

*The
White
Reef*

*Martha
Ostenso*

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MARTHA OSTENSO

WILD GEESE

THE DARK DAWN

THE MAD CAREWS

PROLOGUE TO LOVE

THE YOUNG MAY MOON

THE WATERS UNDER THE EARTH

THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER YEAR





MARTHA OSTENSO

THE
WHITE
REEF



1934

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THE WHITE REEF

CHAPTER ONE

The Cove

FLANKING the sunset were the black cameos of the islands, the Inlet running its copper tide between them into the Pacific. The sentinel cliff at the south was not grim stone now but, soaring in brilliance, had become the immaterial and rosy headland of a dream. A single gull's wing cutting the flawless evening nacre of the middle sky was almost audible, so blandly still was this end of a June sea-day. The tide was cat-footing it out, and only a very aware ear could detect the sussurating of the White Reef, that sinister barrier that lay between Heartbreak Cove and the open Pacific.

In the Dragon's Eye, the Cove's only tavern, a swaybacked frame establishment whose feet, the piles that supported its rotting porch, stood in water, Gil Patterson and his fellow-trawler, Fred Malcolm, sat at a greasy oak table over their after-supper beer. For them the rest season, between the salmon and the herring runs, had set in. Their wives, and all the other wives in the Cove, were busy with their gardens, their goats, and their recently freshened Jersey cows. Day and evening. It was a splendid time for the fishermen, a time for Beer and Gossip.

And Gossip, as luck would have it, was not niggardly just now. There was Nona Darnell, Silas's high-and-mighty daughter who had got her schooling down at Alberni and thought herself a little too good for Heartbreak Cove, who had run off pert as you please with Quentin Wingate in that swank white yacht of his, only five days ago.

The men of Heartbreak Cove, during the fishing season, have to be more than men; they have to pull out of their blood a steel to match and better the steel of the sea. But when the season is over, in sheer exhaustion they become less than women. They sit, big and tremulous, over their beer and think of the girls they might have married, who would have some purpose for late June evenings other than tending gardens and milking goats. They become sentimental, sad-eyed, happy and scandal-mongering. Their wives from this time forward flaunt for a spell the half-male dignity of Diana and Aurora. The fishermen, the valiants of the deep, are of small importance in this season.

“Looks like Silas is takin’ it awful hard,” said Gil Patterson as he wiped the foam from a mustache that had been a handsome drooping crescent thirty years ago.

“The girl has been the apple of his eye, ever since her mother died,” Fred Malcolm remarked dreamily.

“I saw Silas up to Bjork’s this morning,” Gil went on. “Thought I’d try joshin’ him a bit. I said, ‘Well, Nona’s done herself proud, grabbin’ off a good-lookin’ young eagle like Quent Wingate.’ But I guess I shouldn’t o’ done it. He gave me a look—sour as turned milk—so I offered him a chew, thinkin’ to square it. Poor old Silas just hunkered up and went out o’ the store without speakin’. Bjork told me I ought to mind my own business.”

“Bjork’s a rare one,” Fred chuckled. “If he wasn’t a damn square-head he’d o’ been run out o’ here long ago for tellin’ people off when he feels like it.

“But straight as a poker. Wouldn’t cheat you on a coffee bean. Here, Trippy! Two more beers.” He fished in his pocket for the silver his wife had doled out to him that morning.

Fred Malcolm squinted uneasily. “When it comes to cheatin’, it takes the smart ones like old Wingate and Sheel to come into the Cove and do it right. Do you think anything is goin’ to come of that dock proposition, Gil?”

“Not a whistle. But what are you worryin’ about? You didn’t give ’em any of *your* money, did you?”

A guilty blush seemed to embrace all of Fred Malcolm’s squat, sea-built frame. “No-o—not for the docks. I *did* put a hundred dollars into that summer resort scheme for South Beach.”

Gil Patterson gaped at his old friend. “A hun—Where did you ever get hold of a hundred loose dollars to throw away like that?”

Fred’s eyes watered into his beer. “I was savin’ it to send Maggie out to the school in Alberni. She’ll be fifteen next year. It was goin’ to be a surprise to her and her ma. But when Sheel comes along last fall and tells me I can double my money on this pleasure beach proposition—with tourists and all—well, I thought it was a good—”

“You didn’t tell me anything about it!”

“You’re so darn leery on takin’ a chance,” Fred argued in his own defense. “You don’t think Wingate and Sheel have walked out on us, do you?”

“Walked? They—” Gil Patterson was eloquently inarticulate. “Hey, Trippy, bring us two more!” He looked at Fred with mingled pity and contempt. “Walked? They *ran* out on us, that’s what!”

But Fred was stubborn. “No—I won’t believe it—not until—”

“Man,” Gil resumed with a large gesture toward the smoke-and-mildew mottled rafters, “when young Wingate hove out o’ here five days ago in that white yacht—takin’ Nona Darnell with him—the Cove saw the last o’ the Wingates. If you’d been here instead of back in the mountains lookin’ for trout, you’d of heard about it before this.”

Fred’s heavily veined hand shook as he gulped down his beer. Immediately, then, he assumed the magnificent and touching nonchalance of a man whose failure is too vast for reckoning.

“Gone like dust before the wind, like foam from off the wave!” he declaimed to the startled Trippy, who was conscientiously wiping the table. “And all because a couple o’ sons o’—”

“Not a couple,” Gil interrupted judiciously. “I think old man Wingate would do the right thing if he could. They tell me he got caught in the market and just couldn’t cough up any more cash to carry on with here. But Sheel—he’s the crook! He’s cleared out good! Gone east, they say, but nobody knows where.”

Fred’s red-rimmed eyes narrowed with unwonted shrewdness. “What they did, they did together—that’s the way the Cove will figure it. There ain’t hardly a man of us but you and old Entwhistle and them Darnells that didn’t put money into their schemes. And we’ll look to Wingate to make good.”

Gil shook his head regretfully and drank pointedly out of an empty glass. “Yeh—if he has anything to make good on. The lodge over there on the island is in his wife’s name—and the yacht belonged to his daughter—and the packing plant on the north shore is in his son’s name. How are you goin’ to get anything out o’ the old man? You should of talked to me first, Fred!”

Fred sought desperately for some crumb of consolation. “Well, if Nona Darnell’s gone and married that Quentin Wingate, she won’t dare show her face round here again, that’s certain!”

Gil laid a ponderous hand on Fred’s shoulder. “Nona Darnell!” he scoffed. “If she felt like it she’d marry six Chineer belly-cutters and keep ’em—right here in the Cove. And she’d make ’em do more than cut the bellies out o’ herrin’, too!”

There was a shuffling sound at the door and the two men, glancing down the narrow taproom, saw there an oddly assembled figure familiar and yet forever strange to both of them. Clad, on this warm June evening, in a long bag of a coat that was the color of rust and reached to his knees, a plaid cap on his head and a brightly dirty scarf about his throat, Ethan Ashe shambled into the pupil of the Dragon's Eye.

"Howdy, Ethan!" said Fred Malcolm, and crossed his fingers, a habit out of a Cove childhood.

"Have a beer, Mr. Ashe," said Gil very soberly, winking aside to the marble-eyed Trippy.

Ethan Ashe approached and fixed a black, cool eye upon Fred Malcolm, ignoring Gil's proffered refreshment. One lock of snow-white hair fell like a cataract down his forehead between the ebon wisps on either side. They said Ethan Ashe was half Indian, from the north end of the island, but nobody really knew.

"'T will be a hard day for you—and the likes of you," Ethan intoned.

"There'll be no change in that," Gil Patterson said with a grin. "We're used to hard days."

But Ethan Ashe was not to be put off. "The Wingates have gone! They came to plunder—but none may plunder the Cove but the Spanish ghosts from beyond the Reef. Last night, with half a moon on the tide, I saw them. At ebb tide the ribs and the prow of the *Santa Ines* were white in the moon. And the captain and the sailors, with gold rings in their ears and red kerchiefs 'bout their heads, danced round the hull in their thigh-boots, swinging their cutlasses."

"Have a beer, Mr. Ashe," Gil persisted, and felt his skin ripple as he spoke. "We laid them Spanish ghosts three hundred years ago."

Ethan Ashe slid like an animate sack down upon a chair at a table near by. Trippy brought him a foaming glass and withdrew with quick fastidiousness.

Even when he ate or drank in public, Ethan was never actually seen to do so. He performed these functions with what might be regarded as sleight of hand; as now, although the beer vanished out of his glass, neither Gil nor Fred saw it, so to speak, in transit.

Fascinated, Fred blinked across at Ethan. Then, although the Cove superstition was as familiar to him as his own heart-beat, he spoke up loudly

and ingenuously.

“Spaniards, you say, Ethan? And what have they to do with us, or the Wingates for that matter?”

Mistrust flicked Ethan’s face like a whip and Fred at once ordered him another draught of beer. Suddenly a winning sweetness lightened Ethan’s ascetic features; twenty years ago, in his young manhood, his had been the almost feminine grace and beauty of a Castilian matador. There were people who vividly remembered his coming down from the north of the island, in a canoe, as though out of space, and marrying Marie Trumbull, the Scotch trader’s girl. Marie had disappeared last year, alive or dead nobody knew, and since then it was a question in Cove minds as to whether or not Ethan had once changed his clothes.

“Well enough you know what they have to do with you, Fred Malcolm,” Ethan said with a fierce inner glow, “or anybody in the Cove who has dealings with pilferers from the cities.” People said that in his time Ethan had mysteriously been a great reader of books and that this accounted for his high-flown language. The lazy dramatist who had spent a summer in the Cove once—looking, as he had said, for a “play,” and not getting up until nine of a morning to look for anything—had observed that Ethan Ashe was probably a “throw-back,” and Fred Malcolm had wondered audibly if he had meant a fish. “Two years have gone since Edmund Wingate built his lodge over there on the island. That was the beginning. But not the end. If they had not come, with their grandeur and their show of wealth, my Marie would be with me today. That’s how the Spaniards work. When they see strangers trespassing on their sacred region, they bring a madness among us. There will be no coming in or going out. They have said it. Disaster comes to them who enter here for gain—and follows them who go out for gain. In my twenty years here I have seen it. Before I came here I heard of it, all up and down the coast. You think I’m mad. Wait and see. There will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, because the Wingates came to the Cove. I saw the Spaniards last night and I know—I *know!*”

The outer light had fallen to a sooty red; the inner light was not yet in being because Trippy had been leaning open-mouthed across his bar listening to the musical descent and lift of Ethan’s voice.

“Aw, shucks!” Gil laughed, and shook himself as though hail had fallen on him. “Bring us some more beer, Trippy!”

“Thank you, I must go,” Ethan announced, and before they knew it the taproom was empty but for themselves.

Primly belying its lusty origin at the doorstep of the Dragon's Eye among the piers and warehouses, the main thoroughfare of Heartbreak Cove steered in cobblestoned rectitude up a gradual slope along the south shore of the Inlet. Not far inland from it, Quilchina Road staggered upward like a drunken sailor through deep glades of red cedar and white birch close-set as a picket fence, and emerged at last on the seaward-looking summit of the cliff at Sleeping Chief Rock. But Thimble Street, so named after the first missionary in the Cove, ran straight as a die and would have kept on going, probably, all the way across the island as a matter of principle, had it not been for the little Anglican church of Saint Columba which intercepted its progress at the top of the hill.

From Bjork's store upward, Thimble Street was an orderly phalanx of weathered cottages with hollyhock or privet borders in front, small vegetable gardens, outhouses and stables behind. Intersecting lanes of reddish gravel led southward to common pasturage inland from the Quilchina cliff. Above Bjork's the street was unlighted at night save by cottage lamp glow. The dwellings on the north side of the street tumbled their backyards toward the Inlet, and the two farthest inland, just before the snug knoll dominated by Saint Columba, were situated on capricious ground indeed.

There was first the Darnell place, built upon a miniature crag that might have done for an inlet beacon, and so tangled about with English ivy and sumac and evergreens that you might pass the house without knowing it was there. Then, just before Saint Columba's eminence, old Timothy Entwhistle maintained his estate-in-little of an English country gentleman, an English soldier come to the upper years with glory but without gain. Here Timothy lived on his small pension, and grew his flowers for his own pleasure, tulip and jonquil, peony, rose and delphinium, and above all the dahlia, a time for each.

Lower down Thimble Street, on this evening in late June, two women greeted each other across the hedge that separated their backyards.

"Nice evening, Hesper," said Mrs. Fred Malcolm to Mrs. Thorpe. "How many eggs did you get today?"

"Fourteen—and two double yolks," Hesper replied with a worried look. "Leghorns are too darn good. One of them that keeps on laying the double yolks we've got to kill. Her insides are coming out. It's a shame. I said to Clem last night, I said, 'Ain't that just like a woman? Goes and does more'n

her share, and then they kill her!’ And what do you s’pose he had the nerve to say?” Hesper’s nostrils grew taut.

Kate Malcolm put her hands on her hips and waited, smiling in anticipation.

“He said, ‘Females like to brag if they’re anyways half good at their job. That’s why some of ’em wind up trollops and then when they find their lives cut short they blame the men for it.’ ”

Kate laughed heartily. “That reminds me,” she remarked suddenly, her broad, good-natured face becoming sober, “there’s been no word of Nona Darnell yet, has there?”

“I was just going to ask you the same,” said Hesper, slapping a mosquito on her bony forearm. Her mouth drew into a tight crease of outraged propriety. “But it ain’t likely they’ve heard a chirp from her. If there’d been a telegram, Abner Clough would of told us.”

“Well, the *Princess* will be in tonight and like as not there’ll be a letter from her. She was awful fond of her father—it sure surprised me when they told me what she’d done. If it had been one of our own boys, people would of thought it was just kind of romantic. But that stuck-up young Wingate! Guess she must of done it on the spur of the moment, like, without thinking. Or maybe that grand yacht of theirs and everything turned her head.”

Hesper Thorpe laughed shortly with the contempt of one in possession of the facts. “Spur of the moment, nothing!”

The two women, as well as everyone else in the Cove, had repeatedly raked the embers Nona Darnell had left in her flight, but they had not yet tired of searching for a new, shamefully red glow.

“She had it all thought out, never fear,” Hesper pursued. “I saw Prissy Totten this afternoon in Bjork’s. She told me she’d been watching Nona Darnell row over to the Wingate Island afternoon and evening for days before she finally went off with him. Well, she thought she was getting something good, I guess, but now the laugh’s on her, if it’s true what they’re saying.”

“You mean about the Wingate plant shutting down?” Kate asked, frowning anxiously. Her interest in the affairs of others was kindly, though explorative.

“Not only that,” Hesper replied triumphantly. “Clem says the Wingate foreman told him the whole Wingate fortune has gone up in smoke. And that

man Sheel has dropped out of sight with the money people invested in those big schemes of his and Wingate's."

"You don't say!" Kate clicked her tongue in awe. "And imagine Nona running off with a man whose father might end up in jail! I guess they could jail old Edmund for it, couldn't they?"

The needles of reluctant dubiousness knit Hesper's brow. "I don't know about that. They can't prove that he was the guilty one, I understand. Besides, there's news that old Wingate's had a stroke, just last week. Maybe he's dead by this. But if I hadn't hog-tied Clem last fall after that good herring run he would of mortgaged the house for money to put into that hare-brained beach idea of theirs. You folks didn't have anything in it, did you?" Her eyes narrowed in a hope for the sensational worst.

Kate shook her head vigorously. "Land, no! It's all we can do to keep our six young ones in shoes. If we had the odd dollar, it'd go to sending Maggie down to Alberni to school next year. She's that set on going!" She sighed helplessly. "Brains can be an awful drawback when you haven't the money to give them a chance. Maggie wants to be a teacher. I tell her, when I was her age I knew all I wanted was a husband and kids."

"The brains won't hurt her any," Hesper observed, "but she's just as well off she hasn't both brains *and* beauty."

"Well, Maggie ain't what you'd call beautiful, I suppose," Kate admitted grudgingly, "but Nona Darnell, now, had both brains and beauty and, as you say, what has it brought *her*?"

Hesper Thorpe's eyes puckered resentfully. "I was never one to think much of Nona's looks. My own Lydie is only fifteen, and though she's my own child and I shouldn't say it, perhaps, I think she's better looking than Nona already, and *she's* nineteen. I always thought Nona was a little coarse looking. Her mouth was too big and it was always that red it looked painted. And then the sweaters she wore—and the way she never cared what her hair looked like!"

"It was bonny Irish black hair, though, as my father used to say," Kate observed wistfully, "even if her mother was a white-haired Norwegian. And the color of my own cheeks was like that till it leaked out all over my face."

It did not occur to either of them that they had spoken of Nona Darnell as though she were dead.

"Well, it matters little enough now what she looked like," Hesper concluded tartly. "She brought disgrace on her family and broke her father's

heart by running off with that young upstart. And she'll like as not wind up in the street, like Julie Cartaret. You can't tell me Quentin Wingate intended to marry her. If he did, why didn't he marry her before he took her away from here? What would a young buck like him, in his white flannels and all, want with a Cove girl!" Hesper laughed with thin scorn. "You know as well as I do."

The two gardens were shouldering into each other in the violet-red afterglow; cicadas clattered their castanets and crickets chirped disdainfully out of time. Evening smells came up sweet and sad from the fallen dew. Kate Malcolm, thinking with trembling guilt of Nona Darnell until she almost felt nineteen again, sighed with relief when she heard her front gate swing creakingly inward.

"My sakes!" she cried. "Here I've been talking all this time, with a cake in the oven! And there's Fred—with half the Dragon's Eye in him, I'll bet! Good night, Hesper."

"Good night, Kate. Land alive!" One of Hesper's goats was feeding serenely on the young lettuce at the far end of the garden. She ran as though on stilts to drive the animal back into his pen. The goat, his feet apart and his head down, gazed up at her with yellow eyes full of oblique and lustful twilight laughter.

Hesper shivered. "They say those darn Spaniards had goats on the *Santa Ines*," she thought, and shivered again as she thwacked the goat's sleek rump.

CHAPTER TWO

Jorgen

THE *Princess* was due from Victoria, north-bound, at ten o'clock. At half-past nine, the amber glow that filled the Darnells' sitting room from the west windows had begun to vibrate curiously with a blue that was all but palpable. Young Jorgen, who had just come into the house, sat down between two hummocks of the old plush sofa and with elaborate carelessness lighted a cigarette. He was eighteen and looked upon a cigarette as antidote to all the ills the mind of man is heir to. But even a cigarette, he observed profoundly to himself, could not dispel the unease this room created within him just now.

He glanced about him with discomfort. His brother Paul, the eldest of the family, sat beside a window with his chair tilted back against the wall, a newspaper spread open to the faded light. The paper, Jorgen reflected with scorn, was two days old—it had come up on the last mail boat—and Paul must have read every item in it at least twice. His face, moreover, did not carry the expression of one who was reading. It was bitter as—well, as wormwood, Jorgen thought, rather proud of the simile. And on the day when they had found the note Nona had left for them, Paul's face had been black as the north cliff in a storm, except for the white, deep lines down either side of his nose. Why the dickens did he have to demean himself—yes, that was the word—like that, anyhow? It only made Pa feel so much worse.

Right now Pa was sitting in his old Morris chair, as far away as possible from the yellow oak organ in the corner. He hadn't gone near the organ, he hadn't even whistled a tune, since Nona went away. He sat now in his carpet slippers, smoking his pipe and looking at the floor, nodding once in a while to a story of Australia old Timothy Entwhistle was telling him. Nodding, but only half listening, Jorgen knew. Well, it *was* unfair of Nona to do this to Pa—with Ma dead only three years! Jorgen experienced a twist of anger somewhere in the region of his heart. There were new crannies around Pa's eyes, too; and his hair, which Nona had always kept brushed back in a thin gray pompadour, swept limply forward now over his high forehead.

Eva, Paul's wife, sat beside the center-table, knitting a tiny pink-and-white jacket. She sat there so that she wouldn't look quite so big, Jorgen observed with disgust. In his opinion, women in that state should be kept in a vault, and not because anyone would want to run off with them, either! If he ever married, and it was quite unlikely . . . He sighed with disquietude as he recalled suddenly how pretty Lydie Thorpe had grown of late.

The shadows of the simple furniture in the room lengthened along the scrubbed pine floor, so that everything seemed to increase grotesquely in size. Was the low, calcimined ceiling stooping lower, or had the china closet in the corner opposite the organ stretched an inch or two? His mother had always called him an imaginative child. He sighed again, this time out of wistfulness for himself.

"Stop that, Jorgen," Eva said in a tone that was sharp but low, for her. She glanced uneasily aside at Silas, who sat out of earshot, near the dining room door.

The boy flushed with resentment at her stupid assumption that she could read his thoughts.

"I wasn't—" he began impatiently, but Eva, raising her eyebrows with a cheerful wifely smile toward Paul, interrupted him.

"Shall I light the lamp, Pauly?" she asked casually, in the way she did every night, as though nothing were amiss. "It's getting bad for your eyes, there."

"Pauly," Jorgen thought with loathing. Eva was too much for a sensitive man on the threshold of life. Her voice reminded him of a bright wire in a wind.

Paul drew his watch from his pocket, the watch with the gold hunting case. The opening of it made the sound of a click beetle. He gazed at it critically.

"No," he remarked. "I'll have to be going down for the mail in fifteen minutes. I heard the *Princess* blow a minute back."

Eva gave a trembling sniff, bent her head and wiped the corner of her eye with her knitting. "Well—" she whimpered, "you might have thought of me wanting some light. All you can think of—"

"Oh, Lord!" Paul exclaimed, stood for a moment helplessly irresolute, then struck a match on his shoe sole and pulled down the lamp on its chain above the center-table.

Something that had been at the back of Jorgen's mind all evening suddenly stepped off his tongue. And immediately, because of the attention it drew from his father and from the vast, white-haired old Timothy, he regretted the utterance.

"I ran into Ethan Ashe a while ago," he blurted out. "He says he saw the Spaniards dancing around the wreck of the *Santa Ines* last night."

Paul, turning up the wick of the lamp, scowled down at his young brother. "It's time you were beginning to grow up," he said, "and stop listening to that old crack-pot."

But Jorgen had seen the strange glint in Paul's eyes, just as the yellow flame rose in the lamp. And Eva sat forward over her knitting, her small mouth half open, her gaze fixed eagerly upon Jorgen. Her pale eyes were almost pretty now, with the pupils so large.

Silas stood up and said, "I'll get some more tobacco, Timothy." He went to the kitchen and closed the door behind him. Something about the quiet closing of that door made Jorgen's scalp spring forward—as it had done once when he had seen a ball of Saint Elmo's fire at the top of a mast in a storm.

While Silas was gone from the room, there was a tap at the front door. Eva called on a high note, "Come in!"

It was Ivar Hansen. With his hat in his hand, he loomed massive-shouldered and blond in the lamplight. He smiled about at everybody, questioningly, a little uncertainly.

Eva gave a shrill little laugh. "Oh, you startled me, Ivar! Jorgie has just been talking about the Spanish ghosts," she explained. "I guess it got me sort of nervous before I thought of it."

"Old Ethan has been walking again," Ivar said as he seated himself with a smile.

Silas returned, nodded to Ivar, and offered his pouch to Timothy.

"Well," boomed old Timothy, "I suppose Ethan has as much right to walk around as the rest of us. He isn't doing anyone any harm. His prophecies of doom don't disturb us—unless a few of the women and children."

But Jorgen observed that the old man drew stoutly upon his meerschaum pipe. And the poet in Jorgen rebelled. Of course, there was no such thing as a ghost, but there *was* such a thing as the genius of a place. And who was to

prove that its power was not a supernatural one? These people, his own family, old Timothy, and even Ivar Hansen, sea-locked in the Cove with its undecipherable past, smiled, jeered, pooh-poohed, put on the manly face of scorn—but the white and mystical bondage of the Reef looked out of their eyes.

“Well, I know some men who don’t like to talk about it,” Eva breathed. “And sometimes I think there might be something in it, no matter what you say. You know what they’re saying about—” she hesitated and bit her lip —“about Sheel.”

“What are they saying about him?” old Timothy asked.

“I remember plain as anything Prissy Totten saying she saw the Spaniards the night before he came here and started widening the channel and building the pier and all. She said it meant evil and now—”

“Prissy Totten!” Paul sniffed impatiently. “She’s as cracked as Ethan Ashe!”

Not a word of Nona, even indirectly, thought Jorgen, and winced for the cowardice of his people. Then for his own lack of spirit. Why had he not the courage to speak out, to say that Paul was pacing the floor now because in a few minutes the post office would be open and perhaps there would be a letter from Nona, assuring them all that she was, at least, decently married by now?

Old Timothy rose at last, bowed his white head in a courtly good night, took his hat and departed.

A moment later, Paul glanced again at his watch. While he still held it in his hand, a quick, light step sounded on the wooden floor of the front porch. Jorgen started up, but sat promptly down again. It seemed as though his knees had turned to water. Paul, too, seated himself abruptly and stared at the open door to the little hallway.

Nona was standing there, setting her small, ginger-colored suitcase on the floor, throwing her red béret across to the sofa beside Jorgen and tossing back her dark mane of hair with a rippling spill of laughter.

“What is this—a wake?” she cried, her eyes flashing with mockery from one to the other in the room, her hands propped wench-fashion on her hips. But she waited for no answer. She sped across the room and kneeling flung her arms about Silas, kissed his cheek resoundingly, and with her brown, long hand mopped back the hair off his temples. “Only five days, darling,” she laughed, “and you’ve let your hair go helter-skelter!”

“Nona—Nona!” Silas exclaimed with a visible effort to control his emotions. Jorgen, standing now, saw that his father had gone quite pale and that he blinked as though he could not see clearly as his hands clutched Nona’s shoulders. “Was it only a lark, then, my girl?”

“A lark!” Paul’s voice cut through the taut air. “You have a nice way of putting it, Pa!”

Nona sprang to her feet and faced her elder brother. “What have you to do with this?” she asked equably. “It *was* a lark!” When Paul did not reply at once, she turned to Jorgen. “Give me a cigarette, Jorgie!”

With nervous haste Jorgen lighted one and gave it to her. He had never seen his sister look so magnificent—so—so awful. Was Paul such a complete, insensate dullard that he could not get the furious rhythm of her? She looked like the sound of that symphony they had heard on the radio two Sundays back.

“A cigarette,” Eva bleated, wringing her hands, “—at a time like this!”

“Shut up!” Paul barked. Then, hastily remembering, he laid a hand gently on her shoulder and murmured, “You mustn’t excite yourself, dear.” He looked frozenly across the room at his sister. “You’ll have to give a better account of yourself than that, if you still want to consider yourself a member of this family. Everybody in the Cove knows—”

“I don’t give a tar-coated damn for the Cove!” Nona said distinctly, leaning on her palms across the center-table to look at Paul. “I ran off with Quentin Wingate and had a grand time with him on the yacht. When I met his relatives, I didn’t like ’em, so I came home. And that’s all the account I’m giving of myself to you or anyone else, unless I happen to feel like it.”

Paul’s eyes, Jorgen saw irefully, were fish-cold. “You left him when you found out his old man had lost his money, eh?”

For the first time, Nona’s face darkened with color. She stood erect, her shoulders very square beneath the blue flannel of her short jacket. Her slender feet, beneath the strong, slim ankles, stood firmly apart in their flat-heeled shoes and her arms were crossed before her rising bosom. Admiringly, Jorgen remembered the many times he had seen her in just this attitude, on the deck of a seine boat in a tearing gale.

“She wouldn’t be smart enough for that,” Eva thrust in, and then shrank from Nona’s scorching eyes.

Nona swung suddenly around upon Ivar Hansen. “Well, have you nothing to say?” she demanded. “You might as well get your oar in with the rest.”

“I was just leaving, Nona,” he began haltingly. “I—”

But Silas had risen and had his arm about Nona’s shoulder. “You’re home, my girl,” he said, searching for the right words, “and that’s all I wanted. We can think what we like about your running off like that—but you’re back, and you can take your own time to tell about it. This is your home, Nona, and—”

Nona saw that he was having difficulty. She patted his denim shirt sleeve, her mouth twisting into a smile.

“I’ll talk to you, Pa,” she said, “but not with *them* around.” She kissed his lean brown jowl and turned to Ivar. “Did you say you were just going home, Ivar? If you are, I’ll walk out with you.”

She started for the door and Ivar followed her with a nodded good night to the others. Jorgen regretted deeply that he was still too young to be noticed by people who had things happen to them. But his time would come! One day he would be editor of a weekly paper here in the Cove—the first editor of the first paper within sound of the White Reef. And what he would make of that! And that was nothing compared to what he would one day become. Then, disconcertingly, he fell to musing about Lydie Thorpe. Her chin was cute, with that dimple. But people said you shouldn’t trust chin dimples. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Ivar

“LET’S take the lane up to Quilchina Road, Ivar,” Nona suggested when they had come into the street. “It’s still light—and I don’t want to see anyone, just yet.”

She laid a hand on his arm and laughed a little. The laugh fell in an alien way on Ivar’s ears, used as they were only to the plain sounds of joy or woe. In Nona’s laughter there was something new and disturbing. He permitted her to lead him up that tree-tunneled way that came out suddenly upon a bald and rock-bare headland above the world and more than the world.

Here, on Sleeping Chief Rock, at this time of year, the last gleam of a day forever gone had not yet been swallowed up by the Pacific. Here, Ivar felt, at the ebb of twilight you stole something off the inflow of a dawn in Kamchatka, or some uncharted island that lay between. You could see the last narrow gold fillet of the sunset here, long after it had gone from the Cove.

They stood together for a moment and looked backward to where the inland mountains reared themselves against the coming night, their snowy peaks catching the last reflected rays of the sun that had already dropped below the horizon. The fleece of a cloud was gathered snugly about the shoulders of one sleeping giant. The valleys lay deep in darkness.

Nona seated herself on the rock and cupped her chin in her hands. Ivar squatted down beside her on the lichen and rough grass and waited for her to speak. She had said so little on the way up the cliff road that he felt an apprehensiveness now for what she had to tell him. He knew intuitively that she meant to unburden herself to him, as she had done ever since she had been a little girl, in a sort of rehearsal before she went to her father with her story.

But when he found her looking at him with wide, tear-darkened eyes, he flushed with embarrassment. Impulsively, awkwardly, he laid his hand upon her knee.

“You don’t have to tell me about it tonight, Nona,” he stammered, “—or any night, unless you want to.”

She huddled forward then into such convulsive sobbing that Ivar drew her, unresisting, down against the hollow of his shoulder. For a long time then she wept without restraint, wept so terribly that he began to be alarmed. In panic, he knew that her heart was breaking beneath those shattering spasms of grief. While his arms closed more tightly about her, as though he would keep that slender body from flying into a hundred pieces from the force of its passion, the thought came oddly to him that he had never been in love with Nona Darnell. Even before his worship of Julie Cartaret, and afterwards when his belief in beauty had gone crashing to atoms, he had been too much like another brother to Nona for any stronger feeling to take possession of him. Now, as he wondered desperately how to quiet her, and as he beat back the thought of Julie, so sordidly lost to him, a notion sane and tolerable took hold of his mind.

“Nona—Nona!” he pleaded, raising her chin firmly with his hand. “You can’t go on like this. You’ll make yourself sick. Nothing is worth it. Believe me, kid—I know!”

He was not sure that what he had said made sense, but it had its immediate effect. Nona sat upright, away from him, and drew her beautifully shaped hands down over her tear-streaked face. Then, without a word, she fumbled in her pocket for her handkerchief, blew her nose and wiped her eyes as angrily as any man might have done.

“I’m through crying!” she said, and sat back on her slim round haunches, her eyes fixed upon the darkening bay, and down it to the just visible thread of white that marked the Reef. “I had to do it somewhere—with someone who would know about it—not just alone at night. I guess I’ll never cry again—about anything.”

Ivar laughed out of relief. “Sure you will! You’ll cry about lost baby seals caught in nets—and about the tinkle of a cow-bell in the sunset—and —”

She looked at him gratefully. “Not even about that. Anyhow, that’s a different kind of crying.” She looked out across the Inlet to where the Wingate Island lay, its lodge half hidden among the trees. Near it, almost obscured by the darkness, lay the rounded black rock with three or four grotesquely twisted trees bending low above the water—the Ant Hill. She drew her eyes away from it and turned again to Ivar. “Shall we go back? Maybe your mother will be wondering.”

“Mother’ll be all right,” Ivar said. “But if you want to go back, it’s all right with me.”

“I don’t want to go back, just yet. I felt I had to get away from them—except Pa, of course. Besides, I wanted to tell you about it, Ivar—before I told anyone else. We’ve always—”

“I’ll listen,” Ivar said.

She pulled her short skirt down below her knees and folded her arms about them.

“Perhaps it won’t seem so much, after all,” she began.

“It never does, when you’ve told it once,” he encouraged her. “Keeping it to yourself—that’s the worst.”

He waited for her to go on.

“You know where those funny redwoods lean down, almost breaking over the water—on the Ant Hill?” she said at last.

Ivar nodded his head toward them. “You can see them from here,” he said.

“That’s where I met him first,” Nona went on. “I had seen him, of course, off and on through the winter, when he was working at his father’s packing plant over there on the north side, and living at the lodge on the island. But I had never spoken to him—except sometimes when we happened to meet in Bjork’s store or on the street.”

“We all did that,” Ivar said. “Quentin Wingate wasn’t stuck-up, even if he was a swell.”

No, that was true, Nona reflected, though it might have been better if he had been stuck-up. But that didn’t matter now. “I met him, really, the night you and I and Jorgen and Lydie Thorpe came back from our hike—on Victoria Day. You remember, it was still lightish when we got back.”

“I remember,” Ivar said.

“A lot of people had come up from the city to visit Quentin Wingate over the week-end. I don’t know what made me think of it, but I thought it would be fun to row over and hide somewhere near the lodge and listen to what people like Quentin’s friends might have to talk about. I know it was silly, but the Inlet was calm and the tide hadn’t begun to move out yet and I knew the moon would be up in a few minutes and—I don’t know—I just felt like it, I guess. I got into my skiff and rowed across. When I got as far as the

Ant Hill, I pulled in under one of the overhanging trees and listened. It was almost dark and I could hear their voices coming from the lodge on the island. All of a sudden I felt a jerk at the skiff—and then someone laughed. It was him—Quentin Wingate.”

She paused and for a moment Ivar was afraid that her swift recounting of events would be broken by another torrent of tears.

“I could just make out his face and hands as he clung to the side of the boat,” she went on steadily. “I liked the way he laughed. I laughed, too. He said, ‘You’re Nona, aren’t you?’ And I said, ‘Of course, but what in the world are you doing out here?’ He said he had left the gang back at the lodge, drinking highballs, and had come out for a swim and to watch the moon rise. I said he might get into the skiff and we’d watch it together, but he said he couldn’t—but wouldn’t I hop in and take a swim with him? When I told him I had no bathing suit with me, he laughed again and said he hadn’t either, and that was the reason he couldn’t come into the skiff, but what did that matter? He dared me to come in and I told him to turn his back for a minute. I undressed and dove over the side of the skiff. When I turned to come back up again, he was beside me and caught my hand. We came up together, right beside the boat, and I put out my hand and grabbed the edge. Then, before I could pull myself up, he kissed me. There didn’t seem to be anything wrong about it at the time, Ivar. It was just—just eerie—and he said something about mermaids—and then I got a little bit scared and I said I ought to be getting back home. And he said, yes, it would be better if I did go back, but that I must let him see me again soon. I promised to meet him a week from that day, at the same place.”

Ivar, visualizing the romance of Nona and Quentin Wingate, had been reliving in a slightly different setting his own ill-starred love for Julie Cartaret. Now, as Nona paused, he sat with his fists clenched between his knees.

“Go on,” he said dully, despite his effort to make his voice sympathetic. “You might as well tell the rest of it.”

“We met twice and swam—and never went ashore. But the third time we met we went over to the lodge together. After that, I could think of nothing but our meetings. We were in love, Ivar, and we forgot everything else. I think I knew even then that nothing could come of it. We belonged in different worlds. But I didn’t care—I was quite selfish about it. I wanted him—and when I knew he wanted me—I didn’t even think of what it might mean.”

“He should have thought, then,” Ivar said fiercely.

Nona laid her hand on his knee. “Wait, Ivar,” she begged. “Quentin wasn’t all to blame. One afternoon when I was with him on the island, his foreman came over from the plant with a message from Quentin’s father. Mr. Wingate was ordering the yacht brought back to the city. When he told me about it, I said he’d have to go, of course. And then he said, ‘Will you come with me and marry me, after you’ve met my people?’ I told him I would. While he got ready, I rowed across home. There was no one in the house, so I left a note for Pa and hurried away before anyone would come in. I thought it was all so romantic—and I was so sure everything would turn out all right.”

