”

Their voices reached him out of the dark. “Here.”

“I came over,” he told them, as he approached, “to barter a catch of stone crabs for a pound of sugar.”

“Five pounds, you mean. Sugar is cheap, and stone crabs are expensive.”

“These were given to me. That’s the advantage of being a popular physician—you have your perquisites. One of the fishermen off shore had an infected finger, and came in to have it dressed. He brought some stone crabs as his fee. We, Tyndall and I, had more than we wanted, and we need sugar. The crabs are boiled, and I’ll put them in your ice box.”

“I’ll do it,” Jinks said. “We’re coming in—there’s a storm brewing.”

Peter, under the light, showed himself in a half-sleeve jersey and canvas trousers. “The day,” he said, “has brought one darned thing after another—two operations this morning, and one this afternoon. And none of them pay patients. But we’re getting along famously. People are bringing things to me in exchange for my services. The few fees I collect in money, I pay for gasoline. Tyndall keeps my car in order. I have clothes enough to last for a million years.”

“Are these some of them?” Jinks asked.

“Yes. I wore them because Tyndall and I have been tinkering with a motor boat. More lagniappe or largesse, or whatever is the name for things which come to you of another’s bounty. One of the winter visitors left it as wreckage when they went north. Tyndall salvaged it, and presently I’ll be inviting you all

for a cruise."

"Speaking of cruises," Jinks said, "where's Lou?"

"In the tinkling coolness of Long Island. And still with the Stokes-Arnolds."

"You don't mean that she writes to you?"

"I do." Peter had a postcard in his pocket and pulled it out. He had few secrets from Jinks and Denis, but one he had kept—of the things Lou had told him that afternoon on the sands about herself and Mary. They knew only that Lou had seen him, and had again begged him to go to Baltimore.

He handed the card to Jinks, who read that Lou was at Great Neck; that July would see her at Bar Harbor; and that the Stokes-Arnold latch-string was still out for Peter—a long latch-string!

Jinks said, "Sometimes I wonder—why you don't go—"

"It's just one of those things, Jinks. I'm clamped here in response to some atavistic impulse—"

"What does he mean, Denis?"

"That his ancestors have got him. Because his grandfather ate a cucumber, he's always in a pickle, as somebody puts it—"

"Oh," and Jinks, finding the conversation frivolous, moved on to the kitchen.

It was then that Denis said, "Mary was here today, Peter. She knows—about you—. She gave Jinks a message for you. That she's sorry."

"Bless her—"

He did not go on. He sat thinking about it. The storm which had so frightened Mary was beginning to roll and rumble.

Denis said, "One wonders what she'll say to Boone about it."

"She may say nothing. She is dominated by his strength, as she was by her father's. . . . Some day she may assert herself. It has happened before. In Margaret Musgrave's case, for example. She gave way to her husband before Boone came, then she fought his battles—"

"You mean—if Mary had a child?"

"God forbid—with Boone for its father. Oh, I'm not denying Boone's good points, Denis. It's a case of dual personality. But all the more difficult for her

to deal with."

"If she had married you, Peter—"

"Me?"

Peter laughed.

"What if she had, and Boone had foreclosed the mortgage? What a match for a woman like Mary! And look what Boone gives her."

"Those things don't count, do they?"

"Not with you and Jinks."

"They wouldn't with Mary—"

"Wouldn't they?"

The storm crackled and crashed. Jinks, coming in, said, "There's a great wind."

They all sat down, Jinks in the curve of Denis' arm. "It's dreadful outside. Can't you stay all night, Peter?"

"No. I must be getting on." But it was late when he left them, for the storm raged and tore until half the night was gone, then roared away with the moon sailing high behind it.

"Look here," Peter said, as Jinks and Denis walked down to his car with him, "why can't the two of you come over tomorrow night and see my boat? We can eat out-of-doors, and have a grand time together."

"Shall we, Denis?"

"Why not?"

As they stood there, hand in hand, Peter, at the wheel, surveyed them. "What a pair you are—living in this garden of Paradise—thinking it is going to last forever. Babes in the Wood. But I love you—"

"It is going to last forever, isn't it, Denis? And don't be a cynic, Peter."

Driving on, Peter asked himself if there was any reason why he shouldn't be a cynic. Life at the moment didn't look any too good to him. He was facing the world with a brave front, but he was lonely with a loneliness which was almost unbearable. No one knew what the taking of his house had meant. Humiliation? Yes. But more than that. A tearing up by the roots. And he might have held it if he had not fought for Tyndall. But he had had to fight. The thing had been a Cause. Not a Capitulation.

The road he followed led past Boone Musgrave's orange groves. Few of the trees had recovered from the blighting frost, but enough were in bloom to lend to the air their sweetness, and to shine like spectral bouquets in the illumined night.

And it was among those spectral trees that he saw, suddenly, something moving—a tiny creature, springing up. Boone's cat. And back of the cat—wraithlike as she had been on that night when he had first seen her—Mary.

He stopped his car. The act was instinctive. He did not know what he meant to do. He knew only he could not go on. . . .

No, he could not. He must see her. Talk to her. Tell her. . . . He got out of his car, and, running without a sound in his soft shoes, approached her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The Master of the House

TO MARY, PETER'S voice, breaking into the stillness of the night, seemed a continuation of her thought.

He had called her name, and she had turned to see him running lightly towards her.

"I thought you were a ghost," he said, as he came up. "Pretty late, isn't it, for lovely ladies to be out?"

"I've been to Margaret's—"

"I hope I didn't frighten you."

"No. I didn't see you until you called, and then I knew your voice."

"I was passing in my car. I stayed through the storm with Jinks and Denis. Jinks gave me your message. And—I'm glad of this opportunity to tell you . . . I don't want you to worry about my affairs. Things aren't as bad as they sound. Being evicted in Florida is very different from being evicted in the slums of New York. We are having a grand time, Tyndall and Cindy and I. I am cook, and Tyndall washes the dishes, and we don't have to dress for dinner." He laughed. "As you see me now, I am all day, except when I am making my rounds. We're in Denis' cabana at the end of the island, where he took Jinks for their honeymoon."

It seemed to her incredible that he should be laughing in the face of his desperate situation.

"It's not a laughing matter for me, Peter. Not when my husband is to blame for it."

"He was within his rights."

"No one has a right to be—cruel. I told him so—tonight."

"What did he say?"

"That he can't change—and he won't—." Her voice wavered.

Peter came closer, "Look here, you mustn't have me on your mind. Men do

these things every day. It's all in the game. Boone worships the ground you walk on. Let it go at that. We don't love people for their virtues. We love them because of the image we've set up in our minds. As long as we keep that image intact, nothing else matters."

She thought: "The image in my mind was—Lucifer—." Sweeping down upon her was the vision of Boone climbing her balcony. The memory brought a need of his defense. "In many ways, he is—wonderful."

"Then take him for what he is to you. It's the only way to happiness."

"Happiness? Shall I ever find it? Perhaps it's my fault. Perhaps I expect too much of life—" She lifted her hand and brushed the hair back from her forehead, staring at him, "Do I ask too much of life, Peter?"

"No—only—life's a queer thing. Twists and turns."

A long silence. Then Peter said, "May I say something to you, Mary? I'm not sure that I should say it, but I want you to know—It's about Lou Gorman. The night of my party, I didn't ride with her to Tampa."

"Then why did she say you did?"

"Because she wanted to break things up between us. I've told you because I think there's nothing that so makes us lose faith in life as to lose faith in others. And now that I've told you, it's the end of it. If I could go away, so that my affairs need not trouble you, I would. But I've got to stay. It's something obstinate in me that won't let go of Tyndall and Cindy, and the rest. Perhaps I'm a fool. I've said it a thousand times. But this is my country, and these are my people. We've got to hang together—"

There was quality in his voice—a dogged, driving quality—that stirred her to the depths. "I'm glad you're that kind of a—fool—"

In the silence which followed, her words seemed to hang between them like something bright at which they dared not look. Then Peter said, huskily, "I mustn't stay, Mary." For a moment their fingers clung together, then he was gone, and presently she heard the sound of his car far away.

The house, when she reached it, was still and dark. She entered it stealthily, and, having achieved the safety of her room, undressed hurriedly and got into bed. She was glad of the warmth, for her slippers had been soaked by the storm-drenched undergrowth, and the hem of her skirt was draggled.

The illumined figures of her little clock showed the hour. Midnight had passed while she had adventured. It was almost unbelievable that so much could have happened in those short hours. She had seen Margaret, but, more

than that, she had seen Peter, and had her faith in him restored.

Yet, he was out of her life, and she loved Boone. She must never stop loving him. It would be dreadful if some day she found herself fearing her husband and hating him for what he had done to Peter. Dreadful. . . .

Her heart began to beat madly beneath the covers. She reached for a bottle which stood on her bedside table. It touched a glass and tinkled.

Boone's voice came from the next room, "Is anything the matter?"

"No. I couldn't sleep. I'm taking a tablet—"

His light went on, and presently he appeared in the doorway, wrapped in a blue robe. "Sure everything is all right—?"

"Yes."

Seeing him there beside her, her fears fled. "Sit down and talk to me." She pulled the chain of her lamp, and he brought a little pink silk padded jacket. "You'd better put it on. The air is cold after the storm."

With her hand in his, he asked, "What kept you awake?"

She wanted to tell him everything that had happened. Yet she dared not risk it. Dared not impose any problems on his mood of tenderness, of solicitude.

She said: "Boone, I've been thinking—. Let's go to England as soon as we can get ready. I'd love it—a cool, nice little country place—with hawthorne hedges, and larks in the meadows."

"What could we do about your father?"

"Take him with us."

He shook his head, "Three's a crowd."

She considered that. "He might stay with Jinks and Denis. He adores her. It's because she's not afraid of him—"

"And you are?"

"Yes. I'm afraid of everything."

His grasp on her hand tightened, "Afraid of me?"

"Sometimes."

"Tonight—?"

"Yes."

“Yet you know I love you. You know that, Mary—”

“Yes.”

“Then judge me by that—not by any other standard.”

She turned towards him, her lovely face earnest under the light. “Boone, I’ve sometimes thought that you and I need more than we have to make our love complete. I sometimes wish that we believed in—God.”

“Why believe in anything but each other?”

As always, she was swept on the tide of his strong emotion. Yet, even as his arms upheld her, she had a sense of something like despair, that he so little understood her.

After a little, he laid her back on her pillows. “I’m off for St. Pete tomorrow morning. You’d better have breakfast in bed, and run down to Mother’s for luncheon.”

“But you’ll come in before you go?”

“If you’re awake—yes.”

He bent and kissed her. “Warm enough?”

“You might shut the window.”