The poor kid, Ivar thought to himself, but said nothing.

“Well, we had a marvellous trip, with only the engineer and one other man on board the yacht with us. The engineer doted on Quentin, because Quentin knew so much about navigation. When we landed in Vancouver, Quentin telephoned home. He came away from the telephone and I knew something was wrong. I asked him what it was and he told me his father had had a stroke and was in a very serious condition. I said perhaps I shouldn’t go with him to the house right away, but he said, ‘Never mind—it’ll be all right,’ and we drove out in a taxi. Quentin scarcely spoke—all the way out.”

Nona drew her breath sharply. There was no longer any light from the west, but the stars budding in a luminous sky gave her face a reflected tranquil beauty.

“I can’t tell you much about what happened there, Ivar,” she went on. “It’s all like a jumbled nightmare. Quentin introduced me to his mother and his sister Nancy and they looked at me as though I were some unheard-of animal. Then he left me with them and went upstairs to see his father. Nancy asked me right away why I had come with Quentin and I—I told her. If they had laughed, I suppose I would have stood my ground against them. But they didn’t. They were very polite. They made it clear to me that Quentin couldn’t marry me for the very good reason that he was engaged to marry another girl. Eunice Derringer was her name. I refused to believe them, of course, but when Quentin came down a few minutes later, looking very pale, I was sure it was true. I didn’t ask him about it at once. I wanted him to speak about it himself. When his mother and Nancy left the room, he came over to me and said he was sorry, but we couldn’t be married right away—we’d have to wait for some time, perhaps.”

Ivar made a rough sound in his throat, but the rage he felt would not issue in words.

“Then I asked him if it was true—that he was engaged to marry Eunice Derringer. He just looked at his hands and the sweat came out on his forehead. Then he stepped close to me and tried to take me in his arms. I stood away from him—I knew then it was true—and I think I hated him more than I had ever loved him. I wouldn’t let him touch me. I didn’t want him to speak to me. I told him he would have to lend me enough money to get home—and he gave me a bill—a twenty-dollar bill. I don’t think he knew what he gave me. I didn’t either, till later. Just then the door opened and Nancy came into the room. Quentin started to say something, but I ran out before he could speak. I picked up my valise in the hall—a grand hall, Ivar, with two marble statues and a beautiful winding staircase of some dark polished wood—and a man who must have been the butler opened the door and let me out with a bow that made me laugh out loud. It had begun to rain a little and I just stood out there under the trees and laughed till I felt sick. Then I walked away—and got to the boat just before it sailed for Victoria.”

She fell back against the rock. It was better, Ivar thought, not to touch her just now or to offer her any sympathy. But he was close to tears himself. Lovely, warm Nona, with whom he had made sand houses on the beach when they were both kids . . .

“You’re well out of it,” he said at last. “You knew they weren’t our kind. I’m not strong on ghost stories, but I sometimes wonder if there isn’t a curse on anyone who tries to get away from the Cove—to something bigger outside, I mean. Julie Cartaret tried it, for one.”

“But she’s married to some rich—”

“She is not!” Ivar said sharply. “I met her on the street in Vancouver when I was down there last February.”

“You saw her—and were talking to her?”

Ivar smiled bitterly. “Yes—I saw her. She was wearing red open-work shoes—the kind Marie Ashe used to wear, only hers were black. She didn’t know me at first. Not until she came up and spoke to me and I said, ‘Hello, Julie!’ Then she almost ran—”

Nona sat upright. “That couldn’t have been Julie, Ivar!”

With a sigh, Ivar fished a package of cigarettes from his pocket and lighted one. “It was Julie, all right. I didn’t make any mistake about that.” He inhaled deeply and sat looking at the glowing tip of the cigarette. “We

just can't turn our backs on the Cove, it seems, and get away with it. Why, it was the same with—"

"That's just nonsense, Ivar!" Nona cried with such vehemence that he glanced at her in astonishment.

"Well—you tried it, didn't you?"

For several seconds Nona regarded him silently. "That is probably the first unkind thing you have ever said to me, Ivar."

"I know—and I didn't mean it like that, either. It just gets me a little when I think we haven't the sense to know where we belong. We're just dumb, I guess." He was silent for a moment. "Look here, Nona," he said at last. "I've been thinking. Why don't we get married—you and I?"

"Are you taking pity on me, Ivar?" she asked him then.

"I'm asking you to marry me," he retorted. "We've been together ever since we were kids—we understand each other—we like each other—and I know we could make a go of it."

With sudden tenderness he took her hand and turned it palm upward within his own. She sat curiously still for a long time. "I couldn't marry you now, Ivar," she said at last.

"Couldn't? Why couldn't you?"

"You know how fond I am of you. I might have married you once—and I'd have been proud of you, too. And we might have been very happy together. But after what has happened to me—"

"You're still Nona!" he said.

"Yes—but a different Nona from the one you knew. I didn't want to tell you, Ivar—but I may be—I may have Quentin's baby."

His shoulders squared. "I thought of that," he said abruptly. "That's all the more reason we should be married right away."

She shook her head. "No, Ivar," she said. "If that happens—I'd want to be alone with it."

Ivar stood up, tall as fury above her. "Damn Wingate!" he muttered.

She raised her dark, bare head and looked at him levelly in the starlight. "I know—you'd like to kill him, wouldn't you, Ivar? But that isn't done any more."

He grew hot under her taunt. "I never thought you'd be such a fool! After what he has done to you, you're still in love with him. You can't forget him. Isn't that true?"

She sprang up and stood before him. Then she threw back her head and laughed bewilderingly. "Oh, Ivar! If you had any sense, you'd understand that the reason I can't marry you, really, is that I could never love you—or anyone else—as long as I hate Quentin Wingate the way I do!"

It frightened him a little then, when she ran away from him down the steep winding road. But with his long strides he overtook her easily and Nona walked beside him quietly enough.

A kind of shamed dismay filled him now. Tonight, for the first time, Nona had become desirable to him—perhaps because someone else had not only desired her but possessed her. Tonight, for the first time in his imagination, she had run a bright parallel to the tormenting beauty of Julie Cartaret, and in his simple way he had thought to supplant the one with the other.

"All right, Nona," he said heavily, "I know I shouldn't have spoken to you about it tonight. I ought to have known how you would take it. But I meant what I said, anyhow. And if you ever change your mind—"

"I'll tell you," she said shortly, and her profile was very clear and straight-lifted against the pale, cool evening. Nothing was breaking within her now, Ivar thought, rebuffed; it was Nona Darnell, within herself, complete and proud—the Cove and him outside.

The stars in this latitude in late June, Ivar thought in his way, were only a slightly more concentrated silver-blue than the sky itself, so that upon looking upward you were perplexed by an indiscriminate panoply of brilliance for which there was no immediate cause. Upon looking about you, you found unaccountable thin light falling upon leaves and twigs and white stones, rendering them large in wonder, removed from their familiar smallness. To meet anyone you knew under this light was to experience a change in him, no matter how commonplace he might ordinarily be.

Nona and Ivar had proceeded only a short distance down the road when out of the dusk the curiously stooped, awkward figure of a man came toward them. It was Ethan Ashe, his hair straggling half way to his shoulders, his black, restless eyes giving Nona and Ivar a sort of imperious recognition while he was still some paces away.

He stood stock still in the road and waited until they had come up to him. Then he looked from one to the other with his piercing stare. "The moon will rise in half an hour," Ethan Ashe intoned. "Go down to the shore and see. There may be dancing in the moonlight. There was dancing last night. Go down and see."

Then instantly he plunged past them up the road and Nona stood looking vacantly before her. Ivar looked back at Ethan's uncouth, vanishing figure and laughed brusquely.

"The poor old loon!" he remarked and took Nona's arm stoutly in his hand. "He doesn't scare you, does he?"

Nona laughed lightly. "You don't understand him," she said. "Ethan is a poet—he *sees* the Spaniards dancing down there. We ought to be sorry we don't."

They had come to a turn in the road where the trees receded and revealed to them a fan-shaped device of the bay under the wakeful transparency of the sky. And upon the glassy floor of water, like spilled red wine, lay the mark of the rising moon.

CHAPTER FOUR

MACKEREL SKY

IT was hard to tell which was the more exciting position in which to lie on this black rock that stuck out like an alligator's snout into the sudden, still deep off the shore of the Inlet. Little Si was almost persuaded to call out and ask the opinion of Nona-Mom, who lay reading and sunning herself in her red bathing suit on the narrow white shelf of beach a little above him, just where rocks and trees rose into the sky. But he was six years old now and Grandpa Si had told him repeatedly that a man didn't ask unnecessary questions. He wished that he had eyes in the back of his head so that there would be no need of wondering which way he should lie—he could look up and down all at the same time.

Above him the white gulls cut the blue in beautiful patterns so intricately simple that they baffled the eye, and although he knew that they left behind them an airy wake of thin silver he could never quite see it and thus be sure it was there when he spoke to Gramp or Timothy Entwistle about it. A few minutes ago a sea eagle had stormed down from a scarp of rock overhead and the gulls had screamed their stridulous challenge. And far, far above the quick activity of the nearer air, like flecks of foam caught up and woven into a coverlet for the cool and remote middle of heaven, were the fascinating motionless clouds—Nona-Mom called it a mackerel sky. It was riffled like the roof of a cat's mouth, or like the sand under the shallows of that lake behind the mountains. Little Si hated to take his eyes away from that delicate white beach in the sky lest it might disappear. And without any wind, that would be a mystery.

But when he turned over on his stomach, there below him, scudding away under his ledge of rock, was a new kind of crab with claws of flame, or a creature with blackberry eyes standing out on thorns from his head. Beneath the black rock, where it fell away into the water-wonder that has no name, things unbelievable moved or paused or seemed to die of a sudden transparency and then become invisible. Si had never seen an emerald, but he had heard his mother say that when there was no wind the sheltered water of the Inlet was like one, if you looked down; like one, but more frighteningly beautiful, she had said, because it had the astounding enigma

of creation in it. Si remembered her saying that to old Timothy and Uncle Jorgen, and although he had no idea what the words meant, they sounded like what he himself had often seen when he had looked down into the clear green day of that monster-world off the edge of some out-jutting rock. The water was so crystal clear that when you glanced up from it, there seemed to be something wrong with the air about you, as though you could not see things as well in it as you could down there. You felt almost uncomfortable and began to think that you *belonged* down there, among the starfish with the pearls on their backs, and among the silver fins that flashed by like knife blades cutting the heart of the watery twilight. The rock grottoes, farther down than a small boy's height, were alive with a green slime that looked from above like a mysterious fog hovering about their escarpments. Sea-cucumbers, slothful and thick and horned, wound their slow and tortuous way between the dusk-gold turrets, recoiled for an instant at the dart of an unknown shadow, then moved inexorable and undeviating toward their dim and reasonless goal. Sea urchins, delicate and improbable as flowers growing out of ice, shimmered on the white sand far, far down, below the grotesque olive-green and violet castles lighted by the sudden opaque eyes of fish. And suddenly, from the unearthly shade behind the submerged fortress, staggered a baby octopus, hitching itself up on its smoke-colored tentacles and lumping its bladder-like body forward in a way that made Si laugh out loud. Poor thing—it looked like Aunt Eva knitting and losing a stitch and getting mad!

After due deliberation, Si concluded that it was better to look down than up. There was an end to looking down, if your eyes were good enough to make out that slow smudge that was a clam route fifteen feet below the green and gold and shadow-black of the water. But there was no end to looking up, because beyond the mackerel sky, which might even be a Magic Carpet, there were regions of terrible blue which no small boy could ever hope to explore.

It was August, as Si knew. Hadn't he been attending to Grandpa Silas's calendar for him, climbing to a chair in the kitchen beside the cupboard to tear the old month off and let the new one on, bright and shiny with red Sundays and holidays, and no flyspecks? But such an August as this he could not remember. Gramp said the same, and even Uncle Paul, although you could almost understand it in him because he looked as though he had always lived in winter. Uncle Jorgen, who had a wonderful printing shop of his own with trays full of black beetles of letters, had said yesterday, "This is what Debussy meant by 'An Afternoon of a Faun.'" Si had asked him what he meant by that and then Uncle Jorgen had put a record on the phonograph.

And sure enough—it was the music that yesterday played in the still sunshine. And today it was the same.

Yesterday Si had gone to the organ after the record was played and had picked out a little flicker of melody—nothing more than he did often—and Uncle Jorgen had said to Nona-Mom, “My God, Nona, we’ve got to get Si a piano if we have to steal it!” And Nona-Mom had snatched him off the organ stool and into her arms as if he were a baby, and when he saw tears in her eyes he felt queer and kicked himself free and went out into the backyard to dig the grub worms he had promised to get for Milton, his cousin who looked so much like Uncle Paul, and who wouldn’t let Si go fishing with him in Chinaman Creek unless Si furnished the worms.

Suddenly, on the shore behind him, he heard a sharp call that brought him out of his preoccupation. He got up to his slim strong height and tugged at his red wool trunks which had dropped to his buttocks. In the sunlight he blinked first at his mother, who had called him, and then at the large, thick-faced man who stood beside her. Something, Si knew at once, was not quite right. He knew it from the way Nona-Mom stood, her chest out and her arms crossed in front of her; and from the way the big man struck a match and lighted a cigarette and then flipped the match away as though he were watching where it went.

Si ran the fifty yards to the white stretch of beach. He felt important, although he didn’t know why, and he glared with a tight mouth at the big man whose suit was of light gray flannel with shoulders wider than they ought to be to fit him. You could tell that about the shoulders, because there was a little nest in the sleeve just near the armpit. The man didn’t have even the chest that Nona-Mom had, and his belt rose up on a little mound, and Major Timothy Entwhistle always said that was the wrong kind of shape to go with broad shoulders.

Nona-Mom just took hold of Si’s light mop of hair and laughed down into his face.

“Who is he, Nona-Mom?” Si asked.

“He says his name is Bart Leshner, dear,” she told him. “He has been in the Cove only a few months.”

Quickly Si took another look at the man. Yes, he had seen him in Bjork’s store. He drew back a step as Leshner’s face twisted down at him in a smile that was no smile at all.

“Don’t be afraid of him, son,” Nona-Mom said, fast as lightning, and she looked straight across at Lesher with her eyes all black and no blue in them. “He doesn’t understand our ways yet. He thinks because I have you that I ought to let him have me. But he’s going to think very different from now on.”

For a terrible moment, Nona-Mom paused and the big man seemed to go all like jelly. He grinned feebly.

“All right, Nona,” he said. “I can’t talk to you in front of the kid!”

“You can say anything in front of him,” Nona-Mom said, “—anything you can say in front of me.”

Little Si strode forward and knotted his fists. Gramp and Uncle Jorgen said that for his size and strength he ought to be ten years old instead of six.

“If my mother doesn’t like you,” he said, looking up into Lesher’s face, “you’d better go away quick, or—or you’ll be sorry.”

Lesher got red, but he laughed and tried to put his hand on Si’s shoulder. There was a ring on one finger of the hand. Si stepped back and struck the hand away.

“That’s the spirit, son!” Lesher said and laughed. “You take after your mother, all right, all right.” Then he turned away and waved his hand. “See you later, Nona. You’ll be more reasonable.”

Nona knelt with her back to him and put her arms about Si.

“He’s a horrid person, Si,” she said. “Let’s forget all about him. What did you see off your rock today?”

“Oh—” Si began, but he couldn’t think clearly of what he had seen, because Lesher swam in like something ugly—like an octopus—only worse, because the octopus was a baby and Lesher was old, with troughs under his eyes. “He had no right to come here and talk to you, did he, Nona-Mom?” he declared.

“Why—” She sang the word while she gathered her arms dreamily about Si’s shoulders and looked far off. “The oldest right in the world, darling, but you wouldn’t understand. It has something to do with a mark that is put upon you—” Then, very abruptly, she broke off and began to laugh and hugged Si closer. “My big boy—I’m only fooling. He had no right to talk to me at all. He’s just stupid and I didn’t want him to bother me. That’s why I called you over, dear. Let’s sit down and you can tell me what you saw from the rock.”

But Si remained square and sullen, looking threateningly in the direction of the town, toward which Bart Leshner had gone.

“Why don’t you like that man, Nona-Mom?” he asked her suddenly.

She always answered him very directly; that was how he came to know that he had once had a very good father who had had to go away because of honor and a debt he had to pay someone. He had asked her and she had told him. But now, when she took up a handful of sand and scattered it, her red lips very tight, little Silas was puzzled. He was surprised, too, when she pulled him down close to her and said, “In another year or two, son, when Gramp has enough money, you and I are going to go away from here—away to a place where they never heard tell of Heartbreak Cove.”

“Will my father be there?”

He didn’t know why he was sorry just after he had asked that question. It had something to do with the way Nona-Mom’s mouth trembled up on one side into a funny smile, and the way her eyes looked so far apart all of a sudden. When she laughed then, he was so glad he could have turned a hand-spring.

“Let’s go over to your rock,” she said quickly, “and look down and see things!”

And Si bounded up joyously and found the sun spangling midway on the smooth Inlet so that it was not yet more than half-afternoon. Nor had the mackerel sky vanished. It was really as if he had told everything to stand still until he came back, and because everything had stood still in the spell of sunlight at his bidding, Si felt full of power and knew that between himself and the Inlet there was an understanding.

One day soon, he would take Jorgen’s boat—he could use the oars now so that the whole family was proud of the way he did it—and he would row out toward the White Reef by himself when there was a moon. It was just possible that he would one day be able to see the Spanish ghosts his cousin Milton was always talking about. After all, he had seen things under the black rock that nobody else had ever seen—narrow white veils of things, drifting by, deep down in that green eternal evening of water; bursting silver stars that left no ember on the sand far below; patches of black in mid-water, the shadows of nothing and therefore beyond explanation. These things Si had seen and why should he not see the Spanish ghosts, even though Nona-Mom did not believe in them?

It was fun pointing out objects to her from the flat level of the rock. She almost seemed to see what he saw himself. But he could not help thinking that she had her mind on something else and for that reason he was glad when she said they would have to get into the boat and row over to the point where the boys were having the picnic supper.

The “boys” were Uncle Jorgen and big Ivar Hansen and Dick Malcolm and they would have girls with them, too, Si reflected. Ivar wouldn’t have one, though. Perhaps that was because Ivar always thought that Nona-Mom was his girl. She never went to the dances in the community hall, or to parties or anything, but Uncle Jorgen always went. Ivar Hansen would come to see Nona-Mom and listen to the radio or the phonograph or to Gramp playing the organ. And once, when there was a big supper and a wedding dance, Si’s mother had been mad at Ivar because he wouldn’t go, though it was his own cousin who was getting married. Nona-Mom wasn’t invited to the dance, so Ivar wouldn’t go either. It was all very puzzling to little Si.

One evening he would never forget. He had been asleep for a long time and then he had awakened and the radio was going and he had stolen downstairs and there was Nona-Mom dancing around the room with big Ivar Hansen. He could hardly believe it was his mother, looking so wild with her head thrown back and laughing. But he sat down on the floor in the dark hall where they couldn’t see him. And after a while they stopped dancing and Ivar took Nona-Mom’s hands and held them and then her head jerked suddenly forward as if she had been asleep and had awakened and was afraid. And Ivar had said, “You’re pretending you’re dancing with *him*!” And Nona-Mom’s face became so sad that Si couldn’t bear it and he crept back upstairs to bed and lay for a long time looking out at the stars that seemed like bright teardrops about to fall into the Inlet.

But they were both in the boat now and Si had his blue sweater on over his bathing suit and Nona-Mom had her white one pulled half-way down to her middle. Si hurried to take the oars and grinned at her when she looked up and saw him sitting there in her place.

“All right,” she said, “you can do twenty strokes, you rascal.”

But he did more than that, because she wasn’t very good at counting and he was careful not to let his breath out so that she could hear it. When they changed places at last, his mother kissed him on the ear and told him that he was a tremendous man.

“Uncle Jorg says I’ll be able to lick the third grade kids when I start to school next month,” Si remarked confidently.

“When you start to school.” Nona-Mom said that like an echo and looked far away across the water and drew hard on the oars as if someone was chasing them. Then her face came around toward him again and it had her beautiful smile on it. “You mustn’t think about fighting, Si. You’re going to be a great musician, aren’t you?”

Si looked down and wriggled his toes and laughed as he saw how alive each one looked—each like a separate, small brown person. Supposing each one of his toes wanted to go somewhere by itself? He leaned away back and yelled with delight at the thought.

“What’s the matter, Si?” Nona-Mom asked in a queer voice. “Aren’t you going to be a great musician?”

Then he sat up and remembered her question and remembered that it wasn’t polite not to answer people, so he said, “I’m going to be a fisherman, like Gramp.”

“A fisherman?” Everything—the light on the water, the gulls in the air, the white wake of a launch rounding an island—seemed to stand still in the sound of her voice. It was like an echo again, Si thought, and echoes always made everything around you still and clear as glass. But then she laughed and the whole glassy world splintered like music.

They came around the crouching black rocks of the Point, and there on the beach were Lydie Thorpe and Sara Magnusson, spreading the blue-and-white-checked tablecloth on the sand and tending the driftwood fire that snapped upward with red tongues at the pure sky. Farther down the beach, Ivar called and waved to Si and his mother as they came out of the boat. Si could hear Jorgen and Dick Malcolm laughing together where they were stooping over on the sand.

The girls called out, “Hello!” and Lydie rushed over and threw her arms tight around Si, while he did his best not to make a backward curve out of his spine.

“Oh, you’re getting so big and strong and handsome, I’m almost scared of you!” Lydie gasped. “Look—here’s a clam shell—I’m going to cut off one of those curls of yours and keep it!”

Nona-Mom sighed and laughed. “When will you stop treating him like a baby, Lydie?”

As he squirmed out of her arms, Si heard what Lydie said. “He’ll always be a baby to me, Nona. I was only sixteen, you know—and I’ll never forget the night when—”

“You’ll have to forget it,” Nona-Mom said, not loud but in a way that made you think she was almost angry. “Especially if you’re going to marry Jorgen—and be one of the family!”

Lydie sat back on the sand and bit her lip. But Si did not stop to wonder about that. He ran down the beach and was hoisted high on Ivar Hansen’s shoulder.

“How’s the big boy today?” Ivar asked. Si knew that he was looking past him to see whether Nona-Mom was coming.

“I’m fine!” Si said and laughed. “How are you, Mister Hansen?”

That was a joke they always had between them, so Ivar said, “I’m fine, Mr. Darnell, thank you!”

But after that they walked together toward the others, Uncle Jorgen and Dick Malcolm, and Si knew right away what they were up to. They were baiting gulls. Si didn’t like that. To make it much worse, Nona-Mom and Lydie were coming toward them. Nona-Mom didn’t like gull-baiting, either.

But Jorgen and Dick Malcolm liked it. They tied a herring to either end of a long string and threw them out where the gulls could get them. Gulls were greedy. Two of them swooped down and swallowed the herrings and then flew away. But they didn’t fly far. Almost as soon as they got off the water they found out that they couldn’t get away from each other because of the string. And so they pulled and fought in the air while the other gulls screamed and the people on the beach laughed and made bets on which bird would win. Nona-Mom didn’t laugh. She just sat still and looked away.

It used to make Si so angry that he would cry. But now he sat and looked up into the air. At last one gull gave a great tug at the twine and the other gull spat the fish out and Uncle Jorgen shouted and laughed because he had won the bet from Dick Malcolm.

But Si felt sick when he thought of grown-ups laughing at hungry gulls fighting for food and he walked away and sat down behind one of the black rocks leaning over the beach and felt like crying.

But Dick Malcolm saw him sitting there and knew what was the matter with him. And Dick called out to him, “Come on, Si—you’ll never make a fisherman if you can’t bait a gull!”

And then, quickly, Nona-Mom was beside him. “Tell him you’re going to be something greater than a fisherman, son.”

And that made Si feel very much better.

CHAPTER FIVE

Nona

YOU could well believe, during this interval of the bell's tolling, that there was no other sound in the world. It was strangely as though the Cove had laid a finger to its lips, silencing the screaming gulls, muting the clamor of the surf and the wind. In death, Ingrid Hansen, the mother of Ivar, was articulate as she had never been in life.

Nona Darnell stood at the open window of her small bedroom under the eaves and listened. She looked up the stony hill at the tiny wooden church where Abner Clough, the sexton, was discharging his somber duty. Dong . . . dong . . . dong . . . measured and inexorable! The sound reminded Nona of the ominous tolling of the bell on the buoy that warned seafarers of the White Reef. What lonely finality, what isolation! It was the same as when you pressed a conch-shell against your ear, shutting out all sound but the whisper of eternity.

Twice before, the church bell had tolled with poignant meaning for her. Fourteen years ago—when she was twelve—its voice had proclaimed the passing of her grandfather, that vast old man of the sea, Captain Jorgen Rustad. The sound of it then had been spirited and proud, acknowledging no defeat of the flesh. But again, when its knell had hushed the Inlet ten years ago, Nona, blind with tears, had thought it seemed like a dirge for a flower; her mother, Karen, had been so fragile and so fair. Abner Clough, the sexton, had a way of ringing the bell so that you might almost, with no other information, know who had gone “beyond the reef,” as he himself expressed it.

Nona's eyes faltered away from the church and lingered over the small frame cottages that clung like barnacles to the rocky slope, and the wharves and gray sheds and warehouses along the shore of the Inlet. She felt oddly dazed by the bright, unnatural stillness, the Sunday-like tranquillity of the afternoon. With an uneasy motion of her straight shoulders she swung about, her eyes darting in abrupt panic over the scant furnishings of her room. Ivar Hansen's mother was dead. He would have that little dun-colored house to

himself now—that little house that was so like this one, so like every other dwelling in Heartbreak Cove, except—

With a shudder of an old anguish, an old hatred born of a bitter humiliation, Nona grasped the worn back of a pine chair and set her teeth against the very thought of the Wingate name. Had she been different, she might have enjoyed a savage satisfaction from the spectacle of ruin into which the Wingate house was falling. But to Nona the stone and redwood lodge that stood on its jeweled island in the bay would always be a symbol of beauty, as different from the humble abodes of the fisher folk as night from day, even though it crumbled into dust—even though the memories it held for her were already ashes in her heart.

Yes, Ivar Hansen's mother was dead. He would be alone now, and Ivar alone was a thought harsh to bear. He would be alone tomorrow in the small gray house with its dooryard looking to the sea; and nights, when the seine boats would come in through the fog, he would return home to loneliness and a cold kitchen stove, his mother's quiet, purposeful hands gone, and her quiet eyes. Ingrid Hansen had said to Nona—quickly, because her illness was so brief: "Ivar is a good boy, Nona. Let him take care of you and little Si."

That was the way the Cove shaped your destiny for you. As if, once inside the White Reef that guarded its entrance, you did what was expected of you. Perhaps it was just as well, Nona thought. It simplified living. And yet, only a week ago, she had been looking forward to the time when little Si would be old enough to go with her out to face a world inimical to such as they! When Ivar's mother had spoken to her so, she had looked into Ingrid's blurred eyes and had nodded her head. Had she done that out of pity for Ivar, she wondered, or out of fear for what the future might hold for herself and her little son?

Ingrid had been one of the few people in the Cove who had forgiven what was quaintly called Nona's "misstep." But if she married Ivar she would eventually be taken back into the fold and little Si would have a name. Even Hesper Thorpe, who had finally relented toward Nona only because she wanted to get her pretty and useless daughter Lydie off her hands and there was no one in the Cove whom Lydie would look at except Jorgen Darnell—even Hesper would then convince herself that there had been nothing reprehensible in Nona's past. Nona laughed with bitter amusement at the thought.

She met her own gaze in the blistered mirror above the pine dresser and hastily swept her dark hair off her shoulders into a prim knot at the nape of her neck. Eva, her sister-in-law, had spoken to her about her hair only yesterday. “Why in the world don’t you put your hair up, instead of having it blowing around wild! It isn’t as though you were still a kid!” Nona had asked what was wrong with wearing your hair as you liked, and Eva had said, “Of course, it’s *your* hair, but a girl in your position—the men will think—” Then Nona had stormed at her: “Let them think what they damned well please! And let them say what they like! I ought to be used to it by now.”

But out of respect for Ivar’s mother, Nona pinned up her hair, smoothing its dark, unruly strands with her fingers as she stood before the mirror. She fastened a silver pin at the collar of her blue serge dress. The pin had belonged to her mother and had come all the way around the Horn over thirty years ago, in the freighter *Solveig*, out of Tromsø, Norway. Karen Rustad had worn it at her throat on that wild night when the *Solveig* had foundered on the White Reef. The pin was a Viking ship, deftly fashioned, and Karen had always worn it as an adherent of the Romish faith might wear a scapular, or a holy medal, devout Lutheran though she was.

The little picture on the dresser was of Karen as she had looked that day when she was taken from the *Solveig*, standing beside her father, Captain Rustad. Old Jorgen had vowed that if ever a ship of his went down with loss of life and he himself were saved, he would spend the rest of his days on the shore where Fate had tossed him. A strange pledge, a strange man! And so he had remained in Heartbreak Cove and kept his daughter with him—until she met and married the Irishman, Silas Darnell. Old Jorgen had lived by himself after that, tending his little garden on the hillside, wandering about the village with his dog, a Great Dane bitch, smoking his pipe in his cottage doorway in the warm summer evenings, talking before his fire when the nights grew cold, until he became a legend up and down the rugged coast, from Nome to San Francisco. And he had died at last without ever having set foot again upon a ship’s deck.

Nona surveyed her appearance in the uncertain glass, and with a tightening of her full, red mouth, reflected that the villagers would think to see her in black. Well—she had no black, and she detested it, anyhow. She brushed her face lightly with powder—her cheeks were too stinging red for a funeral! Then she pulled her blue straw hat down over her hair and took her mother’s hymn book out of the top drawer of the bureau. She dreaded the feeling of self-consciousness that would come over her upon entering the

church, where all eyes would be sure to give her a surreptitious or a frankly open glance. She would feel more comfortable carrying something with her until she got safely to the pew.

Downstairs, her father and Jorgen were waiting for her, dressed in their Sunday clothes and looking appropriately solemn. Her father, lank and stoop-shouldered, already had his hat on and stood uneasily in the doorway. He had small use for funerals, and had not been persuaded to attend one since the day his wife had been buried. Nona smiled faintly as she recalled that he gave as his reason for going to the service today not only the fact that Ingrid Hansen had been Karen's best friend, but that they had both died suddenly, too! Poor Pa!

Nona went to the side window of the living room and called out to little Si, who was playing with his cousins in the yard.

"Please try to keep clean until supper-time, Si," she said as he looked up. "We'll be having company. If you're all good, maybe there'll be ice cream."

"Can we go down and get it now?" Si enquired hopefully.

"Not till I get back, dear. Good-by—and be a good boy."

Oh, that absurd impulse to reach down from the window and catch him up into her arms, to hold him so forever—a part of her living self and a part of her that had gone farther away than death, the part that was her love for Quentin Wingate! Would it be like this always? she wondered in confusion as she drew away from the window. She had to struggle so to hide her fierce possessiveness. Ice cream for little Si—and a bell tolling from the hill. Oh, strange, uncaring life, brief and long, wide as air and narrow as the stilled body of a man!

People were threading their way slowly up to the church, between tiny dooryards where patches of flower-color had been teased out of the stony soil. Behind the white pickets of his fence, old Timothy Entwhistle was at work among his dahlias, his leonine white head agleam in the sun. At eighty-eight, he stood well over six feet and straight as a lance. Soldier of fortune and veteran of five wars, he lived now in the hope of producing, before he died, a true blue dahlia. He brought his fertilizer from the sea—brown kelp and seaweed, starfish and octopus—and christened each new variety of bloom as his errant fancy chose. He had never named one for Captain Rustad, although the two had been inseparable cronies to the day the old Norseman had died. No—Timothy Entwhistle was keeping the name

of Jorgen Rustad for his “true blue,” when at last it should come proudly into being.

Nona paused and leaned over the fence as Timothy made his way toward them between the full-blown glory of his dahlias.

“Aren’t you coming to the funeral, Major?” Nona asked, surprised to find him in gray denim shirt and overalls.

Timothy’s blue eyes glowed as he patted her hand reassuringly. “It wouldn’t be me, now, if I stayed away from a funeral, would it?” he asked quaintly. “But what need is there for hurry when a poor body’s dead?”

With a half-smile Nona shook her head. Her father was pressing forward eagerly above the white-painted pickets and gazing at the spumy bed of bright yellow blooms close at hand. Timothy, following his gaze, took a step aside and brushed a loving hand over the satin furls of one of the perfect heads. Neither of the men said anything, and Jorgen, frowning heavily, looked away.

But Nona, hating any show of emotion, spoke out clear and low.

“The ‘Karen Darnell’ is lovely this year, isn’t it?”

Seated at last between her father and Jorgen in the Darnell pew, Nona saw everything about her through a radiant veil that obscured and at the same time vivified reality. It had always been so when she sat in church. It had been so when she stood beside her mother and tuned her childish treble to the singing of the Easter service, wide-eyed with wonder before the magnificent altar done in blue and flanked by drapes of yellow, its golden cross and candle-sticks glorified and made ineffable in the sunbeams that fell upon them from the windows. Her eyes had discovered, on a small table beside the altar, a tile of turquoise blue set in a small frame and marked with symbols in black. No one had ever told her the meaning of those symbols, but the notion had come to her later, out of her crowded reading of books, that the tile was a pagan rune, and some deep and impious strain in her nature had quickened and glowed at the thought. One spring morning long ago, when the drone of the good rector’s voice had lulled her senses, she had counted the small leaded panes in the windows to keep herself awake—fifty-two in each window, six windows on either hand, and set in groups of three. Then the rector had begun to speak of Saint Columba, for whom the little church was named, that man of God who had left Ireland in the Sixth Century and established a monastery on the lonely island of Iona, off the

west coast of Scotland. And suddenly Nona was living in another land and another age, and Heartbreak Cove existed only in a dream.

But all that was of the past—the long, long past, it seemed to her. So much that was cruel had happened to her since then. In front of her now, his bronzed face hidden as he sat bowed before the flower-banked casket at the altar, Ivar Hansen was alone in the mourner's pew. The voice of the rector moved like a diffident caress over the congregation. Out of her abstraction, Nona caught a few phrases, and in her own mind they became like lighted tapers.

“ . . . Here in our little Cove memories and creatures never really die. The form may change, but the soul of things is eternal . . . The years cannot erase our memories . . . Time, here, may be likened to the granite cliffs that rise from the sea—the memories to the wind-scars that deepen year after year on the faces of the cliffs . . . ”

Nona saw Ivar Hansen raise his head and lay his brown hand along the back of his pew. But she felt herself suddenly the focal point of all the thoughts of the Cove people who were there, and her mind became cold and clear, seeing herself as they saw her. The Cove, with its tight little bundle of loves and hates and hopes and fears and prides—and its memories that never died! The Cove never forgot. Life moved forward here with a sort of sinister necessity, as inevitable as the ebb and flow of the tides of the sea, and all the past was woven into one piece with the present.

“To these waters came the Spanish explorers of early days, including Quadra”—so read the manuscript that hung on the wall at the back of the church. Here, too, came Jorgen Rustad—already a fabled figure who would one day become a myth, but would never be forgotten. Here came Karen, the daughter of Jorgen—a glamorous legend now, though her earthly beauty had passed by ten years ago. And in the years to come, these people, and their children's children would tell of Nona Darnell, the daughter of Karen, who had cast a shadow upon her mother's memory and brought shame upon herself when she ran off with a rich man's son and crept back again to do penance in her father's house. And they would tell, too—in all probability—of how a good man married her and loved her and never spoke to her of her shame . . .

The simple ritual came at last to an end and the strains of the last hymn faltered away. The congregation moved slowly out of the church and followed the pall-bearers down the winding road to the shore, where the casket was placed in a small boat that stood waiting, dark and still, on the

bright evening gloam of the water. The Cove cemetery was on a little island farther up the Inlet. The women stood weeping on the shore, but Nona scarcely heard them. Tears had long since ceased to have much meaning for her. Presently she was aware of Ivar standing beside her, looking down upon her with his grave, honest eyes. She gave him her hand without a word, felt the rough strength of his fingers close about her own, then saw him turn away and take his place beside the rector in the boat. Someone on shore began to sing a hymn, and the boat moved slowly away through the blue-gold wash of the light, until the dark hulk of it passed from sight behind a small island in the bay.

While Jorgen and the children trooped down to Bjork's for ice cream, and her father and Timothy Entwistle seated themselves with their pipes on the front porch, Nona went through the house to the kitchen where the blinds, drawn, made a familiar dusk that belongs only to kitchens at rest. She lifted the blinds and looked about her, thinking how similar to this one was the kitchen in Ivar's house. If there was any virtue in humbleness, she thought to herself, then surely she was one of the most blessed of mortals. Humbleness in itself, too, was lovable if one had any choice, but where there was no alternative, this small, mean kitchen was a reminder only of limitations.

She shook the ashes from the stove and laid kindling for a fire. From the stone jar in the summer cellar she got out the cold roast beef and began slicing it.

"Let's see," she said half aloud. "Paul and Eva and their two; Timothy and Pa and Jorgen; that's seven—and nine with me and Si. It's a good thing Ivar is going to have supper with the minister. There's something spiteful about cold roast beef—it always shrinks down to suet when you think there's one more helping in it. Well, I made enough potato salad, anyhow."

The children were romping through the house then, and Nona hastily set their low table on the back porch while they scrambled about in impatient anticipation.

"And see that you eat every bit of your supper," she warned them, "or the grown-ups will get all the ice cream."

She glanced back over her shoulder as she re-entered the kitchen and laughed at their grim and furious falling-to.

"Not so fast, there, my hearties!"

Ah, if they were only hers—all three of them! But perhaps never . . . A pang almost like the faintness of hunger smote her, and suddenly with shocking realness it seemed as though Ivar's strong body had brushed against her own. Immediately a sense of shame flooded her. "Little Si will always be enough for me!" she whispered fiercely to her own consciousness. "If nothing ever happens to me again, I have him and he's all mine!"

In a moment Jorgen came in from the backyard with an armful of fresh-dried hemlock that had lain all day in the hot sun. At once its fragrance filled the kitchen.

"You're a great help to your mother, Jorgie," Nona told him with affection.

Jorgen laid a few sticks on the kindling wood in the stove. "I might as well do what I can while I have the chance," he said. "It won't last much longer."

Although there was but a year between them, Nona had mothered Jorgen for such a long time that to both of them she seemed vastly older. She glanced up quickly at the significance of his speech, and flushed.

"Are you trying to marry me off, too, Jorgie?" she said lightly. "That would be too humiliating. Or is it Mother Thorpe that's been putting a bug in your ear?"

"Hell, no!" Jorgen blustered. "I just think Ivar is a swell guy—and you could do worse."

"Worse—or not at all," Nona laughed, a little sharply. Jorgen lit a cigarette and she winced at his apparent unease of mind. Well, if he wouldn't come out with it, he could fret over the hypocritical rectitude of Hesper Thorpe as long as he liked! To control her anger, Nona changed the subject.

"I suppose Eva will be expecting a hot supper," she said. "For anyone that complains of nausea as much as she does these days, she can certainly put away food! Well, she's got to be satisfied with what she gets—and be glad to get it!"

"The table looks nice, Nona," Jorgen said lamely from the dining room doorway.

She knew that he was hating himself right now and suddenly she felt sorry for him. He was, after all, her kid brother and he was so ridiculously in love with Lydie. But why couldn't people go their own way and lead their

own lives and not worry about dragging in and examining the morals of others whose existence happened to fringe their own? If Lydie had an inch of spine she would not permit her mother to interfere in any way between herself and Jorgen, and certainly not to the extent of managing Nona's life to suit her own notions of discretion. But Lydie always had been wax under her mother's bony thumb, except in the matter of falling in love with Jorgen, Nona reflected scornfully.

"Abner Clough says the *Princess* will be in about seven," Jorgen went on by way of making conversation.

"I suppose so—I had forgotten," Nona replied absently.

"But Bart Leshner says there won't be any dance on shore tonight, on account of the funeral."

"We can get along without it," Nona observed. "The *Princess*'ll be back next week on her way south again."

Jorgen idled across the kitchen and looked out of the window. "I'm not kicking—but Lydie was sort of looking forward to it. It's the only fun we get here. If I had any money I'd start a moving picture house."

Moved to tremulous laughter by the solemnity of his voice, Nona came and put her arm about his shoulders.

"Oh, Jorgie! You're so young. You want everything for Lydie, don't you? Well—some day you'll get it. Keep on with that young paper of yours, though. Some day it will have a society column!"

Jorgen's eyes lightened. "Leshner says this town is bound to grow," he said.

"Leshner again!" Nona frowned and took the pins from her hair as she shook her head. "If Bart Leshner had his way, there'd be a dance tonight—funeral or no funeral!"

Jorgen looked at her. "Say, what have you got against Bart Leshner, anyhow? You never have a decent word to say about him."

"Leshner is no good," Nona replied. "I wouldn't let a dog of mine have anything to do with him—if I cared for the dog."

On the back porch the children were clamoring for their ice cream. When she had taken the dessert from the cooler and served the youngsters generously, she came back to Jorgen.

He said, “Bart’s not such a rough-neck. He has a funny way of talking sometimes, that’s all. Down at the store just now he said these old-timers ought to pick a time for dying when it wouldn’t interfere with healthy people having a good time.”

Nona turned on him sharply. “You ought to be ashamed to repeat it!”

“Gosh, I didn’t mean anything!” Jorgen protested in an injured tone. “I was just telling you what he said.”

“And you could have told Bart Lesher that he probably won’t have much to say about picking his own time for dying,” Nona retorted. “Here—open this jar of pickles for me. I’ve got to cut the jelly-roll. Eva’s so darn fond of it. I made it specially for her this morning and now I suppose she won’t touch it when I put it on the table. Oh, God—these sheltered wives!” You could keep your mind calm, at least, with ironical trivialities right under your hand.

Eva called from the front of the house.

“Oh, dear!” she lamented as she came into the kitchen and seated herself wearily beside the table where Nona was at work. “I meant to get over in time to give you a hand with the supper. Isn’t there something I can do?”

Nona placed the sliced cake on a blue dish. Eva eyed it with distaste, Jorgen observed, and with a blank wink at Nona he departed for the front porch.

“Everything’s ready,” Nona replied shortly, “except the coffee.”

“Jelly-roll,” Eva said in a plaintive tone, as one might speak of a love that had died. “You haven’t a piece of plain cake or a little canned pineapple, have you, Nona?”

“Ice cream,” Nona told her, with a twitch of her lip.

“Ice cream.” Eva deliberated.

“Or some of Toby’s biscuits.” To conceal her laughter, Nona swung about and looked through the outer doorway. “Kids, where is Toby?”

“He’s here,” little Si said, “—eating the rest of my ice cream. You gave me too much, Nona-Mom.”

The shaggy old dog looked up from the plate and wagged his tail trustingly at Nona.

“You should have put it on his tin for him, Si,” Nona said. “Well—if you’re all through, trot out and play for a while. But don’t go over to Mrs. Patterson’s apple trees. She’ll take the hides off you, and anyhow the apples are too green.”

From behind her Eva spoke. “That’s a nice way to train children, I must say,” she observed primly. “Don’t they know it’s wrong to steal?”

“Oh, bother!”

But Eva was too far gone for an argument in ethics. Besides, she had counted the plates on the dining room table.

“Is there somebody coming for supper?” she asked.

“Just Timothy Entwhistle.”

“Oh. I thought—with the lace cloth and all—perhaps the rector was coming,” Eva observed, “—or maybe Ivar.”

Nona removed a stove lid noisily and placed the coffee pot over the fire. You simply couldn’t combat this kind of thing, Nona thought. Oh, Lord, to have enough money to get away from it all! It had taken Jorgen three years to make enough out of his fishing to buy an old hand press and she, Nona, couldn’t even fish!

“Ivar is having supper with the rector,” she replied indifferently.

“I think it would have been nice to have him—though in my condition I’m not very good company for anybody.”

“Great masters!” Nona exclaimed. “Get your mind off your condition, for God’s sake! It isn’t the first time you’ve been this way. You’d think—”

“Of course,” Eva broke in, masking the barb with a hurt look, “I might know you’d say something like that. *You* don’t *have* to go through it again.”

“And you do, I suppose, because you have a husband who can’t resist your charms, even when you try to hide them? A married woman can be like that!” The contempt in Nona’s voice was like steel ringing on steel.

Eva, taken aback, pulled down the corners of her mouth. “Oh, dear! You seem ready to snap at anything I say lately. I don’t see what you’ve got to be so uppish about!”

“What you mean is that beggars can’t be choosers, isn’t that it?” Nona replied. “Why don’t you come out into the open with it? I know you’re all counting on my marrying Ivar Hansen, now his mother is dead, and take the

stain off the Darnell name. I put it there—so I ought to take it off. Well, when I marry anyone, it'll be because I want to, not because the whole town thinks I ought to be made respectable.”

Eva folded her hands in her lap, distress clouding her face. “I didn’t think there was any harm in your own sister-in-law saying a word about you and Ivar. Everyone thinks you’re just playing with him. If you’d let people know that you’re on the level with Ivar—”

“People!” Nona retorted, her hands on her hips. “That’s just what’s wrong with this place. Everybody knows everything about everybody else. If it hadn’t been for Pa I’d have got out of here long ago and the whole lot of you could do your talking among yourselves. I’d have gone any place—I’d have made a living if I’d had to go on the street to do it—rather than put up with your damned persecution!”

Paul appeared suddenly in the doorway to the dining room. Nona turned to find him glaring coldly down at her.

There had never been any difficulties in Paul’s life. He was born in and of the Cove. He worked hard, he made money, he sheltered his woman and his children. It was not altogether his fault that he couldn’t see what a slave he had become. Paul was fortunately not too imaginative. When Eva was pregnant he had a hired girl to do the housework. Just now Abner Clough’s granddaughter was working for Eva.

“Well!” he said, and continued to glower at Nona. “That sounds great, coming from you. It seems to me you’ve been pretty well treated round here, considering everything.”

“All I want is to be left alone to look after my own affairs—and in my own way,” Nona replied evenly.

“That ought to be easy enough,” Paul returned, “especially since you manage to keep your affairs pretty well to yourself anyhow.”

“And I intend to go on keeping them to myself,” she said, unruffled. “When there’s anything to tell anybody that ought to know—I’ll tell it if I happen to feel like it.”

“There’s nothing new about that,” Paul remarked. “I don’t remember that you were ever in the habit of telling us anything, unless you felt like it, and that hasn’t been often.”

“Your insinuations are so subtle, Paul,” Nona retorted without rancor. “It seems to me that after seven years you would have learned that there are

some things I intend to keep to myself.”

“Oh, Nona!” Eva said tremulously. “How can you be so stubborn with your own family? It isn’t fair to little Si or to yourself to keep on making a mystery of everything. The Cove—”

“Mystery!” Nona cried in desperation. “Are you all so thick-skinned that you can’t imagine a person not wanting to *talk* about something?”

In a sudden revulsion of feeling she lifted the coffee pot from the stove and hurried into the dining room, her dark hair tossing almost to her shoulders.

Eva was on the verge of tears. “She’ll never take Ivar,” she whimpered almost under her breath. “And our children will grow up with an aunt who is a—a—” She broke off feebly, then added, “If she ever gave a darn about anything or anybody except herself and her own highfalutin notions—”

“Keep quiet!” Paul cautioned. “Here’s Dad and the Major.”

Eva sighed remotely and got up as Nona called everyone to supper.

CHAPTER SIX

Full Moon

THE death of Ingrid Hansen had touched Silas Darnell deeply. Perhaps it was because she had been Karen's closest friend. Or perhaps it was because he had always felt there was something more than pitiable in the death of a woman in the Cove. A man might die—as Oscar Hansen had died a few years ago, on the White Reef one night in a thick fog—and that was the natural end of a man whose life had been lived on the sea. But a woman! Most of the women of Heartbreak Cove were worn-out long before their passing.

"It's no place for a woman, here in the Cove!" he declared when Timothy, seated beside him at the supper table, paid a gentle tribute to the memory of Ingrid Hansen.

"You are a sentimentalist," the Major objected. "Ingrid lived and died as she was meant to do. True enough, we have women here who are not fit for the life they have to lead. Marie Ashe, now, proved herself unfit."

"Poor Marie!" Eva murmured complacently.

Nona, after a brief glance, looked away from her with irritation.

"I met Ethan Ashe this morning," Timothy went on, "while I was out taking my constitutional along the shore. He stopped me—you know the way he does—and talked as usual about his wife. He still believes she will be back any day now. Strange thing, isn't it? He seems to think that it was only a day or two ago that she disappeared. And it must be almost eight years now, isn't it?"

Nona kept her lids lowered. Marie, the pretty and flighty young wife of Ethan Ashe—what had become of her? What, for that matter, had become of the Nona Darnell who had been so confident seven years ago that a glorious life outside the Cove was hers for the taking?

"Yes, it's well that," Silas said gravely. "And I'm afraid it's not going well with poor Ethan."

“He still blames the Wingates for putting ideas of grandeur into her head,” Jorgen said with cheerful unconcern. “Whenever I meet him, the old boy points over to the Wingate Island and says in that funny whisper—it always gives me the creeps—he says, ‘There’s the evil! There’s the evil!’ Shucks, the old bird ought to be cooped up, I think!”

“Old bird?” Timothy replied mildly. “Ethan Ashe isn’t so very old.”

“Not much over fifty,” Paul remarked. “He was about fifteen years older than Marie, and she was thirty or so when she went away. But he has aged twenty years since she left him. He looks like a mummy now.”

“He scares me when I meet him at night,” Eva said with a pretty shudder, and leaned as though for protection against Paul’s arm.

Nona stared at her with unconcealed distaste.

“I think there’s something grand about Ethan,” she declared. “Whether he’s crazy or not, he clings to a hope, and that’s something!”

“Oh!” Eva breathed. But whatever she might have uttered just then was checked by Nona’s scornful eyes.

Timothy Entwistle shook his head. “Well, it isn’t likely Ethan will ever see Marie alive again. I mind those fancy open-work slippers she bought that summer she vanished. Ethan had given her money to buy bed linen with, or some such, and she went to Bjork’s and saw the shoes that had been brought in on the boat the night before. It wasn’t nature in her to resist them. And a pretty foot and ankle she had, too, bless her! And not a brain in her head. I recall her saying to me, with the shoes on her feet, ‘Well, Major, am I good enough now to walk over the Wingate threshold?’ Of course, she never did enter the Wingate place, but”—Timothy’s eyes grew dreamily blue as he looked into space—“somehow I feel those shoes of hers did.”

“Do you mean you think she’s dead?” Nona asked in a still voice.

“I don’t think she ever left the Cove,” Timothy replied.

A quiet fell upon the group about the table. It was Silas who broke it.

“Just so—I’ve said the same thing from the first,” he observed. “Once they come into the Cove, they never get out past the Reef again—unless they go out with their men to spend the night on the fishing grounds—or unless they die, or—”

“Or run away, Pa,” Nona laughed coolly.

Silas drew his brows together in embarrassment. He had never approved of Nona's flippant way of referring to her own escapade. He cleared his throat in the manner that prefaced one of his rare philosophical periods.

"The Cove is a pleasant enough spot for anyone, man or woman, if it comes to that," he said. "We have our trials here and our setbacks, but they're no worse than the trials that come to people in other parts of the world—nor as bad as some. We've always got our work to do—and it's hard work—but we're the better for that. Our women carry too much of the load, to my way of thinking, but there's no help for that, so far as I can see."

It was precisely this touch of fatalism in her father's character that sometimes moved Nona to impatience. It could be found just under the surface of every man and woman who lived here. As if, like a dark cloud that hung menacingly over their small cosmos, some inexorable power ordered their days and nights, their living and their dying. That Nona herself had once defied it and gone her way did not alter the truth in the least. She had come back again, her pride humbled, her spirit numbed, glad to find herself once more within the anomalous security of that dark cloud's shadow.

A hollow moan sounded from below the hill.

"There's the *Princess*!" Jorgen remarked.

"Aren't you going down?" Nona asked him.

"There'll be nobody coming ashore tonight," he replied.

Nona heard Timothy's voice as he told of something that had happened to him in South Africa years ago, but the details were lost to her. She was thinking of Ivar Hansen and seeing herself woven inescapably with him into the pattern of life in the Cove. Almost in spite of herself she had assimilated some of her father's fatalism. There were times when she rebelled, still, with all the vehemence of her spirit against its indisputable truth. At twenty-six, she wanted to be loved—she wanted to *love*—without fear of humiliation and bitterness and hatred coming in. From her kitchen window, when it was light, she could look out over the bay to the little island where stood the reminder of her one reckless adventure with life. She had grown to hate—even while she still granted its beauty—that great house growing shabby now among the green firs, from whose windows no light had shone now for seven years. In the end perhaps even her hatred would die. Perhaps she would marry Ivar and lose her mutinous identity in the life of the Cove.

Her reverie was broken by the sound of the children's laughter coming from the side yard. She got quickly up from her chair.

"Excuse me, Major," she said, "but I've got to put Si to bed."

While Nona went to the window to call the boy in, Eva hastily folded up her napkin. "Oh, dear!" she lamented, shaking her head archly at Timothy. "I've been so interested in your stories, Major, that I clean forgot my young ones. I guess I was meant to have a nursemaid for them every minute. We simply must get them home, Paul dear."

At the window, Nona heard Eva's high, indolent voice—that voice that managed always, somehow, to make Paul appear mean, even though he was exhausting himself to provide every comfort he could for his family. Nona's mouth set into a straight line. How could Paul be such a fool as to put up with Eva's whining and at the same time censure his own sister who had taken her ill luck without complaint and gone on with her responsibilities to a household in a way that Eva would never have done?

But when she was undressing little Si in his room next to her own, and giving him his sponge bath in the little kidney-shaped tin tub, she forgot all about Eva.

"There's a full moon tonight, Nona-Mom," the boy said, looking restlessly toward the window. "It says so in the almanac."

"Dear me, how you can read!" Nona laughed. "Between Gramp and Uncle Jorgen, you'll learn more than you'll ever learn at school. Here—the other foot, now!"

"What's on the other side of the moon?" Si asked thoughtfully while Nona told him to step out of the tub.

As she dried his slippery young body with a rough towel, Nona said, "I don't know, dear. You'll have to ask the Major tomorrow."

"What's the moon full of, Nona-Mom?" Si persisted.

"Oh, darling!" Nona exclaimed and hugged him. "It's full of mischief. Ask Uncle Jorgen tomorrow. He'll have an answer for you. Now—into bed with you! Little boys always sleep better when there is a full moon."

Tucking the light blanket about him, Nona kissed his cool, petal-clear cheek, and by sheer will restrained her impulse to hug him again.

"The Spanish sailors dance when there's a full moon," Si concluded as he nestled into his pillow.

“Oh, darling!” Nona remonstrated. “There *aren’t* any Spanish sailors around that wreck. That’s just nonsense. Now, get ready for sleep and there’ll be griddle cakes for breakfast.”

The boy was looking past her at the opposite wall in the lamplight. His long black lashes remained fixed as a doll’s above the blue of his eyes. When he had been a baby he used to stare like that, Nona recalled, at nothing or at something wonderfully invisible, and then suddenly his lids would drop and he would be away from her in his own mysterious baby world of slumber until he wakened.

Nona knelt beside him. She had never taught him to say, “Now I lay me down to sleep.” They had their own precious ritual. She took one of his small hands and said, “Now—one kind and happy-thought for somebody for tomorrow, son.”

Si’s hand was more tense than usual. But perhaps that was because he had played late with Paul’s youngsters or had had too much ice cream.

“One for you, Nona-Mom,” he said, “and one for—” He hesitated. “How does a happy-thought get to somebody when they don’t know about it?” he asked.

“Happy-thoughts have wings of their own. It was lovely of you to think one for me. Now I’ll think one for you.” She fell silent for a moment, her eyes downcast. Then, smiling, she got to her feet and they shook hands as they always did after the happy-thought had been sent on its way.

“Good night, Si. Sweet dreams.”

“Good night, Nona-Mom,” Si said as she blew out the light.

In the brief interval between leaving Si’s room and moving down the stairs, Nona struggled to regiment her thoughts into something approaching order. In less than a month, Si would be starting school. He would meet other children, some of them from the other side of the Inlet, who would learn quickly the difference between themselves and him. More than anything else, Nona feared the deadly wisdom of children. Through his school years, unless he was given Ivar’s or someone else’s name, little Si would have to bear the crude brunt of his illegitimacy. It was all very well to dream of leaving the Cove some day, with Pa and little Si, and trying to make a living somewhere else. But without training or experience of any kind . . . Nona’s heart shrank back into a cold depth and told her that all her courageous planning for independence was just so much stuff.

As if to crystallize the thoughts that filled her mind, there came a sound of a footfall on the front porch, and at the moment when she reached the hall below, the door opened and revealed the rugged figure of Ivar Hansen dimly outlined against the outer dusk. Jorgen stepped out from the living room.

“I got away from the minister,” Ivar said and smiled at Jorgen. “I *had* to!”

“Well, you’ve had a whole day of it,” Jorgen replied.

Ivar turned to Nona. “I thought you might like to take a walk. I don’t feel much like sitting around.”

“Go ahead,” Jorgen spoke up. “I did the dishes while you were upstairs, Nona. And there’s no use of you staying in the house. Pa and the Major are on politics now.”

Nona took her flannel jacket from the hall rack.

They walked down along the shore into the heart of the village, where the Sunday-like hush still prevailed. From quiet dooryards people observed them walking together and husbands felt stiff-necked and proper in their dark, neat clothes, and did not know exactly what they thought under the circumstances, because although Nona Darnell should certainly be married to a good man, still and all it seemed a shame that Ivar Hansen, model son of a highly respected mother, should not win a virgin to wife. But because the passing of Ingrid Hansen still possessed the evening, husbands and wives alike were reminded of their own shortcomings and were made grave in spirit to the point of charity. Shameful it was, of course, that Nona Darnell should have betrayed her own kind—a far more serious error than betraying herself—to the son of that old cutthroat, Edmund Wingate, who, with his partner Sheel, had ruined them all some years back. And yet, surely, much of the harm could be undone with Nona’s wedding of a decent man.

The tide was nearly full. Here and there on the still water of the bay, white nests of foam that had drifted in from the Reef lay waiting to be carried out again on the ebb. Small fishing boats were plying out into an indigo sea, the busy chatter of their engines intensifying the nearer silence.

Down the bay, the *Princess* was making her way slowly out through the narrows, her lights showing dimly against the western afterglow. Ivar’s eyes followed the sleek, white ship for a moment, then he glanced aside to where Lucius Crane was leaning far over his gate to give Nona a curious stare.

"I think we'll turn back up to the Quilchina Road and walk out as far as the Rock," Ivar suggested, his tone deep and steady, the husk in it only that which is common to men who lay their voices against the sea.

"It's all the same to me, Ivar," Nona replied easily. "I don't mind their staring. I've got used to it."

With awkward impulsiveness, Ivar stretched forth his hand and laid it on her bare brown forearm.

"They can be cured of that," he said.

He seemed to be holding his breath as he spoke. Nona, glancing sideways with compassionate warmth, saw that his eyes were fixed moodily along the Inlet where there was a glowing water murk under the cliffs.

She felt herself suddenly become the storm center of conflicting emotions; it was as if her heart were crowded with wings that beat against one another for release. Ivar, with his rough light hair and his level gray eyes, was dear and kind and strong. Never from him had she suffered any humiliating and easy glance, although there had been no lack of shore men who had favored her so before her cold fury had repulsed them. In the security of Ivar's calm love she would be, she thought, like a small, storm-torn craft coming to shelter in a snug fjord. There would be safety there, and peace—but ah, there would be none of that stinging rapture that had once sent the wild blood flying through her body.

The village was behind them now and the tall firs made parapets of shadow on either side of the road.

"I meant that—what I said back there," Ivar ventured, clearing his throat. "They can be cured of their staring and their talking."

Nona laughed gently at him. "But I don't mind it, Ivar," she insisted. "Really, I don't."

"Maybe you don't, but I do!" he said stubbornly. "And maybe it's no business of mine, either, but"—he hesitated, then hooked her hand brusquely into the crook of his arm—"I'd have put an end to it long ago, if you had let me, Nona. I'm sort of dumb, I guess. I can't talk the way I want to. And maybe you'll think I oughtn't to talk this way tonight—after today."

"Your mother wouldn't want you to be any different tonight, Ivar," she said steadily. "I think it would make her happy if she knew we were walking together and thinking of her. I haven't had a chance to tell you—but the last thing she said to me was that I should let you take care of me and little Si."

“She told me about that,” Ivar said. “And she said you—”

“I couldn’t do otherwise, Ivar. I couldn’t refuse her.”

Ivar swung about and gripped her hands in his large ones so that she winced. “But I have been hoping that you meant it, Nona.”

She looked away from him with a dull surge of unhappiness. Her silence, then, hurt more than any reproach. She moved from the road and took the little pathway that led up to the Sleeping Chief Rock, Ivar following. She seated herself at the base of the rock and cupped her chin in her hands. Seven years ago—hadn’t the scene been very much like this? Perhaps there was some significance in that.

“I guess I’ve been talking too much again,” Ivar said at last, a hint of resignation in his voice, as he sank down beside her, “but I haven’t any way of knowing—”

Nona placed her hand affectionately on his shoulder and was distressed to find that her fingers were trembling.

“Ivar—dear Ivar!” she said in a half whisper.

He took her hand and stroked it diffidently. “There are things, I guess, that don’t stand much talk,” he stumbled. “I know I’m not good enough for you. Nobody is. But I’d do everything I could to make you happy, Nona. And you know what I think of little Si.”

Nona’s lips shaped to a twisted smile.

“I know, Ivar. It’s you who are too good for me. But that doesn’t matter, after all. I’m awfully fond of you—and you are of me. But—marriage, Ivar. Do you remember how you felt about Julie?”

“We’re not talking about what’s over and done with,” he muttered. “It never gets you anywhere.”

A chilling ripple passed over her. Done with? Perhaps Ivar had got over thinking about Julie Cartaret. But it would take seven times seven years to erase the memory of Quentin.

She was close to despair. “I have tried hard to forget what happened to me, Ivar,” she said. “And every time little Si glances at me out of the corner of his eyes and grins as though we were having a secret joke together, I could scream! Whenever I think of Quentin Wingate a bitterness comes up inside me—like a taste, Ivar. It will be so, even if I marry you.”

“You could marry me—and try it,” Ivar said boldly. “It might—maybe you’d forget all about it after a bit.”

For a long time she was silent, her eyes half closed. What she saw behind her lids was, arrestingly, an avenue of bright stillness and peace, down which she walked hand in hand with Ivar Hansen.

“Perhaps,” she said softly at last, “—perhaps it will be different, now that I’ve told you.”

“It will!” Ivar insisted and laid his face down against her hands.

It was with a distinct sense of shock in the repetition of the thing that Nona saw Ethan Ashe on the road ahead of them as they returned down the steep way. He was carrying an unwieldy bundle on his back.

“Good evening, Ethan,” Nona greeted him. “Where are you going with all that load?”

He gazed at her and Ivar searchingly before he made any reply.

“You don’t know,” he said with dignity. “Marie will be back any day now. And it wouldn’t be fit, would it, to have a lot of rusty pots and pans in the kitchen for her to use? I have put in everything new—shining like the sun. This old stuff is still good, mind you, but not good enough for her. I am taking them to the Indians up the road.”

Nona’s eyes filled with compassion. She glanced helplessly at Ivar as Ethan’s sharp scrutiny darted over her.

“Do not marry her,” he said to Ivar, in a harsh whisper, “unless you know what is in her heart. Women—they are a mystery and a madness!”

Then, like a grotesque wraith, he disappeared up the road behind them.

“He never gives up hope,” Ivar observed skeptically.

“But he never bought new pots and pans before!” Nona cried in a broken voice.

When Nona entered the house again she found her father alone. He was seated at the small organ—she had heard him playing when she left Ivar at the gate. Shaggy old Toby, the dog, lay on the floor near him. Silas turned his head as she closed the door behind her.

“You didn’t bring Ivar in with you,” he commented.

Nona pushed her hair back of her ears and flung herself into a chair beside the table.

“He went home,” she said simply.

Silas Darnell swung about slowly on the stool and drew his pipe from his pocket.

“He’s had a trying day of it,” he said quietly. “I was thinking he might drop in, though, for a little while before he went home. It’ll be cheerless enough for him there tonight.”

Nona looked at her father for a moment without speaking. Long ago, even when her confidences and her problems were of small importance, she had taken them to him. The problem was not so small now, but he had never failed her in sympathy and understanding.

“Pa,” she said suddenly, “I think I’ll marry Ivar.”

Silas lifted his brows and gave her a steady look as he tapped his pipe smartly against his palm.

“Well,” he said with a whimsical smile, “that’s no great surprise to me, my girl.”

“Nor to anybody else, I suppose,” Nona retorted. “They’ve all been throwing me at his head for years.”

Her father began filling his pipe thoughtfully. “That’s true, maybe. But it’s nothing to feel bitter about, after all. They mean well—half well, anyhow—and that’s about as much as we can expect from people in this world.”

Nona looked about her. “Where’s Jorgie?”

“He’s off playing bridge at the Thorpes’.”

Nona shifted impatiently in her chair. “Hesper Thorpe is one who will throw rice and old shoes with delight!” she remarked shortly. “She’d get me married off, if she could, by hook or by crook.”

Silas grinned. “Young folks usually raise a holler when the neighbors *object* to their getting married,” he observed.

“When I marry Ivar,” Nona replied, “it won’t be to please anybody but myself.”

“That’s as it should be, I think.”

“I don’t mean it the way you think, Pa. Marriage to Ivar will be a selfish thing on my part—so that little Si can have a home—and a name. I’ve thought of getting out of here and doing something for myself, but there’s no sense in that. Jobs don’t grow on trees and I haven’t any training. I could have taught school once, but it’s too late for that now. Besides, I’d want to have you with me, Pa—and you’d never be happy anywhere in the world, outside the Cove. You see—when I marry Ivar, it will be because I’ve thought it all out deliberately.”

Silas pressed the tobacco firmly into the bowl of his pipe. “So that’s the way of it?” he said.

“I know,” she went on resignedly. “It isn’t easy for you to understand why I should be willing to marry Ivar when I’m not hopelessly in love with him. Well, I was hopelessly in love once, Pa—and what came of it? I don’t want any more misery.”

“Are you quite sure you’ve forgotten Quentin Wingate?”

It was the first time in seven years that Silas had spoken the name in Nona’s hearing.

“I remember only that I hate him.”

“We’ll say no more about it, then,” her father said mildly. “Have you told Ivar how you feel about it?”

“I’ve told him everything.”

For a while then Silas was with his own thoughts. “Well, my girl,” he said finally, “there seems to be little left for me to say. It isn’t often a person marries his first love. Maybe it’s just as well. We grow in experience and there’s more to marriage than kissing. Romance is thin fare when you settle down. If you have the respect of a good man—and he has yours—and if there’s real understanding between you, you needn’t be afraid of taking the step.”

“There is all of that,” Nona told him. “Besides, I am fond of Ivar. I could never do anything to hurt him.”

She got up and began pacing excitedly about the room, her arms clasped across her breast, her eyes brilliant and straight before her.

Silas raised a quizzical eyebrow. “Are you trying to convince yourself now that you’re doing the right thing?” he asked her.

Nona's color rose. "You're much too sharp, Pa. But the truth is that I don't have to try. I know that I care more for Ivar than I shall ever care for anyone else. And Ivar loves little Si."

Silas drew gently on his pipe and smiled to himself. "You are your mother's daughter," he said. "There was something wild about Karen Rustad—something that was never tamed, because no one could ever capture it, let alone tame it. But no one can say that our life together wasn't a happy one, for all that. Happier, maybe. I sometimes think it's better for a man when he doesn't get all—when there's something kept back. You know"—he looked across at Nona and grinned—"there was never a day in my life with your mother that I wasn't afraid some man might happen along that she'd take a fancy to and run off with."

Nona laughed and stepped to his side. "How perfectly silly—and sweet!" she cried as she ruffled his scant hair with her fingers.

Silas's stiff yawn was not quite convincing. "Well—it's me for bed and bed for me!" he said with a forced jauntiness as he got up from his chair. "By the way—I almost forgot," he added quickly. "I was talking to Amanda Clark in Bjork's yesterday. She wants you and Si to spend a few days with her out at the farm. I think it might be a good thing for you right now. They have a pretty spot back there in the mountains."

"I'd like to go," Nona said, "if you think you can get along without me for a day or so."

"If we can't," her father replied, "we'll be in a poor way when you leave for good."

He yawned again and went off slowly toward the stairs. Nona could simply not bear the sorry feeling she sometimes had for him; his futility, his resignation, his sensitiveness to unhappiness in others, overwhelmed her with a sense of responsibility toward him, even while she knew that in his odd aloneness he had no real need of her or of anyone else. Growing old was simply a process of drawing closer to that ultimate independence called death. Nona shivered, turned the lamp low for Jorgen, and went upstairs. She paused to listen at the doorway of little Si's room. His light, regular breathing brought her momentary peace. She resisted the impulse to go in and bend over him, but her lips moved in words that were tender beyond form or meaning.

A half hour later she slipped quietly out of the silent house and stole down to the little floating wharf where her own light skiff lay moored

alongside Jorgen's new one. The stillness of her room had been unbearable.

When she had rowed some distance from the shore, she rested on her oars and let her head fall back while the boat drifted. It was easeful so, to her tired body and her tired mind. Against her lids, her eyes closed, she could feel the moonlight, an infinitely cool and delicate pressure. The tide had turned; the Inlet smelled sharply of the sea, the strong waters plaiting with the brackish, so that dark knouts of their mingling were momentarily visible on the surface of the flow. The little islands stretched toward her or edged away with the drifting boat, solid clumps of black except where, at intervals in the treacherous channel, a "ghost" had been painted on a slab of stone as an aid to navigators.

One thing about being out alone like this among the islands, Nona reflected, was that you became incapable of thought. The stark and eerie beauty of the channel under a full moon, with the night cliffs cut against the hollow green of the sky, seemed always to mock any brooding you might do over your own problems. You were transported to a realm of pure light and pure darkness and were made a part of it, cool and luminous and immaterial.

But somewhere in the depth of her thought lay the memory of Quentin Wingate, his bronze locks through which she had so often run her fingers, his provocative, laughing mouth, his wide-spaced, deep hazel eyes. Hot anger at herself drew her suddenly upright.

Presently she lifted her oars again as an abrupt swirl of water swung her skiff sharply about. There was something in the dark treachery of the turned tide that frightened her for a moment and she pulled away from it with all her strength and found quiet water close to a dark, pine-clad island.

She pulled up sharply as she realized that she was abreast of the Wingate place. What obscure instinct to seek security was this, she wondered, that had driven her to the one spot where she would never find it?

Her eyes widened with incredulous amazement as she saw, in the frame made by the two great pines before the Wingate house, a pale glow that could come only from a lamp in the living room of that house.

She must have been sitting staring at that light for many minutes in a sort of hypnotic trance, for now she came suddenly awake to find herself frozen with terror. Her hands, as she gripped the oars, were numb and almost impotent. And now, like some strange visitation from outside her own being, a colossal dread seemed to stagger down upon her out of the glaze of moonlight.

Perspiration was trickling down her spine and along the sill of her throat when she pulled up finally at the Darnell pier. Her hands were wet and aching. She turned her head quickly at the sound of a voice behind her.

“Nona—Nona!” It was her father, with Paul and Jorgen beside him. “For God’s sake, Nona, haven’t you got little Si with you?”

Jorgen’s boat was gone from its place at the pier.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Quentin

QUENTIN WINGATE hunched up his broad, spare shoulders and drew the collar of his coat more snugly against the back of his neck. He leaned across the taffrail of the *Sirius*, his father's old tugboat that had stood for seven years on her stocks under the meager shelter of a decrepit roof that had been erected on the rear beach of the Wingate Island. He had left the house early and strolled around the island to give it a preliminary inspection. Low clouds were scudding in from the north-east, and now and then the wind, knifing the Inlet, flung spray into his face with the sting of nettles. What a capricious place this Cove was! Last night it had been bathed in calm, warm moonlight, until all of a sudden there had come a rush of wind overhead, as though some fabulous creature were fleeing seaward through the pines.