Boone, crossing the room, stumbled over one of Mary’s slippers. He stooped to pick it up, then uttered a startled exclamation, “It’s wet, Mary!”

Panic seized her.

“I went out,” she faltered, “to see your mother.”

“What for?” sharply.

“I wanted to talk to her.”

“About me—?”

“Yes.”

He laughed aloud. Not a pleasant laugh. “So the two of you have been tearing me to pieces. You’ve been telling my faults, and she’s been telling you to put up with them.”

“It wasn’t quite—that. Boone—I love you. But I couldn’t feel you were fair—”

“About Peter Ferry? It all comes back to that, doesn’t it?”

It did come back to that. And suddenly she found herself telling Boone the truth—telling him all that had happened, with a decisiveness that was no less amazing to him than to herself. She told him that she had seen Peter. “He was passing, and stopped to tell me that I was not to blame you. That you were within your rights. He defended you, Boone. . . .”

“Against my wife—my lovely, loyal wife—”

“Boone—don’t look at me that way. You’ve got to see you’re—wrong—”

She stopped. For Boone had left her. She heard his soft slippers padding down the stairs.

She had been sitting up in bed as she arraigned him, hugging the little jacket about her, but now she dropped back on her pillows. She had a sense not of exhaustion, but of exhilaration.

After a little, a reaction set in. Her heart felt big in her breast, so big that it made breathing difficult. Yet she would not call for help. A push of the button, and old Julia would come to her. But she wanted no one.

Then, suddenly, startlingly, through the stillness of the house sounded the crash of chords, the thunder of mad music . . . waking the echoes . . . bringing Julia, half-dressed, to Mary’s door: “My lan’, Miss Mary, what’s all the noise about?”

“Mr. Boone’s playing. He’ll stop presently. . . .”

But he did not stop. Julia went about picking up Mary’s clothes. She made no comment when she found the wet shoes. Things were, apparently, beyond her knowledge.

Hamilton tapped at the door, and Julia opened it.

“May I come in, Mary?”

“Yes.”

“What does Boone think he’s doing at this hour of the night? Nobody can sleep with that racket.”

“It’s his house, Daddy.”

Hamilton went away grumbling, and there was no cessation of that torrent of sound. It was as if Boone defied them all with a demoniac challenge—as if the keys said for him, “This is my house—where I am master—. Do you hear me? I’ll keep you awake—because I’m awake. No one shall sleep. Do you hear? Up there in your room? I’m the master!”

At last Mary could stand it no longer.

“Give me my dressing-gown, Julia.”

Mary, descending the stairs, wondered why she was doing it. What should she say? And how should she say it? When she came into the living-room, she stood for several seconds on the threshold. Boone’s head was thrown back, his dark hair streaming, his face white, as he pounded the keys.

And all at once, Mary felt that she understood. Understood the warring forces that fought for mastery. Understood, too, her husband’s need for help. . . .

She spoke from the threshold, “Boone—”

He turned and saw her. She was wrapped in her old dressing-gown, her hair in disorder. It was as if she had brought to him no appeal of loveliness. As if, indeed, she had discarded everything but the bare beauty of her compassionate spirit.

He did not say a word as she approached him. She dropped on her knees beside him, and laid her cheek against his hand. He drew her up, and hid her face in his breast: “Mary—I’m sorry—”

Never before had Boone Musgrave said those words to any human being. Mary trembled in his arms, but not with fear. She was shaken by his storm, but was serene in the midst of it. She did not know how strength had come to her, but it had come. It was a moment of dedication. A high moment, always to be remembered.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

An Island of Dreams

PETER'S boat was christened the next night after supper. Cindy did it, smashing a ginger-ale bottle over its bow. She smashed three bottles before she was satisfied, and so it happened that "The Wanderer" was thrice christened.

"Why 'The Wanderer'?" Denis asked. "Isn't that a bit bromidic?"

"So many others of the same name? Perhaps. But it fits my mood. I'd like to sail away tomorrow and never stop—"

"We should miss you—" Jinks told him, "a lot—"

Peter smiled at her. "That's good of you. If anything would keep me here, it's you and Denis."

He was broiling a steak over charcoal in a brazier. The sun had gone down, and the pale flames of the charcoal were blue in the deepening shadows of the night. The steak was a windfall—Peter's butcher had had a child with whooping cough, and was paying the bill with choice cuts.

Becky sniffed the air with anticipation. The old dog had borne transplanting to the house of the beach philosophically. Where Peter went, there she went also. His fortune was hers. When the rest were fed, she would have the steak bone. Beyond that, she had no fears. Her future was in her master's hands. He would not fail her.

Tyndall, making toast over a bed of glowing driftwood, passed it on to Jinks who buttered it.

"Everybody ready?" Peter asked.

There was a salad, crisp from the icebox, and Jinks had brought a pie. On the driftwood coals, the coffee-pot rocked and sang.

It was a comfortable meal, and Peter was soothed by the good company in which he found himself—Denis, of course, Damon to his Pythias, Jonathan to his David. Jinks, Denis' second self, lending her good sense and sympathy. Tyndall, growing daily more self-reliant, proving himself a helpful comrade. Proving himself more than that—a loyal and worshipping subject.

And Cindy, curled now in the corner of Peter's arm, being fed bits of toast and smaller bits of steak, Cindy was a new experience. For it had gradually come about that Peter, handier than Tyndall in the care of the child, had filled, as far as any masculine might, the place of her mother. He regulated her diet, looked after her manners, and heard her prayers at night.

"I want to say them now," Cindy said, suddenly.

"Say what?"

"My prayers—"

Peter protested, "But this isn't the time."

"Denis did."

"That was thanks for food."

"For toast?"

"Yes."

"For beefsteak?"

"Yes."

"And salad?"

"Yes—For everything."

Cindy found the subject fascinating, and went on with "Salt?", "Pepper?"

Jinks broke in with: "Mary's going abroad—next week. She came over this morning to tell us."

"Rather sudden, wasn't it?" Peter was glad Jinks could not see his face. He felt it must be stiff and distorted.

"She asked if her father might stay with us until she and Boone come back. They're afraid to have him travel—"

"It will be a burden for you—"

"It will mean a lot of money—enough to take care of a dozen of our families. Denis hates the idea."

Denis said: "I hate the idea for you, Jinks. You've sacrificed enough already."

Jinks flamed, "I've sacrificed nothing. I've never been as happy, Denis—and you know it."

In the dark he drew her to him. “I do know it. But Hamilton is selfish. He imposes on you, darling.”

From the cabana came the ring of the telephone. Tyndall, going in, brought back a message for Peter:

“Mrs. Margaret Musgrave wants you to come right over.”

Peter got his things together, and returned to the beach, “I won’t be long. Stick around, won’t you, ‘till I get back?”

Whirling on through the darkness, with Becky on the seat beside him, Peter had Mary on his mind. Since his talk with her last night, he had been gripped by despair. To have seen her and talked with her had opened his wounds. It seemed to him that he bled. . . .

Oh, if only things had worked out differently! If only he might have brought her to his boat, to steer by the stars to a little island he knew—an island he had bought in the years of his affluence, and had fitted up with a small pavilion where he and his guests might go and bathe in the deep solitudes, and carry hampers for their hilarious luncheons and teas. When he lost his money and had no guests, the island had ceased to draw him. Yet there it was, set about by the sparkling waters of the bay, its palm trees green now with their new growth, its bright birds flying, its white sands waiting. A kingdom of his own? What had Boone that was better to give her?

He found Margaret lying on a couch.

“In pain, my dear?” he asked, and knelt beside her.

“Yes. But it isn’t that. It’s that Boone’s going away—and I can’t stand it —”

He had never seen her lose her self-control. But now she lost it, weeping bitterly.

Peter said: “Why not tell him?”

“No. I mustn’t hold him back. He was here this morning—I didn’t let him know how I felt about it.”

Peter, busy with a hypodermic, said, “As soon as they leave, I’m going to send you up to Baltimore. You can’t suffer like this—”

“If I go, you must go with me.”

He promised, and stayed with her for some time. He wanted to call a nurse, but she would not. “Boone might find her here, and wonder—. I’ll wait—‘till he goes—”

When, at last, Peter returned to his cabana, he found Jinks and Denis still on the beach. He flung himself down beside them. The moonlight showed Becky like a sentinel on a hillock of sand, and “The Wanderer” drawn up beyond the reach of the tide.

Peter spoke of his patient. “I think Boone should be told. But Margaret won’t have it.”

Denis, too, was troubled: “If anything should happen—”

“She says she’ll write a letter—There’ll have to be an operation, of course, and one takes chances.”

When his guests were gone, Peter got his boat into the water, and steered for his island. He was mad with restlessness, and was glad of the rush and wash of the waves as he sped through them.

He had not visited the island for many months, and he was curious to see what changes had come to it. Perhaps it had been swept by one of the big storms. Perhaps some fisherman had found it, and had spoiled it by untidy occupation. When, at last, it showed itself in the distance, it was as a dark blur on the shining expanse of the sky. On closer approach, Peter saw its palm trees netted in a delicate tracery of black, and, as his keel scraped the sands, there were the lights and shadows beneath the trees, the breathless beauty of the solitudes, the singing murmur of wind and tides.

Beaching the boat, he followed the almost obliterated path, and came at last to the pavilion. Set rather high on a slope of sand, and commanding a view of the Gulf, it was a rustic affair, thatched with bamboo and overgrown with vines. With some difficulty, he got the door open, entered, and struck a match.

There had been, he remembered, candles in a metal box. He found one, lighted it, and surveyed his domain. There was less damage than he had feared. The reed furniture, in brilliant Chinese red, was unharmed, as were the grass rugs. As for the rest, there was Italian pottery, and some old bronze bowls.

In imagination, he saw Mary seated in one of the red chairs, with candles back of her—the seven-branched candlestick, with seven white candles. How she would love it! The little house set in the island, and the island set in the sea —!

He sat for so long and was so still that at last Becky, who had accompanied him, stuck her nose in his hand.

“All right, old girl.”

Peter blew out the candle, and left the house behind him. When he reached the beach, the waves of the incoming tide spread a thin veil of foam at his feet —

A wedding veil! Mary's!

Peter suddenly laughed aloud. She was the wife of Boone Musgrave. She was sailing next week on a great liner. And she would forget! It was inevitable that she should forget. . . .

And why should he remember? Why should he torture himself with the past? Life was before him. He was young, strong, and women loved him!

He spoke to Becky: "How about Baltimore, old lady?"

His voice seemed loud in that silent space. He climbed into his boat and put off, his motor put-putting.

When he was well away from it, he looked back at the island. It seemed to float now between earth and heaven. Silver sea beneath it, silver sky above. His island of dreams! Well, one could not dream always. It was time to wake up!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Sanctuary

IT was on the day before she sailed that Mary came to see Denis. She had made an appointment, and found him in his study in the church tower.