Now he walked slowly along the tug's shabby deck and glanced down the narrow companionway. He could hear the rats scuttling through the malodorous murk of the rotting hull and he jeered sardonically at himself for the involuntary symbolism the sound evoked in his mind. He began sketchily computing the probable cost of making the old *Sirius* seaworthy. He had already looked over the small launch that had been kept locked in the boathouse and had found it very little the worse for its long period of idleness. But there were the two scows over at the packing plant on the north side of the Inlet, directly across from the town. He could well imagine the time and money that would be necessary before they could be put to use again. Besides, there were the buildings of the plant itself. By the time he had done everything that must be done, his purse would be slender indeed. He was almost glad that his father, that spendthrift dreamer, had died in the midst of the Wingate chaos those years back. It would have broken Edmund's heart to have seen his son start anew on this miserable shoe-string.

Shoe-string though it was, Quentin was glad that he had managed to pay the almost negligible taxes as they came due—even last year when his income had been next to nil and he had come dangerously close to being supported by Eunice. Looking back now, he believed that he must have

foreseen that he would one day need the sanctuary of this island, and that that was the reason he had bought it from his mother more than five years ago when he had still a little money of his own. He had never returned to take formal possession of the lodge, but that was another story. Nona Darnell! Her name still echoed like heart-breaking music along the corridors of memory.

He shrugged the thought away and walked to the tug's stern where he stood for a moment with the wind whipping his face. He could look across the surly water from here and see the gray, weathered buildings of the old packing plant. Only last week, back in Vancouver, Joe Iden had made a final sober effort to dissuade him from what Joe regarded as a foolhardy, a quixotic and altogether bootless, experiment. But Quentin had told him that this was no experiment. "Horse collar!" Joe had exploded. "Why make a slow death of it? Why not take a room on the top of some nice tall building—it's quicker and it wouldn't be half the mess. Besides, it would be practically painless. People wouldn't understand it, perhaps, with a wife as rich as yours, but neither will they—" Quentin's face had gone so black then that Joe had broken off with a feeble laugh. "We can leave Eunice pretty well out of this," Quentin had said evenly. "Marrying her was the shabbiest trick I ever pulled—and you know it! What's more, Eunice knows it—now! A man can't marry money to save his family's pride and keep any pride he ever had in himself. For nearly seven years I've been a kept man, a he-mannequin toddling about after a pair of million-dollar ankles—and all because the Wingate name had to be saved from dishonor. My God—when I think of it! Well, *that's* over. And I'll tell you this—Eunice has had more respect for me since I left her three months ago and took a furnished room to myself than she ever had while I lived with her." And Joe Iden had said, "You'd better be careful, old man. She may fall in love with you all over again and refuse to sue you for divorce."

Quentin's lean face creased into a sardonic smile at the memory. Good old Joe! He had wanted to stake him to a new beginning in the same old world. Quentin's rejection of the offer had not been made in perversity. As for Joe's opinion of his resolution to wrest a living out of what remained of the Wingate fortune—these pathetic holdings in the back-waters of creation, on which during the past year he had not been able to keep up even the fire insurance—as for that, Quentin had shown a tolerant understanding. He had not taken the trouble to set Joe right. It would have been almost impossible for Joe to grasp the fact that Quentin Wingate was sick to the soul of the world of money, and that Heartbreak Cove offered a challenge more subtle than anything he could find in the stock market or the wheat pits. In the face

of Joe's disapproval, Quentin had asked him if he would stand behind him in the event of his needing help later on, but Joe had laughed at the idea of putting any money into such a hare-brained scheme as Quentin had described.

Well, Quentin pondered, if it was a challenge he was asking for, he was well in the way of getting it. He had scarcely anticipated a hearty welcome in the Cove, but he had not been prepared for the frank animosity that had met him last night when he had stepped down the gangway from the *Princess* and moved among the townspeople who had gathered on the dock. He had recognized many of them, but had won only chilly rebuffs wherever he had ventured a greeting. Even old Bjork, to whom he had gone for a few supplies to take with him over to the island, had tempered his shop-keeper's cordiality with a curious restraint. On second thought, though, it had seemed more like embarrassment in Bjork.

Finally, Quentin had been forced to hire the services of a Japanese fisherman to take him and his effects across to the island. He could foresee already the difficulties he would encounter when he went at last to engage the men he must have as soon as he began the task of repairing the boats and the buildings. In the end, he would probably have to bring men from Vancouver to do the work. The realization touched him with exasperation and dismay. A crew of outsiders, no matter how agreeable they might be, would glean little warmth from the inhabitants of the Cove, so long as they were associated with a Wingate.

He clambered down from the deck of the tugboat and continued his walk around the island until he stood once more on the porch in front of the house. Despite his armor of irony, a sense of bleak loneliness was already invading him. He tore his eyes away from the row of small cottages that lined the shore on the south side of the Inlet. When he had first looked out this morning, he had glanced along that straggling row until he had found Nona Darnell's house. With a sickening sense of defeat he had recalled the girl as he knew her during that last summer he had spent in the Cove. And he had cursed himself in the next breath for a spineless romantic. That was all over and done with—that piece of shattering folly that somehow had sealed and put away his first youth. Nona was probably married now to some sturdy swain in the village, her summer escapade with Quentin Wingate only a distasteful memory, if a memory at all.

He wondered detachedly if it had ever occurred to her that his experience with her had made something else of him—something hard and cynical and inaccessible. His betrayal of her, in the best bathetic and

Victorian manner, had been a betrayal of himself which she had probably never glimpsed. Irony had fairly shouted at him when, a week after his marriage to Eunice, his father had serenely died.

How his mother and his sister Nancy had managed to “keep up appearances” after the debacle he did not know. They had, of course, sold their town house and the yacht, *The White Falcon*, and Quentin himself had paid his mother what he could for the island and the lodge. The packing plant at the Cove had been turned over to him by his father, before the failure of the Sheel project, and Quentin had stubbornly hung on to it despite his mother’s entreaties to exchange it for what ready cash he could get for it. The Wingate women, however, still maintained a fashionable apartment in the city, drove an expensive car and played bridge at a cent a point. *The White Falcon* had passed into the hands of old man Derringer who had promptly turned it over to Eunice, but the Wingate properties had received no other reinforcement from the Derringer money. Quentin had been trying to sell bonds until he paled at any word that began with a B, and finally Eunice had turned upon him in a scene from which he had fled with a deep sense of relief.

Their set-to had had many of the aspects of a shameful brawl with cheap invective hurled from both sides. Eunice had accused him of marrying her for her money and he had savagely admitted that he had done just that. Breathless with rage, she had devoutly thanked God that she had given him no children and Quentin had retorted that it was impossible to produce children from a doll stuffed with sawdust. That had been three months ago and he had not seen her since. Nancy, her best friend still, had angrily informed Quentin that Eunice was planning to sue him for divorce and that he ought to be ashamed of himself. There had never been a divorce in . . . and so on and so on. Quentin had roared with ferocious mirth.

As he stepped up to the doorway of the lodge, he turned once more and looked across the gray, wind-whipped water toward the village. A small rowboat was coming slowly around the corner of the island and approaching the landing directly below the house. Quentin waited until, with a vigorous sweep of the oars, the boat was beached and the towering figure of Timothy Entwistle rose and turned toward him. Quentin knew him at once. Who could forget the old Major?

He hurried down from the porch to meet Timothy as he stepped up along the sandy beach. But before he came quite face to face with him, his pleasure in seeing the old man died, and in its place he felt a surge of self-conscious anxiety. How would the old Major, who had once been his best

friend here in the Cove, greet him? Timothy had been, after all, a close friend of the Darnells, and although his visits to the city were rare and far between, surely in the past seven years he must have been there at least once. But Quentin had never seen him.

From beneath his rugged brows, Timothy's sharp old eyes surveyed Quentin from head to foot. The young fellow, he noted, meeting him with outstretched hand, had the same likeable, rakish grin, but there was something underneath it now, something steely, formidable. His light, rough hair was as boyish as ever, but the clear hazel eyes were no longer the eyes of a boy. In that trice, the old man drew in his breath and told himself that he would have to chart a different course from the one he had intended to follow. His reason for coming here had been harsh enough. Now, after one look at Quentin Wingate, he wished he had not assumed the responsibility.

"Hello, Major!" Quentin was exclaiming. "You old son-of-a-gun! You look younger than ever!"

Timothy's hand, thrust out from beneath an incredible blue cape which was the souvenir of some almost legendary war, clasped Quentin's hand in a grip that belied his years.

"My boy!" Timothy boomed, like an old cannon shattering the silence of the island. "Why didn't you ship across and see me this morning—or after you got in last night, for that matter?"

He heard in Quentin's laugh a mingling of discomfiture and relief. "I wasn't sure—" He interrupted himself and added, "Lord, man, I haven't been up more than three hours!"

Old Timothy shook his head. "I knew it. You young fellows sleep away the best part of the day and use the night for prowling. I've been up since six o'clock. But—let's have a look at you."

He seized Quentin's shoulders in his two powerful, knotted hands and peered down into his face, only an inch or two beneath his own.

"A little pale to suit you, eh?" Quentin grinned. "But I'll fix that in a couple of weeks."

"I'm not thinking of that so much," Timothy said brusquely. "There's more in a man's face than the skin that covers it. But let's go up to the house—if there's a chair in it."

Quentin hooked his arm into the older man's and started up the path. "The furniture we left is pretty much moth-eaten, but don't mind that," he said lightly. "Lord, I'm glad to see you, Major! And you're just as big and husky as ever. You still make me feel like a peanut, by gosh!"

In the living room of the lodge, Timothy glanced about him while Quentin made a fire in the giant maw of the fireplace. The rich, wine-colored drapes Timothy remembered, the oriental scatter-rugs, the paintings, the incidentals of luxury, had been removed from this room seven years ago. Timothy remembered the day, and the talk there had been in the village regarding the event. A small sofa, a refectory table, a floor lamp, two or three chairs and a sadly gnawed hassock remained of the amiable furnishings that had once been there. But the warmth of the dim, redwood-paneled walls and the heavy-beamed ceiling saved the room somehow from the appearance of having been denuded.

Quentin hastily prepared a lunch from the provisions he had bought in the village the night before, brewing coffee over the open fire and frying bacon while he called attention elaborately to the splendor of the utensils. When they had eaten, he tossed a couple of dry sticks upon the smoldering embers and drew his chair closer to Timothy's.

"Get that old pipe of yours going, Major," he urged. "There's some of my favorite blend in that jar, if you'd like to try it. I blew myself to some before I left town—as a last gesture to the glory that was Rome."

He stepped to one of the empty built-in bookshelves and brought forth a couple of small glasses and a bottle which he placed on a packing box between the chairs.

"Help yourself to this, too, Major," he invited. "We're going to celebrate the return of a Wingate to his broken-down heritage."

Timothy poured himself a modest drink and proceeded leisurely to fill his pipe from Quentin's jar. The tension in the young fellow, he observed—it was almost a brittle wariness—had not diminished much during the past half hour. Clearly, the young fellow expected him to pounce on him yet in the matter of Nona Darnell. Timothy sighed.

"Aye—a broken-down heritage," he said quietly, "—though not beyond repair, eh?"

Quentin stretched his legs toward the fire. "I hope not, Major," he replied. "I haven't been over to the plant yet, so I don't know exactly what I'm up against."

“You’re here to stay, then?”

“What do you think I’m here for?”

The old man drew his brows together. “I didn’t know. We were all aware that your father died, of course. I—I was sorry to hear of his passing, my boy. In a way, I think I understood him a little better than a lot of the others around here.”

“I think you did, too, Major. Well—I’m staying here indefinitely.”

“Aye—just so,” Timothy mused and struck a match. “And—your wife? We all read about your marriage. Is she coming here, too?”

Quentin lifted his glass and the bottle from the make-shift table before he replied. “No, she won’t be up. As a matter of fact—we’ve separated,” he said, watching the amber liquid trickle into the glass as he held it between him and the fire.

“Oh.”

For a few minutes then, Quentin sketched the course of the Wingate fortunes during the past six or seven years, a course that lay downward all the way, until there was little left of it except the few fragments of equipment in Heartbreak Cove. He rather pointedly omitted, Timothy thought, any further mention of the girl he had married.

“And you’ve come here to save that?” Timothy asked. “It’s scarcely worth the trouble, is it?”

Quentin frowned. “Scarcely—if you choose to look at it in that light,” he admitted. “If that’s all there was to it, I could sell everything here for what I could get for it—and get out.”

Timothy leaned forward and brought a heavy hand down upon the younger man’s knee. “That’s the point, Quent!” he exclaimed, using for the first time the familiar diminutive. “You could have done that without coming here at all, eh?”

“Sure!”

“Then—what is it that brings you here?” the old man persisted. “Why, dammit, sir—you’re taking a long time to get to the point.”

Quentin faced the issue squarely at last, Timothy observed to his own satisfaction. The young fellow, he thought, smiled oddly as he spoke. “Maybe it’s pride—family pride, perhaps,” he said slowly, “though I haven’t much use for what usually goes under that name. I’m not proud of much that

my family has been—or has stood for, either. But hard times and bad breaks do something to you. They kill some people and they bring others to life. I know it sounds foolish—but I'd like the Wingate name to stand for something—something more than—well, I can't tell you in so many words, Timothy. I—”

“You don't have to say it, Quent,” Timothy broke in. “I get your point clear enough. And I'm glad. But have you any idea of what's ahead of you here?”

“A little, I think. After all, Dad was a sort of a fool, and Sheel was a genius. We haven't been able to locate him, by the way. But I imagine Dad got most of the blame for what happened here.”

Timothy was silent for some time before he spoke again. At last he drew himself up slowly and set his shoulders back.

“Your father was a dreamer, my boy,” he said gruffly. “Maybe it's a sin to be a dreamer. We are told that we have been conceived in sin. I've never quite accepted that at its face value. But I do know that many of the schemes of men are conceived in sin. And I know that the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the sons.” He paused a moment. “Do you see what I'm getting to? I don't mean your father in particular. We have been living in a mad world—a sinful world. Your father—the dreamer—trusted in the power of money. And your generation is going to pay for it. You get that, don't you?”

“Perfectly,” Quentin replied. “Among other things, I'm going to pay off every cent charged against the Wingate name in Heartbreak Cove before I leave here.”

“That's only one side of it, my boy,” Timothy went on, “and you know I wish you luck in that. But you spoke of pride. Do you realize that you're going to have your pride stepped on, young fellow?”

“That might be good for it,” Quentin grinned.

“It isn't worth much, eh? But there'll come times, like as not, when you'll wish to heaven you hadn't come back.”

“When that time comes, Major, I'll get out—*pronto!*”

“Aye—just so. Well, we'll see. How many men will you be needing to do the work you have here?”

“I'll need a full crew for the plant,” Quentin told him. “I've made a contract with old Bob Bennett for the catch. He was down in the city last month. I told him about my plans to come out and open the plant—and

asked him to keep quiet about it till I was sure of how it would all work out. Bob's as good a seiner as there is anywhere along the coast. If the catch is good, I'll need at least twenty men."

"Where will they come from?"

"There are plenty of men, Major."

"There are none in the Cove."

Quentin looked at the old man and smiled. "Come on, now. You forced me to speak out a minute ago. It's your turn now. What's on your mind?"

"Fair enough, sir," Timothy replied. "There isn't a man in Heartbreak Cove who will work for a Wingate."

Quentin was thoughtful for a moment. "I was afraid of that," he said at last, "and I don't much blame them. I'll have to bring in a crew, then."

"Aye—and look after them when you get them here," the old man added.

Quentin set his glass aside. "Well, we won't go out to meet trouble," he said quietly.

The old soldier clapped a hand over each knee. "Well, then," he declared resolutely, "if you're bound to stay, I shall have to tell you what nobody else in the Cove would tell you."

He saw the younger man's eyes lift with guarded enquiry.

"What is that?" Quentin asked.

"Your son was drowned last night on the Reef."

After he had uttered the words, Timothy sank feebly against the back of his chair. For the first time in his life he felt old and unequal to a situation. Quentin Wingate's face had become mottled with scarlet, the veins standing out on his temples as though a strangling rope were about his neck. With a terrifying look in his eyes he almost started from his chair.

"What did you say?" he demanded thickly.

The Major ran a trembling hand across his eyes. "Nona's boy—and yours, Quent. He was six years old. He took Jorgen's boat last night—slipped out by himself—and the rip tide got him. One of the Stone boys, coming in through the gap, saw him go over and tried to save him, but it was too late."

Now, when he dared to glance across at Quentin again, he saw that his face was ash-gray. And before Timothy could say another word, he had sprung to his feet, his fists clenched at his sides.

“Good God, man!” he cried in anguish. “Why didn’t *you* let me know she had had a son? Oh, my God!” His weight crashed haphazardly down again upon the light chair and he buried his head in his hands.

“Nona forbade me to write to you—or to go to you,” Timothy said helplessly. “She doesn’t know I’m over here this morning. If I’d found out that you intended to stay here only a short time—a day or two—I should have said nothing about it.”

“I see,” Quentin muttered, almost stupidly, without looking up. “How—how is Nona taking the boy’s death?”

Timothy stroked one gnarled hand with the other. “She’s what they call prostrated. They had a doctor in for her this morning. Telegraphed last night to Alberni and he came down in a fast launch. I saw her for only a minute, but she looked as if she didn’t know who I was. She doesn’t cry—just stares into space and makes a queer sound as if she can’t get her breath.”

At that Quentin stared across at Timothy with burning eyes. “Does she know I’m here?”

“I’m not sure—unless she saw the light in your window here last night,” the Major told him with difficulty. “You see—she had rowed out alone and it was while she was gone that the boy slipped away from his bed. When she came back and found that the little fellow was gone, she fell into a faint, and when young Stone came in with the news, she lost her reason entirely and —”

As he hesitated, Quentin said, more steadily now, “Tell me, Major.”

“Well—she said something about a light in the lodge—Silas said he didn’t know what it was, or what it meant.”

“Do you think she would see me, Timothy?” Quentin asked, and his eyes were the very heart of misery.

Timothy shook his head. “Don’t go near her now, my boy. She has never spoken your name—to my knowledge—since the day she came back to the Cove. And the lad was her whole life.”

“Oh, Christ!” Quentin turned, lifted the bottle from beside him, then without pouring a drink from it he slammed it back down upon the box. More quietly he asked, “What did they call him?”

“Silas Darnell.”

Wincing, Quentin clenched his jaws. “What was he like?”

“He was like you, to my way of thinking, though his eyes were blue, like his mother’s. He was very strong and big for his age. He could handle the oars as I’ve never seen any child of his age do. But the remarkable thing about him was his gift for music—if you can call it a gift in one so young. I think—we all thought—he might have made something of it, with good training.”

“Did he—know anything about me?” Quentin stammered.

“His mother—he called her Nona-Mom—”

“Nona-Mom?” Quentin laughed with a catch in his voice and looked away.

“She told him that you had gone away somewhere because of a debt you owed someone. But that was all she ever told him, I think—except that he knew your first name. Nona never permitted him to think anything but well of you, even though she gave everyone around her to understand that you should never be spoken of in the boy’s hearing. Doubtless, if he had lived, he would have gone one day to look for you. His curiosity was like that. For myself, I believe that he went last night in search of the Spanish ghosts that are supposed to dance around that half-exposed hull of a galleon out there on the beach. He was talking to me about them only a few days ago and I recall that he said something about going out to see them for himself.”

Inarticulate, Quentin took to an aimless striding about the room.

“Good Lord, Timothy!” he burst out at last. “What can I say to all this? It has knocked the pins right out from under me!”

“There’s not much anyone could say, I suppose,” the old man said sadly. “Perhaps—under the circumstances—you’d rather go back now to where you came from.”

“You don’t mean that, Major. I’ve got to see Nona as soon as possible. Could you—will you speak to her—tell her I’m here and that—well, God! Tell her I must see her, Timothy—tell her that, will you?”

Timothy got to his feet. “I’ll tell her—yes. But not for a few days, Quent. It wouldn’t be wise.”

The wind had risen and was sweeping over the Inlet now and rushing through the pines on the little island, with a sound of complaining about the

corners of the lodge.

Timothy picked up his cape and hat. "I'd better be on my way before it comes up a real blow," he said. "There's been weather brewing since morning."

When Quentin bade him good-bye on the beach, he wrung the old man's hand. "I realize what it must have meant to you, Tim," he said laboriously, "to come here and tell me all this. The next time I see you, I may be able to tell you why I did—"

"There's no hurry about that, my boy," the old man interrupted.

"It was pretty contemptible—even for the young fool I was then," Quentin said.

In eloquent silence, Timothy patted the younger man's shoulder.

It was when he turned back to the house, his mind in a turmoil, that Quentin saw the shabby rowboat nosing around the island, close to the beach. Narrowing his eyes, he recognized the man at the oars. It was Ethan Ashe. He remembered the story that Nona had told him in her candid way about the disappearance of Ethan's wife from the Cove. Marie Ashe, the local legend had it, had brooded over the better lot of the Wingates until she could endure her own life no longer. These reflections moved through Quentin's mind as a sort of obbligator in a minor key to the overwhelming dissonance of what Timothy had told him.

Ethan's boat had come to a curious pause now in the rough water. Only half aware of what he was doing, Quentin raised his hand in absent-minded salute. Then a disturbing thing happened. Ethan stood upright in the boat, lifted his arm and swept it before him in a gesture that seemed to be directed toward the house, considerably to Quentin's right. He seemed to be quite unaware of anyone standing on the shore. An uncanny sensation swept over Quentin as he made his way abruptly back up the path and entered the house.

Try as he might to dislodge it, for hours afterwards the baffling and somehow ludicrously sinister image of Ethan Ashe remained in his mind with a nameless ominousness, like a shadow cast by his constant thought of Nona Darnell and the tragic thing that had happened. While he went about the necessary but irksome task of making his abode habitable, he was unwholesomely conscious of that flailing gesture of Ethan's arm hovering over the house like a curse.

When his work was done, it was all he could do to restrain himself from lugging a punt out of the boathouse and rowing across to Nona despite Timothy's warnings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Pool

A WAY from all sea-sound, in a mountain valley where fogs moved that were white and fresh and alien to the salt-yellow of the Inlet fogs, Amanda Clark and her wizened husband Felix somehow eked out an existence. It was four years now since they had left the prairies and settled on the coast. Their Jersey cows fed well on the succulent growth of the rainy upper pastures; their chickens pecked at this and that; their vegetables were not various, but under the will of the large Amanda they were mesmerized into maturity and fed Amanda and her husband through the winter. They sold milk to the people who had the sawmill on the river at the lower end of the valley, but how did they manage to buy clothing and other incidentals out of that? It was said that Felix was being paid so much every year by his family in England to remain at a respectable distance from the ancestral home—he had eloped with a kitchen maid—and that his name was not really Clark at all, but no one made it his business to inquire too closely into the facts. Gossip thrives better when the imagination is not hampered by facts.

It was to this green skyward glade that Silas Darnell took Nona two days after little Si had been drowned on the Reef. He had no money to take her farther. But the Clark place, only five miles from the Cove, was sanctuary from the soughing whisper as well as the thunderous roar of the tide in the Inlet. Nona, dim in spirit as a snuffed wick, half-alive, had nodded her head when her father suggested a visit to the Clarks.

Now, after a week, Silas was taking leave of his daughter. He had thought it all out, nights, when she had sobbed herself into insensibility in the privacy of her room. It was better to leave her alone here now, with Amanda Clark, that vast-bosomed female who had lost four children in a trice when fire had destroyed the Clark homestead north of Saskatoon.

In the dooryard of the Clark cabin, Nona and Silas stood alone. The late summer morning was yellow and fair on the mountain above them.

“A few more days here, Nona,” Silas said, holding her hand, “and I think you will be able to come back—and go on again. You understand, don’t

you?”

She stood quite still after she drew her hand away from his.

“Yes, Pa,” she replied without energy, “I understand—everything. And it was nice of you to stay up here with me all this time. I’ll stay—for a few days more. Then I’ll go back. Everything has to go on. I know that.”

Silas averted his face to hide his emotion. Nona caught at his shirt sleeve.

“Don’t you worry about me, Pa,” she pleaded, smiling a little. “I’m strong—and I’ll come out of this gradually. Run along, now—and good-by, dear.”

He began his trudging descent of the road and did not look back. Already, he noticed, there were crimson stains on the leafy shelves of trees along the trail and asters burned blue as stars in the narrow mountain meadows.

Oh, it was no use thinking about the beauty of approaching autumn, Silas told himself in despair. There was Nona, back at the Clarks’, alone with her tragedy. She had been like something fixed and waxen in a glass case ever since the night when little Si was lost, except for those first hours when she had screamed so that the house would forever echo with the sound. He had done all he could to assuage her grief, and he believed now that to leave her alone was the most merciful thing he could do. It was all that he, her father, could do for her anyhow.

Nona turned back to the white-washed cabin, where Amanda stood in the doorway, generous and golden as a shock of ripe wheat.

“You’ve been good to me, ’Manda,” she said. “I want you to know that I’m grateful, even if I don’t act like it.”

She stood rigid as a post and Amanda made her sit down on the doorstep.

“It’s getting hot again,” Amanda said. “Let me fix you a cold lemonade, eh?”

“Thanks, ’Manda, but not just now. I think I’ll take a walk up the ravine. I’ll be back in time to help you make dinner.”

“Now, look here, Nona!” Amanda began in distress. “I don’t want you going off alone by yourself and—”

“Please, ’Manda!” Nona’s eyes were so wide and clear and different from anything Amanda Clark had ever seen that when Felix rounded the clump of birches from the stables she folded her arms in resignation.

Nona was standing up. She had on a white sweater and a blue skirt and her hair was rich as dusk above her pale face. Amanda sighed. She herself, when she had gone through what she had thought at the time no mortal could survive, had not been so enthrallingly the picture of heartbreak.

When she had gone away from the neat, white cabin with its orderly red barn and sheds about it, Nona walked upward a half mile or more along a narrow trail through the dense firs that bristled the mountain-side. The stillness of the forest was broken only by her soft tread over the silky, almost colorless moss, and by the chuckle of a freshet as it plunged through a rift of sunlight into a stony basin close by. Whenever she came to a stretch of forest floor carpeted with red clusters of bunchberry, or when she was enclosed suddenly in a mysterious crypt of somber, coniferous shade where mosses and lichens and coral root breathed a live death, she would pause, half-fainting, as many echoes of Si’s little boy treble caught at her senses. She longed to lay her dry heart down upon this trail that was invisibly printed with his excited, exploring feet.

A twin-flower vine beneath her hand made her feel all at once that she was suffocating. Last spring Si had come up with Amanda—and had brought back the first delicate and fragrant blossom he had found, as a gift to his mother.

Nona began to run. She ran until her legs gave way beneath her, then sank face downward at the brink of the pool below the bronze rock.

For a long time she lay breathless while physical pain ran like fire along her limbs. Then gradually the cool earth seemed to draw her body flat against it and blessed exhaustion flowed over her, deep as water. Out of a mindless space, she returned at last to the feeling of the hot sun upon her back through the plumed aisle of trees overhead.

With the quickening of vitality came thoughts that had been dark and formless at the back of her consciousness. Had she not rowed out among the islands that night, little Si would be with her now. The brutal honesty of her mind told her that she had gone out in the boat alone because she had wanted to get close once more to the place where she had first known of her

love for Quentin Wingate. Just once more before she pledged herself to Ivar. In a sense, then, it was Quentin who had taken little Si from her.

Beyond this rationalization, however, lurked a belief that filled her with shame and contempt for herself in the very acknowledgment of it. How scornful she had always been toward superstition of any kind! But there was no use in fighting this thing that had overtaken her—she was submitting at last to the fear that there were supernatural forces on guard in the Cove, that the place was an inscrutable, merciless law unto itself, and that in reprisal for Quentin Wingate's intrusion it had taken his son forever into its fortress, the White Reef.

Nona sprang suddenly to her feet, threw back her head and stared at the brilliant blue escape above her to the sky. These thoughts, she told herself, were madness. Ethan Ashe, coming between her and the sun, had laid his hand upon her brow. Was it Ethan who had done that to little Si, too, or was it the Reef?

In terror of her own fancy's closing in upon her, she stripped off her garments and stretched out on the edge of the pool. Spring-fed though it was, from a crevice at the base of the rock, its motion was none-the-less no more perceptible than the shadow of a bird's wing across its jewelled surface. The tiny brook that spilled from it ran over long tatters of golden moss and made no sound. Nona gazed down for minutes into its pellucid depth, changing and yet changeless with its cycles of light and shadow, violet and lemon-pale, rust-red in its granite abysms, and flecked green under the stooping ledges as though with ghosts of leaves. The pool was no more than ten feet across. Nona could look down diagonally to its floor below the opposite brink where, far under water, the earth made a strange and primordial twilight, with protruding ivory roots interlaced or fantastically antlered.

A murmur ran through her, inarticulate, prayerful, desperate. "Oh, beauty—beauty! Save me from bitterness and horror—let me keep you within me forever!"

Even after she had slipped down into the pool and was swimming in slow circles, almost vertically so that her body in the transparent water was foreshortened in the way that had always made little Si laugh when he saw her, the rhythmic, idle motion of this water-waltz Jorgen had taught her was a continuous repetition of the words.

The sun sparkled on her wet skin when she sat on the brink afterwards, resting back on her palms, her face turned up to the light with closed eyes,

her mind empty.

A sound came from her left, in the thicket below, where the brook ran out of the pool. Nona started, clasped one shoulder in her hand, and glanced quickly about.

He was standing there, bareheaded, his unforgettable shock of hair that was so like Si's shining in the patch of sunlight. He had his back turned toward her and one of his hands was pressed against the trunk of a tree as though he were braced against it.

"Nona!" he said, in a voice that was clear and unembarrassed. "I'll wait till you get dressed."

She was at first too astonished to speak or move. The thought even sped through her mind that her senses had deserted her, that the figure among the trees below was an hallucination. But then a flood of savage heat swept through her, pounding at temples, throat and wrist.

"Get out of here!" she cried hoarsely.

But even in the noise of her own rage she heard a sound from him that was like a sigh or a groan.

"I *must* talk to you, Nona," Quentin pleaded.

Her hand, that had darted toward her clothing near by, as quickly drew back without lifting a single garment. The fierce color ebbed out of her face, leaving it ashen and hard.

"I have nothing to say to you," she replied steadily, her eyes fixed upon his straight, tense shoulders.

He made a gesture then with his left hand as though he were drawing it across his eyes. Nona's lips curved with contempt and satisfaction. Surely he would go now, without another word.

"I've come to talk to you," he replied in a tone so agitated with eagerness that she was listening in spite of herself, "and I'm going to wait here until you have your clothes on."

Forgetting her resolution in the rush of anger that overwhelmed her, Nona seized her clothes and stood up. Her hands shook as she stepped into her skirt and then drew her sweater about her. A frightening weakness took the place of her rage. She sat down limply and covered her face with her hands.

“Please go,” she breathed, just audibly. “If you haven’t any self-respect —,”

“For God’s sake, Nona!” he burst out and glanced up through haggard eyes so that she saw the changed sharpness of his profile. “Have you no—no forgiveness—”

“Forgiveness!” Nona panted. “You don’t exist—how can I forgive you?”

For a long time he was silent then, his hands thrust down into the pockets of his gray flannel sack coat. He did not move toward her. “All right,” he said at last. “Timothy told me I shouldn’t try to see you up here. Forgive me, at least, for coming, when I should have known better.”

Then, before her flaming gaze, his broad, tapering back and his long gray-clad legs vanished downward through the trees.

She had seen nothing of his face but that brief glimpse of a profile that was harshly sweet—no, no! not sweet—but not youthfully blunt as it once had been.

CHAPTER NINE

Bjork's

WHEREAS the sea was unquestionably the Cove's soul, the pulse of its being was to be found in Bjork's store. Here, any fluctuating from the normal beat of life was immediately perceptible—any quickening of excitement, any pall. For it was in this low frame structure on the waterfront that men foregathered in common weal or woe. And although they were a reticent folk, the mood that was upon them could be clearly felt in their congress, if only from the exchange of a deep and thoughtful glance, the shrug of a shoulder, or the slow scraping of an old pipe bowl.

The twelfth morning after Quentin Wingate's arrival had flung in a squall. By afternoon the air was raw and uneasy with it, the gulls flying high and curmurring above a reef of low fog, the masts in the Cove slanting dolorously leeward. Karl Bjork, who was troubled with rheumatism, had a wood fire going in the heater that stood midway of his establishment, dividing the groceries from the dry goods, and the homely wares threw off a snug and agreeable aroma. In all likelihood it was this odor of friendliness that drew together the master-spirits of the Cove on the day when all were convinced that something untoward had entered their lives.

There was no doubt that something unguessable was pending. Enough had already happened to shock the little community into a state of nervous expectancy. The death of Nona Darnell's boy had given the talkative ones all they needed to occupy their idle hours for days to come. There were those whose sympathies were stirred to unwonted depths by the tragic end of an episode that had been pitiful from the first. There were others who saw the hand of God in all that had happened and were quick to draw the moral from an escapade conceived in thoughtlessness and delivered in tears. A few were disposed to marvel that the death of Nona's son should have occurred on the very night that her betrayer had come back to Heartbreak Cove. There was something in that that squared nicely with their mystic sense of the eternal fitness of things.

It was clear, too, that young Wingate had come back to stay. No one had been ready to believe Timothy Entwhistle when he hinted broadly that the

old packing plant would be operating again in the fall when the herring season began. But nearly two weeks had elapsed now since Wingate arrived, unannounced, on the *Princess* and he certainly had given no signs to indicate that he was leaving. For the first two or three days nothing had been seen of him except when he had finally put his launch into running order and had crossed the Inlet to visit Timothy Entwistle. After that he had spent his days at the plant on the north shore, rummaging about among the old buildings, clambering over the two old scows that had lain on the beach for years, or repairing the small wharf that stood below the bridge on the island. Conviction had begun to take root when it was learned that Quentin Wingate had been trying to hire men in the Cove to do the work of repairing the old buildings and making the plant ready for the fall. Some sense of the resoluteness with which he was setting about his task came to the villagers when, having failed to engage men in the Cove, Quentin was seen driving his launch through the gap in the early morning and turning its nose northward in the direction of Amber Point. It was generally accepted that he would be back in a couple of days with enough men to begin the work he had to do.

Well, he would find more to do than he thought. Last night one of the old warehouses had been burned to the ground. Had it not been for the valiant efforts of a dozen of the villagers who had seen the fire when it started, the whole plant would have gone with the warehouse. It was not so much that the men of the Cove were eager to protect Wingate property. They had reason to feel that a good fire might be the easiest and quickest judgment the Almighty could bring down upon the son of old Edmund Wingate. But no man can stand aside and see a building burn without doing something about it. The men of Heartbreak Cove had yielded to the same instinct that would have prompted them to lend a hand to their worst enemy if he were drowning.

It was not until the next day that they began to reason about it.

"I told my wife this morning," Lucius Crane was saying, "that it'd be only what was comin' to young Wingate if the whole damned thing went up in smoke. And that lodge over there on the island—whose money built that? I wish I'd 'a' set a match to it seven years ago, instead o' havin' it starin' me in the face every time I look out o' my own back door."

"*Ja*—if burning your own money iss any satisfaction," Karl Bjork observed.

Bjork, a short, stocky man of seventy at least, who remembered the Lofoten boats in the days of sail, was not fond of an argument. But he had a twist of humor and it amused him to hear what the fishermen would do for the sake of an ancient grudge.

“Of course, Quentin Wingate may pull up his stakes and get out when he sees what he’s up against,” Gil Patterson said hopefully.

“Not if I know anything,” Fred Malcolm declared. “You didn’t see the pile of stuff he took off the boat with him that night. There was more than a nightshirt in them bags.”

“Unless he’s fixin’ to sell,” Gil countered.

Bjork pursed his lips and looked over his glasses. “Vell, ve’ll find out, might be, pretty qvick now.”

Quentin, on his trips to the store for supplies, had left no doubt in the old man’s mind that he intended to remain and operate the plant himself.

Fred Malcolm sat forward in his chair, his great fists dangling loosely between his knees. Bjork puttered anxiously about, resolved upon keeping himself out of the net of violent feeling that was being spread before his very eyes.

“Well, it won’t take him long to find out he ain’t wanted round here,” Fred said. “We’ve had enough o’ the Wingate tribe to do us for the rest of our days.”