He rose to meet her. “This is a great pleasure.”

“Denis, I want a father confessor. But you don’t look the part.” She was smiling.

“I can’t help my looks.”

“I mean, you’re too young. You ought to be old, with a gray beard—and a brown habit.”

“Like the friar in Juliet?”

“Yes.” She sat down in the chair he placed for her on the opposite side of his desk. She wore a thin white dress, and a wide hat. “I want to talk a bit first about Peter’s protégé, Tyndall. There is no one else who can tell me what I might do for him.”

“You mean with money?”

“Yes. Boone gives me a generous allowance. I can’t possibly spend it. And I could give you something each month for Tyndall and Cindy.”

“I’m not sure he’d take it.”

“But he takes things from Peter.”

“That’s different. Peter has made him feel that his services are important, and that what he does about the place pays for his board and room, and Cindy’s.”

“But it’s a dreadful strain on Peter.”

“I’m not so sure. He loves the child.” He sat silent for a moment, his fingers tapping his blotter. Then he said: “It’s Peter you really want to help, isn’t it?”

A flush dyed her whiteness. “Yes.”

“He won’t need it. He’s going back to Baltimore—to take up his practice. And I can’t advise against it. It’s right, perhaps, that he should. But it’s rather a tragedy for Jinks and me. . . . And it’s a tragedy for Peter. When a man’s an idealist, he can’t get away from it. . . . When he kills his dreams he kills himself.”

She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, looking down. When she raised her eyes, she said: “There’s something else I’ve got to ask you—”

“Yes?”

“About—my husband.” Her flush was deep. “He needs—help—and I don’t know how to give it—”

Denis waited.

“He—does hard things that make people hate him, and he doesn’t want to be hated. He wants me to love him—yet he knows my mind can’t consent to his injustices. He can’t change. And he suffers.” She lifted her hand with a little hopeless gesture. “I’m not sure I can make you see what I mean.”

“I do see.”

“His mother said that prayer might help. But I don’t know how, Denis.”

“Prayer is just—asking. . . .”

Not even to Jinks did Denis tell all that was said in that hour with Mary. A priest is a priest, and not even to a beloved wife may he reveal the secrets of the sanctuary.

But this he did say to Jinks that night. “Boone doesn’t know it, but he’s lost her. She doesn’t know it, either. She says, ‘I love him’ to convince herself. But she’s going to see it through, and she may save him.”

Jinks said: “Darling parson, you’re so hopeful.”

She was looking over the linen which Mary had sent down for Hamilton’s use. “She’s added a lot for us,” Jinks told her husband. “Did you ever see such towels?” She laid a row in front of him. “She’s going to hire old Doady to do our laundry. We shall be so dressed up, we won’t know ourselves.”

He sighed, “I’d rather scrimp by ourselves than borrow other people’s affluence.”

Jinks leaned across the towels and kissed him, “Darling—nothing can come between us.”

“Thank God—”

The next day Hamilton came to them. He was given a room on the first floor, but he was rarely in it. He liked to be with Jinks. He followed her about, and found much interest in her activities.

He told her one night, as they sat waiting for Denis to come to dinner: “You do it very well, parson’s wife.”

“Do what?”

“Play your part. I didn’t know all it involved. I thought it was just—burning candles at high altars.”

“We burn our candles before any altar. Denis says that when I fix a feeding bottle for a black baby, it is frankincense and myrrh.”

Hamilton said: “I’ve made out a list.”

“Of what?”

“The things you’ve done today.”

He read it, while she sat with her chin cupped in her hand and listened. “Brought breakfast to carping invalid . . . made a pudding for the family dinner . . . showed a bunch of black mothers about babies’ diet . . . made soup for sick woman . . . helped a bunch of white mothers plan their budgets . . . made salad for lunch of carping patient who wants garlic in the dressing. . . .” A smile lighted his sardonic countenance. “Read aloud to carping patient . . . gave ‘ditto’ assistance with jigsaw puzzle . . . packed baskets for the poor with the church committee . . . made tea for carping patient. . . .”

She laughed a little, “Every day isn’t like that.”

“Every day is just as busy.”

“Yes.”

With her chin still cupped in her hand, she reflected that it didn’t leave much time for Denis. But then, Denis understood—and each night she walked with him in the garden.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Fatted Calf

A WEEK later, Peter left with Margaret for Baltimore. He did not burn his bridges behind him. It would be necessary, he felt, before he made a final decision, to look about him—to discuss with his adoring relatives certain matters of finance—to let them kill, as it were, the fatted calf; to rejoice in the return of the prodigal from the husks and swine.

For that was the way they would look at it. He, Peter, had lost caste by the very fact of his simplicities. They could not understand a state of mind which had to do with residence in a cabana, and a practice that did not pay. Peter reflected that perhaps they were right—civilization had progressed as man had set up for himself certain standards. Yet one wondered whether any of those standards had to do with the twelve apostles, or the One who was a carpenter.

Before he left, he said to Jinks: "Why should you and Denis stay and buck up against all this? Think what a church he could have in a thriving town!"

"Peter—look me in the eye! You're not in earnest?"

"I never expect to look anyone in the eye after this," he told her, with a touch of bitterness. "I'm a quitter, and I know it. But you needn't think I'm going to change my mind about it."

"Does Margaret know you are planning to stay up there?"

"Not yet. I'll break it to her later."

"But what will she do for a doctor—?"

He shrugged, "Find one—"

Jinks had blazed, suddenly, "Don't be so hard-boiled, Peter. You know you'll hate having Margaret in any other hands. You'll hate leaving this town to the doctors that are in it. So stop lying about it—"

"I'm not lying, Jinks. I'm facing what the moderns call—reality—"

Jinks was scornful: “As if the moderns knew! See what a mess they’ve made of things.”

With Margaret safe, at last, in the wide-windowed room in the big hospital in Baltimore, Peter went about his own affairs. There must be, the doctors assured him, several days for observation. Most of the older men had known Peter’s thundering grandfather; some of the younger ones had been Peter’s classmates. They all told him how well he was looking, and how glad they were to have him back. “Why not stay on? There’s a place waiting for you, Ferry.”

Peter laughed and said, “Why not?” He walked about the hospital and found it grand and gorgeous.

He said to Margaret, “It’s perfection isn’t it?”

And Margaret said: “I miss my orange groves—”

Peter left her and went home to Aunt Judy’s.

His Aunt Judy was a very splendid and stable person. Peter was staying at her house, and she was giving him a dinner party. “I hope you have the right clothes, Peter.”

“I might come in my jersey and shorts—”

“Darling—you don’t mean that you dined—that way?”

“Darling, I do. Loads of times. And it was grand.”

“You’re joking.”

He kissed her. “You’re such a blind bat, Aunt Judy.”

“A bat?”

“A darling bat. Your eyes are open only after dinner.”

She was puzzled. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Night-life . . . nice mid-Victorian night-life. No jazz—no speakeasies. Big dinners, good talk, cards—cotillions—”

She said, again, helplessly, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Aunt Judy lived in one of the old houses on St. Paul Street. It had a wall about it that enclosed a garden. The wall would stand until Aunt Judy died, and then wall and garden and old house would die, too, and be reincarnated in an apartment house on the same site. Peter, if he planned his life from now on according to Aunt Judy’s pattern, would inherit the property. She had told him

so. “Otherwise, it will have to go to Channing. I won’t have my money spent in the tropics where there’s nothing but blacks and bananas.”

He told her there were more things than that, but she wouldn’t believe it. He even told her about the island, and, for a moment, she was thrilled by the romance of it—the adventure. Aunt Judy was the only sister of Peter’s father. He had been the dreamer, inheriting a spiritual side from the thundering grandfather, but Aunt Judy was a throw-back to some of the remote and more practical grandfathers who had had an eye on the main chance. She had married money, and was glad of it. She was now a widow, and had made a will. She had no children, but she had two nephews. Peter was her favorite, but Channing had been more acquiescent. He, too, was a throw-back, the child of another brother. And he, too, had his eye on the main chance, but he wished no harm to Peter. Aunt Judy had enough for both of them. And he was sure of his share. Aunt Judy had told him, “If Peter doesn’t come back, you’ll get it all. If he does come, I’ll divide it between you.”

The prodigal’s party was to be a big one. All the grown-ups were to be in the great dining-room, the younger generation at tables set around the sides of the ballroom. Not many town houses have ballrooms in these days, but Aunt Judy hated entertaining in hotels and clubs. Her dining-room was hung with portraits, and in the ballroom were half a dozen old masters. There was a great deal of heavy furniture, yards of velvet carpets, bric-a-brac and bronzes, cabinets with collections—for Aunt Judy’s husband had collected everything from silver wine-tasters to over-blown rum bottles.

Lou Gorman was among the guests who were invited to the dinner. Aunt Judy liked her, and took it for granted that the affair with Peter was still on. Lou had not told her otherwise. “If Peter comes back,” the two women had said to each other, with an air of conspiracy.

Now that Peter was back, Aunt Judy argued, why shouldn’t he marry Lou? She belonged, it is true, to that younger generation which Aunt Judy neither understood, nor wanted to understand. But she belonged, too, to that entrenched social group into which Peter must marry. Lou, as Peter’s wife, would hold him where he ought to be.

Peter was, Aunt Judy told him, to sit at the head of the big table in the dining-room.

He protested: “Let me be my age, Aunt Judy. . . .”

“Just for tonight, darling. Channing can do the honors in the ballroom, but you’re the hero of the occasion.”

“Channing will hate me—”

“Why should he? He’s always known you’d come back.”

So that was the way they had looked at it—that he would come!

On the day before the dinner, Peter wandered into the dining-room, and considered the portraits that hung on the walls. Substantial men, all of them, good-looking. More than one showed on their well-shaped heads hair that matched Peter’s ruffled locks. Peter liked, best of all, the picture of his thundering grandfather, and a smaller picture of his own father. The thundering grandfather had a thatch of white curls, and a keen blue eye. He was lean and tall, and had been done by Sargent in riding clothes, with a crop in his hand, and a dog that might have been Becky’s forebear. So Peter had often seen him. So they had often ridden together. Sometimes they had ridden to the houses of patients, clattering down the cobble stones of a side street, and Peter had held his grandfather’s horse while the old man went in.

Peter’s father had been painted in his officer’s khaki just before he went overseas. His leanness was a youthful slenderness; his hair had in it Peter’s gold. His blue eyes lacked the keenness of the thundering grandfather. They looked down on Peter with something in them that brought vivid remembrance. His father, on the night of his sailing for France, had laid his hand on his son’s shoulder, and, with just the look that the artist had caught in the picture, had said: “Life will give you a lot of jolts, old man—but don’t ever let it beat you—”

That had been all, except at the very last when he had caught the boy in his arms for a moment and held him close, and then torn himself away—!

Peter had his father’s record of service—a wonderful record. And he had died to save men. Peter wouldn’t often let himself think of it. He hated to think of that beautiful young face in the hell of those last moments.

Yet, had it been hell? Looking now into his father’s eyes, he was inclined to believe it had not. For his father had known that his men were safe—!

And here was he of the third generation, letting those others down—that grandfather who had clattered over the cobblestones to that little house on the side street, and, finding something there that was dire and dreadful, had stayed awake for two days and two nights until the dreadfulness was over; that father who had made his way through barbed wire—No, he wouldn’t think of it . . . !

Son of one, and grandson of the other, he was choosing the safe and easy path—suffering, as it were, Aunt Judy’s soft embrace, sinking back against the feather pillow of her planning for him.

She had said at breakfast, “I’ve been talking to Rives Gordon. He’s giving up his practice. He’s had a stroke. It would be a wonderful berth for you, Peter.”

“I don’t want his practice.”

She showed her astonishment. “Why not?”

“A lot of fashionable women with inhibitions—”

“Inhibitions? I hate all those new words, Peter.”

Peter let it go at that. “Anyhow, I don’t want it.”

“What do you want?”

“A wider field. I haven’t quite decided.”

“But it would be suicide, Peter, not to take what Rives offers.”

So this was what he had come back to—to Rives Gordon and his kind! Well, he wouldn’t. There were those others—colleagues who fought as his grandfather had fought—men who worked with a fierce energy, not patting themselves on the back, or giving themselves credit—men who worked for the work’s sake, and the satisfying of the urge within them.

Yet here was Aunt Judy, appraising him, ready with her unanswerable arguments—ready, too, with her blare of trumpets at the feast that was to follow.

He tucked his arm in hers and kissed her. “When do we eat?”

“But, Peter, about Rives?”

“I’ll think it over.”

She warned him, “Don’t think too long, darling.”

Luncheon being announced, Lou Gorman appeared with Channing. Peter, not having seen Lou since he had called her “a cat,” felt that the moment was awkward. But Lou swung up to him, and, much to his astonishment, gave him a peck on both cheeks. It was done, he assumed, with a view to the effect on his aunt and his cousin. “Hello, old thing,” Lou said. “You’re looking lovely —”

She was looking very lovely herself, and knew it, in something rather crisp and summery—pale green with a sash. She used no rouge on her cheeks, and her clear skin, her reddened lips, her lacquered black hair, gave her the look of a porcelain piece on a parlor mantel.

"I had to come over," she said, "as soon as Channing told me."

"That I was back? I came up with Margaret Musgrave."

"But you're going to stay?"

"Aunt Judy says I am—"

"Darling Judy! And she's giving you a party. I've got a new dress for it. At short notice. Her invitations are only twenty-four hours old, but everybody's coming."

They talked then, the four of them, about the dinner. Lou protested against Peter's place among the graybeards. "It will be so stupid for him, Judy."

Aunt Judy, who hated to be called by her first name but endured it because it was useless to protest with these casual youngsters, said: "I know what I'm doing. Peter's to be the head of the house. Why shouldn't he be at the head of the table?"

Channing said: "Don't think my feelings are hurt, old fellow. I'd hate to be the heir presumptive—or is it the prince consort?"

Peter reflected, as they drank their consomme, that life would be easier if he could take things as Channing took them. Channing had no urge for humanity—no urge for anything. He and Peter had started life on the same plane financially, and Channing still had an unimpaired income. He lived the life of a butterfly, and would have been bored to death to follow a profession. He nursed a hopeless passion for Lou—yet in love-making, as in everything else, he was somewhat passive. Lou had been won by the more vivid and less adoring Peter. Yet when Peter was away, she went around with Channing. Now and then she let him hold her hand, or gave him one of her cool kisses.

After the luncheon, Lou did not try to see Peter alone. She was content to wait. There were things yet to be told about Peter's coming. Aunt Judy was, apparently, taking it for granted that he would stay. As for Margaret Musgrave, Peter had not come merely on her account. There was something back of it, something that had torn him from his moorings. She said, as she left him, "First dance, Peter, for old time's sake?"

Peter, acquiescing, reflected that he might as well take Lou with the rest of it. She was no worse than the others. Perhaps none of them were so bad. Perhaps he had listened too much to Denis, who preached that man did not live by bread alone. . . .

Going back that afternoon to Margaret, he said: "I came through the old part of town. There's something attractive in it—"

But Margaret said again, “I miss the orange groves—”

But Peter had meant what he said. There was charm in the old town. There were, to be sure, those rows of small brick houses with white stone steps that had to be scrubbed every morning. Stuffy little houses with shades pulled down against the sun, their stiff parlors, when you entered them, swimming in a soft green darkness. Yet the people who had been born, lived, married and died in those houses had been, for the most part, content. There was no doubt about it. On Saturdays they went to market; on Sundays to church. Their children went to the nearest public school. Most of the mothers, being Marylanders, were good cooks. Most of the fathers, being Baltimoreans, were sober and industrious. Not so bad, any of it. Better than that jazzy, shouting crowd he had once gathered about him in his house on the Gulf.

Yet, granting for a moment that, like some modern Pied Piper, he had played, and they had listened, to a tune which took them far away from these city streets to the shining skies and the wide, wide seas? Would they want to live on his island set in its solitudes? In his cabana on the beach? Would they thrill, as he had thrilled, to the beauty about them? The Gulf and the bayou, the palms and the orange groves, the gray moss, the flame vine? The jungle?

Even thinking of it brought a nostalgia that threatened to overwhelm him. He said to Margaret, “I’m homesick.”

“In a little while,” she said, and smiled at him, “we’ll go back—together.”

He dared not tell her that if he went, it would be to return again to this old city. She must be stronger before he broke the news. She was to be operated on the day after the dinner. Peter would be with her through it all. She had written to Boone. “In case anything happens.”

“Nothing will happen,” Peter told her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

A High Mountain

AUNT JUDY'S dinner table was a thing of satin damask, heavy plate, high candles, cut-crystal bottles, spun sugar bonnets spilling pink roses, men in bottle-green livery, a butler who had served three generations of her husband's family. What Aunt Judy had received as wedding presents in the late eighties sufficed for her now. Her elegancies had nothing new about them. She rather distrusted newness in belongings and background.

To Peter, at the head of the table, came a vision of that last feast with Jinks and Denis—himself in a short-sleeved jersey, the blue flame of the charcoal fire, the blue clearness of the twilight, the smell of broiling beefsteak, the aroma of boiling coffee and of buttered toast. Well, each to his own! He could not think of Jinks and Denis in the elaboration of this formal service, though neither of them would have been ill at ease. But they would have felt held and shackled within these walls, missing, as he missed, the breadth and sweep of open country.

The woman at his right was saying, "You look like your father, Peter."

Peter's gaze followed hers to the portrait. "I haven't his eyes—"

She said, "I remember him. . . . He was—different—"

"How—different—?"

"Oh—something of a dreamer—a darling—." She laughed a little, yet Peter saw that her eyes were suffused. "I was in love with him a thousand years ago—"

"Really?"

"Before he married your mother. When I found she was the one he cared for, I thought my heart was broken. But hearts don't break, do they?"

For a moment Peter did not answer. He was stirred to the depths. Here was a woman, thirty years after, whose eyes were wet when she spoke of that early love. Somehow he knew that it had lasted. That the man in the portrait had meant more to her than her husband.

Yet she was happily married, had children, and a serene brow. No, hearts did not break. Life went on. One married, had children—and only at such moments as these, remembered. Peter wondered if thirty years from now, seeing the portrait of Mary Hamilton, his heart would tremble.

Towards the end of the dinner, he made a little speech. Aunt Judy asked him for it. “Tell them how glad you are to be back,” she urged from the other end of the table. So Peter stood up, and everybody was silent. To the woman at his side, he seemed a reincarnation. Her eyes went again to the portrait—

Peter said: “It’s grand to see you all again.” And sat down. He did it with such ease, and so smilingly, and was so handsome with his ruffled head and his sun-browned face, that they forgave the brevity of his address, and clapped and laughed, and went back to their eating.

And when dinner was ended, Peter roamed into the ballroom to find Lou Gorman. He had seen her for a moment when she arrived—and had again been struck by her porcelain-like effect, set off tonight by ivory satin and carved red coral.

He had the first dance with her, and found it rather satisfying. She said little, except at the end to draw a breath of content, “Like old times, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

Then Channing came to claim her, and Peter danced with five other girls, and came back to Lou. And again she was silent until the very end. Then she said, “Do you still hate me, Peter?”

He danced for a moment in silence. “All that belongs to another incarnation.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been born again. Into a new world. Your world, Lou. Aunt Judy’s.”

She stopped dancing. “Let’s talk about it out on the terrace.”

The terrace was reached through the long French windows of the ballroom, and led down to the walled garden. There were statues in the garden, placed there before Aunt Judy’s time, with an Apollo in the foreground with a rose vine growing over him.

Lou and Peter sat on a bench which faced Apollo. The lights from the street shone over the wall.

Lou said, without preamble: “I was a cat, Peter.”

“It made no difference.”

“You might have married Mary.”

“No,” he said. “It was not written in the stars.”

He was smiling, but there was something bleak about him. Something in his voice. It came to her then how changed he was. How remote. If she won him now, it would be a Peter utterly unlike the youth she had danced with on the moon-lit sands.

Lou found herself, suddenly, a bit sorry. “You’ve decided to come back?”

“Undoubtedly. Aunt Judy wants it—”

“Peter, where is Mary Hamilton?”

“Abroad.”

“With Boone?”

“Yes.”

She wanted to ask more questions, but was aware that this was not the moment. She found, too, that her usual tricks were not suited to the occasion. One couldn’t flirt with a stone statue. She might as well have tried her arts on —Apollo—! Yet she didn’t want to go back to Channing and his platitudes, or to those other men who bored her. Peter with all his silences was the best company she knew. The only company she cared for.

She said something of the kind, almost timidly, when at last they rose to go in. “I want awfully to be friends, Peter.”

“Of course.”

“Don’t say it that way.”

“How shall I say it?”

“As if it—mattered—”

“Nothing really matters, except that I hate it here, with those street lights shining over the wall, making all this a—prison; and with those portraits inside to tell me I’m a rotter—”

“Oh, don’t be silly, Peter.”

“I’m not.”