The door opened and Bart Lesher came in. His small, colorless eyes were so bedded in loops of flesh that although he always looked straight at you, you had the unflattering feeling that you yourself were guiltily trying to avoid his gaze. For a man who did so much careless, easy talking about his affairs, he managed to reveal singularly little about himself. He had come up from Puget Sound, the Cove had been given to know, after he had lost canning interests on the Columbia River through the wily machinations of a crooked partner. His own whimsically philosophical attitude toward that calamity had won the Cove’s admiration at once. He was, as he himself boasted, a fisherman like themselves, content with the day’s catch, and shared his profits equitably with his men, to the fraction of a cent. Open-handed, outspoken, good-humored, he was welcomed as a pleasing contrast to Edmund Wingate when he built his own plant and carried on the work by which the Cove existed. Above everything, the circumstance that had secured him his place among the fishermen was the fact that the oldest inhabitants remembered Johanna Lesher. On his first day in the Cove, Bart

had let fall the remark, with a wistful twinkle, that he felt as though he had lived here all his life—his grandmother Johanna having spent her young womanhood between the shadows of the cliffs. Things had not gone well with those early Leshers who had deserted the Cove, he admitted sadly, and had dropped his eyes at the complacent nods that followed his confidence.

Bart came up so softly behind the group that faced the stove in Bjork's store, that when he spoke all started as one man. He laughed gently and drew from his pocket a gold-banded cigar. Bjork stooped and threw another stick of wood into the stove. An odd gleam came and vanished in the old man's eyes.

"Well, well!" Bart said as he cut the tip from his cigar with a pearl-handled pocket-knife. "So the little town has been having some excitement while I've been away in the city."

He chuckled as he rolled his cigar between thumb and finger.

"I didn't know you was back," Lucius Crane said.

"I came up on the mail boat early this morning," Bart replied. "What's this I hear about a fire over on the north side?"

Briefly they told him. "Looks to me like the work of someone who doesn't care for the Wingates," Lucius Crane suggested. "Well, he can't expect much sympathy around here. He don't belong."

"Come, now," Lesher said good-naturedly, "who does belong? Where did you come from? And where did I come from? What you ought to do, Luce, is stick up a 'No Trespassers' sign out there beside the Reef and keep the rest of the world outside."

Gil Patterson got up from his chair and strode irritably toward the door, then turned and faced Lesher.

"It's easy for you to talk, Bart," he said. "You weren't around here when ___"

"I've heard all about it, though," Bart put in. "But why take it out on the boy? If it comes to that, I've got more against him than any of you. I tried to buy that lodge last spring—thought I might settle down one of these days. I offered him twice what it was worth and he wouldn't sell. I even offered to buy out the old plant over there on the north side—but he wouldn't do business. But what the hell—all I say is, forget it! Old Wingate just outsmarted a bunch of you boys, that's all there is to it. But that's no reason ___"

Back of the counter, Bjork's blue eyes became dreamy as he broke into the mellifluous drawl of Bart Leshner.

"Vass it Vingate—or vass it Sheel?" he asked.

Leshner's indolent shrug seemed to dismiss Bjork's query.

"What's the difference? There's no reason for jumping on the young fellow for what his father did. Of course, if you let the young fellow get away with anything, that's your fault. You've had your lesson. But I don't think he'll try anything, at that. I've seen him once or twice and my opinion is that he's a mite too swell to take the gaff here. Too much college and all that."

Fred Malcolm had been shredding a pine chip between his strong yellow teeth. Now he threw the chip away and looked blackly at Leshner.

"You mean well enough, Bart," he scowled, "but you're just rubbin' salt into the cut when you talk about too much college. My own kids could of gone out—"

Gil Patterson's mighty fist came down resoundingly into the palm of his other hand. But just then Hesper Thorpe, who had come in while Bart was talking and had stood aside unnoticed, strode towards Leshner, her arms akimbo.

"It's very easy for you to talk, Bart Leshner!" she snapped. "And it's easy enough for you all to talk. But you can't think of anything but yourselves. What about the young girl this man took out of the Cove—stole her away—and made her a disgrace to her poor mother's memory? There are some of us who haven't forgotten that, let me tell you—and won't forget it. I'd take the hide off a girl of mine if I ever saw her as much as speak to Quentin Wingate. And I'm not alone in that, either. I'd save my breath if I was you, Bart Leshner, and all the rest of you, till you can talk about something besides the few dollars you lost by your own greed, for that's what it was!"

She turned abruptly then and plumped her basket down on the counter under Karl Bjork's nose. A deep silence had fallen on the group, a silence that smoldered, for Hesper Thorpe had touched upon that which, to their austere minds, was not to be mentioned in public discourse.

Bart Leshner alone was aware that Ivar Hansen had come into the store while Mrs. Thorpe was speaking. The others were too engrossed in their own thoughts. Bart chuckled under his breath, anticipating the little drama which Ivar's appearance would surely create.

Ivar had paused for a moment just inside the doorway and had waited until the woman's tirade had come to an end. Then he stepped forward to the counter where Bjork had been unpacking a crate of California grapes. He hesitated only a moment before he spoke in a loud, clear voice to the storekeeper.

"Those grapes look pretty nice, Karl," he said. "Send a couple of pounds up to Nona Darnell."

The hush that had fallen on the group was broken only by Bart Lesher's casual clearing of his throat. Slowly, Ivar turned and stared at him. Bart flicked his cigar ash nonchalantly.

Hesper Thorpe edged toward Ivar with a smile of confident approbation.

"Nona's looking much better after her visit to the Clarks'," she said unctuously. "It did her a heap of good. And there's nobody deserves a little treat more than she does—they *are* nice grapes, aren't they?"

Ivar looked coldly down at her but didn't speak. Hesper smiled understandingly.

"You're a lucky young man, Ivar, if I do say so," she murmured. "Nona is one of the finest girls in town."

Ivar drew his eyes away irritably. "I'll have a box of matches, too, Karl," he said shortly, "and send those grapes up as soon as you can."

Then he turned and stalked out of the store.

In a little while Bart Lesher sat alone beside Bjork's stove. He sat there oblivious of Bjork, as though he owned the place, drawing contentedly at his cigar, blowing smoke rings at the ceiling, lost in profound thought. Bjork's nostrils quivered a little as he went busily about arranging wares that were already in perfect order, and perhaps the end of his nose became a little redder. Otherwise he gave no sign of his annoyance.

The old man was on a stepladder before a shelf of canned goods when Nona Darnell came in. He glanced about and hastily clambered down. As he did so, Bart Lesher got leisurely, spaciouly, to his feet. Nona went directly to the grocery counter.

She wanted, Bjork heard, sugar, baking powder and potatoes. Karl regretted that he must go into the storeroom at the rear for the potatoes. He regretted it chiefly because Bart Lesher, in a lounging attitude, was leaning

with one arm on the counter, quite near Nona, his gold-banded cigar poised airily so that the smoke drifted across her face. Bjork wished that he was younger so that he might, without ruing it, throw Leshner out of the store by the seat of his tailored pants.

“I just got back to town this morning, Nona,” Bart said when the storekeeper had disappeared. “I didn’t have a chance to see you before I went away. I was very sorry to hear of your—your loss. That was terrible.”

She stared at him briefly, then looked away. Perhaps this sudden upsurging of anger within her was unreasonable, she thought quickly, but she felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to strike him as he leaned toward her. What right had he to speak of what had happened to her? What right had he to speak to her at all now, after the way he had spoken to her before he had been a week in the Cove?

But Bart Leshner could not know what was going through her mind just then. “That young man of yours was in just now,” he went on. “Nice young fellow, Ivar. In fact, he *must* be or he wouldn’t have made good where the rest of us—”

Two things happened very quickly then. Quentin Wingate entered with a swift stride—and Nona, swinging about toward Bart Leshner, brought the smart strength of her open palm across his loose mouth.

Leshner recoiled. Then, aware that someone else had come into the store, he hastily recaptured his equanimity. He turned and faced Quentin with a smile of perfect aplomb.

“Ah, Mr. Wingate, I believe,” he said urbanely.

Quentin did not reply. He was looking past Leshner at Nona’s dilated, burning eyes and her white face with the two crimson petals flaming in her cheeks. He had wondered—when he had had that brief glimpse of her white body through the trees on the brink of the mountain pool a few days ago—whether her beauty was as odd and wild as it had been on that evening in his father’s house, seven years ago. Now—he knew.

Mechanically, he recovered himself. Stiff-lipped, he turned to Leshner.

“Can you tell me how that warehouse of mine—” he began, then paused abruptly.

He had returned from Amber Point just half an hour ago and had found nothing but smoking embers where his old warehouse had stood. Cold anger gripping him, he had left his three men on shore and had driven his launch

across the Inlet to seek an explanation of what he was convinced had been a deliberate outrage. He had gone to Bjork's as the most likely place of getting the information he sought. Karl Bjork, at least, had shown him no hostility on the couple of occasions when he had gone to the store for supplies. And now he looked from Leshner to Nona—and his eagerness to have the burning of his warehouse explained faded suddenly. He realized that his half-finished question had been nothing but a screen to his embarrassment. What had happened between Leshner and Nona?

"We are friendly rivals, I believe," Leshner was saying. "You probably remember me—I tried to buy your lodge last spring. I meant to drop over and have a talk with you one of these days. It certainly was hard luck to lose your warehouse just when you were getting things in shape. I just heard of it an hour ago—I was down in the city for the past week—and it sure was a bad break for you. I don't think anyone around here would do a thing like that deliberately, but if I find out anything I'll let you know at once. We've got to stand together, eh?"

But Quentin was not listening. He had turned away and had walked to the other side of the store. Bart did not permit the chilly reception his overture had evoked to be prolonged, however. With his back to Nona, and with a humorous grimace, he sauntered out of the store.

Bjork had returned from the storeroom in time to hear the latter part of Leshner's speech. But when he saw that Nona and Quentin were alone, he hastily muttered some excuse and retired once more to the rear room.

Quentin stood looking at Nona, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Her eyes, meeting his above the full curve of her lips, shone brilliantly.

"Do you have to be told why you lost your warehouse?" she said coldly. "Or how long will it take you to find out that you're not wanted in Heartbreak Cove?"

"I'm not thinking about that now," he told her. "I saw you hit that fellow, Leshner."

Nona looked toward the doorway through which Bjork had vanished. "Mr. Bjork!" she called, leaning forward on her hands against the counter. "I'm in a hurry, please!"

"Yust a minute," Bjork's voice came back.

Then, because her hands were trembling, Nona stepped away from the counter.

“All right, Nona,” Quentin said haltingly. “It’s none of my business.”

Her laugh struck across his senses, waking memories he thought had been crushed out of mind. From somewhere behind his embarrassment, he dragged out a shred of humor and smiled at her. Then, as Bjork appeared once more, Nona opened her purse and handed him a bill.

A moment later she lifted her bag of groceries and walked, straight and light, out of the store.

At home again, Nona found Eva still seated at the kitchen table playing solitaire with a tattered deck of cards.

“I declare I thought you never *would* get back,” Eva complained. “I got the four aces out once and I wanted you to see it so Paul won’t think I’m lying. By the way, Bjork sent up a box of grapes while you were out. I helped myself to a few of them. They’re really delicious.”

But Nona, striding without a word across the room, had separated the potatoes from the other things she had bought and flung the bag into the shelf below the cupboard so violently that Eva looked toward her with startled eyes, a card arrested in midair.

“Well, I never!” Eva marveled. “What on earth’s the matter? You look as if the Old Nick himself had been after you.”

Nona laughed mordantly. She hung her green béret on a peg near the door, removed her leather jacket and the flowing tie she had worn at the collar of her flannel blouse. Eva watched her while she stood for a moment unfastening the blouse and drawing it wide from her throat as though it were an oppressive weight. Nona certainly ought to be in mourning, Eva thought disapprovingly. What else could you expect from life but hard knocks if you insisted on being so different from everybody else? In Nona it was nothing but downright cussedness, anyway. Why, she wouldn’t even let anyone mention little Si in her presence. It wasn’t decent—it was certainly unnatural—not to let other people share your sorrow with you. It wasn’t human.

“You look feverish,” Eva observed narrowly. “You’ve got those red spots in your cheeks again. I’d be afraid of consumption, if I were you. People say those red spots—”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake!” Nona broke out, then checked herself suddenly. “I’ve got to have this table—if you don’t mind moving into the other room.” Then, at the injured expression on Eva’s face as she gathered up the cards

with her pallid, sandy-freckled hands, “Now, don’t go to feeling hurt, Eva,” she said in exasperation. “I can’t stand anything of that kind today.”

“I suppose you’ve run into that Quentin Wingate,” Eva said plaintively.

Nona carried a fresh kettle of water to the stove and shook down the ashes.

“I ran into plenty down at Bjork’s,” she replied tersely. “I didn’t want to say anything about it—everything upsets you so these days. But you might as well know. For one thing, I slapped Bart Leshner’s face.”

“You slapped—” Eva was breathless. “Well, for heaven’s sake! What for?”

Nona turned and looked at her sister-in-law almost pityingly.

“It has never occurred to you, I suppose, that I have had more than one indecent proposal made to me since—since I came back home that time.”

“Did Bart Leshner—”

“He wasn’t in the Cove more than a week before he spoke to me one day down at the dock and suggested that I might spend the night with him on his tugboat, out on the fishing grounds. I guess somebody must have pointed me out to him.”

Eva’s light eyelashes fluttered. “And you never told—” she breathed.

“When he tried to tell me he was sorry for me today—I just couldn’t stand it. He said something about Ivar, too, and I completely forgot myself. I slapped him—and Quentin Wingate walked into the store.” She gave a short, wild laugh that caused Eva’s mouth to fall open in consternation.

“What did he do?”

“Nothing—nothing! I don’t want to talk about it any more.”

She turned away to the pantry and Eva, feeling sensationally that she had just been in the presence of some dark and incomprehensible force, got her wrap and stood looking in a baffled way toward the pantry door.

“Don’t worry about it, Nona,” she said feebly. “It’ll all work out nicely when you and Ivar—”

“Don’t talk about it!” Nona interrupted loudly. She wanted only to get her sister-in-law out of the house.

As soon as Eva had gone, Nona threw herself on the chair beside the kitchen table, buried her head in her arms and wept with long, shattering sobs. It was so that Silas Darnell, coming in softly from the front of the house before his usual hour, found her. She was aware of him only when he laid his hand in an awkward caress upon her shoulder.

“There, there, now, my girl!” he said unhappily. “You promised me you’d try not to brood—”

Nona lifted her head with a sharp effort and got her handkerchief from her pocket. “It isn’t that, Pa,” she said in confused shame. “I’m just feeling—all mixed up. You shouldn’t have come home so soon.”

“Is it this—this Wingate coming back?” he asked her.

Nona got to her feet resolutely and smiled at her father. “That has nothing to do with it,” she said as she patted his arm and hurried about getting supper ready. “It’ll take me a little while to get used to—everything, that’s all.”

Her voice leaped a little at the end, as though it were going to break, but her father was pouring water into the wash basin in the sink and did not hear. How could she tell him that Quentin’s face had brought little Si terribly back to her, just as the child’s, at thrilling and unbearable moments, had brought back Quentin’s?

“I suppose you’ll want to wait a little now—before marrying Ivar,” Silas said, his voice trailing off lamely as he dried his face on the roller towel and wished he had not spoken.

“It doesn’t matter, Pa,” Nona said. “I’ll marry him tomorrow, if you’re afraid of anything.”

Silas smiled at her. “I’m not afraid, my girl.”

CHAPTER TEN

Timothy

LITTLE given though he was to reducing his own problems to metaphor, Quentin Wingate thought now that the hostile forces he faced were sharpening each other like two great clashing knives; Nona and her invincible hatred of him—the Cove and its unambiguous acrimony.

It had not taken long to prove the truth of old Timothy Entwhistle's prophecy. There wasn't a man in Heartbreak Cove who would work for a Wingate. Even at Amber Point, Quentin had encountered difficulty in getting men to accompany him and undertake the task of repairing the buildings of the old plant. While they harbored no grudge against the Wingate name, they showed no eagerness to take the brunt of the hostility that name had awakened. Quentin, moreover, had been at pains to assure them that their reception would be far from cordial. They must know what to expect from the people of the Cove. Big Axel Lindstrom, however, had found something attractive in the challenge. The willingness with which he and his two able-bodied friends had accepted Quentin's invitation was a little fervent, perhaps, but it held an assurance of faithful service that would brook no interference. Quentin was satisfied.

The loss of the warehouse had angered him at first, but after he had talked with Karl Bjork and learned that the whole plant might have gone up in flames but for the timely efforts of a dozen men from the Cove, he became more philosophical about it. He would have to get along as best he could until he was able to replace the building with one more substantial and better fitted to his needs.

It was not so easy to be philosophical about Nona Darnell, however. His visit to the Clark farm had been an unfortunate blunder. Timothy Entwhistle had warned him against it and Quentin had not had the courage to go near his old friend since. He had seen Timothy only once, in the street, and neither had mentioned Nona's name. It was as though each had felt that there was nothing to be said.

Quentin was amazed at himself, too, as he recalled how he had acted in Bjork's store. He would always have a confused memory of what had

happened after he had stepped through the doorway and found Nona confronting Bart Lesher, her cheeks flaming, her dark eyes full of contempt. What a spiritless dolt he had been! And yet, if he had projected himself upon the emergency with a force worthy of what he felt at the time, he would have gained nothing but Nona's scorn and Lesher's undying enmity.

Altogether, he had made a fine mess of things, he reflected now as he dressed in the chilly morning air and glanced from his window at the waters of the Inlet where the tide was ebbing. He had been too weary last night to give much thought to anything. He had gone to bed after seeing that his men were settled in their new quarters and had fallen asleep at once. But now, after a sound night's sleep, he could dwell upon the anomaly of his position in all its challenging clarity.

Not a word had come to him as yet from Eunice's lawyer. The one hysterical letter he had received from his mother had reassured him very little. Mrs. Wingate, writing, "My Beloved and Incomprehensible Son," with a flourish of capitals, had deplored and bewailed not so much his desertion of Eunice—whom she in truth cared little for anyhow—as his continued sojourn in Heartbreak Cove. She and Nancy had both believed that he would sell the old packing plant and return to the city at once, but now his protracted absence was filling them with alarm. Her letter had implied—and this had made him genuinely uneasy—that Eunice was regarding the whole unfortunate episode as nothing more than a lovers' tiff and was throwing cocktail parties and drinking gaily to his safe and speedy return.

As he ran the brush over his hair before the mirror above the washstand, his own reflection looked out at him with disconcerting honesty. Before he had seen Nona Darnell again, he had not cared much how Eunice chose to regard his quitting of her. But now—in self-disgust he threw the brush down. Even freedom from Eunice would never in this world make Nona Darnell any more approachable. He flung on his jacket, pulled his hat down over his eyes and left the house.

On the porch he paused a moment and looked down along the shore of the island. Scarcely more than a hundred yards away, old Timothy Entwistle stood almost to his hips in the brackish water, harvesting brown kelp for his dahlia beds. Quentin stepped down from the porch and followed the little path to the beach.

As he made his way along the wet sand so recently exposed by the outgoing tide, tiny jets of water rose before him to mark the hiding place of buried clams. Pink starfish clung to the dark rocks that shone in the cool

morning sun. A shoal of tiny lance-fish darted past close to the shore, trailing their shadows on the mottled floor of the Inlet, and lost themselves in beds of kelp that waved their slender brown ribbons in the moving tide. A huge jellyfish opened its yellowish cloud to the sun and sank slowly out of sight.

While he was still some distance from Timothy, Quentin paused and watched the old man fishing the fertilizer from the water with the aid of a long pole on the end of which he had fixed a short hook with a knife-like edge. His boat lay with its nose in the sand and was already half-filled with refuse from the sea, various sea-weeds upon which lay a half dozen starfish whose rays spread forlornly over the shining brown mass of algæ.

“Old Neptune himself!” Quentin cried with a laugh as the Major lunged with his pole and brought his quarry to the surface.

Timothy turned about quickly and waded out of the water.

“You’re up early, young fellow,” he said as Quentin came beside him. “It’s not a bad sign.”

Quentin took his proffered hand. “Just a sign that I’m getting to bed earlier. I turned in after supper last night or I might have been over to see you. I was pretty much all in.”

“I heard you were back. Brought a couple of men down from the Point, eh?”

“Three,” Quentin told him, “and I feel better already, with them over there.”

Timothy laid his pole in the boat. “I was sorry to hear about your warehouse. I didn’t know anything about it till the next morning.”

Quentin glanced toward the north shore. “It gives me a pretty fair idea of where I stand with my neighbors,” he said.

The old man’s brows darkened. “Don’t go jumping to conclusions, my boy,” he warned Quentin. “I think I told you you might expect trouble, but it isn’t quite fair to believe that your neighbors are all of the kind that would burn you out.”

“Probably not, but I’m taking no chances from now on. I’ll have three good men on the job, night and day.”

“I don’t suppose I happen to know any of them?”

“Big Axel—”

“Would that be Axel Lindstrom?” Timothy interrupted.

“Yes. Do you know him?”

The Major smiled. “Well, I can’t say that I know the gentleman, though I’ve heard of him. He has been in the Cove before. He probably told you about that.”

Something in Timothy’s manner made Quentin uneasy. “He hasn’t told me anything. What’s the matter with him?”

“There’s nothing wrong with Axel,” Timothy replied. “He has a good many friends in the Cove, I believe, who are always ready to back him when he gets into difficulties.”

“What kind of difficulties?”

The old man laughed and slapped Quentin on the back.

“Axel loves a fight. In fact, I think he really fancies himself as the great white hope, as we used to say. If you can manage to keep him away from Lesh’s men you shouldn’t have any trouble to speak of. When he was down here last spring he dealt with three of Bart’s men in one night. It might be just as well to keep Axel busy on his own side of the Inlet.”

Quentin was silent for a moment. “Well,” he said at last, “I seem to have a knack of making trouble for myself. I was counting on Axel to hold things together here while I went down to the city for a crew.”

Timothy shook his head. “I wouldn’t do that, I think. Axel may prove to be the right man to have on the job—if you look after Axel yourself. Isn’t there someone in the city who could pick your crew for you and send them out?”

“I’ll have to think about it,” Quentin said and turned away quickly. “You might drop over some evening, Major, when you’re in the mood for it. I’ll have to be getting over to the plant now. The boys will be waiting for me.”

“And I’ll be getting back to my garden,” Timothy replied, lifting the prow of his boat clear of the beach. “By the way, did you see Nona when—”

“I’ve seen her twice,” Quentin admitted, “but she won’t speak to me.”

“Aye—I thought as much. She’s a proud young hussy. And now there’s talk of her going to marry Ivar Hansen, I hear.”

Quentin checked the exclamation that came to his lips. Was it possible, he wondered, that Timothy had been withholding the news deliberately for

some obscure reasons of his own?

“You didn’t tell me anything about Ivar Hansen,” he said with ill-concealed surprise.

The quick glance which the old man darted over his shoulder at him made Quentin flush to his hair. “When there’s anything worth telling you, my boy,” he said shortly, “I’ll tell it. It came to me only last night.”

Without knowing it, Quentin had obviously touched the Major in a tender spot. “That was my mistake, Timothy,” he said quickly. “After all, it’s none of my business. There’s no good reason why she shouldn’t marry anyone she wants to marry. By the way, what has she against Bart Leshner?”

“She might have a number of things against him. Why?”

Briefly Quentin told him what had happened in Bjork’s store.

Timothy chuckled and shook his head. “The girl can take care of herself,” he remarked. “If she couldn’t, I’d hate to think of what might have become of her since she came back to the Cove. Not that she has had much trouble of that kind—there’s only one Leshner hereabouts.”

“My God—you mean Leshner—”

“That slap in the face was probably the girl’s answer to a dirty suggestion, Quent. I say probably, for there’s no way of knowing for sure. She’d never speak of it unless—”

“I wish I had taken a poke at him!” Quentin said suddenly.

“You’re very young, my boy,” the old man observed. “I wouldn’t worry over what happened between Nona and Bart Leshner—not nearly so much as I would over his friendly talk to you. Look out for him, Quent. There are so many trees in Bart Leshner, you can’t see the woods, if you understand me.”

The old man raised his eyebrows and smiled as he stepped into his boat and pushed off. Quentin stood and watched him, then waved his hand in response to Timothy’s gesture of farewell.

“I’ll be over tomorrow night, maybe, with a bunch of ‘Old Commodore’ blooms for you,” Timothy called back. “They’re at their best now.”

Quentin waved again and walked back to where his launch lay moored beside the wharf.

It was seven o'clock when Nona went to see Timothy. She had baked a huckleberry pie for her father and Ivar to take with them for their late supper on the fishing grounds. It was just as easy to make two, when you were about it anyhow, and the old Major had a weakness for huckleberry pie.

When she entered the cottage, she flung her béret upon the horse-hair settee in the corner and removed the paper napkin from the dish she placed on the table.

"Huckleberry pie!" Timothy exclaimed with his time-honored pretense of amazement. He had observed the same ritual since she was twelve. "Lord, girl, have you no respect for a man's stomach!"

"I've never known anything to upset your stomach, you old fraud!" Nona countered.

Timothy's throat rumbled fiercely. "Get a plate and a fork out of the cupboard. I'm going to open it before it gets cold."

"I'm getting *two*," Nona told him. "I didn't have any for supper."

They sat down at the table and Timothy set his cribbage board for a game while they ate. Occasionally, when her eyes were downcast, he stole a glance at her and wondered. Her face was thinner, older. But she was made of the stoic stuff of this storm-swept coast and it did not surprise him that she had steeled herself to the routine of life again after tragedy had cut into her heart. Timothy had loved Nona's boy as if he were his own grandson and now, reflecting upon her silent courage, he could hardly keep the tears from his eyes. Only when some reminder came that was too cruelly sudden, giving her no quarter, was the mask torn aside and the scar revealed. What she had felt when she first saw Quentin Wingate again Timothy had never dared to guess, for in Quentin dwelt the living and mature image of little Si.

This evening, however, there was a preoccupation in her manner which Timothy knew instinctively did not come from any inner brooding over the boy. It had too much live bitterness in it, too much smoldering and secret fury. The old man was not in the least deceived by her easy air of serenity.

When the first game of cribbage had been pegged out, there was only a fragment of the pie left on the plate, although Nona had eaten very little of it.

"Fifteen for two!" Timothy said and laid his pegs on the table beside the board. Nona had lost.

"You're much too good for me tonight," she laughed.

He glared at her from beneath his bristling white eyebrows. “You threw that game away,” he declared. “What’s on your mind, young lady?”

Nona leaned back in her chair. “I never throw a game away. And there’s nothing on my mind.”

“Do you want me to tell you what it is?” Timothy barked.

Nona’s eyes fell. In her lap her fingers twined nervously. “I can guess what you’re thinking. It isn’t that.”

“It isn’t Quentin Wingate?”

Nona smiled defiantly, but her darkening eyes betrayed her. “It isn’t,” she declared, “—at least, not in the way you think.”

“There are many ways of thinking, my girl,” the old man said, “and it’s no affair of mine, after all. I was talking to him this morning—over on the island.”

Nona’s color deepened, only to fade at once, but she held her chin high as she got up from her chair. “He has been in the Cove for two weeks now,” she said with a passionate vehemence that startled even Timothy, and he had often seen in her a trace of something lawless, something incalculable.

“And he’s likely to be here for many weeks more,” Timothy put in. “He’s not going to give up for the loss of a warehouse.”

“The Cove isn’t going to be a fit place to live in while he’s here,” Nona said angrily. “One of these days something is going to break out—and no one will be able to stop it.”

Timothy smiled to himself. “And why should you be so worked up about it?” he asked dryly. “Are you afraid of what may happen to him?”

“Nothing will happen to him,” she retorted. “Nothing ever does. Someone else will have to suffer.”

The old man leaned back in his chair and stroked his chin thoughtfully. “There’s no telling, of course, what may come of it,” he said finally. “On the other hand, there’s no need for taking an unfair attitude to the boy. I know you have your reasons for feeling the way you do. And perhaps they’re good reasons, too. But there are always two sides to any question—and much to be said on both sides. That has been my experience and I’ve lived long enough to prove it, one way or another. Taking a fair-minded view of it, you must admit that it has taken something like courage for Quentin Wingate to come in here and start all over—where his father failed.”

“Courage?” Nona laughed briefly. “Arrogance!”

Timothy lifted a protesting hand. “You’re feeding your young heart on malice, my girl,” he cautioned her, “and it isn’t healthy fare for anyone.”

Nona swept a soft lock from her broad forehead. She stood with her feet placed firmly and well apart on the floor, her hands thrust deeply into the pockets of her tweed skirt. Her full breast, beneath the boyish flannel blouse, rose and fell in an agitated way.

“I’m not malicious,” she objected.

“Or maybe it’s just plain hatred.”

“What else could it be?” Nona demanded. “Haven’t I cause enough to ___”

“I have already admitted as much, haven’t I?” Timothy interrupted. “But the fact remains that Quentin Wingate is going to stay in Heartbreak Cove—you’re both going to be here, perhaps for years. The place is too small to prevent your meeting now and then. You may think what you please—and feel as you like—but there’s no need of your putting on a show for the natives every time the two of you happen to be within a block of each other.”

She laughed scornfully. “Are you afraid of that?”

“I know what you’re capable of, young woman,” Timothy replied. “Didn’t you slap somebody’s face yesterday—in Bjork’s?”

Nona turned suddenly, her eyes blazing. “I suppose Quentin Wingate told you that.”

“He did,” the old man smiled.

“I slapped Bart Leshner’s face because it was coming to him, and I’d do it ___”

“It isn’t quite civilized,” Timothy reminded her.

“Neither am I, then!” she declared.

Timothy picked up the deck of cards and shuffled them thoughtfully for a moment. “And now—you’re thinking of marrying Ivar, your father says.”

“Does that surprise you?”

The old man got to his feet with surprising suddenness. “Stop this badgering!” he roared. “Lord above, what’s coming over you? You’ve never

talked like this to me before. It isn't like you. How can you find room in your heart for Ivar, when—"

"Don't you see that's what's wrong with me," she cried. "That's what hate does to you!"

Then, seizing her béret from the settee, she rushed out of the cottage, leaving the door wide open behind her as she fled. From where he stood, old Timothy watched her go down the path through the garden and out upon the street.

"The young she-devil!" he said to himself and closed the door.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Axel

PERHAPS it was a banal and thread-worn precept, Quentin Wingate thought to himself as he surveyed, a few days later, the work of reconstruction that had been done on the old buildings, but there was nothing like the sweat of your brow to take your mind off troubles. With the help of the three men he had brought down from Amber Point, and with such supplies as he could afford, the work was progressing rapidly. The plant would be ready a good two weeks before the herring began to run. There remained a few more days of work on the packing sheds and the smoke-house. After that the *Sirius* would have to be patched and launched and the scows made ready to receive their cargoes. Quentin had never before known what it was to toil from sunrise to long after sunset—and nothing in his life had ever given him more satisfaction. Joe Iden, if he could have witnessed it, would probably have laughed. But Joe always laughed when he wanted to hide either pity or admiration.

Quentin walked across the yard to the smoke-house where the men were replacing the hooks in the blackened beams. He had resolutely refrained from saying anything to Axel Lindstrom about what Timothy had told him. But he had hinted strongly that it would be better if the men should remain on their own side of the Inlet and avoid trouble with the villagers. They had all agreed with him at once, Axel with a wide grin that proved how clearly he understood what was in Quentin's mind. The great Swede had developed a dog-like devotion to Quentin, who had done everything in his power to make the men comfortable. All three had decided to remain throughout the fishing season and help with the pack.

There was still the problem of bringing in the rest of the crew and having them on hand when Bob Bennett began his harvest. After another talk with Timothy Entwhistle, Quentin had decided to leave the selection of a crew to a competent agent in the city. Timothy had conveniently announced that he was going to pay a visit to Vancouver—the first in three years—and had offered to assist in finding the right kind of men and looking after their departure for the Cove.

Another month, Quentin reflected, and he would know whether or not his enterprise was to meet with success. A good crew and a good run of herring—he asked for nothing more. He would be able to carry on then into the spring when the salmon season opened. After all, it had not been such a bad idea of his father's to inflict on his son a brief apprenticeship to the business.

"I'm going across for the mail, Axel," Quentin said, as he glanced in through the smoke-house door. "I'll be right back."

"Right, boss!" Axel grinned.

The Inlet was blue and thrilling as a perfect gem in the mid-afternoon. Quentin stood for a while and gazed out at it before he got into his launch. It twinkled mockingly back at him, reminding him of all that was precious and unobtainable in life.

For days he had been struggling vainly to disentangle himself from a preposterous set of emotions. What a smug fool he had been to think that he had ever got over loving Nona Darnell! He swore softly to himself, seeing her now as an incurable fever running brightly through his blood, a malady which, lying dormant for years, had broken out afresh only with greater virulence than before. It seemed but last night that their romance had been shattered in his father's house with such sickening finality.

Nona hated him still—but in hatred there was life, there was even warmth. Perhaps there would yet be a way of making up for the injury he had done her in the past. Again he thought of the boy whose face and sturdy body he had built out of anguish into his imagination. What lunacy it was to think he could ever in any way compensate her for that loss! He had nothing to offer her now except what she would not accept. She would not even permit him to approach her. And now she was going to marry Ivar Hansen, if Timothy Entwhistle knew what he was talking about.

Like a blunt white blade the launch scored the blue enamel of the Inlet, the glazed swell of its wake riding smoothly outward to break against the rocks of the little islands. Not once on his trips across had Quentin failed to think of that night when his son—Nona's son—had been swept out on the tide between these sinister barriers, upon any one of which he might have been tossed to safety or to death. But the islands must have submerged themselves that night, so that the boat and its little adventurer might pass on to that more legendary and mystical fate of the White Reef.

Quentin closed his eyes now in a spasm of futile pain. Ivar Hansen had known little Silas—had probably been devoted to him—had even looked forward to being a father to the boy. Ivar had listened to his first words, had seen him try his first steps, heard him laugh, felt his arms about his neck, sought for answers to all the unanswerable questions his boyish wit had framed. There was nothing Quentin despised more than self-pity, but there were moments when, looking back upon those few weeks after he had first met Nona seven years ago, he could not help feeling that a perverse Nature had taken him unawares and made him the butt of a heartless jest. How unpardonably young he had been!

He found a half dozen letters in his box. After a brief glance and a frown at one addressed in Eunice's thick, vertical hand, he stuffed them all into his coat pocket, made a few purchases from Karl Bjork, whose eyes seemed more blue and anxious than ever, and went back to where his launch was moored beside the wharf.

Instead of casting off at once, he sat down on the edge of the dock and opened Eunice's letter.

"Dear, delectable Quent," it ran with a gay brittleness that made him writhe, "I'm waving the white flag, darling! Ready to admit I was all wrong and all that, don't you know. Can't bear the mad crowd without you as a strong and silent background. Anyhow, Cousin Kate—*requiescat in pace*—has finally folded up with angina and Great-aunt Laura says she will make you and me her heirs if we patch up our differences and give the family tree a chance to grow. Good Presbyterian that she is, she can't understand a marriage without children and she can't abide a divorce—any more than your own family can. She is, if you remember, over ninety and her bonds are the same. It would, I think you will agree, be a shame to have this perfectly good bracer to the rapidly dwindling Wingate-Derringer fortune converted into Mother-Hubbards for Hottentots. This sounds really worse than it is, darling, but I'm using it as a frank inducement to you to come back. As you know, I am a physical little beast, and the minute I knew you had really gone I began to want you in the *worst* way—and still do. Didn't we have some delectable times together, Quent? Yours hopefully, Nitchy."

How long he had been sitting there staring dumfoundedly at the violet ink of her script he did not know. He had begun to tear the letter into small bits and toss them one by one into the water when a fishing boat drew in to the side of the dock opposite from where he was sitting. Its engine was shut off, and a moment later Ivar Hansen clambered up and made the boat fast to the pier. He turned and his eyes met Quentin's. There was a brief second

during which neither said anything. Then, moved by an impulse he could not have explained, Quentin raised his hand in a bleakly gallant salute.

Ivar nodded—an inscrutable nod that almost made Quentin laugh aloud with cold amusement. The great fool, he thought to himself, had he never made a mistake in his life, that he could stand there so aloof and insensitive to the pain and regret in another?

“Come and sit down,” Quentin invited. “I’ve been wanting to talk to you.”

Ivar moved as if to comply with the suggestion, then hesitated. A blur—Quentin could describe it to himself in no other way—seemed to come over his face. “What about?” he asked.

What about, indeed? Quentin looked up at him. He was a sturdy, upstanding fellow, a little stolid, perhaps, but decent—more decent than Nona would ever believe him, Quentin Wingate, could be.