“Let’s not quarrel about it. We’ll have one more dance, and then I’m going home. Do you remember when I was a child, I always saved the best piece of candy in the box for the last? Well, you’re the last best, darling—”

She laughed, but there was a shake in her voice. Peter, lonely and craving comfort, was moved by it. “Oh, come on,” he said. “You’re not going home—We’ll have a dozen dances, and then some, if you say so—”

They danced well together. Aunt Judy, watching them reflected that Lou would be another anchor to Peter’s wayward fancies. Lou had a dominant nature, though she managed to conceal it under a suave effect of femininity. But she got her own way. She would get it now, unless something unforeseen happened.

Peter, dancing, dancing—with Lou’s swinging ear-rings tapping against his cheek, with Lou’s ivory shoulders matching her ivory satin; with Lou’s expert slippers advancing and retreating in perfect accord with his even more expert patent leathers—found his spirits rising. After all—why not? Here was youth and gaiety, life at the old rhythm, the rhythm to which he had danced before he met Denis Colt and Mary Hamilton. Lou was a good sort—. Aunt Judy was prepared to play guardian angel to his somewhat uncertain future. . . .

Lou, breathing a little quickly, said, “Oh, Peter, it’s grand to have you here again—”

Peter went on dancing. But something had happened—the ballroom with its seething, colorful crowd faded out and left in its place a scene on a stairway, a girl looking down—and Lou saying, “Oh, Peter, it’s grand to see you—” and swinging on his hands, back and forth, and back again—!

It had all begun there . . . !

He danced Lou to the end of the room and released her. “I must be getting on,” he said. “Margaret Musgrave will be operated on at ten o’clock in the morning, and I’ll need some sleep.”

“But Peter—there’s going to be a breakfast—”

“Sorry—”

His tone was formal. Once more Lou was aware of the bleakness, and wondered what had happened. She knew better than to try to hold him. Time enough to try other tactics. She met him on his own ground. “I shall want to hear how things come out with Margaret.”

“Of course. I’ll telephone.”

“I shall be sending her some flowers—”

“She’ll like that—.” He stood looking down at her. She was less porcelain-like than earlier in the evening. Dancing had ruffled her sleek plumage. Yet

she still preserved her look of a parlor ornament. Lou was nothing if not artificial. Yet there was about her lack of naturalness something finished and exquisite, like an ivory carving or an enamel inlay.

Peter, admitting her charms, refused to yield to them. He wanted to get away before he was further tempted. For Lou stood for the things he might have if he would reach out his hand and take them. He felt that this was a moment of decision. He had, as it were, been taken up on a high mountain and shown the world—Lou's world and Aunt Judy's!

"Good-night," he said, abruptly, and held out his hand.

"See you tomorrow, Peter?"

"Of course—"

He left her with Aunt Judy, and told the elder lady, "I'll have an early bath and breakfast, and get to the hospital." He kissed her warmly. Aunt Judy sighed a little when he left her. There was something about Peter—like his father. And there had been a look in his eyes . . . !

Some hours later, Peter talked with Margaret's doctors. The operation was over. Or, rather, there had been no operation. "Too late," they said. There was no criticism of Peter. He had done all that could have been done. Only an exploration such as they had made could reveal the true condition.

Peter went back to Margaret. She was still under the influence of the anaesthetic. A nurse sat beside her. The room was hot with June sunshine. Peter leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. He saw a blue sea, palms waving—

Margaret stirred. The nurse bent above her. But Margaret's eyes went beyond, to Peter—. She smiled at him, "All over?"

"Yes."

"You'll stay with me?"

"Yes."

She drifted off again, and Peter stood looking down at her. As soon as she was able . . . she would go home . . . after that, it would be only a matter of time . . . she would need help to bear it—

He laid her hand on the white cover and bent and kissed her. There was no doubt in his mind as to what he could do.

Well, after all, he had been taken up on a high mountain, and had seen—the world . . . !

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

"*Oh, Little Bad Boy*"

DENIS, greeting Peter, said, "Thank God—"

It all came out then—how much they had needed him. Other doctors had done their best, but Peter's life was linked with that of the town in an intimate and altruistic relation. His patients paid if they could; if they couldn't, their bills went unpaid. "You've no idea," Denis said, "what you mean to this old town."

"I'm glad to be back," Peter said, and meant it. His place was here.

Hamilton, talking it over with Jinks the day after Peter's arrival, said: "Now that he's back, it will give you a chance to get away. You're working too hard down in this hot hole. I've written Mary about taking you with me into the North Carolina mountains. She wants me to go, and you and I could have a few weeks of coolness."

Jinks shook her head, "I couldn't leave Denis."

"Denis ought to make you go—if he loves you enough to be—unselfish—"

"Unselfish—? You don't know the meaning of the word as Denis knows it."

There was a flame in Jinks' cheeks. She was tired and nervous. The summer without Peter had been a strain. She and Denis had tried to take his place with many of the charity patients. Giving their skill and time. And here was this sardonic creature talking of selfishness! She wondered if he ever thought of the comfort of others. If he took her away, it would be in the capacity of nurse! A staff on which to lean!

It was, therefore, with some amazement, that she heard what he had to say two weeks later. "Mary writes that she wants you and Denis to go with me to Blowing Rock—"

“Denis?”

“Yes. She’s sent the money. I knew it would make you happier.”

Jinks was in the kitchen, fixing milk bottles for her black babies. She sat down suddenly beside the table, and Hamilton saw that she was trembling. “If only Denis can go—”

“He can if he will—”

“But he’s needed here.”

“Not more than you need him—”

“I know—”

A week later, the three of them left for the mountains. Peter had entered into their plans. “Tyndall can help me, and Aunt Judy’s sent a check. She’s a grand old battle-axe—”

“Do you think you’ll ever go back, Peter?”

“To Baltimore? No. Let Channing be ‘prince consort,’ as he calls it.”

He had told that to Aunt Judy—in a long letter. And he had told it to Lou, and Lou had written him: “Oh, you idiot! You darling idiot! Do you think we’re going to take this as final? We can’t, and won’t, Peter. Aunt Judy’s heart is broken, and mine . . .”

But Aunt Judy’s heart was not broken, and Peter knew it. “I’d be miserable chucking my job, and if you can’t forgive me, I shan’t blame you. But I’m here to stay, and that’s the end of it. And no hard feelings?”

Aunt Judy, incredibly, had written back: “You are your father’s son, and that’s the best I can say for you. And God bless you, Peter.”

The checks she had sent he accepted for the use of others. He made only one concession—that old Nan should look after his house, and thus leave him and Tyndall free from domestic duties.

With Denis and Jinks away, Peter found himself more than ever busy. The heat was intolerable, and there were days when the dense humidity, the white glare of the hospital, and the drug-soaked atmosphere of sick-rooms seemed impossible to endure. With the night came the trade winds which bring surcease in the tropics. Peter would go home to find fresh linen laid out by old Nan; a good meal cooking, and Cindy, in her blue bathing suit, waiting for a frolic in the reviving waters of the Gulf. He would swim far out with her, and come back to lie on the sands, while she sang to him her silly songs. There was one, “I had a little nut tree—,” about the king of Spain’s daughter and a golden

pear! Peter liked to hear it, since, for some unknown reason, he identified the king's daughter with Mary Hamilton!

A little later, he would go in and dine on old Nan's delicious food, and have a talk with Tyndall; then again to his rounds. At the last, a dip in the sea —and to bed.

But sometimes, when he could not sleep, he would get into his boat, and, coming at last to his island, would seek his little house—and sit in the red chair, and light the candles.

He did not go often, for when he went, he met—Mary. Not the Mary who was the wife of Boone Musgrave, but the Mary he had seen under the lamp in the jungle—the Mary of the balcony—the Mary he had known before Boone put his spell upon her.

It was, he assured himself, a spiritual relation. As if some part of her, which did not belong to Boone, came, and they spoke together without words. And his tiredness would leave him, and he would go back refreshed and ready for the morning.

Often he stayed all night, stretched on the sands with the stars shining down on him. But always, awake or sleeping, he was aware of that mystic bond which brought Mary to him.

He spoke to no one of these trysts, but he knew that because of them he could meet loneliness, could fight disease and despair; because of them, life still had a savor; because of them, he had the strength to fight through.

He saw Margaret every day. He was glad she did not suffer. There were things he could give her. He hoped that before the days came when the potency of the drugs failed, she would drift away on the tides which touch Eternity.

But he had to tell Boone. He wrote to him, saying briefly that Margaret had asked him to take her case, stating the reasons for his decision to have the Baltimore doctors give an opinion. Presently their verdict, he offered to call in other experts if Boone required it. "I want, if you are willing, to stay with her. She leans on me, and asks so little. I think you will agree that she must not be disturbed by the truth. It can do no good, and she does not fear death. But she does fear pain, and I want the knowledge of its possibility kept from her."

Boone and Mary were in Switzerland when the news came. Their rooms looked out over snow-capped mountains.

Their letters were brought to them at breakfast. Boone read Peter's, and read it again. "Mother is ill," he said.

“Oh, Boone—”

“We must be getting back, Mary.”

“Is it as bad as that?”

He handed her the letter. When she had finished, she said, “I’m so sorry.”

Boone, his arms folded, his eyes bent moodily on the table, said: “So I shall lose her—the only woman who ever loved me—”

“Boone—”

“Oh, I know. You’re trying to make yourself think you—care. You’ve been perfect in your manner—in everything. You haven’t failed in a single wifely duty. But it isn’t enough. Just when I think I’ve got you, you’re gone. There’s nothing to take hold of. Now and then I sweep you along on the strength of my own passion so that, in spite of yourself, you give response. But it isn’t what you gave. You know it—and I know it, Mary.”

“Oh, Boone, why say such things?”

He leaned across the table and spoke with earnestness, “Because they’re true. I’m not blaming you. I am what I am. You want me different, and I can’t be. You want me—with wings—and I wasn’t born with them.”

His voice had grown harsh. He rose from his chair and stood frowning. “Perhaps I shouldn’t ask for love. I can do very well—without it—”

He stopped, and a shadow seemed to fall upon him.

“Boone—don’t—”

Her words were broken, and he at once came around to her. “I didn’t mean to make you cry. I know you’ve tried. You’ve been—sweet—.” He bent and lifted her up, “Hush, my darling—I didn’t mean it—”

It was in such moments that he was at his best. Yet since that night when she had talked to him of Peter, their relations had changed. Her knowledge of his ruthlessness had destroyed her sense of security. Now and then, as he stood with his back to her mirror, she had been aware of a shuddering sense of what it might mean if he turned that hidden face towards her, and she saw that which would strike her down with dread.

Three weeks later, Boone and Mary were back in Florida. The heat was intense. Margaret, folding her son in her arms, said, “You shouldn’t have brought Mary here at this time.”

“Business,” Boone said, briefly.

It had been thought best not to say that Peter had sent word to Boone. If Margaret guessed, she gave no sign. Boone sat by her every day. It was early in September when he said to her, “No one can ever be to me what you’ve been, Mother.”

“Not Mary?”

“No. She wants me perfect—”

“Not perfect. But fair and just.”

“What is justice? Was it just that you should suffer because you loved too much? That I should suffer for my father’s sins? Life is all one huge injustice. Then why blame me for being what life has made me?”

She did not argue, but later when Denis came, she said to him: “May I talk to you frankly? Peter hasn’t told me, but I know—that I shall soon be—going on. And when I go, I want you to be friends with Boone.”

“If he’ll let me.”

“I think he will. But even if he fights against you—don’t give him up—”

He saw her agitation, and promised. “Things will work out for him—if we believe it.”

She was soothed and comforted, and spoke presently of other things: “I have left a little money to your wife. Boone has given me more than I needed, and I have saved it. And it will make things easier for Jinks.”

“And for Jinks’—child—”

Margaret said, his hand in hers, “What a child it will be with you to father it!”

The hot days dragged on. Margaret’s strength ebbed slowly. Boone, meeting Peter one morning, said, “Will she suffer?”

And Peter replied: “I can save her that—”

Everyone seemed to be waiting. Mary, restless and not wanting to be alone, sat often with Jinks and sewed. Hamilton, as a rule, sat with them. He was very gentle with Jinks. He had, of course, on Mary’s return, moved back to Boone’s big house, but he came every day to see his little nurse, and brought things he had purchased for her—a painted rubber pussy cat, a bird whistle that warbled like a thrush in the garden, lavender water in a tall, green flask—

Mary said, “You never did things like this for me, Daddy.”

“You were never a parson’s wife.”

“What difference does that make? I’m your daughter.”

“I owe her a debt.”

“What debt?”

“She drove devils out of me.”

“Daddy—!”

He chuckled: “She did. Ask her if she didn’t.”

It seemed as if, indeed, Jinks had exorcised the evil spirit which had possessed him. Hamilton’s weeks in the atmosphere of the parsonage had shown him life at a new angle. A busy life, yet one in which there was no restless striving. There was simplicity, but no squalor. And there was faith. Faith in themselves, faith in others, faith in God. Hamilton, sharp-tongued and skeptical, was forced to concede that here was Something—Something that lifted the black shadows which had hung about him—Something that gave new hope, new courage.

He became, quite unexpectedly, interested in the activities of the town. Jinks, on rushing days, pressed him into service. He got bottles ready for the black babies, and helped pack the baskets for the poor. He developed, in fact, a technique in buying so perfect that he was often called upon by the women of Denis’ congregation for advice in the matter of selecting supplies. It was no uncommon thing to see him in a chain store, aware of bargains in molasses, or canned soups, or hominy, or fat bacon, which enabled the little welfare group to balance its budget.

“He’s an old darling,” Jinks told her husband.

“If anything could bring him back to normal, dear heart, it’s your sanity.”

Jinks was, in those days, a wonder—lighted by the incandescent flame of her high expectations. Mary watched her with a kind of envy. “To live one’s love like that—!” It seemed to her that Jinks and Denis had found the secret of successful marriage. Living vividly for themselves, they lived vividly for others. She wondered if the people who sought artificial stimuli in all sorts of dissipations ever touched such heights of experience as this little parson and his wife. Their sense of adventure expressed itself not so much in material things as in what might be called spiritual excursions into realms of sympathy and understanding that made them leaders among those stripped of hope and courage.

And working with these two was Peter. Peter, who had put behind him ease of living. With Jinks and Denis, he held the fort against the forces which

threatened to conquer man, and which man must conquer. He never spoke of these things to Mary, but she had eyes to see.

As for herself, she achieved, as the summer progressed, a kind of serenity which Boone seemed to share. They grew at least no farther apart. He sought her out always when she was in the house, and took her with him whenever he could.

Yet he was very busy. Mary read about him in the daily paper. He was deep in politics. Some of the politicians came to the house. Some of them had unsavory reputations. Some of them were linked with illicit undertakings. Mary hated to have Boone's name appear in the same columns. She spoke to him of it—somewhat timidly.

"You tend to your knitting, darling," he told her, "and I'll tend to mine."

"But Boone—"

"I'm not a Sunday School teacher, Mary. You know that. And some day I want to be governor. How'd you like to be the Governor's lady?"

She said, with some spirit, "Not if the men you had here tonight had to give you the office."

"I have to deal with all kinds."

They were walking in the orange grove after dinner. A little moon was a silver crescent in the sky. Beneath it hung a trembling star. Boone stopped and said: "Darling—you're like that moon. I never expect to reach up to you, but I love to see you shine."

It was all a great muddle. Mary tried not to think of it. But there came a time when she had to think.

Boone had asked her to entertain a man notorious for his law-breaking.

Mary had protested: "But Boone, how can you ask him?"

"He's useful, and it won't hurt us—"

"It will hurt us. And you're too big for things like this. You don't have to make such concessions—"

He had argued, but she had stuck to her point. The infamous man came, but Mary was not at the dinner. She had refused absolutely to attend. She had even taken her case to Margaret. "What would you do, Mother?"

"You must decide, Mary."

"But—"

“There will come a time when I won’t be here. You must learn to lean on your own strength.”

But to Boone, Margaret had said, “With such a wife—why should you risk it?”

“She must understand that these things are not for her to meddle in—”

“You’ll drive her from you, Boone.”

“I’ve never driven you. Should a wife love me less than my mother?”

The infamous politician came and went, and afterwards Boone went upstairs to Mary. She was reading in bed, and the lamp shone full upon her.

She laid down her book, “Everybody gone?”

He threw himself in a chair, “Yes. We missed you, Mary.”

“You did. Not those men.”

He sat looking at her, “What a strong little thing you are!”

“Obstinate?”

“No. Strong. To set yourself against me.”

“I am not setting myself against you. Only against things you ought to hate yourself for doing—”

There was a red flame in his cheeks. “Hate myself?”

“Yes. You might be so wonderful if you would—”

He rose and stood above her. “Wonderful? Would you love me if I let you clip my locks, like a Samson, and take all my strength from me—?”

“Boone, don’t be silly—”

“Would you—?”

Their eyes met, and the blood ebbed from her cheeks. He was asking her, she felt, to make a bargain—his surrender in exchange for what she had once given him. But could she give it again? Could one resurrect a thing that was—dead—?

As if he saw something in her eyes that told him the truth, he turned from her, and went to the window. Boots, the small cat, sat on the sill. Boone smoothed its fur, and it arched its back.

“I’m going to Miami tomorrow, Mary.”

“Oh . . . How long will you stay?”

“Perhaps a week—. There’s a September meeting of stockholders in one of my companies. I’ll motor, and take Alec with me. You won’t mind?”

“I shan’t be needing the car.”

His hand still stroked the little cat. “I’m sorry I tried to force Carter upon you. It won’t happen again.”

“Boone—come here.”

He went back to the bed and knelt beside it, laying his head on her pillow. She smoothed his cheek with her hand. “Oh, little bad boy,” she said, and her voice broke.

His hand reached up and caught hers, and after a while he kissed her.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Peter's Island

ON the day before Boone was expected home from Miami, Peter gave a birthday party for Cindy. It was a beach party, and old Nan baked the cake. Mary was asked, and came with her father. Her presence had been insisted upon by Cindy, who, meeting Mary at Jinks' one afternoon for tea, had said impressively to Peter, when he arrived to take her home, "Make her do it, Peter."

"Do what?"

"Come to my birf'day cake."

"Will you?" Peter asked Mary.

"Why not?"

And so it was settled, serenely and formally on the surface, but with Peter seething with excitement, and with Mary's pulses pounding.

She should not, she told herself, have let herself in for it. The farther away she was from Peter, the better for both of them. But surely there could be no harm in this—to give herself an hour or two with these old friends, when the alternative was the loneliness of her own great house, with Boone away and only Boots, the little cat, for company.

Arriving at Peter's cabana, Mary and her father found a low table set on the sands, with beach chairs about it, and with Cindy, in a filmy frock, presiding. The frock was blue, and had bows and a sash. It was a birthday present from Jinks and Denis. Mary had brought a doll, and Hamilton a cradle. Peter's gift was a pair of blue shoes. Tyndall had painted a small boat, and made a sail for it.

It was broad daylight when the cake was cut, so that the flames of the little candles were pale as moonstones in the heavy air. Cindy blew them out with a great breath. Then, with Peter guiding her hand, she cut pieces of cake for

everybody. Trembling and ecstatic, she was like a blue butterfly as she hovered over the cake.

Peter's brown hand, covering Cindy's plump fingers, as together they guided the knife, held Mary's eyes. How gentle he was, yet what things those hands had done! Things in surgery, when one false movement might cost a life! Since her return, she had been hearing much of Peter. Throughout the town, people adored him. And they hated Boone. His easy-going generosities had failed of late to balance his growing unpopularity. Tyndall's case, the taking away of Peter's house were among the many counts against him. Hamilton had not hesitated to retail what he had heard to his daughter. He was liking Boone less and less. "At least my faults never had to do with—usury—"

"Boone had a hard boyhood, Daddy."

"All the less reason for making it hard for others."

The cake cut and eaten, Cindy's father carried her off to bed. She came back shortly, in pink pajamas, to wish everyone, "Good-night." She had an extra kiss for Peter. "Thank you for my party."

When Cindy left them, Peter lay looking out over the water. His arms, bare and brown, were under his ruffled head. The strength of his young body showed through the lines of his jersey.

He said: "Have you heard about the hospital?"

Jinks said, "The new free wards?"

"Yes. You'll be interested in this, Mary. I have an Aunt Judy. She's a great old girl. Hard as nails on the surface, but soft when you reach her sympathies. I told her about our lack of room, and the darling sent a check. If we have any money left, we'll use it on our beach solarium. There's a perfect stretch of sand a mile or two south of here." He sat up, suddenly, "Would you like to see it? We can make it in a few minutes in my motor boat."

The invitation was a general one, and Hamilton declined, but Mary went, and Jinks and Denis. As "The Wanderer" swept out from the shore, so deeply was the water dyed by the red and gold of the sunset that the bow of the boat seemed to cut through molten metal. Mary, wrapped in a silk shawl of pale yellow, partook, as it were, of that golden brightness. She threw back her head, and her hair streamed in the breeze. She loved the feel of the wind on her face. She loved, too, to see Peter standing at the wheel, steering for the flaming clouds.

Jinks said, "They are like the gates of Paradise."

Mary did not answer. She was content to fly over those shining waters with Peter as pilot. Whither he was bound, she would go. And when they arrived at last at the site of the solarium, she was sorry.