“Look here, Ivar,” Quentin began uncertainly, “there’s no point in our trying to avoid each other. We’re both going to live in the Cove for a long time, probably. We might just as well try to understand each other, eh?”

“I guess we understand each other,” Ivar replied without moving.

“I know—and I don’t blame you much for what you’re thinking. There’s no point, either, in my trying to tell you how sorry I am—about everything. But Timothy tells me you’re going to marry Nona. I’d like to congratulate you.”

“Thanks,” Ivar said heavily. “I didn’t expect it.”

Quentin smiled up at him. “That’s natural, I suppose. I can’t blame you if you have no better opinion of me than the rest of them—or even worse.”

“You might be mistaken there,” Ivar replied. “We don’t all think the same, quite. You’re wrong if you think any of us had a hand in trying to burn you out. You’d better get that straight.”

His tone was neither friendly nor unfriendly. Its colorlessness was a warning to Quentin that Ivar was determined to play his part in the little interchange without any waste of feeling. In the blank face that looked down upon him there wasn’t the slightest clue to any sentiment Ivar might have entertained toward him.

“You didn’t have to tell me that, Ivar,” Quentin said simply, “though it’s damned nice of you to mention it, just the same. I appreciate it.”

He was close to saying something more, something friendly, perhaps, but suddenly the impulse seemed false. He lifted his hand once more toward Ivar as he stepped down into his boat. Ivar nodded gravely and strode off along the wharf.

A little after sunset, Quentin prepared to go across for dinner and a final talk with Timothy Entwhistle, who was leaving that night for the city, on board the *Princess*. In his room at the lodge he shaved carefully, avoiding this time the cut he usually gave himself below the left ear. A reddish beard was a deuce of a problem. He changed to his dark blue, double-breasted suit, the one that Eunice had disliked because she had been in a pet the day he bought it. Finally he gave a cursory brush to the brassy wave of his hair and hated it again for the stubborn kink it had. Nona Darnell had once made fun of that and had laid her lips against it. Damn! He looked at himself in the mirror. He saw a pair of candid hazel eyes, a broad and prominent nose that was far from classic in contour, a mouth generous and mobile with humor, even now, and a good chin. But no heartbreaker, Quentin Wingate! This young Ivar Hansen has you trimmed forty ways for looks. He gave an impatient tug at his gray and red tie—what a fool he was to be languishing like some seventeen-year-old smitten with his first love!

A slight uneasiness moved through him as he left the house and went down to his launch. He had warned his men against going across to the village for the dance that always celebrated the arrival of the *Princess*. The two older men had nodded their heads solemnly, but Axel, that blunt-headed giant, had smiled at Quentin through lazy blue slits of eyes. It was plain that Axel Lindstrom was merely biding his time.

The cool and starry dusk was already setting in when he stepped from his launch at the landing below Timothy's cottage. At a sharp turn in the steep way that led upward, a dark, stooped figure drew back abruptly to let him pass. Startled, Quentin halted and looked at the man. There was no mistaking that eccentric form. Ethan Ashe's high, eerie voice whined out like a note from another world.

"I'm going down to the dance tonight. Marie was always there—dancing to the music. She may be there tonight."

"I hope she is, Ethan," Quentin replied and started away with a feeling of embarrassment.

But Ethan Ashe darted toward him and grasped his arm. "So—it's you, is it? They told me you were back." He laughed softly but with malevolent mirth. "Well, let me warn you, young man. Go away before my Marie comes

home. Get out of my sight before you rue it, do you hear? I'm warning you—and that's more than I'd do for everybody. Go away and don't come back. Beware the full moon and the dance of the men from Spain."

Quentin fell back a step with a smothered exclamation. He might have questioned the man, but before he could speak a word Ethan Ashe had staggered down the path and out of sight around the hill. Quentin turned away and climbed the slope to Timothy's cottage.

It was almost dark when Nona went down to Ivar's house. The *Princess* had docked and Jorgen had already gone to get Lydie Thorpe. There would be dancing tonight and the music from the ship's orchestra would be heard wherever you were in Heartbreak Cove. Silas Darnell had gone to Bjork's store where he would probably remain until the *Princess* cleared. He had asked her to go along with him, knowing how she dreaded being alone in the house, but Nona had not been in the mood for Bjork's.

Ivar was sweeping his kitchen floor when she entered.

"Hullo!" he grinned. "I was just getting ready to go down your way. Hand me the dustpan—back of the door, there."

She held the pan for him while he swept up the sand he had tracked in on his shoes. As she straightened up, he put out his hand and touched the top of her head.

"Gosh, you don't know how pretty your hair is—just there! You ought to see it in this light. It shines like a wet seal."

She went to the door and threw the dust outside. "I washed it this afternoon—to give myself something to do. If I don't keep going every minute—"

When she paused, Ivar gave her a sharply covert glance and put his arm about her shoulders. "I'd ask you to go down and dance for a while, only I know you wouldn't go. Let's go in and see what we can get on the radio."

They sat together on the small sofa and listened until Ivar saw her lean her head back and close her eyes. There were faint whitish lines about her mouth and he knew that she had gone back into herself again. He reached out and turned the radio off, then laid his hand gently on her arm.

"You're too tired to listen to that," he said.

She opened her eyes and looked at him. “Don’t be impatient with me, Ivar,” she begged with such intensity that he put his arm about her and drew her toward him.

“Have I ever been impatient with you?” he asked.

“No—I didn’t mean it that way. But I wouldn’t blame anyone for losing patience with me these days. I can scarcely stand my own thoughts—they seem so crazy sometimes.”

She drew her feet beneath her on the sofa and spread her fingers fanwise over her knees. Her expression was so lost and helpless that her whole face seemed altered by it.

“Gosh, Nona,” Ivar said in distress, “you don’t have to keep your thoughts to yourself. You can talk to me, can’t you?”

Now, although he held her close, he felt unhappily that she was farther away from him than ever. Perhaps, he thought in bewilderment, she would never be any closer to him. Perhaps the loss of the boy and the return of Quentin Wingate on that tragic night had somehow twisted her mind so that she would never be herself again. For the first time a fear stirred in Ivar which he was ashamed to put a name to.

“But there are things you can’t talk about,” Nona said hurriedly. “How can I tell you that sometimes I believe it was his coming back here that took little Si away from me. It isn’t reasonable. And then I get the feeling that there is more yet to come—as if there was no escaping the—I can’t tell you what it is, Ivar.”

If it had been anyone but Nona, Ivar would not have felt as he did now about the pressure of the Cove superstition. Nona had always been so contemptuous of such things.

“You’re just nervous and upset,” he told her. “You’ll get over it. You know there’s no sense to thinking that way. It might help a little if we looked forward and began to plan things together.”

She ran her fingers distractedly through her hair. “I can’t plan anything until I get rid of this—this other thing that’s on my mind all the time. It’s so hard to explain—but there it is, Ivar.”

He looked away from her. “I’ve been thinking along that line myself today. It’s funny, but these things seem to leave you when you stand up and face them in the open. I’ve been trying to keep away from Quentin Wingate

—but this afternoon I talked to him and—I don’t know—I feel different somehow. It doesn’t seem to matter so much when—”

“You talked to him?”

“I ran into him down on the dock, with nobody else around. Timothy told him you and I were going to be married.”

“He mentioned that?”

“He congratulated me.”

“Oh!” The sound was low and thoughtful on Nona’s lips. Her face did not change.

“I didn’t know exactly what to say,” Ivar added, “but I’ve been kind of sorry for him ever since.”

Nona stood up suddenly. Her eyes were like blue fire. “What’s the matter with you all? Timothy is having him to supper tonight—just as if nothing had ever happened. And now you’re feeling sorry for him. Why should you waste your sympathy on him?”

“Gosh, I don’t know. I guess I’m just dumb. Maybe it’s because I have a feeling that he still wants you and can’t have you. I never like the looks of a man when he’s licked. I hate to have to feel sorry for anyone like that, but I can’t help it.”

“You don’t have to feel sorry for him. Let him—”

“All right, Nona. It’s nothing for us to fight about, is it?”

She turned from him and looked out of the window. “I’d better go home,” she announced finally. “Pa always says when I get nasty the only thing for me is to go to bed and sleep it off.”

Ivar laughed with relief and a moment later they left the house together.

The lights of the *Princess* were just visible around the whimsical bend of Thimble Street when the noise of the crowd in front of the Dragon’s Eye reached their ears. The boat was in dock across the board walk from the tavern and its lights fell upon the cursing and jeering mob that poured into the quiet little street. Strains of the orchestra drifted down from the hall on the hillside.

“What can it be?” Nona asked in alarm, her eyes upon the scene in front of the Dragon’s Eye.

“Looks like a small riot,” Ivar observed. “Someone has had a few drinks, I guess. Let’s go down that way and take a look.”

They hurried along the street until they came within easy sight of the crowd and Ivar caught Nona’s arm.

“Lord—it’s Big Axel!” he said.

For only a moment they stood and watched the vague figures that milled about in the dim light that fell from the ship and from the sickly globe above the tavern doorway.

“I hope Jorgen isn’t mixed up in it,” Nona said breathlessly. “He’s so hot-headed—”

“He’s not there,” Ivar assured her. “Come on—this is no place for you.”

He led her away quickly, talking with cheerful excitement until they arrived at the Darnell gate. Nona listened, responded, with the surface of her mind. At the gate she said good night to him and could not have told whether it was discontent or relief that she felt when he did not offer any endearment. Would it make any difference, she wondered blankly, if he treated her as he must have treated Julie Cartaret—as Quentin Wingate had treated her that night of their first meeting? Ivar was waiting for her to give a sign—but how wrong that all was!

She lingered beside the yew hedge until Ivar passed from sight down the street. Suddenly a mad impulse seized her. Her lips parted drily, then pressed hard against her teeth. She swung about and ran up the street toward Timothy Entwhistle’s cottage.

Timothy and Quentin were sitting back from the table, discussing the selection of a crew in Vancouver, when a sharp knock sounded at the door and Nona Darnell entered the room without waiting for Timothy’s invitation. For a moment she stood and looked at Quentin. Then she closed the door behind her and leaned her back against it.

“One of your men is in a fight down in front of the Dragon’s Eye,” she announced abruptly.

Timothy and Quentin got to their feet. “Axel!” Quentin said, as though to himself. Without a moment’s thought he started for the door.

“Go easy, my boy,” Timothy warned him. “You’ve got nothing to do with that fracas down there.”

Quentin halted. After all, he had warned Axel to stay away from the village. But Nona's eyes were on him, and her provoking smile.

"They're probably waiting for you down there," she said.

Quentin's eyes narrowed coolly. "Nobody in this town has to wait for me," he said and started once more for the door.

But Timothy came forward with alacrity. "Don't be a thundering idiot!" he boomed.

Quentin turned on his old friend. "Do you expect me to stand around here while one of my own men—"

Timothy's heavy hand fell upon the younger man's shoulder. "That's exactly what I expect. What can you do against a dozen men—maybe more?"

"I can at least take a licking, if I have to," Quentin said. "But I'll not be the only one in the crowd to know there was a fight."

The old man lowered his head slightly and brought his face close to Quentin's with a black scowl. "You're fool enough to do it, too!" he rasped. "You'd go now and make a mess of everything before you got started on what you want to do. Go down there and get into a brawl and there's no telling what will come of it. Why, dammit—if you leave this house, I'll wash my hands of you and everything you stand for. You can do what you like about getting a crew together. I'll not turn a hand for you, do you hear?"

His face reddening dully under the lash of Timothy's tongue, Quentin looked at Nona where she stood against the door, clad in a reefer, a white sweater beneath it drawn up to her vivid cheeks, her wild dark head bare. He drew a deep breath and let his arms fall limply at his sides. Never in his life had he seen anything so inimical as Nona's scornful stare.

"What brought you here?" he demanded. His jaw set into a hard line with the effort he was making to control the absolutely grotesque and unseemly rage that overwhelmed him.

"To see whether you were fool enough to go down and help your man—or coward enough to stay where you are!" Nona said deliberately and was out of the house before he could make any reply.

Quentin stood for a moment, his hands in his pockets, his eyes upon the door that had just closed. The sound of Timothy striking a match to re-light his pipe came to him. He turned and looked at the old man whose grizzled eyebrows rose comically.

“Would you rather spank her—or kiss her?” Timothy asked with a chuckle.

“Both!” Quentin admitted, his sense of humor returning suddenly.

Timothy’s sigh was not without guile. “She’d probably yield to one as soon as to the other.”

“But what in the devil brought her up here to tell me about Axel?” Quentin asked.

Timothy snorted. “Lord Almighty! Do you think the girl has no nature? She’d warn the devil if she thought it would save his neck.”

Quentin grinned. “Well, you told me I’d have my pride stepped on sooner or later. After tonight there won’t be anything left to step on. Damn Axel Lindstrom!”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Autumn Sea

OCTOBER in Heartbreak Cove is unguessable. There will be a jeweled day when the scarps of the cliffs are boldly wrought, iron settings for the sapphire blend of the Inlet with the sea; when the sun inlays a filigree of cool gold and the White Reef, quiescent, seems but a curious, pale enameling midway of the blue and motionless horizon. The gulls wheel and dip with a languor that is not true nature; it seems that they, too, voracious creatures, have been bewitched or caught in a prism so that they are unable to move their greedy, alert heads or plunge from a height to scoop their insatiable beaks into the ripples that tell of herring shoals.

But the day may not be well brought to a close before you know that the morrow will bring its terrors, especially for those who must go out to sea. Fog, rain, wind or sleet may ride in on the western swell and woe betide the fishing boats then, or the tugs towing in the laden scows through the treacherous waters of the channel.

The month was only well begun when the first gale of the autumn raked the north Pacific coast from Nome to San Francisco. For four days the wind drove in from the sea, heavy with rain and sleet out of a gray sky that hung no higher than the cliffs above the Cove.

"I think she has blown herself out," Silas Darnell said on the evening of the fourth day while the family was gathered in the living room.

"I hope so," said Ivar, who sat beside Nona on the couch. Nona was intent on the mending of one of Jorgen's shirts.

"It's starting out like a bad season," she said absently.

A sudden blast of wind and rain struck the house and Jorgen looked up at the windows that glistened in the light from the lamp.

"There's plenty of kick left in her yet," he observed.

"I wish I were going out with you tonight," Nona remarked. "I haven't been out since last spring."

"It's no place for a woman," Silas replied decisively.

“No place for anybody,” Ivar put in, “unless we run into some herring pretty soon.”

Across the wind came the wild note of a boat’s siren.

“There goes the *Sirius*,” Jorgen said. “I don’t see how they have the nerve to take that tub outside the gap in any kind of weather.”

Silas Darnell shook his head thoughtfully. “It’s risky—but it’s a case of making hay whether the sun shines or not. Fred Malcolm says Wingate brought in close to a hundred ton last night.”

“The Stone boys went up to Amber Point this afternoon,” Ivar said. “Old man Clough says the agent up there was talking to him over the wire today. The herring started up the channel there this morning.”

The men reviewed their experiences of the past few nights in their search for the elusive finny hordes, but Nona gave them only superficial attention. The cross currents of emotion within herself were far more perplexing than any physical disturbance the men had encountered in their nights of futile searching and in their struggles to bring their boats back safely to the Cove.

The town, watching with invidious interest the busy preparations at the Wingate plant, had displayed an even greater concern when it became known that Timothy Entwhistle had taken upon himself the task of selecting a capable crew and seeing them safely embarked at Vancouver. Nona, who had promised to look after the Major’s garden during his absence, had been surprised to learn that he would take any such active part in the enterprise. It looked as if he were openly flaunting his regard for Quentin Wingate in the face of everyone in the Cove. But when Quentin himself brought the *Sirius* over and took his men off the *Princess* without any show of feeling on the part of the villagers who crowded the wharf, it began to dawn upon Nona that resentment, even of the kind that existed in Heartbreak Cove, languishes after a time when there is little to feed it.

What annoyed her more than anything else, however, was the state of her own mind. Perhaps it was impossible, after all, to nourish hatred in one’s heart forever—and go on living. Only last night she had been agitated by a wild desire to have Quentin Wingate come off victor in his first battle with the elements. When, during the day, she had heard that he had brought in his laden scows through a storm that threatened to drive him on the reef, and had landed his first big cargo safely at the Wingate dock, she lost patience with herself for everything she had thought and felt during that one confused night of hopes and fears. What in the world had taken possession of her? Of

course Quentin Wingate would bring his boat safely in, whatever the odds against him! Others might suffer, but he led a charmed life.

An hour or so after midnight, the *Sirius* was groping her way along the coast in the inky darkness, shackled to an old scow in which lay the ninety tons of herring that had been taken from the waters at Amber Point in the early hours of the night. Before daybreak the other two scows would be filled. The run for which Quentin Wingate had been waiting impatiently was on in earnest now and the old plant on the north shore had sprung into new life. Bob Bennett, the seiner whom Quentin had taken under contract, had acted with an almost uncanny wisdom. Just when fishermen up and down the coast had begun to despair of any harvest, Bob had come upon water the surface of which was like a cauldron of livid silver under the cloud-wracked skies. A short distance away, the sea was a dark field covered with hoar-frost where the teeming myriads flipped their white bellies and made a soft rippling whisper like remote surf. Old Bob Bennett, loafing in the wheel-house of his seine-boat, had suddenly come to life. A few crisp orders and his crew had cast their nets. The harvest was on.

When the gale had hit them on the following day, the seiner had talked at length with Quentin and had hinted that heavy seas might interfere with the task of returning the loaded scows to the plant. But Quentin had refused to listen. As long as Bob could take the fish from the sea, he, Quentin Wingate, would get them down to the Cove. And the work had gone forward.

As he sat now in the wheel-house of the *Sirius* and peered forward and a little to the left, where the Tyee Light should flash into sight at any moment, Quentin hoped he might never again have to live through three such days. True, he had had his thrills, for the battle had gone on without respite—and he had won. But he felt now that he had come to the end of his physical resources. For three nights he and Axel Lindstrom had driven the old tugboat back and forth through a gale that had battered them without mercy. And for three days, Quentin had been forced to content himself with an hour's rest snatched now and then from his task of getting the work under way at the plant. It had been a little too much. Even Bob Bennett, gruff and taciturn in his way, had finally sworn to kick him over-board if he came back again tonight.

The wind that had gone down before midnight had taken on new spite as Quentin pulled away from the seiner with his scow and pointed for the Cove. Worn as he was from sleepless nights and anxious days, he could not

quite resist the feeling that here was the thrill of adventure—the very challenge he had anticipated that day when he had last talked with Joe Iden. Within an hour, however, his mind was intent upon the business in hand. The world about him had become a black immensity of howling wind and tumbling seas. Sleet and rain lashed the windows of the wheel-house; tons of black water threshed over the deck of the *Sirius* and fell upon the shuddering scow at her side. The old tugboat plunged and wallowed and heaved like a thing possessed.

When he finally picked up the Tyee Light, Quentin realized that he had been driven too far to the southward. He waited for a second flash, then put the *Sirius* about and steered for the light. Another fifteen minutes should bring him to the mouth of the channel and the shelter of an island. He might lie up for an hour or two and wait for the wind to go down. When ten minutes had elapsed he turned on the searchlight that stood above the wheel-house and swept its ray over the seething water before him in the hope of finding the island that lay outside the entrance to the channel. Then he pulled a cord overhead and the next moment Axel Lindstrom thrust his great head into the cabin and bellowed:

“What’s wrong, boss?”

Quentin turned and beckoned him forward. “I’m thinking of taking an hour or so when we get behind the island and give the wind a chance to go down a bit.”

Axel narrowed his eyes and peered ahead through the darkness to where the light flashed from the headland.

“You’re the boss,” he replied, “but we got the worst of it behind us now. We can make it from here in.”

“Okay!” Quentin said and Axel went back to his place in the engine room.

It was less than five minutes later when the *Sirius* settled into a trough and seemed to halt for a moment before being lifted on the swell. But in that moment something happened that startled Quentin and made him hold his breath as he looked forward with straining eyes through the swirl of spray. For a moment it was as if some floating timber had struck the *Sirius* amidships and had set her shivering as she raised herself and poised momentarily for the next plunge. When she started downward again, Quentin flung himself upon the wheel and held on grimly. He was only vaguely aware of Axel leaping up the companionway and being hurled

forward as the tugboat dropped with a crash and stood shuddering like a stricken animal.

Three hours after midnight, Nona Darnell dressed and came downstairs. It was the second time she had left her bed that night. Shortly after twelve she had come down and made coffee for her father and Jorgen who had returned when the wind had risen again. They were asleep now—not even the eerie wail of the siren coming in on the wind could rouse them.

But the awesome sound had awakened Nona. From her window under the roof she had seen one light, then two, and three, glimmer nervously into being through the watery and furious dark between the Darnell cottage and the Inlet. Others were up, lighting lamps; others in the Cove who had not lain awake all night as she herself had done.

Holding the lamp with its concave reflector in her hand, Nona went to the kitchen. From the mat near the stove old Toby got up and whined. The windows rattled and the shed door, flying open, banged against the wall. Nona set the lamp on the table near the window that looked toward the Inlet. She replenished the fire that had been banked an hour or so earlier, then drew her flannel robe about her and seated herself on the mat with Toby's head in her arms.

"What's the matter, Toby, old precious?" she whispered breathlessly as the old dog looked up at her with his questioning, anxious eyes.

Toby whimpered and rose stiffly, to stand by the outer door in a listening attitude. Nona leaned back on her hands and heard only the roar of the wind and the surf on the rocks of the Inlet, and the threshing of the rain against the roof and the windows of the house.

She began quietly to clear the table and wash the dishes that had been left from the midnight lunch. There was no point in leaving them until morning now—sleep was out of the question, anyhow, with the wind complaining in this high, sinister way, as though between the rocky teeth of the cliffs.

When her work was done at last, she brewed some fresh coffee and sat down at the table. Toby, crouching on the mat, growled deep in his throat.

"Toby!" she whispered and put out her hand toward him.

The dog got up and faced the door, the shaggy black hair on his back rising into a cockscomb. Nona looked toward the door, listening to the

almost groping sound that came from beyond it. The door opened slowly and she saw Quentin Wingate standing on the threshold, swaying a little, smiling uncertainly, moving one arm in a curious way in front of him as though he were struggling to sweep from before his eyes some obscuring mist. With the other hand he closed the door behind him. His head was lowered and for several seconds he fixed upon her an uncanny, blood-shot gaze.

“What brings you here?” Nona asked, her heart throbbing.

He looked as if he had not heard her question. Toby had given his clothing an inquiring sniff and had retired to a corner beside the woodbox.

“The old *Sirius* is gone, Nona,” he announced, with no waver in his strange, set smile. “The Reef has her.”

Nona caught her breath. “The *Sirius*?”

“She’s breaking up—this minute—just outside the gap,” he told her. “I thought you’d like to know. I saw your light in the window and came to tell you. There’s some code, isn’t there—about a light? Can’t turn a man away, you know . . .” He hesitated and drew his hand across his eyes.

Nona realized that he was talking in the feverish, stumbling haste of utter exhaustion. She had no more than drawn out a chair for him at the table before he sank down upon it, burying his head in his arms. She hastily replaced the coffee pot on the stove, then took a small bottle of brandy from the cupboard.

“Here,” she said brusquely, pouring out a stiff drink and setting it before him, “drink this while the coffee is getting hot.”

Out of his stupor he looked up at her, then lifted the glass to his lips. She saw for the first time that there was a jagged wound on his left hand, just below the wrist.

“Old Andy MacNab took us off,” Quentin said, like a man in a dream. “Took me and Axel off. Axel stayed with him. I came to tell you, Nona. Thought you’d like to know I’m licked.”

He swayed unsteadily in his chair.

“You’ve hurt your hand,” Nona said.

He looked at it and grinned. Oh . . . yes! Yes, he remembered now. She *would* see that—the woman—soft creature—soft, and hard as hell! She’d see that—but what of his dreams that lay shattered on the White Reef? What

of the hurts she could not see? Damn! With a smile that was not pleasant to see, he lifted his right fist high and brought it crashing down upon his outspread bleeding left hand.

Then he tossed off the drink that Nona had poured for him.

She stood for a moment clutching the back of a chair. When the sick faintness had almost passed, she brought from the top shelf of the cupboard a roll of gauze and a bottle of disinfectant. Although he watched her bind his hand, he did not seem concerned with what she was doing. When she finally stepped back and steeled herself really to look at him, to talk to him, his head slumped forward upon his arm where it lay inertly upon the table.

"You mustn't go to sleep here, Quentin!" she cried in a panic.

But her fingers tingled in contact with his rough coat sleeve.

"Too bad, Nona," he muttered. "That drink . . . must have hit me . . . didn't think I was so soft . . . Guess I can't quite—"

In an instant Nona had made her decision. With her strong arms she half raised him from his chair and led him to the bench beneath the kitchen window. At one end of the bench she placed a chair and brought a cushion from the other room which she drew beneath his head. Then she covered him with a shawl, turned the lamp low, and sat watching him until his slumber had become deep and even.

The sullen dawn lay opaque and noncommittal against the window panes. The changing light played capriciously over his bronze, rough hair, his sharp, tanned cheek bones, his long, sensitive mouth. Nona had moved only to keep the fire going in the stove or to cover Quentin again if he stirred in his sleep. Once, when she had kept her eyes fixed for a long time in an ecstatic kind of terror upon the lean, too-well-remembered line of his jaw, she pressed her hand in desperation to her own cheek and found that it was wet.

Scarcely knowing what she did, she stole to the bench and knelt beside him. In this profound and blessed unconsciousness he belonged to nothing, to no one—neither to himself nor to that life that had taken him away from her, outside the Cove. But no! she thought with a sudden and reckless joy, that was not true. He belonged at this moment to her and to her alone. He would never know it, but for these few precious minutes with the barrier of thought and the cognizance of the difference between them removed, she possessed him entirely. Little Si—little Si—the grown and breathing man—asleep only, not dead on the Reef! It was only by exercising supreme self-

control that she resisted the impulse to draw him into her arms, to cradle his rumpled head in the curve of her shoulder. But it was something—oh, it was much!—to brush with her lips the crisp tangle of his hair, the rough edge of his coat sleeve so near the exposed wrist, and to lay her cheek lightly for an instant against the protective bandage of the injured hand.

He came full awake a little after that, sat up and ran his hand along his brow.

“You must go now,” she said gently, “before anyone sees you leaving.”

How strange he was, she thought, herself a little giddy now from loss of sleep. He looked down at her from beneath his curiously dark and twisted brows.

“Yes—I’ll go now,” he said harshly. “I understand.”

She believed afterwards that she must have stood very stiff and white before him. She did not give way, not in the least. With his quizzical smile and that familiar hunch of his spare, broad shoulders, he turned from her and slipped out of the door.

But it had not been too early even in that wild dawn for someone to be peering out of a window as Quentin made his way out of the Darnell house and down through the yellowish-gray murk of the street. Mrs. Patterson, who prided herself on being the earliest riser in the Cove, chanced to look from the window that faced toward the Darnell cottage. Her eyes, which Nature had ordained should protrude a little, bulged almost out of their sockets. Her sharp intake of breath was held intact for several seconds somewhere beneath her pouter-pigeon bosom, while her astonished gaze followed Quentin Wingate down the street. Then, as though fully convinced that she was not having hallucinations, she turned about and surveyed the appurtenances of her immaculate kitchen with a triumphant gaze.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Sun

HESPER THORPE, on her way home from Bjork's store, called at the Darnell cottage. When there was no response to her brisk knock, she marched around to the backyard where she found Nona talking with Jorgen, who was mending a net.

The sun had split the clouds at last and a panel of fresh light lay across the net reels, the shed, and the autumn-colored garden which Hesper entered. But Hesper saw none of this. She saw only Nona Darnell standing in her bright red wool skirt and her white pullover sweater—an outfit, Hesper had always thought, that made her out far worse than she really was, and God only knew why she insisted on wearing it, unless she meant it for a flagrant taunt to the Cove people who thought she was *that kind*. She saw Nona, rather white-faced and tight-lipped, and heard her make some retort to her brother Jorgen, who appeared to be—little wonder!—out of sorts.

Before Hesper could say a word of what was on her mind, Nona saw her and stiffened defiantly.

“Hello, Mrs. Thorpe!” she greeted her. “I’ve been looking for you.”

“What do you mean by that?” Hesper quavered.

“Jorgen has been telling me about the talk that’s going around town this morning,” Nona went on, unperturbed. “I thought you would have been in to see me hours ago.”

Mrs. Thorpe drew in her breath but clung to her dignity, although she was beginning to fear the worst.

“Nona, tell me—it isn’t true, is it?” she pleaded.

“What isn’t true?” Nona asked.

Hesper contrived to speak in tearful indignation. “They were talking about you down at Bjork’s just now,” she said. “Selina Patterson has been spreading a story about young Wingate coming out of your house at five o’clock this morning. I told her, Nona—”

Nona interrupted with a laugh. "I hope you didn't tell her she was having a nightmare. He *did* leave a little after five."

Jorgen threw his net aside. "Why don't you tell things right, if you're going to tell them at all? I don't see any sense in making 'em worse than they are."

"I'm not making it any worse or any better than it is," Nona went on. "Quentin Wingate came to the house last night because he was exhausted—and had no place else to go. He saw the light in the kitchen window. He went to sleep on the bench and didn't leave till dawn. That's all there is to it."

A gleam of outraged propriety shot from Hesper Thorpe's eyes as she looked at Nona. "I should think a girl with your experience would be more careful about what she does!"

"A girl with my experience doesn't have to be careful of what she does," Nona replied.

"So! Selina was right, then!" Mrs. Thorpe went on. "Very well—this is the end. I've always stuck up for you because I thought you had been wronged. But I've been made a fool of—and so has Lydie!"

Jorgen reddened. Nona, seeing his look, stepped closer to Mrs. Thorpe, her earnest dismay on Jorgen's behalf over-weighing her wrath.

"If you let this come between Jorgen and Lydie—" she began, but Hesper interrupted her.

"I'll do what I like with my own daughter. After this, Lydie will keep where she belongs."

With a sinking heart, Nona saw the woman stamp her way out of the garden, out of sight around the house. She turned to her brother then and found Jorgen's face a study of mixed emotions.

"Don't pay any attention to her, Jorgie," she begged.

"I told you how it would be!" he burst out. "What do you expect, anyhow? Why in hell didn't you shut the door in his face?"

"You mean that?" she asked.

"Isn't it coming to him?" he demanded.

For an instant Nona stood as though transfixed. Then, without a word, she wheeled about and went into the house. Paul was bringing Eva in for a

midday meal, since she found it almost impossible these days to do any cooking for herself. The young Clough girl would stay with Eva's two children and make lunch for them. Paul's wife, indeed, had developed a temperament that was almost quaint in the Cove—especially when you remembered that her mother, ten miles north along the coast and living in a similar environment, had raised seven children. But Eva and her mother had not got along well together. And so Eva's mother was never here to see how things went.

Nona went about preparing the meal, remembering mechanically what Eva liked and did not like these days. But under the routine of her task ran the bright and mocking image of Quentin Wingate as he had lain asleep on that bench there beneath the window, the ragged dawn-light flickering across his face.

One thought alone possessed Quentin Wingate's mind as he entered the lodge that noon-time and flung himself into a chair before the open fireplace in which lay the blackened embers of the last fire he had made there several days ago. His clothes were covered with grease, his face and hands were grimy, his whole body was weary almost to the point of exhaustion. But these things mattered very little. A couple of days would repair such superficial affronts to his dignity. It was the fact that he was beaten that shut everything else from his thoughts. Fate was inviting him, urging him to admit defeat and go back where he belonged.

All forenoon he had clung to the hope that the *Sirius* could be saved and put into condition to serve for the remainder of the season, but the hope had vanished when Bob Bennett, standing by in his seine boat, with his crew about him, attempted to pull the old hulk off the Reef when the tide was full.

"No use, Wingate!" old Bob had said. "If we take 'er off, she'll go to the bottom like a plummet o' lead. Let 'er rest where she is and take the insides out of her before another gale blows in."

Quentin had received the verdict without comment. There was nothing to say. He had no other boat to handle the scows and had no money to replace the one he had lost. With the season in full swing and his crew at work in the packing plant, a trip to Vancouver was out of the question. It would take two weeks to make any kind of satisfactory arrangement, if indeed he could do it at all. He might swallow his pride and telephone Joe Iden to do something for him, but Joe would probably laugh at the thought of trying to induce

anyone to sink good money in an enterprise that he had considered a hare-brained scheme from the first.

Well, he had been forewarned. Timothy Entwhistle had told him, on that first day after his return to the Cove, that the Wingate pride would be trampled upon. The old Major was right, as usual. Quentin began to wish earnestly for Timothy's return from the city. He was staying longer than he had planned. There was comfort in talking to the old man, if nothing else.

Something would have to be done at once if he were to avoid even worse consequences of the blow that had been dealt him. It was this realization that had driven him home at the noon hour instead of going to the plant to eat lunch with the men. He had not felt equal to facing them. His crew had been brought out from the city on a venture the nature of which he had not disclosed to them. They did not know that their first month's wages would take practically every dollar he had in the world. And pay day was only a little more than a week away. He would have to act quickly or suffer the ignominy of seeing his men take the first boat back to Vancouver. Lord, what a joke that would be! They would talk about that in Heartbreak Cove for years to come. And how his sister Nancy would relish it! She and Eunice would have something to feed their little spite. And Nona Darnell—Quentin grinned wryly to himself as he thought of it. His had been a brave gesture, indeed!

The sound of a gas boat approaching the little landing below the lodge brought him suddenly out of his reverie. He got up and went to the window. A man stepped from a small boat, made it fast to the landing, and came slowly up the pathway, looking about him as he came. Startled, Quentin recognized Bart Leshner. He recalled that the man had been among those who had gone out early that morning for a look at the wrecked *Sirius*. It was impossible for him to regard the fellow impersonally after that extraordinary encounter he had witnessed between him and Nona and after what Timothy had told him about Leshner.

Quentin opened the door with mixed feelings. "How do you do?" he said coolly.

Leshner smiled and took the cigar from his mouth. "Hope I'm not barging in on anything, Wingate," he remarked affably and hesitated as he awaited Quentin's invitation.

With a questioning look which Leshner chose to ignore, Quentin stepped aside. Leshner entered and tossed his hat into a chair, then looked around

quickly, taking in the room and its furnishings with a glance that was to Quentin somehow offensive.

“Not at all,” he said, his curiosity roused despite his instinctive dislike of the man. “If you’ll sit down I’ll just take the chill out of the room. I haven’t been in the place for four days.”

He knelt and began building a fire in the fireplace.

“You’ve been hard at it,” Leshar observed genially as he dropped into a chair. “Well, you’ve been lucky, at that.”

“I have Bob Bennett to thank for it,” Quentin replied as he struck a match and watched the flames rise.

“There isn’t a better seiner on the north coast,” Leshar said. “He’ll find herring where there aren’t any. I’ve been doing all right myself, though the last few days have kept a few of the boys at home.”

Quentin seated himself, took a package of cigarettes from his pocket and extended it to Leshar. “Sorry I haven’t a good cigar in the house,” he apologized.

“Thanks,” Leshar said, “I have one here.” He tossed what was left of his cigar into the fire and took a fresh one from his pocket.

When Quentin had lighted his own cigarette he glanced with narrowed eyes through the smoke at his guest. It would be interesting to know just what the fellow was after.

“Tough break you got last night,” Leshar declared and shook his head. “You’ll be sending out for another boat to take her place, I suppose.”

“I’ll have to, of course. The trouble is, it may take a week or more to get one out here.”

There was no point in betraying his real position to a stranger.

“Longer than that,” Leshar replied, “unless you’re very lucky. As a matter of fact, Wingate, that’s what brought me over to see you. I might as well come to the point at once, eh?”

The corner of Quentin’s mouth twitched, half in perplexity, half in annoyance. “Well, I suppose I ought to congratulate myself on having a caller from the Cove, no matter what the reason.”

Leshar laughed and slapped his knee. “They’re not what you’d call a friendly bunch over there, are they? Of course, they think they have a

grievance. I don't know much about it except what I've overheard now and then. The way I figure it—they've never quite got over the fact that your dad was a smarter business man than any of them happened to be."

"I can't say that I blame them much," Quentin admitted.

"Well—the sooner it's all forgotten, the better everybody will feel about it. That's what I think—and that's what I tell them." Leshner hesitated for a moment. "I had a talk with old Bob Bennett about an hour ago. He gave me to understand—quite confidentially, of course—that you might have a hard time keeping the plant going."