Peter, too, was sorry. “Look here,” he said, when they had finished their survey and were back in the boat, “why can’t we go on to my island?”

Mary asked, “What island?”

Peter, busy with the motor, said, “Tell her, Denis.”

“It’s a playground that Peter bought when he didn’t know what to do with his money,” Denis said. “We used to go there for picnics. But lately we haven’t had time to play.”

Peter let it go at that. It was not for him to tell all that the island meant to him. What it might have meant if Mary had married him. Well, she would never marry him now. But he would take her there, and she would sit in the red chair, and he would light the candles behind her head. And always after that, he would see her in that golden shawl with a halo about her, like a Botticelli saint.

Night was falling, and there was a purple haze over the world when at last the island lifted itself out of the water.

They landed, and Peter, helping Mary, said, “You won’t mind a bit of a walk, will you? I want you to see the house.”

The walk would be, Denis decided, too long for Jinks. “You stay here with me, old lady.”

Peter had not hoped to have Mary to himself. Yet, since the moment was his, he would make the most of it.

He was leading the way, and spoke over his shoulders: “You’ve been feeling better?”

“Yes. The doctors abroad gave me the greatest encouragement.”

“I was sorry to bring you home, but Mrs. Musgrave’s condition demanded it.”

“I was glad to come, and it has seemed good to be back again. Do you remember you told me once I’d learn to love this country? And I wouldn’t believe it?”

“Do you love it now?”

“Yes.”

They had reached a cleared space. “There’s the house,” Peter said. “I’ll go on ahead and open it.”

Mary, reaching the threshold, stood for a moment looking in. She saw a low room springing into brightness as Peter lighted the candles. She saw a red chair—with candles back of it—and other red chairs. She saw Peter turning towards her—

“Mary, this is where I would have brought you if you had married me.”

She stood, one hand holding the golden shawl about her throat, the other against her cheek, in the startled attitude of one who doubts the evidence of her ears: “Here?”

“Yes. Oh, I know I shouldn’t be telling you this. But I’ve got to say it. I’ve been coming—all this summer. And you always come with me. You sit in this red chair, and I light the candles—. Or we go down to the beach and watch the moon come up, or the stars shining—”

She said, breathlessly, “Peter, don’t—”

“Why not? This is our moment, Mary.”

“It can never be—our moment—.” Her hands were locked now in the tenseness of her agitation. The shawl slipped from her shoulders. Peter stooped and picked it up, and then wrapped it about her so that she was held closely in a sheath of pale silk, the fringes still in his hands.

And holding her thus, he said: “Mary—”

Their eyes met, and something he saw in hers brought him to his senses. He released her suddenly. “Go out by that door, my dear. I’ll be with you in a moment.”

She stumbled over the threshold. Behind her, she knew he was snuffing out the candles. When he joined her, he said, “Forgive me.”

“There is nothing to forgive.”

“There might have been—and I shouldn’t have brought you.”

“I’m glad I came. I shall have it to—remember.”

“Mary, will you come to me again—in your dreams . . . ?”

She walked a little faster, as if she were flying from him. As if, indeed, she were flying from herself. “No,” she said, “this must be the—end. If I let myself come—even in my thoughts—my life will be divided. And Boone is my husband. He needs me, Peter, more than you can know. In a little while his

mother will be gone, and I shall have to take her place. I'm not sure I can make you understand. But it's just that I can't be a—quitter."

She had stopped in her flight, and he stood beside her. He said, with quick breath, "If happiness were the only thing, I'd never let you go—"

"I know—"

In the dark, he found her hand and kissed it, "God keep you, dearest."

She moved on then, ahead of him, and a little later sat beside Jinks in the bow of the boat—a dark and shadowy figure, yet seeming to Peter to shed a radiance beyond any on sea or land.

The wind was rising, and by the time they landed, the dresses of the two women were wet with the spray which the waves had flung over them. Tyndall and Hamilton, waiting on the sands, told them that storm warnings were coming in over the radio. "They're having it bad on the East Coast," Tyndall elucidated, "but we may escape the worst of it."

None of them had any thought of danger, but Mary said: "Why not let me take Cindy home with me? Then if it should be a bad blow, you men can easily get out of it."

So Cindy went back with Mary, wrapped in a blanket and sound asleep. In the morning she waked in Mary's bed, to find her head pillowed on the pink silk and lace of Mary's shoulder, her hand tucked into the curve of Mary's white throat.

And Mary's eyes, close to hers, were smiling: "Good-morning."

Cindy sat up, "Is this your bed?"

"Yes."

"How did I get here?"

"In my arms—"

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all about it."

She dropped her head again on Mary's shoulder, and Mary told her. "Daddy and Doctor Peter had things to do, and I didn't, so they said you could stay here until they came."

"When will they come?"

“Maybe after breakfast, maybe after lunch, maybe after dinner . . .”

“Can I stay all that time?”

“Yes.”

“And have breakfast with you, and lunch, and dinner?”

“Yes.”

Cindy heaved a great sigh of content. “May I have my breakfast now?”

“When we’ve had our baths.”

Julia came in then, and Cindy was scrubbed and talcumed, and wrapped in a gorgeous negligée of Mary’s. They had their breakfast in the window which looked out over the garden. Boots sat beside them and drank milk from a saucer. During the night, the world had been swept by a heavy gale, but with the morning, calm had come. Yet it was calm with a menace in it, for the world was filled with a pale greenish light which cast strange shadows.

The telephone rang. Boone was calling from Miami.

“All right, dearest?”

“Yes.”

“We’ve been having high winds, and there’s a hurricane promised. I think I’ll get out of it. You can expect me after dinner.”

“It blew hard here during the night.”

“You’re not afraid?”

“Not a bit—”

“You needn’t be. My house is as strong as a rock. If you’ll stay in it, nothing can happen. If things get very bad, you’d better bring Mother up. Her cottage isn’t safe in a storm.”

“I will.”

“Mary?”

“Yes.”

“Love me?”

“Of course.”

“Don’t say it like that.”

“How shall I say it?”

“I’ll teach you when I come—”

“Oh—”

“Good-bye, darling.”

“Good-bye, Boone.”

Mary, hanging up the receiver, drew a long breath. When he came—? Oh, if she could only give him what he gave!

She sat down again beside Cindy, on the window seat. Outside big drops of rain were beginning to patter. “Tell me a story,” Cindy said.

Mary began on “The Three Bears,” but was stopped by a rush of wind and rain. Julia hurried in to shut the window, and other servants were shutting those downstairs. The great fans of the royal palms which lined the driveway swept down to the ground and then up towards the sky. The flowers in the garden were whipped into shreds, their leaves and petals whirling. Gulls and herons flew low over the bayou, their wings and breast chalk white against the darkness of the clouds which pressed upon them.

Boots grew restless. He stood with his paws on the sill, his tail twitching. He mewed to be let out, and Mary, with difficulty, opened a window for his exit. He lowered himself expertly by means of the vines which covered the walls, and when he reached the ground, he braved the rain in a wild scamper to the shelter of the garage. There he sat in the doorway, very small and smug amid the chaos of his surroundings. He washed his wet nose with a paw, and licked the fur along his spine with an air of insouciance which was essentially frivolous and feline.

Mary was to remember, afterwards, Boots in the garage door. When she next surveyed the scene, there was no garage, but Boots, unharmed, was as smug and serene as ever. Worlds might fall, but his little cat-mind dwelt only on the sleekness of his fur, or the fullness of his small stomach.

The telephone rang again. This time it was Peter. Margaret was, he said, much worse. Could Mary get in touch with Boone?

“I’m afraid not. He has just left Miami. He said if the storm increased to have his mother moved up here.”

“It wouldn’t be wise to attempt it. And besides, things are easing up.”

“Shall I come down?”

“It would help a lot. Jinks is here, and Denis.”

“Jinks shouldn’t be there.”

“I know. We’ve told her, but she won’t listen.”

He went on to say that things at Margaret’s were about as bad as they could be. The old colored woman who helped about the house had fled in a panic before the storm. Margaret’s nurse, too, had fled.

“It’s as if the world had gone mad,” Peter ended.

The rain had ceased when Mary started out, but the green light persisted, and the clouds hung low. One of the stablemen drove the car, with old Julia on the front seat with him, and baskets of food and bottles of coffee crowded into the back with Mary. When they arrived at the cottage, Mary and Julia set the table, and Julia served the luncheon. Jinks and Denis sat down, but Mary went on to Margaret’s bedroom. “I’ll eat a little later,” she said. “I’m not in the least hungry.”

Margaret’s bedroom was old-fashioned. There was a wide mahogany bed, and an ancient lowboy, inheritances from her own family. The walls were hung with a pale, flower-patterned paper, and there were hooked rugs on the floor. The bed had a white dimity spread, and Margaret, set high on three pillows, wore a lavender, knitted jacket. There was a white dish of pansies on the lowboy, and Boone’s photograph in a silver frame. The effect was austere and beautiful. And Margaret was beautiful with her own whiteness, her delicate profile, her banded hair.

Mary bent and kissed her, “Darling. . . .”

“Mary, what do you hear from Boone?”

“He’s coming.”

“Soon?”

“Tonight.”

Peter stood at the foot of the bed, his eyes on the two women—on old Margaret who had lived her life, and on young Mary who had so many years before her. He wondered what those years would bring. Hardness of living? Unhappiness? Old Margaret had known both hardness and unhappiness, yet here at the end of life, there was about her something triumphant, as if her strength of spirit survived the weakness of her body. Would Mary come to such an end? Seeing her youth and beauty, he asked more for her than the triumph of the spirit. He wanted her to be happy. He felt that no sacrifice on his part would be too great if he could make her happy.

As night came on, Mary sent Denis up to the house with Jinks. They

protested, but she insisted. “I’ll stay until Boone comes. You must wait, Denis, and prepare him for the change in his mother.”

Peter and Mary were left alone in the sick-room. Tyndall returned from town with some parcels, and reported that the hurricane warnings were alarming. “The storm seems to have whipped around this way.” He went on then to Boone’s house to look after Cindy.

The rain began again, and the strength of the wind increased. The house shook. Finally a great tree in the garden fell.

Margaret roused herself to ask, “What happened?”

“The oak fell.”

She murmured, “It dies with me.”

Darkness was all about them, and tumult. But the lamp in the sick-room burned steadily. Its light fell on Mary’s hair as she sat beside the bed. Peter, looking across, said, suddenly, “Are you afraid?”