"Bob was speaking a little out of turn," Quentin said quickly. "There'll be no difficulty keeping the plant going as long as the fish continue to run—and as long as Bob Bennett—"

"Don't misunderstand me, Wingate," Leshner spoke up. "Bob isn't the kind that talks behind a man's back. I've known him for quite a while. He's as anxious as you are to make good."

"I think so, certainly. But he needn't have any fear of the plant closing down."

Leshner shifted in his chair and gave Quentin one of his contemplative smiles. "You ought to have a new boat as soon as you can get it."

"I need one now."

"That's the point, Wingate. I thought I might be able to help you out of the hole. I happen to know where a good tug can be got for about half of what she's worth. I don't know if you're interested, but—"

"I'm interested, of course, if the boat is in good condition."

"You don't have to take anybody's word for it but your own. You can go and look it over for yourself. You know boats."

"What can I get it for?"

"I think you could pick it up for four or five thousand, cash. If you haven't the cash to spare just now, we might be able to make some kind of deal between us. I have a little surplus lying idle in the bank."

Quentin got up from his chair and stood for a moment with his back to the fire. He could not help a feeling of irritation at Leshner's manner.

"You're crowding me a little, Mr. Leshner," he said finally.

Lesher stroked his leg slowly. "Don't let me do that, Wingate. It's just a habit I have—coming to the point without any waste of time. I don't beat around the bush when it comes to business—and I know you don't. I've got my reasons for what I do and I don't mind telling anyone what they are. In the first place, it's going to be a bad thing for the Cove to have you close down just when it was beginning to look like something. I like to see things go ahead, once they're started. There's no reason why you and I can't pull together here and build up an industry that will mean something to the place in a year or two."

"On the other hand, Mr. Lesher, I see no reason why you should want to do it all on your own money."

Lesher laughed. "Don't get me all wrong. I'm not laying out good money just to put the Cove on the map. I haven't enough for that. It happens that the present owner of the boat is an old friend of mine. I'd like to help him a bit, if I can see a way of doing it and getting my money out of it."

"I see," Quentin replied. "For the sake of an old sentiment, you're willing to gamble with four or five thousand—"

"Gamble? Hell, I'm making an investment in a business that looks better to me than having the money gathering dust in a bank in the city."

"You mean—you'll take an interest in the business for security?"

"That's up to you, of course," Lesher replied. "I'd take an interest in it, yes—and I don't mind telling you that I think it would be a safe investment. I would have been willing to make some kind of hook-up with you when you first came in, but I didn't want to do—"

"I may be a little prejudiced," Quentin put in quietly, "but I'd rather swing this myself, if I can. My father had very little luck with his partner."

"I've had some experience myself along those lines," Lesher hastened to say, "and it wasn't all good, by a long shot. And I don't blame you a damned bit for keeping it in your own hands as long as you can. However, that's all up to you. I thought I might be able to give you a lift, but it's all right. No harm done." He got up as he spoke and offered his hand to Quentin who took it with an unpleasantly perfunctory feeling. "There's plenty of room for both of us here, Wingate. Drop in when you're over in town."

"Thanks, Mr. Lesher."

"And think it over. If I can be of any help, call on me and we'll talk it over. I'll always be glad to see you, anyhow. You know that."

“Thanks. I may drop in any time.”

Quentin followed him to the door, where he stood and watched him go down the pathway to the landing. Then, with tightened lips, he went back into the house and began to prepare lunch for himself. Suddenly he felt almost overcome by weariness—weariness of mind as well as of body. He threw himself on the old couch in the living room and was sound asleep in a moment.

“Mrs. Clough was in to see me this morning,” Eva said as soon as she entered the Darnell cottage. Her voice was almost sepulchral, Nona reflected as she consciously hardened herself against her sister-in-law’s presence.

“It must be visiting day in town,” Nona retorted. “Hesper Thorpe came over to see me.”

“Well,” Eva sighed, “you ought to know what they’re like. If you give them something to talk about, they’ll talk. Selina Patterson—”

Nona raised her head impatiently. “Do we have to talk about it?”

Eva folded her hands and stared at the floor. “I declare I don’t understand you lately. How could you have let Quentin Wingate into the house last night, after—”

Nona shook the frying pan noisily on the stove and began to laugh. “Honestly, Eva, you have as little sense as the rest of them. Just whose business is it, anyhow?”

“It seems to me you owe something to your family, but of course you wouldn’t—”

Nona hurried into the inner room and began setting the table. It was impossible to stay in the same room with Eva and remain sane. Presently, when her father came in with Paul, Nona carried the hot dishes from the kitchen and laid them on the table.

“Where’s Jorgie?” she asked as her father drew the chairs into place.

“You don’t need to worry about Jorgen when it comes time to eat,” Silas said. “Sit down, Paul.”

Eva came in and took her place beside Paul, the picture of meek forbearance.

"You might as well have brought the children along," Silas said, looking at his daughter-in-law. "Nona has enough here to feed half the town."

"It's a relief to sit down to a meal without them," Paul observed bluntly.

Eva sighed. "Oh, dear! I hope they're eating their lunch. Emily is all right on custards, but—"

"Forget it!" Paul said impatiently, then looked across at Nona who had just taken her place at the table. "Well—you've certainly given the town plenty to talk about this morning."

Silas shrugged his shoulders with embarrassment and spoke without looking up. "I think it would be better to say nothing about that just now."

Paul looked at his father and drew his mouth into a thin, taut line. Nona, glancing up, saw her brother's face and caught her breath suddenly. She knew something of Paul's fits of passion. When he was angry he knew no control. She saw him set his knife and fork down beside his plate and prepared herself for the outburst that followed immediately.

"It's high time somebody else was taking a hand in this Wingate affair!" he declared. "If the women around here are so damned weak-minded that they can't look after themselves, the men ought to look after them. If we hadn't all been cowards, we'd have kicked Quentin Wingate to hell out of here the day he had the nerve to come back. He would have found out that all the members of the Darnell family haven't weak minds."

"And what good would come of that?" Silas asked quietly.

"There's such a thing as family honor!" Paul stormed. "I refuse to be made the laughingstock of the town because I happen to have a weak-minded sister."

Silas looked at his son, his brows deeply knit. "I don't think you know what you're saying, my boy," he observed, with an effort to remain calm.

"I know damned well what I'm saying!" Paul retorted. "When a girl who has had the experience that Nona went through opens her door in the middle of the night to let that blackguard in—and keeps him here till dawn—she's either weak-minded or just a common—"

"That will do!" Silas said sternly. "I have never asked any of you to leave my table, but I'll not have one of this family turn traitor to the name I gave him."

Nona, glancing furiously about at all of them, stood up.

“Never mind, Pa,” she said huskily. “I may not be fit to sit at the same table with Paul, but I’m not weak-minded. I’ll get out—somewhere—somehow, I’ll get out!”

“You’ll do nothing of the kind, Nona,” her father said. “And don’t talk such foolishness. While I’m here you’ll stay as long as you want to stay. Let’s stop this nonsense—now!”

There was a moment of strained silence and then Eva burst out hysterically, “It doesn’t matter to her. The disgrace of it will fall on us—us and our poor little children who—”

“Shut up!” Paul checked her harshly, some sense of the absurdity of the thing taking possession of him at last.

“Very well,” Eva concluded in a trembling voice, “that’s quite enough for me. I’ll not sit at this table and be insulted. I’m going home.”

It was abject melodrama, Nona thought as she saw Eva clumsily stumbling away from the table and Paul, dark-browed, following her, trying to guide her, with a wrathful backward glance at Nona who stood, still and white, smiling at them with bitter contempt.

The helpless sympathy of her father’s hand on her shoulder only made matters worse. “We might as well sit down and eat something,” he suggested.

She sat down without a word, but eating was impossible. Silas ate with deliberate heartiness and tried to look as if nothing had happened. Presently the front door opened and Ivar Hansen stepped in.

“Hello!” he called cheerfully, and in a manner that seemed singularly out of place in the room from which Paul and Eva had just gone. “I thought Paul was here—having dinner with you.”

“They left early,” Silas explained. “I don’t think Eva was feeling very well.”

Nona tossed her head. “Why not tell Ivar the truth, Pa?” she challenged. “Paul got into one of his rages because of the talk that’s going round town this morning—and the two of them left before they had eaten anything.”

Ivar smiled but his embarrassment was apparent as he stood turning his hat about in his hands.

“Let’s say nothing more about it,” Silas implored. “Paul’s temper gets the best of him sometimes, but he always gets over it.”

Nona leaned toward Ivar, her cheeks white and drawn in the sunlight from the window. "We might as well face it," she said coldly. "I'm the cause of all the trouble and I'm the only one who can settle it. If Quentin Wingate had gone to anyone else last night, there wouldn't have been a word about it. It will be the same thing over and over again. It can all be settled at once—if Ivar will marry me right away."

"And how will that settle it?" Silas asked.

"I'll be a respectable wife then—and they'll quit their talking," Nona replied.

Ivar looked from Nona to Silas. "They'd quit their talking, right enough," he said. "Of course—"

"I'll not have it so," Silas interrupted. "Marry, if you like—and when you like—but not like this. No good ever comes of plans made in anger."

"It isn't the way I'd do it," Ivar admitted.

Nona, checking the retort that flashed into her mind, got up quickly from the table and went into the kitchen. There she hastily washed a few pans and pots and put them away. Then she sat down at the scrubbed white pine table and rested her throbbing head in her hands. Her fingers were puckered and dry from ammonia and coarse soap, her shoulders smarted from fatigue. She looked wearily down at her hands, and with duty to their natural grace she went to the cupboard and got down the bottle of rosewater and glycerin. One silly, rapturous afternoon, an age ago, Quentin Wingate had said that her hands were like a dream of perfect peace, a dream fashioned of quiet sunlight. He had said that if it weren't for her hands she would be too much for him, with her sea-change eyes and her mouth that was destruction. What words, what cruel folly! To how many others had he, since that afternoon, uttered similar absurdities!

"A dream fashioned of quiet sunlight!" Mockery! And yet, as she mused now in the stream of radiance from the window, it was the sun upon her own strong hands that illumined for her a truth she had until this moment denied in her heart. If Quentin Wingate were to stand suddenly before her she would be defenseless against any gesture he might make toward her. She would see only the lights in his unruly, tawny hair, the new ironical smile in his eyes that had been so boyish before, the new, hard set of his mouth that had been so generous, so careless. Abruptly, and with a frightened feeling, she knew that he was no longer the devil-may-care, spendthrift boy she had

once known. He was another person now, a man upon whom the unkind years had placed their own relentless mould.

When she heard the outer door close presently, she got up quickly and stepped into the inner room. Her father sat at the table still, the smoke from his pipe rising about his serene face.

“Has Ivar gone?” Nona asked.

Silas looked up and nodded. “He wanted to see Paul. He would have gone out to say good-by to you, but I told him he’d better run along while you—”

“While I was in a tantrum, I suppose.”

“Wasn’t I right?” Silas smiled.

She checked the sudden rise of feeling within her and leaned against the doorway, her hands clasped behind her.

“I’m in no tantrum,” she said with quiet intensity.

“Maybe not,” he conceded gently. “A man might live a hundred lives—with a hundred women—and still know nothing about any of them.”

Nona looked at her father for a moment, then lifted her head and brushed the hair back from her brow with a sweep of her hand.

“There’s nothing impossible to understand about me just now, at any rate,” she said. “For seven years I’ve gone around among people who have done everything they can to remind me of the disgrace I brought upon the town and upon my own family when I ran away with Quentin Wingate. Some have even tried to pity me—and that was worse. I’ve taken it all, Pa, because I thought I deserved it. But I’ve taken enough. I’ve paid ten times over for any wrong I’ve ever done. But I’m through paying—today was the end. Paul and Eva and Hesper Thorpe and Selina Patterson—the whole crowd of them can do what they like and say what they like from now on. I’ll live my own life in my own way and they can go to hell!”

Silas glanced up quickly, a startled expression in his mild, gray eyes. “You’re overwrought, my girl,” he said. “You’d better go and catch up a little of the sleep you’ve lost. It’ll help you to see things more clearly.”

“Sleep! I’ve been asleep for seven years. It’s because I’m awake now that I know I’ll never marry Ivar Hansen. I’ve never loved him—and I never will.”

“But—you asked him today—”

“I asked him because I was a coward. I would have married him—tomorrow—and gone on being a coward all my life.”

Silas moved uneasily in his chair and drew his hand across his brow. “He’s well out of it, I guess,” he said finally. “But what will you tell him?”

“I’ll tell him the truth. I’ll tell him I can’t marry him because I don’t love him.”

“Is that the whole truth?”

He looked at her shrewdly and she knew what he was thinking. Her face became suddenly smooth as a mask.

“I don’t know. I only know I’m smothering here. I must get out.”

She strode across the room and opened the door into the full sunlight.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Cliff

AT the gate, Nona met Jorgen.

“Guess what!” he exclaimed as he stepped down from the sidewalk.

There was excitement in his manner and in his voice and Nona paused with her hand on the gate. “I’m not good at riddles,” she said, “but if you want anything to eat you’ll have to get it yourself.”

He glanced uneasily at her and then looked toward the house. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing much. Paul blew up over what happened last night. He and Eva went home without eating.”

Jorgen shrugged his shoulders. “I expected something was going to break open. I was talking to him just before he came up. I thought I’d stay away till the worst was over. Where are you going now?”

“I’m just taking a walk. Go along into the house—Pa’s alone.”

Jorgen turned to her suddenly. “The Patterson kids found the fancy shoes Marie Ashe used to wear—out on Sleeping Chief Point this morning.”

“How do you know they were Marie’s?” Nona asked him.

“Gosh, I saw them myself. Gil Patterson brought them down to Bjork’s about an hour ago. Her wedding ring was stuck in the toe of one of them—with her name and Ethan’s and the date on it. Besides, Karl Bjork says they are the ones Marie bought from him. The kids were climbing down the rock and young Tom stuck his hand into a crevice to give himself a boost—and there they were, as if someone had hidden them there. They’re all saying she must have jumped off the rock and drowned herself.”

For a moment Nona felt faint. When she had left the house it had been with the intention of walking out Quilchina Road and climbing the steep path to the top of Sleeping Chief Point. She started off along the street, scarcely knowing where she was going.

She sat alone for a long time in a sunny coign of the cliff, gazing with empty eyes out over the firm blue of the sea. Some unfathomable insistency had drawn her here—even while the familiar and open part of her mind had been repelled at the thought of going to the place where Marie Ashe had taken her own life. But after a while, the sun and the wind and the sea tang meeting and blending in her, she was filled with a kind of elemental peace, a finality of sensation outside the experience of her physical being. It was as though the forces here, so far above the temporal concerns of the Cove, were touching her with the same darkly luminous promise of oblivion that had lured Marie over the cliff's edge. The thought did not come wholly formed, but it seemed to her now that this barren solitude between sky and sea, where nothing obscured the spirit from itself, had irresistibly pulled her up to it even as it had done with Marie Ashe, those years ago.

But it was not the death of the body that Nona sought. That was the difference between her and Marie Ashe. Marie had wanted release from desire for things she could never have—a fine house, fine clothes, the expansive luxury of breakfast in bed: Nona remembered how she used to talk. She had brooded over the inaccessibility of such things. She hadn't the courage to go out on the mail boat some night, with five dollars in her pocket skillfully eked out of her housekeeping allowance from Ethan, and offer her beauty to the night corners of Vancouver or Seattle. But she had had whatever it took to give her wanting body to the steep eternity below the cliff.

Nona drew her knees, with her long arms about them, close up to her chin. It was not that kind of death she sought. She knew now why she had come here. It was for a death, to be sure—but one that could occur only without exterior drama. The sudden demise of hatred was a more noteworthy thing, when you thought of it, than the mere cessation of life in a human heart.

It was reduced to this then, she thought, pressing her eyes against her knees: hatred for Quentin Wingate had died within her. During the bleak dawn hours she had seen more than the man who had come to her for solace. She had seen her son in him—their son—like a pageant of what he might have been—flags flying in a sunny wind, or hanging sadly in a rain.

She moved closer to the edge of the cliff and looked down. The waves, down beyond that depth of air where the gulls wove their ceaseless, unarrestable design, where green-blue walls begun—and crumpled beneath the bodiless white of their parapets of foam. Straight down, at the base of the

cliff, a runnel of gold streamed out of shadow—an oddity contrived by the sun and the overhanging ledge of rock—and was lost in that sudden tumbling of the surf. Nona raised her eyes from the dark, deep light below to the fragile shimmer that crossed the Inlet to North Cliff. This would always be the morning of the world, this region between the two promontories. Here was something begun, rough and hard at dawn, brought to a pause in the lambency of noonday, and forgotten in the drowse of a setting sun.

At once she knew what she must do. She must go to Quentin and tell him that here, on the cliff where Marie Ashe had met death, life had come to her, to Nona Darnell.

The pearl and silver of the late-afternoon water before her skiff made a myth of last night's storm. Heartbreak Cove—fury one night and the next day dreamful tranquillity! Her heart began to beat oppressively as she moored the skiff to Quentin's pier. A narrow tendril of blue smoke was rising from the thick stone chimney at the side of the lodge. This and the presence of the launch at the pier told her that Quentin must be in the house.

At the front door she lifted her hand to the knocker. It made her feel strange and cold. Never in the past had she announced her arrival in this way. She would not do it now. She turned the door knob with inert fingers and the door swung noiselessly inward.

Her first view of the living room, in spite of what Timothy had told her and what she had known anyhow, gave her a distinct sense of shock. It was curiously as if the trappings of her own past had been torn away, leaving only the gaunt essentials of what had created her romance with Quentin Wingate. But the essentials were still there! Although Quentin himself was not in the room—he might, indeed, have died seven years ago—the aura of their magnificent and uncalculating love colored it still. She was glad, suddenly, that she had seen the room again alone.

As she averted her eyes from the great stone fireplace in front of which she had lain in his arms on cool evenings, she knew that this abrupt revelation of the integrity of the past had given her added strength to face Quentin. For their idyll of those brief summer weeks was something sealed in a crypt, invulnerable to the cruelties that had followed. That, at least, was complete and finished as a crystal; she could only gaze into it, never touch its cool, bright heart.

She heard Quentin now, moving about in the rear of the house. There was a smell of coffee and frying bacon in the air. Presently she stood in the kitchen doorway and saw him at the range with a griddle in his hand. He looked across at her and set the pan at the back of the stove.

“Nona!”

“Yes,” she said simply and moved toward him out of the doorway. “I’ve come to tell you something—whether you care to hear it or not doesn’t matter. I have to tell you to get square with myself.”

His eyes were bewildered, alight with relief, troubled—she could not follow their swift change. “Here—sit down,” he invited as he drew a chair from beside the white oil-clothed table.

She saw that his left hand wore a fresh bandage. She began abruptly, meeting his gaze with implicit candor. The sea-light, striking sheer through the window, could not sound the depth of blue in her eyes.

“I have had a difficult day, Quentin,” she told him. “You were seen leaving the house early this morning.”

“I was afraid of that,” he replied. “I didn’t know it was so late when I left. I was beyond knowing anything, I guess. I shouldn’t have stayed. I shouldn’t have gone at all.”

“I’m glad you did,” she said. “Things couldn’t have gone on—the way they were. Something had to happen. Your coming last night brought it about. I’m even glad Selina Patterson saw you going away. I don’t care what they’re saying about me—about us—over in the village. After years of that sort of thing, you get used to it. I told Pa and Jorgen all about it at breakfast this morning. But Paul and his wife got the news from others—outside the family—and at lunch today there was a scene. It was pretty terrible while it lasted, but it brought me to my senses. And that’s why I’m here.”

Quentin started to speak, but she lifted her hand.

“No—first I want to tell you why I came. For years I have been feeding myself on hatred—and hatred is a killing thing. I think I was dead of it. But after Paul and Eva left the house, I began to see what my bitterness toward you was doing to me. I went out and walked by myself to the top of the cliff. I have been there all afternoon. I’ll never know exactly what thoughts came to me up there, but after a while I knew I’d have to stop hating you if I wanted to live. And so—I have stopped. I had to hear myself tell you that—to make it real. Now that I’ve told you, I’m alive again. Maybe you won’t

understand that, but it doesn't matter. I've done this for my own sake—nothing else.”

She got up from her chair, but Quentin put out a protesting hand. “Don't go yet,” he begged. “Won't you let me speak to you for just a minute?”

His smile was so earnest that Nona's lips curved in the first pathos he had seen in her. “All right,” she said and sat down again.

“There's a lot I'd like to tell you, Nona,” he began and paused. How maddeningly aloof she was! Could this be the impulsive, warm and selfless girl he had known so long ago? She was lovely and clear as the surface of a sea shell, and as hard. “I'm not going back over the past. There would be no use in that. It would only bore you. Besides, I couldn't begin to tell you what a mess I've made—of everything. I've put the past behind me, as far as that's possible. I want you to know that. I knew nothing about what you were going through—until I came back here and heard something about it from Timothy. But you've come through it all—even your hatred for me, it seems—and now you're free. I'm not—that's the difference between us. If I were free—if I could talk to you now as I'd like to—”

“No, Quentin,” she said calmly, “we can go on from here just as if there was nothing more to talk about. We must.”

All at once, possibly because mental and physical fatigue had undermined his endurance, rebellious anger welled up within him at the impasse which confronted him in Nona. Unreasonably, hopelessly, he longed to talk to her about the boy, to warm his frozen spirit at the piteous glow of her memory of him. It seemed that if she would only tell him quietly, with her hand within his, how little Si had walked, what his ways of speech had been, his favorite food, his favorite games—anything—he could forget for a while last night's disaster as well as the numbing thought of Eunice. But he was not yet a complete fool, he reminded himself. In the blue clarity of Nona's eyes, the remote calm of her face, there was no admission that he shared in the least her supreme loss.

He strode away from her and turned to meet her steady gaze. The wall of disinterestedness she had built about herself toward heaven was far less scalable, he decided glumly, than the bitter passion that had enclosed her from him hitherto.

“I understand,” he said finally, “and I don't blame you. That's how it should be.” He believed, wearily, that the irony in his heart did not emerge in his voice.

She stood up. “You were going to eat, weren’t you?” she said, glancing at the stove. “I must go, anyway.”

He came toward her and extended his hand. “Yes—I think you’d better,” he replied with an effort at a grin. “And thank you for coming over.”

Her hand for an instant lay cool in his own. She glanced down and it seemed to him that a flush passed like a shadow over her cheeks. Then she raised her eyes again and said, “Is your hand all right?”

He looked at the bandaged hand and smiled. “Thanks to you, it’ll live, I think.”

He walked with her through the house and out to the shore. When he returned, he stood in the living room for a long time, lost in thought. They had passed straight through that room together, neither hurrying their steps nor lingering, and Nona had been saying something about the beauty of the Inlet today after last night’s storm—and was the *Sirius* a total loss?—and had he heard that Marie Ashe’s shoes had been found on the cliff? And yet he believed that she, too, as they walked together through this desolate room and down the little pathway to the shore, had been aware of something touching them like wings.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Julie

IT might be a simple sort of belief, Ivar Hansen thought to himself as he prepared a glass of mulled wine to dispel the chill that had seized him on his way home that evening, but there was something to be said in favor of bringing one's problems into the open and facing them squarely.

He was not so sure that the chill had not been induced partly by the letter he had received that evening from Julie Cartaret—but that was another matter. He was concerned for the moment with what the town had been saying about Nona Darnell and Quentin Wingate. It was all so profoundly silly as he thought of it now. If Quentin had gone anywhere but to the Darnell cottage, there wasn't one in Heartbreak Cove who would have shut the door against him. If Selina Patterson herself had taken him in, bound up his hand and given him a couch to sleep on for two or three hours, she would have boasted that at least one woman in the Cove knew how to be generous and sympathetic when a man needed caring for. Even if he had come to Ivar's place, there would have been little more than a flutter of interest. But he had gone to Nona, and now all the old women in the village were chattering.

It wasn't always easy to deal with people like Selina Patterson and Hesper Thorpe, but Ivar had hit upon a plan so simple that he wondered why he had not thought of it before. Why not invite Quentin Wingate to dinner on Sunday, when Timothy Entwhistle would be back from the city? Timothy would come and might even urge Nona to join them, though there wasn't a chance in a thousand that she would consent. They could have dinner early and might walk out together, all four of them, to the cliff or to Indian Grove, and the old women of the town could look on to their hearts' content—and be damned to them! Ivar chuckled aloud at the idea as he took a bottle of his mother's homemade wine from the cupboard and poured nearly half its contents into a saucepan on the stove.

The more he thought of the plan now, the better he liked it. If it did nothing more than break down Nona's stubborn pride it would be worth while. Something would have to be done to free her of the obsession that

was slowly destroying her. He had known that for a long time. For hours, sometimes even for a day or two, she would sink into a lethargy that was her only respite from the memories that tortured her. But the pain would come back and nothing that Ivar could do was of any avail.

All day her image had been with him as she had stood there before her father and declared she would marry at once and settle everything. Ivar's heart had ached for her then. She must have known that nothing could ever be settled until she first found peace within herself. He had tried to tell her that once or twice but it only seemed to make matters worse between them. There was only one way to account for it—Nona would never love anyone as she had loved Quentin Wingate. Ivar could understand that, too. He was devoted to Nona, but the feeling he had had for Julie Cartaret was a different thing. If Julie should come back to the Cove—well, he just hoped she wouldn't.

He took Julie's letter from his pocket and opened it again. As he drew a chair to the table and unfolded the closely written pages under the light from the lamp, a light knock sounded at the door and Nona stepped into the room. Ivar glanced up with a self-conscious flush.

"Hullo! You've caught me in the act," he said.

"You *do* look guilty," Nona replied and laughed as she closed the door. "What particular sin are you committing now?"

Her manner was almost gay.

"Mulling a pot of wine—and reading a letter from an old sweetheart," Ivar told her.

Her eyes widened with a faint, wondering smile. "Not Julie!"

He pushed the letter across the table toward her. "Sit down and read it for yourself. I'll put a little more wine in the pan."

While he busied himself over the stove, Nona sat down and spread the pages before her. Always after that the pleasantly sweet, snug aroma of cinnamon, cloves and oranges and steaming wine would make her think of Julie Cartaret.

"Go ahead and read it out loud," Ivar suggested. "I've read it but I don't know quite what to make of it."

"To Ivar Hansen," Nona began quietly, with the secret reflection that Julie was not lacking in a sense of the dramatic. "As I write this I am slowly getting over an attack of pneumonia that almost proved fatal. I promised

myself that if I ever got well again I would write to you and thank you for saving my soul, which you did, though you didn't know it at the time. Perhaps you don't even remember meeting me on the street nearly eight years ago. That was the first time and the only time in my life that I ever did anything like that. I swear it, Ivar, and I want you to believe it. When I left the Cove I took a job selling tickets in a movie house, but I quit when the manager fell in love with me and asked me to live in a little apartment he got for me. He was a decent guy, too, and I liked him a lot. I thought maybe he'd marry me, but his wife found out about it and he went back to her. He did his best for me, though, and tried to get me a job on the stage, but he died and I didn't have a job or any money and I couldn't find any work. I was almost starving the night I met you on the street. I guess I didn't know exactly what I was doing. But I was so ashamed that I went to a chop suey joint where I knew a kind old Chinaman and asked him to let me wash dishes for him. I worked there till I couldn't stand it any longer and then I got a job in a laundry and worked there until this summer. But the work was too hard for me, being on my feet all day in the heat and everything, and two months ago I had a breakdown and then pneumonia. I have a few dollars saved and my landlady is very kind and says I've got to stay with her till I'm well again. But the doctor says I must get out of doors and get a new interest in life again. But when I was so sick I realized that I'd thrown my life away and so what's the use? I guess I never should have left the Cove. I may as well tell you that I never forgot you even when I had swell clothes and went riding round in swell automobiles and everything. When I was delirious and almost dying I saw you clear as anything and I knew I would always love you, no matter what. I guess you think it's funny that I never wrote you till I got myself into this mess. But I was too shamed. I thought maybe you wouldn't care anyhow. I don't suppose anyone up there cares about me. They think I've gone to the devil. Maybe if I'd had parents instead of only my old grandfather I'd never have left. I don't know. But grandpa is dead now—somebody told me about him dying—and even if he did curse me for a so-and-so, which I know he did, because he was like that, you've got to forgive the dead if you expect to be forgiven yourself. I know this all sounds funny to you, like a sermon or something. But you're the only one that ever really loved me and I really never loved anyone else and I just wanted to thank you for that night on the street and for coming to me in that vision when I was almost dead. And I hope you are happy and have a nice wife and a lot of kids, which I guess you have, though nobody has ever told me."

Her signature was a simple "J" and she gave no address.

Ivar had placed the spiced drinks on the table and had seated himself, leaning forward and staring unseeingly straight in front of him.

Nona laid the letter aside. “She doesn’t say anything about where she is living,” she remarked, at a loss.

“Of course not. I guess if she wanted me to answer her letter she’d have put her address on it.”

Nona took a thoughtful sip from her glass. “You don’t know much about such things, do you, Ivar?”

“What am I supposed to know?”

“Julie’s the same proud girl.”

“Oh, I thought of that,” Ivar said hastily, and his voice held an eagerness that made Nona wonder. “But even if I wanted to find her—”

“And you don’t?”

He sat for some moments turning his glass slowly about under the light. “We can’t leave her there alone—after what the doctor says about her getting out more. We ought to do something, don’t you think?”

“I’ve never been surer of anything in my life,” Nona replied. “You’ll have to go down and find her.”

“Will you come with me?” He gave her a quick look.

She laughed briefly, then stood up and took his brown face between her hands. “Let’s be honest with each other, Ivar,” she said as she bent upon him an earnest regard. “Julie doesn’t want to see me. She wants to see you. Besides—I want you to take the boat south on Tuesday and bring her back here with you.”

He turned and looked up at her. “You’d better tell me what’s behind all this. Are you trying to get rid of me?”

She bent above him with a ruefully understanding smile. “Something happened to me today. I came down to tell you about it.” She paused and ran her hand over his hair.

“Go ahead.”

“After you left the house I went out and walked to the top of the cliff. Just as I started I met Jorgen and he told me about their finding Marie Ashe’s shoes. I’ll never be able to tell you just what happened to me when I

heard about it. I was frightened. Do you know that there have been times when I've thought of doing just what Marie did?"

He gave her a straight, true gaze. "I've been afraid of something like that ever since you came back from the Clarks' farm."

"And you never said anything about it."

"Well—gosh, how's anybody going to say—"

"No, I had to find it out for myself. This afternoon I saw that I'd have to stop hating Quentin Wingate or stop living. And then I went down and told him. I had to tell him, do you understand?"

He nodded. "It's the best thing you could do—though it must have been hard to do it, just the same."

She pressed her fingers against her eyes. "I don't know—perhaps it was. And yet, it seemed so easy, after it was all over."

Ivar got up and laid a hand gently on her shoulder. "You've never got over him, quite, have you?"

"I don't know, Ivar. There's something—it's hard to explain—a kind of terrible tie that—"

Her voice that had gone on so strongly began to break now. He patted her shoulder affectionately.

"You don't have to tell me. Maybe I know more than you think I do. I've had my own ideas about it all along. I've been waiting for you to change, but I guess there's no way of changing some things. Maybe you don't know it yourself, but you're still in love with Quentin Wingate. You've never stopped loving him, even when you thought you were hating him. But that's something else you'll have to find out for yourself. Gosh, there's nothing much I can do about it. If we had got married—"

"Oh, Ivar! That wouldn't have been fair to either of us. There's a better way for us than that. There must be." She paused and put her arms about him. "Promise me you'll go down and find Julie—and bring her back here with you. I want you to go, Ivar."

He smiled down at her and drew her close in his arms. "There'll be time enough to think of that," he said. "You've had plenty for one day. Come along, I'll walk up with you and drop over to see Paul for a minute."

It was while they were walking along Thimble Street in the darkness that Ivar broached the plan he had in mind for asking Quentin Wingate and

Timothy Entwistle to dinner on Sunday. He even went so far as to suggest that Nona should come along and help with the cooking.

“We could all hike through town together and spend the afternoon on the cliff,” he added, “and give Selina Patterson an eyeful.”

“Or call on Hesper Thorpe,” Nona laughed.

Ivar observed that she was in the first frivolous mood she had been in for weeks.

On the following day Quentin Wingate stepped from his launch to the small landing before his packing plant. An hour ago he had been surprised and not a little puzzled at a visit he had had from Ivar Hansen. Ivar had asked him to Sunday dinner and had informed him that Nona and Timothy Entwistle were to be the other guests. The trace of formality in the young fellow’s manner might quite possibly have been nothing but shyness, Quentin thought, and yet he could not resist the feeling that this overture toward him was part of a deliberate plan. He certainly had no reason to believe that anyone in the Cove, least of all Ivar Hansen, would extend such an invitation from purely friendly motives. Nevertheless, Quentin had accepted readily enough. He hoped his expression of thanks had sounded genuine.

When Ivar had gone, Quentin had thought it over to himself. It had dawned upon him then that behind this strange gesture there stood, beyond a doubt, Nona Darnell. Was she taking this way of telling him that his existence meant no more to her than that of anyone else in Heartbreak Cove? Since her visit yesterday, she had been out of his mind scarcely a moment. He had even dreamed of her during the night and had awakened from the dream in a cold rage at himself.

Now, as he contemplated spending half a day in Nona’s company—it was with a reservation of arid humor and curiosity. If she had, as he believed, persuaded Ivar to invite him to dinner, he would do what he could to appear grateful for their hospitality. He would have to muster an impersonal friendliness to match her own. It was bound to be a delightful occasion, he told himself sardonically. Nona and her future husband; and Timothy, who had ceased long ago to differentiate between virtue and vice; and himself, Quentin Wingate, whose present seemed to be smothering in the lap of the past. But he had other things to think about just now.

He made the launch fast, then glanced over the scows moored at the dock and rocking gently on the swells that came in with the rising tide. They had been emptied of their cargoes. He turned and looked down the Inlet and through the narrow gap beyond which the hulk of the old *Sirius* was plainly visible, perched on the rocks, the white breakers playing about her in the afternoon sun. He could hear the voices of his men as they hurried to dispose of the last ton of the catch. Before evening they would have finished their work and would be waiting for more.

Axel Lindstrom had spent the previous evening with him at the lodge on the island and they had gone thoroughly over the problems Quentin was facing as a result of the loss of his tugboat. They had visited the village later and Quentin had despatched a telegram to Joe Iden begging for assistance.

Axel met him now, coming down from the smoke-house, a look of enquiry in his face.

“No news yet,” Quentin announced.

Axel scratched the back of his neck for a thoughtful moment. “Too bad, boss. We lose money now every day unless we fill the scows.”

“I’ll drop over again later,” Quentin replied. “There ought to be some word before night.”

They went together into the plant where Quentin made his daily round of inspection, moving up and down the aisles that divided the bins, talking to his men, making mental calculations on the value of the harvest he had already garnered from the sea. In another week, with what had been put away already in the storehouse, he would have enough to make his first shipment. The money it would bring him would be ample to take care of any obligations he would have to assume in order to replace the *Sirius*, and leave him a tidy sum besides to go forward with the work and prepare for the salmon season. But the *Sirius* would have to be replaced—the work must go on.

He turned away at last and went back to his launch.

“Come over to the house tonight, Axel,” he called over his shoulder to the big Swede who stood watching him, an unwonted look of anxiety in his mild blue eyes. “I’ll have some sort of news for you, anyhow.”

He started the engine and put the launch about into the running tide. Fifteen minutes later he mounted the steps to the doorway of the little telegraph office that was a room in Abner Clough’s house. Old Abner appeared through a doorway beyond which Quentin caught a fleeting

glimpse of Mrs. Clough, her head thrust forward curiously above the table where she was at work.

“Any message for me yet?” Quentin asked.

“Two of ’em,” Abner replied briefly and rustled the papers that lay on his table. “Both came through—almost together—’bout an hour ago.”

Quentin took the telegrams and read the first hastily, aware that Abner’s eyes were furtively watching him from beneath shaggy brows. Joe Iden regretted that he could not offer any assistance at present and ventured the suggestion that Quentin should come back home and leave the fishing business to the natives. He folded the telegram and put it into his pocket without betraying any outward sign of his disappointment in the presence of Abner Clough. His efforts at self-control were not so successful, however, when he opened and read the second message. It was from Nancy, informing him of the fact that she and Eunice and Eunice’s Aunt Laura were on their way north, aboard *The White Falcon* with a small company of friends and would arrive in Heartbreak Cove sometime on Monday to spend a few days with Quentin.