“No. If anything happens, we will go out—together—”

“Together—”

That was all. Not another word. No movement toward each other. Just the two of them sitting among the shadows with the storm outside.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

"*And the Trees Bloomed which had been Dead*"

BOONE in his motor car, with Alec driving at sixty miles an hour across flat country, found himself projected into a world so strange, so divorced from reality, that it seemed the product of a disordered imagination. On each side of the highway which links the big cities of the East Coast with the big cities of the West stretches an endless swamp. And in that swamp is an undercurrent of existence utterly removed from what we know as civilization—an existence which has to do with primitive peoples, with reptiles and crustaceans, with animals that live in slime and sluggish waters, or amid the wild growth of cypress and mangroves—creatures that hide themselves until such times when the waves of the Atlantic, blown landward in great tides, flood the sequestered haunts, and drive to high ground the bewildered denizens of that vast, mysterious realm.

And so it was that Boone saw, scrambling and tumbling and climbing towards the safety of the road, creeping things and crawling things in an extraordinary procession. There were alligators, making Alec's eyes bulge as his car sped by them; rattlesnakes, seeking dryness; queer small beasts, humping and scurrying; crabs, scuttling; and hurrying with them, groups of dark humans—Seminoles, picturesque and Spanish, the women with their wide skirts and beads, the men, handsome, swarthy fellows, laden with household goods, as the women were laden with babies.

There was, Boone told himself, something about it almost prehistoric—as if the weird creatures we moderns know only by their bones had come to life, and were filing before him in the flesh, reincarnated, as it were, by the primeval dreadfulness of the disaster which had overtaken them; or like something out of the Old Testament, illustrated by Doré. He remembered a picture of the Flood which had troubled his boyish dreams.

Yet he was not afraid. There was something in his blood which answered the call of that strange company. More than once he had penetrated the swamp, hobnobbing with the Indians, who knew him, and who had piloted him on the sullen streams, and had fished with him, and hunted. The night when Mary had first seen him had been one of the many nights when he had thrown off the chains which bound him to the day's routine, and had tasted the sweets of a freedom which had to do with nature unhampered by man's restrictions. Perhaps, after all, he belonged to that life, rather than to the one which until now had seemed so good to him. Ambition? What was it? Love? Of what avail if it brought unrest?

For the first time in all his years of fighting, the battle had lost its zest. There had been, until now, the joy of victory. But in the struggle with his wife, there was neither zest nor joy. What she wanted was something he could not give. Could not? Well, then, would not—. For good or evil, he was himself! Should he then make of himself another man, that she might love him?

His mother had loved him—knowing his faults, wishing him different, yet loving him still. A mother's love wasn't enough. He wanted his wife's—Mary's. But he wanted it on his own terms . . .

Or did he? Might he not say, "Let me strip myself of the things you hate, and live anew—with you—?" What then? Could he bring her back?

He moved restlessly, then spoke to Alec: "I'll take the wheel."

They changed seats. Boone was glad to feel the car leap to his bidding. The road was clear, and they ate up the distance. The speedometer climbed to sixty-five. To seventy. They had left the swamp behind, and its fleeing, fantastic company, and were passing through a sodden town. The rain made of the streets a roaring river, and people were shut up in their houses. Stopping at a small hotel, Boone ordered a hearty meal. A radio in the dining-room proclaimed the progress of the hurricane. It was headed straight for the West Coast, and the barometer was falling.

It was midnight when Boone reached his house. No servants were about as he entered. From the foot of the stairs he called, "Mary—"

A man's voice answered, and Denis came down. "Mary is at your mother's. She asked me to tell you."

"Mother should have been brought here. The storm is frightful."

"She is too ill to be moved."

"Ill? Worse?"

“Yes.”

“Dying—?”

“My dear fellow—.” Denis’ hand went out towards him.

But Boone was reaching for his raincoat. “I’ll go down.”

“You’d better have Alec drive you.”

“No. I’ll walk. The roads are full of débris. I’ll get a flashlight.” He went out to the kitchen, where he found the servants in a nervous huddle. Alec, in their midst, was scolding them soundly. “Whut you ‘fraid of? Rain an’ wind? They’s been rain and wind befo’. An’ not a hide nor a hair of you in the garage to he’p me, an’ to meet Mr. Boone at the do’. An’ he wo’n out an’ hongry.”

A murmur went round, “Hit’s lak the end of the worl’, Alec.”

“End of the worl’—nothin’. You all go on an’ git Mr. Boone somethin’ to eat, and a hot bath ready.”

Boone interposed, “I don’t want anything, Alec. My mother is ill, and I’m going down. Get me a flashlight, and you stay here and look after things.”

Boone went back to Denis, and found him in rubber coat and boots. “I’ll go with you, and help them in town. They’ve been telephoning. Things are pretty bad.”

“Who is with Mary?”

“Peter Ferry.”

“Nobody else?”

“Tyndall went down a few moments ago to take a message from the hospital to Peter. They said they couldn’t get him at your mother’s.”

Boone strode out into the storm, and Denis followed. As they walked through the grove, the wind tugged and tore at them, and the rain sluiced down. “A little more of this,” Boone shouted, “and nothing will stand against it.”

They fought on, and in a sudden lull, Boone spoke again, “What does your God think He’s doing?”

“He isn’t my God—He’s yours also.”

The flashlights showed the two of them—Denis’ pliant figure bent to the wind, his hair blown back, his face wet and shining. Boone, unbending, “If he were my God, He wouldn’t rob me.”

"Of what?"

"First of my trees, then of my wife, and now of my—mother—"

"Your wife—?"

"You know. I've lost her. . . ."

It was as if out there in the storm he had stripped himself of sham, and was showing Denis the nakedness of his fears. "I can't hold Mary. I don't have to tell you, do I?"

"You can hold her if you will—"

"How?"

"By forgetting yourself—"

"This is no time to preach—"

"God rides—in the storm—"

The wind was on them again, shrilling and shrieking like a thousand devils. Boone bent to it now, and as it streamed past him, it seemed to catch up Denis' words and repeat them.

When they reached the highway, Denis stopped. "I'll go on to town."

Boone's flashlight cast a circle of light. Denis stood in it, illuminated. Boone said, impulsively, "What if I did—?"

"Did what?"

"Forget myself—"

He began suddenly to laugh. Then said, "Good-night," and tore on, breasting the tempestuous tide, a dark figure in the darkness. And now he found his own words flowing with the rhythm of the wind. *What if I did? What if I did?*

If he forgot himself and thought of Mary, what then? And was she not always in his thoughts? But that was not what Denis had meant. Denis had meant something bigger. Something that had to do with the man he had been and the man he might be. Well, parsons talked like that. Weaklings! But was Denis a weakling? He had been no mean adversary in the affairs of the town. More than ever of late, Boone had known it, as the people had followed the little parson in his spiritual crusades.

What if I did? He flung his question again into the storm. *What if I did?* And out of the storm the answer came, for the beam of another flashlight

suddenly crossed his own, and through the curtain of streaming rain, he saw—Tyndall!

It was the first time since the day Boone had turned his tenant out the two men had faced each other. But Boone had no fears. Tyndall's case was one of many. The man and his affairs had, indeed, gone utterly from his mind. He asked now: "You've come from the cottage?"

"Yes. Dr. Ferry sent me to bring help. A tree has fallen—. There's great danger—"

"You mean to the house?"

"To the house and all in it."

"My wife is there?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you get her out of it? Why didn't Ferry?"

"He tried to make her leave, but she wouldn't."

"I'll make her—"

Boone started on, but Tyndall stopped him. "She won't leave. Not without Ferry—"

Tyndall was reckless—intoxicated not with strong drink but with the knowledge that the moment of revenge had come. "She loves him," he said, shouting the words above the storm. "She loves him, don't you know it—?"

"You lie—" Boone shouted back.

"I'm telling the truth. It isn't easy for you to hear. You've always had your way. You had it when you ruined me and killed my wife. But you can't have it now. No man can make a woman love him—"

Boone lunged forward, but Tyndall's light went out, and he was lost in the wildness of the night. Boone called after him, "Tyndall, Tyndall—!" Then giving up, he staggered on blindly, stumbling and falling in the wet, rising to go on again.

At last, he came to the cottage, finding it by its window-square of light. He looked through and saw his mother high on her pillows, and, on one side of the bed, Mary, her hair shining under the rays of the low lamp, and, on the other side, Peter among the shadows.

Boone went in through the kitchen, stopping long enough to shed his wet coat. When he entered the sick-room, Mary rose with a low cry, and came

towards him. He passed her and stood by the bed. “Mother,” he said, “Mother!”

Through the fogs that encompassed her, she heard him.

“Boone—the oak—fell.”

She drifted away again, and Peter said in a low voice: “She’ll come back —”

“Is it—the end—?”

“Only a matter of moments.”

Then, suddenly, it seemed to Boone that nothing else mattered except this going-away of his mother. Nothing. Not even Mary. He and his mother had always been together. He couldn’t think of a world without her.

He stood up and spoke to Peter, “You must get Mary out of this. It isn’t safe—”

“You go with her. . . .”

Boone shook his head, “My place is here—”

Peter protested: “A doctor’s place is with his patient.”

“And a son’s with his mother.” Boone turned to Mary, and drew her suddenly to him, holding her close. “You must go now, my dear, with Peter.”

“But Boone—”

She said something else, but he could not catch it. The noise was appalling as the hurricane swept down upon them. Boone bent and kissed his wife, feeling the softness of her hair against his cheek, hearing the quick breath that told him she was crying.

“Wait till I come,” he said. “And if I should not come—I want you to take happiness—where you can find it—”

“Boone—darling—”

“Promise—”

But there was no time for promises with that wild world crashing. He caught Mary up and wrapped her in his coat. Then he carried her to the kitchen. He opened the door, and held it, strongly, while Peter, his arm protecting Mary, passed through.

“Take care of her,” Boone called.

Peter looked back and saw him, his dark splendor shining. Then the door was shut, and Boone went back and sat beside his mother.

She opened her eyes. “Darling—” and he laid his cheek upon her pillow and after a time the fingers he held relaxed. “Mother,” he said, uncertainly. “Mother—” He bent down to her, and saw then that he was alone—alone in the little house where his mother had borne him.

He said again, “Mother—.” He was a child again, frightened, wanting her to comfort him.

Suddenly the walls of the house seemed to crack asunder. There was a roar and a long silence. . . .

Then out of the silence, he heard his mother laughing, and he was aware that it was young laughter. He looked up and saw that the storm had passed, and that he was walking beside his mother, and that the road they followed was as shining as a river, and over all the world was a strange clear light. And he saw, too, that his mother was young and lovely, and he was young, with his head reaching not quite to his mother’s shoulder. And as they walked, they came presently to the orange grove, and he saw that his trees bloomed, and were hung with golden fruit—the trees which had been dead. And Margaret spoke, and pointed to the trees, “They were dead,” she said, “and are alive again.” And once more she laughed, and took his hand, and they went on their way—laughing.

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 *Enchanted Ground* by Temple Bailey]