He looked up at Abner Clough, whose face had broadened into a smile.

“Looks like we’re going to have visitors,” Quentin said as he folded the telegram and thrust it into his pocket.

“Like old times—havin’ the yacht back in the Cove,” Abner observed.

“Yes—like old times,” Quentin replied absently and turned away.

He was in a daze as he walked down the street to the waterfront and stepped once more into his launch. It was bad enough that Joe Iden had disappointed him, but as he thought it over now he admitted to himself that he had been prepared for that. His appeal to Joe had been in the nature of a forlorn hope. But that Eunice should be on her way up here now—and his sister Nancy—that was a little too much. They were the last people in the world he wished to see. And Eunice’s Aunt Laura—that pious old crone with one foot in the grave and the other on her money bags—what a grotesque joke that was!

He looked down the Inlet again and through the gap to where his old tugboat lay on the reef. Nancy and Eunice would see that from the deck of *The White Falcon* on their way into the Cove. They would recognize the old boat as the one upon which Quentin had taken them out to the fishing grounds years ago. They would be quick to understand what had occurred and would spare no pains to taunt him with his failure. Aunt Laura would

probably cackle with delight and demand to hear all about the adventure that had led to the catastrophe. She took a sprightly and almost indecent interest in activities which were physically beyond her powers to share. That, to some people, had always been an amusing contradiction in her austere nature. To himself it had been merely boring.

Well, he concluded with determination, whatever Eunice's object might be in coming here with her hench-women, it would end where it began. When they arrived in the Cove they would learn how far a man would go before he accepted defeat. He turned his motor over quickly and put his launch about in the tide. A few minutes later he climbed out upon the wharf that led to Bart Leshner's office.

It was late Saturday morning when Nona awoke, heavy-eyed, on the couch in Eva's living room. Just before midnight Emily Clough, Abner's sixteen-year-old granddaughter who had been "doing for" Eva, had knocked at the Darnell door and Nona had gone to find the girl white-faced and trembling with the expected news that Eva was "carrying on something terrible." An hour before dawn Eva's third child had uttered its first cry in a gray sea-world.

Nona sat up now and pushed the rumpled hair from before her eyes. Young Emily, awe-struck still but stiffly smiling, was offering her coffee and toast.

"Did you get some sleep, Emily?" Nona asked with a yawn that was an effort.

"I was too excited," the girl said naively. "The baby is so cute! Mostly, they're so darned homely. And Paul is that tickled because it's a boy!"

A boy. Of course—it was a boy. Nona closed her eyes for a moment, struggling against faintness. "Where's Paul?"

"He's upstairs in the other room, talking to Mrs. Pringle. She thinks she's awful smart because she brought Eva through. But she didn't do any more than you did." Emily stood blushing furiously, scraping a shabby foot on the rug.

"How is Eva?" Nona asked wearily.

"Ah, she's all right. I took her up a cup of hot tea a little while ago. She wanted to know where you were. She's still afraid she isn't going to live."

"Oh, hell!" Nona said in a muffled tone.

Emily blinked approvingly. “Yes—that’s what I think. You know, she ate three pieces of toast and a boiled egg and wanted some bacon, too. But Paul said no, she’d have to be careful.”

“Careful!” Nona said and laughed. Young, colt-legged Emily sat down beside her on the couch and laughed too.

Fully awake now, Nona was remembering her promise to Eva, made a few hours ago when her sister-in-law thought she was dying. In her hour of travail Eva had sought Nona’s forgiveness for the abuse she had given her and had begged her to stay by until she was well enough to care for the baby herself. And Nona had promised.

“I think you’re so wonderful, Nona!” Emily was saying as she stroked the coverlet over Nona’s knee. “Honest, you are—and so pretty, too! I never knew anyone as nice looking as you are. I can’t ever be as pretty as you, but maybe I can be as—as—oh, darn it, I never can say what I want to say!”

Suffused with bashful red, Emily flung herself face downward on the couch and Nona leaned forward and put her arm about her.

“That’s the nicest compliment I’ve ever had, Emily,” she said, troubled and obscurely happy at once. “And this,” she added in the hope of restoring the girl’s composure, “is a swell cup of coffee, by the way.”

Emily straightened up. “Maybe you’d better go up and look after the baby. Eva won’t let me lift him, and Mrs. Pringle is going home right away.”

“All right, Emily. And you’d better run along home now. You’ll need some sleep and you can’t get any here. I’ll look after everything until you get back.”

“But—”

“Suppose you come back in time to cook supper. By that time Eva will be ready to have another—” she bit her lip—“she’ll be ready to sit up and eat a hearty meal, Emily.”

“I’ll do the dishes first.”

“Go right home, then, as soon as you get them done.”

A bit crestfallen, Emily retired to the kitchen and made much of washing the dishes. Nona finished her meager breakfast and went up to Eva.

It was a day of trials. Eva had to be humored constantly, the children fed and kept at play in the yard with the adjuration not to make any unnecessary noise. When Paul did not return for the noonday meal as soon as he was

expected, Eva fretted. When the midwife came back before supper instead of after, as she had arranged to do, Eva declared petulantly that she had come early just to eat.

But most difficult of all was the task of attending to the tiny new mite in his crib in the room adjoining Eva's. Each time that she was alone with him there, Nona was seized by an unspeakable terror. To change him, to guide the bottle to his puckered, searching little mouth, even to tuck the blanket about him, brought a cold dew over her whole body. Once, when he craned his head back on his sturdy neck and seemed to peer beyond her out of his vague, blue, unfocussing eyes, she rocked on her feet with sudden dizziness, and had to put her hand against the wall to steady herself.

When Emily Clough returned at five o'clock, Nona could have cried out with relief. It was something, at least, not to have to be alone with the boy child.

"Did you hear we are going to have visitors in town on Monday?" the girl asked cheerfully when she had laid her hat and coat aside.

"Visitors?" Nona replied.

"Yes. I know it won't matter to you, but I s'pose everybody will have a lot to say about them coming. It's Quentin Wingate's folks. The telegram came for him this morning, Grandpa said."

"His folks?" Nona repeated vacantly.

"His sister and his wife and some aunt or other. They're coming on *The White Falcon*. I remember it when I was a kid."

Not to Emily, who was too young to have more than an indistinct knowledge that the yacht itself was of peculiar significance to Nona, but to her own mind as she gazed out of the window at the twinkling Inlet Nona said, "Yes, I remember it, too."

Then she turned abruptly, and at her pale, queer look Emily felt all at once unhappy inside, as though she had stepped on a wounded bird. She knew, as every adolescent in the Cove knew, about Nona Darnell and Quentin Wingate, but she had believed that all of that no longer mattered to Nona.

"I'm sorry if I've said anything—" Emily stumbled miserably. "I didn't think—"

Nona's voice was almost harsh as she interrupted her. "Let's get at making supper, Emily. Mrs. Pringle is with Eva. She'll look after the baby."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Spirit Trees

INDIAN SUMMER among the islands was what it had always been: an uncalendared season that came unheralded and vanished without farewell. The sea-broken land was steeped in a gray and golden haze; spectral, shimmering bridges of light linked island to island and made one great spangled web of rock and water. Knots of brass and scarlet appeared on the stony outcroppings, trees colored with autumn. There was something somnolent and treacherously soft about this joined mood of air and sea and earth, as though the smoke and flame of Indian campfires centuries dead had created it, possessed it now, and would subtly and ruthlessly destroy it in a trice.

Quentin strode up the little wooded path that led from the waterfront to Timothy Entwhistle's cottage. The last time he had gone that way, he recalled, he had met Ethan Ashe in the darkness. What would the unfortunate creature do now that the hope of Marie's return was gone from him forever? Had he surrendered to despair or was he, perhaps, on this unearthly day holding some rendezvous with Marie that would be chilling to the normal mind?

Quentin found Timothy waiting for him and the two set out at once for Ivar Hansen's. On their short walk down Thimble Street, they talked of the loss of the *Sirius* and Quentin revealed the fact that he had secured another tugboat through Bart Leshner and would be able to go on now without interruption. At the mention of Bart Leshner, Timothy fell silent, but when Quentin informed him of the projected visit of *The White Falcon* the old man gave him a sharply sympathetic glance and uttered his opinion in an inarticulate grunt.

"A fine bunch of amazons you'll have on your hands!" he said presently.

"Not for long," Quentin replied. "I didn't invite them. And I'm not in a very hospitable mood. By the way, what's behind this sudden display of hospitality in Ivar Hansen? I don't want to be ungracious, but I can't help thinking it's a plot—maybe just another of those things that are supposed to be for my own good."

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Timothy admitted cheerfully. “It’s an invitation to dinner, so far as I’m concerned. I don’t see why you can’t look at it in the same way until you find out more for yourself. I’ve never made it a habit to look a gift horse in the mouth.”

Quentin told him then of his visit to Nona on the night the *Sirius* was wrecked. They were nearing Ivar’s house or he might have said something of Nona’s visit to the lodge the following afternoon.

“For my part,” Timothy observed, “it’s a relief to know that the girl has declared a truce. She’s been having a hard time of it lately, with this new addition to Paul’s family and all. It may have worn down her resistance a bit. Even a woman can get too tired to fight, my boy.”

They had arrived at Ivar’s door and Quentin had no time to sort out the confused thoughts that heaped themselves in his mind.

It was Ivar himself who appeared and bade them enter as he shook hands with sober cordiality. Beyond him, in the simply furnished room, Nona was setting the table. She called out a greeting as nonchalant as though the circumstances were commonplace and familiar.

“Hello, Quentin!” She smiled and something of the impudent naïveté he remembered in her long ago flickered momentarily in her face. But as he looked at her searchingly and went to her to offer his hand, he saw that there were faintly violet hollows under her eyes.

“Hello, Nona!” he responded directly as she laid her hand in his. “This is one of the nicest things you have ever done.”

She colored a little. “Dinner is all ready,” she said and turned quickly away.

In a moment she came in with the roast chicken on a platter and set it at one end of the table. “You sit here, Timothy, and do the carving. I’ll sit next the kitchen and you two”—she looked from Ivar to Quentin—“sit where you like.”

Although her manner was brisk and matter-of-fact, Quentin could not fail to notice in her an underlying tension as she sat down and glanced critically over the table.

Ivar took a bottle from the sideboard and began filling four glasses. “This is Nona’s idea. I might have got cocktails but she wouldn’t stand for any showing off—and so it’s homemade wine.”

"If it's your mother's," Timothy said, "it's more to my taste than any of the ladylike concoctions they're drinking nowadays."

"It's the last bottle," Ivar told him.

Sunlight glowed through the little glass in Quentin's hand. He looked at it and thought: These two, Nona and Ivar, have planned a dinner for me. Timothy is here as an amiable solvent only. The thing to do, of course, is to propose a toast to the bride-to-be, meeting Nona's challenge with challenge.

Aloud he said, "This is a beautiful glass, Ivar. Where did you get it?"

"My mother brought them with her from Norway," Ivar told him. "They've been in the family for a hundred years—maybe more. There are only these four left of them."

His face became grave and Timothy spoke up quickly. "I hear you've been having a bit of excitement while I was down in the city. Has anyone seen Ethan Ashe since Marie's shoes were found?"

"Gil Patterson went down and showed him the shoes and told him where the boys had found them," Ivar replied, "but nobody has seen anything of Ethan since. I was down that way yesterday and looked into his place, but he wasn't home. Now that I think it over—" He broke off and looked blankly at Nona. "Gosh, there wasn't a pot or a pan in the house! And you remember, Nona—"

"He used to keep them hanging in a row on the wall," Nona said thoughtfully. "What do you suppose—"

"There's no following the ways of a man like him," Timothy put in. "We may have seen the last of him, though I'd rather not think so. He was harmless enough and he was as much a part of the Cove as yon reef is."

"I suppose Quentin has told you about losing his tug," Ivar said.

"I heard about it last night and he told me a little on the way down here," Timothy replied.

"I'm getting another from a friend of Bart Leshner's at Amber Point," Quentin explained to the others.

"And I for one don't know what to think about that," the old man growled.

Quentin laughed. "I didn't expect you to show much enthusiasm, Tim. But it was the only way out."

“He’s a man I’d have no dealings with,” Timothy said seriously. “I’m not against a man keeping his business to himself. But there’s something hidden about everything that man does. He’s been in the Cove long enough now but there isn’t a one of us knows any more about him than we knew the day he landed. You can understand the mystery in poor old Ethan Ashe. But it’s my opinion that there’s something mysterious about Lesher that no one will ever find out. It will die when he dies.”

“I’d rather have found another way out of it, Tim,” Quentin said flatly, “but I didn’t have the money for a new boat and I had to have one without delay.”

“You paid Lesher enough, I’ll warrant.”

“I gave him my note for ninety days.”

“On what security?”

Beneath the old man’s barrage, Quentin smiled drily. “As a matter of fact, he took a lien on the lodge and the island. But I’m not worrying about that. I’ll have my first shipment ready in a few days and I’ll be able to lift the note and still have enough to carry me over.”

Timothy leaned toward him across the corner of the table. “This is your business, my boy,” he said sternly, “but I think you told me once that Bart Lesher tried to buy the lodge from you.”

“He offered to buy the plant, too,” Quentin said in an easy tone, “but I still own the lodge and the plant and I have no intention to let go till I have to.”

Timothy ran a finger down one side of his ample nose. “Your intentions are one thing, my boy, and Bart Lesher’s may be quite another. When a man is crooked—”

“But what proof have you that he is crooked, Tim?” Quentin asked.

Nona spoke up breathlessly, as though against her will. “Bart Lesher is filthy—all the way through!” She flushed, rose abruptly and went to the kitchen.

There must have been some shrewdness, then, Quentin thought unhappily, in Timothy’s conclusions about Nona and Lesher. The other two fell into an awkward silence.

“I’ll just have to make the best of it, I guess,” Quentin said.

When Nona returned, carrying the pot of coffee from the kitchen, Ivar gave her a troubled look. "We thought we'd take a walk out to Indian Grove this afternoon," he said, by way of changing the subject.

"The spirit trees," Nona said, glancing at Quentin.

The old Indian burying ground lay some three miles south of the village. Quentin had visited the place once, shortly after the Wingates had first acquired the island, and had taken Nancy with him. But Nancy's vexation at the creepers and dense fern that continually caught at her feet and her clothing had spoiled the trip for him.

"It'll be just the thing to get me back into shape after my sojourn in the city," Timothy remarked, lightly sarcastic. "You youngsters don't give an old duffer much chance to rest. I might have known, when I was asked out to dinner, there'd be a catch in it somewhere."

"And you'll walk the rest of us off our feet when you get started," Quentin said.

When Nona soon got up and began to clear the table, Ivar protested. "Oh, let them be till—"

"No," she said, "it'll only take a minute. I'll wash and you dry. It'll give Tim a chance to relax after gorging himself."

It was absurd, Quentin told himself, that the homely friendliness between Ivar and Nona should affect him as it did. There was little solace in reflecting that any other condition between them would be still more disturbing, or in reminding himself that he had no right to entertain any feeling whatever on that score. It was something he would have to accept if he were to continue to live in the Cove.

When they had reached the summit of the cliff, Ivar leading the way, and had dipped down into the valley on the south, they were once more deep in summer. In this earth-pocket the forest was a world unto itself, almost inviolable to the march of the seasons. Beneath the topless dusk of the Douglas firs there were tangled vines, wild sarsaparilla, curious saprophytic orchid plants and stag moss, and their intergrowth made a pale green day, a still and sinister incandescence. In the lacework far above there was a blue hint of the sky, but the sun's passing left so little impress here that the underfoliage bore the fixed transparency of wax.

It seemed to Quentin that none of them spoke until they emerged from the depth of the little valley and came out upon the shoulder of the next rise. Here there was an open glade of rocks and dried grasses and the familiar sweet air of autumn. Even Ivar stopped then and drew a deep breath. But immediately before them, Quentin saw, the sunlight was banked against what looked like an impenetrable wall of immense firs.

“Well, here we are!” Ivar announced.

Quentin had looked for mystery here years ago; now he found magic. Was that because Nona stood not far from him, straight and tranced, gazing beyond that barrier of light into the eternal darkness of her spirit trees?

He dug his hands into his coat pockets as he followed the others to the first tree. A crude wooden coffin, precariously balanced on two branches ten feet from the ground, had rotted to a fragile husk, a powdery cocoon, but the light, sun-filled skeleton of the Indian long years dead was still there. They walked on into shadow, and Timothy paused under a tree where the burial box had decomposed and spilled its burden into the festooning moss below. Exploring vines trailed in and out through the hollowed ribs, the brown and honeycombed limbs. A little farther on where a box had more recently fallen apart, the branches had caught the skeleton by the shoulder blades so that it was suspended almost vertically and appeared to be dancing bizarrely in midair, with no feet.

Quentin stood looking up at it with a smile of ironical pity. He knew of the curious superstition among the coast Indians that impelled them to cut the legs off their dead or dying. It was based, with quaint logic, on the fear that the spirit might walk back to haunt the tribe.

Nona scuffed at the mold and brought up a tobacco-brown skull. Its sockets stared upward into the tree twilight, strangely innocent and inoffensive.

“How *clean* it is!” she mused.

Quentin glanced at her with the quick warmth of understanding. “From air thou art—to air thou shalt return,” he suggested.

A short distance from them Ivar and Timothy were making their way into the deeper woods.

“That’s it exactly,” Nona agreed. She stooped and turned the skull over with her foot.

Quentin knelt and examined it closely. "This is an old one," he observed. "See how flat the forehead is."

"Yes, but even I can remember when they still put boards on the babies' heads and flattened them into a peak."

"I thought the missionaries had put a stop to that long before your day," Quentin said. "It's a wonder they weren't all idiots."

"They always fascinated me, though. Do you remember the twins we saw—"

She stopped with a sudden, light flush, straightened and crossed her arms before her. Quentin could see that she regretted this indirect reference to the past and that she was struggling now to get back to safe ground again.

But he remembered the evening when they had gone up the Inlet together in a skiff. Coming around a point, the tide bearing them homeward in the dusk, they had seen an old squaw close to the shore with two newborn infants in her arms. At the first sight of Nona and Quentin she had scuttled off through the woods. Nona had been sure the woman intended to drown the twins because their arrival meant there would be no fish for the tribe that season.

"Yes, I remember," Quentin said thoughtfully, "and I remember the storm-bird you told me about—that same evening. Wasn't it a black duck with a red bill?"

Nona absently nodded her head, as if already she had forced that memory back into the dimness of indifference. She began to walk through the cluttered trees to the sunny slope beyond which Ivar and Timothy had disappeared a moment ago. Quentin accompanied her in silence.

At last, in a perverse desire to tear from himself recollections that filled him with an unbearable nostalgia, he said, almost harshly, "I thought of that storm-bird Thursday night, when I ran the tugboat on the Reef. Didn't it sometimes mean death to the one who saw it?"

Her shoulders sprang straight again as though from an electric shock and her profile was white and set.

There came to them suddenly then a scrambling noise as of some creature rushing wildly through the forest, slashing against the branches, stumbling over fallen trees. The sound was accompanied by a shrill bleating that seemed neither animal nor human, but before Quentin had quite swung about in the direction from which it came, the shabby figure of Ethan Ashe

flew past them out of the shadows and down the stony slope to the deep ravine.

Staring after the vanishing form, Quentin was aware that Nona's fingers were clutching his arm. He turned toward her and saw that her eyes were half closed and her cheeks and lips colorless.

"Nona!"

He put his arm about her and led her to a grassy open space beside a lichen-covered stone. Even before he had placed her gently on the ground so that her back rested against the stone, she looked at him, then pressed her fingertips against her eyelids.

"He frightened the wits out of me," she said with a nervous laugh. "I guess it must be lack of sleep. I've had a couple of nights with—"

"Don't talk for a minute," he interrupted sharply. "Sit back and be quiet. I admit he gave me a bit of a shock, too. Perhaps I'd better call Ivar."

Her head fell back against the stone and even in this disquieting moment Quentin was miserably conscious of the pure tawny curve of her throat. He ran his hand along his temple and found it moist and hot.

"They'll both be back in a minute," Nona said. "We'll wait for them."

Quentin looked down into the somber valley where Ethan Ashe had vanished. "I don't believe he even saw us."

Nona sat forward and gave Quentin a swift look, elusively fearful. "I believe he was spying on us the whole time we were in there." She inclined her head toward the burial place, and something in her still transfixed attitude swept Quentin like a chill.

"Why the devil should he spy on us?" he asked impatiently.

Anger seized him as he saw that all around him he was fighting shadows: a shadow in Eunice, who was an unguessable threat; a shadow in Nona, whom he loved in spite of her cool contempt for him; a shadow in the drowned boy whom he had never seen; a shadow in the inimical Cove, with its Ethan Ashe and its Bart Leshner.

Before he could master the quick welling up of rage within him, he had stooped and seized Nona's wrist in a grasp that left her powerless.

"Look here!" he cried hoarsely. "Why can't you and I talk things over like rational human beings? It isn't fair to—"

“Fair?” She winced under his hold and he let her wrist fall.

“I know!” Quentin exclaimed in despair. “I have no right to expect fairness from you. And I’m not begging for forgiveness, either. I don’t deserve it—and I don’t expect it. But I’d like to know why you asked me to dinner today and came out here—”

She was gazing at him with eyes so wide and dark that he felt as though he were reeling forward into their blue-black depths.

“Ivar invited you,” she reminded him.

“That’s not all there is to it,” he persisted. “Why did he invite me and why did you agree to come?”

Her reply was so candid that he could have laughed aloud in self-mockery.

“It was Ivar’s idea in the first place,” she told him. “I just fell in with it. We decided it was time the Cove was beginning to take some things for granted.”

“For example?”

“For one thing—the fact that you are going to be in the Cove and that we might as well make up our minds to it. For another—the fact that we are all going to live together and may as well begin at once. After today, I think, there will be nothing to gossip about. They can’t gossip about something that is being done in the open—where they can all see what’s going on.”

“You want them to know that we’re friends, is that it?” he asked and leaned toward her with a penetrating look.

She did not shrink back, though her face was so close to his that a strand of her loose hair blew across his cheek.

“You and I can never be friends, Quentin,” she said. The words came on a stricken whisper. “You must know that as well as I do. There has been too much—for that.”

The passionate bitter truth of her eyes and her trembling lips left him speechless. He could only look at her while their hours of perfect union surged back to him from memory. At last he found his voice only in her name.

“Nona!”

For an imponderable moment he swayed toward her, conscious of a fierce sweet blending of their two identities in the declining light. The moment passed and she seemed to grow small and away from him. He got up and stood before her.

“We’re almost where we were before—except that now there are barriers,” he heard himself say.

“There’s no help for that,” she deliberately told him. “You can’t keep *The White Falcon* on the other side of the Reef tomorrow, not even if you wanted to.”

He dared not look at her for an instant. Of course, old Abner Clough had spread the news that Nancy and Eunice were coming. The whole town would know it by now.

“Unfortunately, no,” he admitted equably. “But I can refuse to see them or talk to them when they get here.”

Nona smiled, her eyes fixed across the valley. “You can, I suppose, but you won’t. You’ll see them and you’ll talk to them. And it’s only right that you should. That’s only one more reason why we can’t be friends. We can’t afford to be.”

Her intense quiet maddened him. “Yes, by God, I’ll see them! And I’ll tell them what I should have told them long ago. I’ll tell them the truth about us—from the beginning. I’ll tell them I loved you—and that you loved me—and if it hadn’t been for their filthy meddling we’d be living together today—and our son would be living with us.”

She did not cry out at that. She did not move. With her gaze still upon the slope beyond the valley, she said, “When you have told them that—what then?”

He turned and offered her his hand to help her rise. Then they stood confronting each other.

“When I’ve told them that,” he said, then paused and studied her face. “When I’ve told them that,” he repeated, “I’ll go to Ivar and tell him what —”

“I think Ivar would be relieved,” Nona smiled. “We’ve decided not to get married, but he’s not quite sure he’s free of me yet. You see, there’s someone else—”

Not too gently Quentin took her face in his hands.

"I think we'd better go and look for the others," she said quickly. Her lips smiled at him from a great distance.

While she spoke, Timothy called to them from the edge of the firs. After that there was the going back across the ravine and the recounting of the disturbing incident of Ethan Ashe. The moon rose when they were descending the north wall of the cliff.

"Bjork's expecting me for a game of pinochle," Timothy said. "I suppose you'll be getting back to the island, Quent?"

"I claim the privilege of taking Nona home first," he said. "You fellows have shown her little enough attention since we left town."

"Well, you're traveling the same way," Ivar said, and perhaps there was a hidden meaning in that. "I'll go along with Timothy."

Quentin and Nona continued down the steep trail, the other two taking a bypath westward from the main road. The way tunneled through the rich black of pines splashed with moonlight. Quentin's hand, resting on Nona's arm, felt the faint tremor that ran like a chill through her body. Neither spoke for the first while. It seemed impossible to put into words their thoughts of that afternoon in the grove. But at a turn in the road where the moon made tenuous silver wraiths of a white birch copse, he swung her toward him and held her shoulders.

"I can't help it, Nona," he muttered. "And I'm not ashamed. I've never known till this minute what it means to love. Tell me you'll let me come back to you—afterwards."

This, she thought in terror, must be very like the sensation of drowning—drowning in a black-and-silver sea of crushing beauty.

Quentin was speaking once more, was lifting her face to his. She closed her eyes to shut him out, so that she might use all her remaining strength now against the thrilling tide that was engulfing her.

"Look at me, my dearest!"

Hearing him, she raised her eyes blindly to his. She did not resist, made no outcry, as Quentin's arms closed about her. She heard only the voice of her own being—Quentin Wingate should never hurt her again . . . never again! Beneath the sudden and desperate demand of his lips upon hers, she became almost without substance, fluid as the moonlight, as the shallow passing of air through the lanes of darkness.

"Nona, Nona!" he cried brokenly. "Don't be stubborn with me."

Quentin strained anxiously down into her eyes, seeking there between despair and hope an answer that her lips would not utter. But she was incalculable, maddening, elusive as something not quite earthly—she who had been rich and deep as the earth itself—she who had been part of him in their drowned boy.

She swayed against him, her hands lifting warily to his face. His blood leaped as he felt the sudden change in her.

But then, as quickly, she straightened and started back with a sharp cry, her eyes fixed in terror across the waters of the Inlet. Turning, Quentin saw that the dark pines about the lodge on his island were alight with flames that were rapidly transforming each tree into a living torch.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The White Falcon

BY the time Karl Bjork had opened his store the next morning the town had slept, though briefly, on what had happened the night before.

Old Abner Clough, who prided himself on a certain aloofness becoming in a telegraph operator, had come down the hill earlier than was his wont. Nothing so sensational as the burning of the Wingate lodge had occurred in Heartbreak Cove in thirty years. There would be much talk and no end of surmise as to how the fire had started and Abner was determined to miss no word of it. Secretly, Abner believed that the Almighty dealt justice with a stern mien.

He ventured to say so, in fact.

“Mebbe you’re right, Abner,” Lucius Crane conceded, “and mebbe the Almighty moves in a mysterious way—but this burnin’ of a man’s house—and I don’t care who the man is—is carryin’ it a little too far to my way of thinkin’.”

Fred Malcolm coughed lightly. “It don’t look to me like the way the Almighty does things. I didn’t see no lightnin’.”

And that, indeed, came very close to expressing the temper of everyone in Heartbreak Cove that morning. When Quentin Wingate lost the *Sirius* there had been very little wasted sympathy. The wrecking of a boat in a storm might be counted an act of God and against such there was no argument. But the burning of a man’s house was something very different.

Gil Patterson spoke thoughtfully. “Of course, there’s no tellin’ about such things, Fred. If Wingate’s warehouse hadn’t gone first, we might all of thought it was an accident. If there’s somebody around here settin’ fires—well, it’s a damn bad habit!”

“Trouble is, Gil, you or me might be the next one to get burned out,” Lucius observed. “You can’t tell where a firebug will strike any more’n you can lightnin’.”

"I heard last night that Bart Leshner took a lien on that property for the boat he sold Wingate," Fred Malcolm contributed. "What's he goin' to do now for his security?"

"I wouldn't worry none about Bart," Gil said. "He knows how to get his own out of a deal. Smart feller!"

Lucius Crane spat sideways and cocked an eye. "Come to think of it, I wouldn't put it past Bart to set a fire if he thought it was goin' to get him what he wants."

The others looked at him quickly.

"Better go careful, Luce," Malcolm warned.

"Besides," Gil suggested, "Bart has been wantin' that place for himself. He ain't likely to put a fire under it when he wants to keep it for himself, is he?"

"I don't know what Bart wants," Lucius replied crossly, "and what's more, you don't."

If Bart hadn't walked into the store at the moment the issue might have been threshed out, but suspicion covered its head the instant Leshner showed himself in the doorway.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" he greeted them heartily. "What's new along the waterfront today?"

There was a moment of fidgeting, then Gil Patterson spoke up, somewhat deferentially. "We've been talkin' about the fire last night. Kinda hard luck for young Wingate."

"Maybe—and maybe not," Leshner replied cryptically as he strode over to the counter where Karl Bjork was bending above his ledger, apparently oblivious to what was being said within earshot. "Good morning, Mr. Bjork!"

Bjork peered above his glasses. "Vell, Mr. Leshner, dere iss somet'ing you vant diss morning?"

Leshner chuckled softly. "You ought to be a rich man some day, Karl. You talk nothing but business."

"Vell—I'm *in* business," Bjork replied reasonably.

"Send me up ten gallons of kerosene," said Leshner. "Any time before night will do."

Bjork made a note of it and Leshner turned and looked at Lucius Crane with a smile. "When you fellows get it all figured out, I wish you'd drop in and let me know who did it."

"Did what?" Lucius asked guilelessly.

"Put a match to the Wingate place last night," Leshner added with indolence, and flourishing a freshly lit cigar he sauntered from the store.

As he disappeared through the doorway, Gil Patterson looked at Fred Malcolm and winked.

Lucius cocked his eye once again and started to speak, but Karl Bjork drew himself up with authority behind his counter.

"Dat vill be enough for diss morning," he said quietly and returned to his ledger.

At sunset *The White Falcon* moved elegantly through the gap and down the Inlet toward the Wingate Island. From the shore the townspeople watched the slim white yacht drift inward with the tide. They silently admired her sleek lines, paid unspoken tribute to her poise upon the unrippled waters of the sound, and disregarded her significant emblem. She was a boat, and a beauty.

From the window of the Darnell kitchen, Nona looked out and saw the aloof stranger that seemed so incongruous in the society of uncomely, weather-raddled barges, scows and fishing-boats. All day she had been watching for the yacht, but her heart skipped a beat now as with narrowed eyes she discerned several figures moving about on the deck. One of the women on board was Quentin's wife, who had been Eunice Derringer. She had been the Eunice Derringer whose lovely blondness had appeared more than once in the society columns of the city papers before Nona had dreamed of what that tilted face would some day mean to her. Later she had been Mrs. Quentin Wingate, receiving at such and such an address; entertaining easterners, Londoners, at the theatre; or sailing to Japan with her husband. Nona smiled with clear joy. Eunice was Mrs. Quentin Wingate, but she, Nona, was Quentin's beloved, as she had always been. What did it matter if he was never released from Eunice? The world was bigger than the Cove—and it was bigger than the social restrictions in which Quentin had grown.

In a moment she saw Quentin's launch put out from the north shore and gather speed as it went to meet the yacht. And if it had not seemed sheer

madness, Nona thought, she would have sung out there all by herself a call to Quentin which he would hear only in his heart.

On the Quilchina Road last night he had been humble. Not humbled. No! That she could not have borne. And all her thinking after the fire last night, after everything that had happened, had come to this: In little Si had been Quentin; in Quentin was little Si; in Quentin was herself, inevitably and without denial. To the Cove, to her own people, to herself, she was already the exception, a woman taken without marriage. If Quentin never became legally free, it would not matter so long as she was, in the eyes of their love, his wife.

When they had dashed across to the island in the launch last night, there had been more people than they had expected to see fighting the fire. Even Dave Malcolm and Gil Patterson were there. Everybody had been too excited to take much notice of her. After the walls had crumbled to a red ash, Quentin had taken her back to the south shore, and in bidding her good-night had told her that tomorrow he might not find time to come across to see her. He had only held her hand then, firmly as he might that of a good friend, but his eyes in the crowning moonlight had told her more than any words.

As he steered his launch toward *The White Falcon*, Quentin rehearsed with grim exactitude the scene which he would presently have to play out with Eunice. The scene would be brief and concluded with a minimum of melodrama, if he could, as he fervidly hoped, control its development and dénouement.

There was only one honest thing to do, and that was to lay the whole truth about himself and Nona before Eunice, and trust to her instinct for fair play. It would be awkward if Nancy and the old aunt insisted on putting their oar in—and that would not be unlike them—but he would not mince matters in telling them just where they belonged in the picture.

Eunice and Nancy were waving to him from the yacht's deck. Quite in character, he thought dourly, and lifted his hand in a curt salute by way of acknowledgment as he drew alongside. Then he swept about and led the way to the island where lay only the charred embers of what had once been the Wingate lodge. In a few minutes the yacht's anchor was dropped and Quentin clambered on board.

When he saw that Eunice had her usual coterie about her, he did not know whether to be glad or sorry. He had little time, however, in which to

dwell upon his own misgivings as to what her procedure would be at their meeting again in the presence of others. He had no more than swung his leg over the railing from the rope ladder when Nancy and Eunice were upon him with depressing gusto. Nancy gave him a cross and sisterly kiss on the cheek, while Eunice, laughing and crying, stood on tiptoe and brushed her lips against his chin.

“You’ve grown so enormous, darling!” Eunice sparkled at him, and stood back from him with her hands on his arms, while Nancy surveyed him with less enthusiasm.

“He’s grown damn thin, I think!” she declared. “But what in heaven’s name has happened to the lodge?”

Quentin released himself from Eunice firmly and quietly. Before he spoke he glanced in the direction of the yacht’s guests who were seated at a small table under an awning drinking cocktails and rather too delicately averting their gaze from a meeting which must, he knew, be of piquant interest to them all. Eunice’s Aunt Laura was not at the table. She wouldn’t be, of course, with her disapproval of cocktails.

“Must we stand here and talk?” he asked shortly, looking at Eunice.

“Of course not, darling!” Eunice replied and smiled at him radiantly. “Let’s go into the lounge. But first come and say hello to everybody. They’re just dying to—”

“For heaven’s sake, Quentin!” Nancy interrupted with exasperation. “What *has* happened to the *lodge*? Is it a secret, or what?”

The people at the table were glancing over now with hopeful amusement. They evidently thought that Nancy’s strident voice was a sign that everything was just like old times, friendly and stormy. The two men raised their glasses to Quentin, the two women blew him kisses. There was nothing for it, he decided with distaste: unless he were to appear downright churlish he would have to sit and talk with the crowd for a few minutes. Better be a hypocrite for a little while than a thumping boor, anyhow.

“A secret?” he repeated after Nancy as he strode toward the table, where Eunice demurely drew out a chair for him while the men stood up and extended their hands toward him.

There was an indiscriminate chorus of “Hello, old man!” “Glad to see you again, Quentin!” and, from the women, “You sweet thing, how are you?” and “ ‘Sakes, Quent, how handsome you’ve become!” During this,

Eunice seated herself cross-legged in her white flannel trousers on the deck beside Quentin's chair, and looked up at him with artless, trusting eyes.

"Yes!" Nancy cried when she could make herself heard. "*Is it a secret?*" She threw out her hands imploringly to the others. "I've been asking him what in fury has happened to the lodge. Or am I wrong in believing that there ever was such a place?"

She's carrying this off very well, Quentin thought as he flicked the ash from the tip of his cigarette. Just like her, too—a good sport in her way.

"You can see as well as I can, Sis," he replied with cool good-humor. "It was evidently an eye-sore to someone and—"

"But have you no idea who did it?" Eunice asked, prettily at ease as she cupped her chin in her hands and looked up at Quentin with wide, green-blue eyes. She was having a little trouble, Quentin thought dryly, in affecting concern over the matter.

"I couldn't even make a good guess," he responded. He was looking across the water in the direction of Nona's house and thinking impatiently what a farce his visit on board *The White Falcon* was in the very nature of the case. "Mysteries," he went on, "have a way of remaining mysteries in this part of the world."

It was then that the image of the flying figure of Ethan Ashe appeared suddenly in his mind with shocking vividness. And as he glanced about at the fatuous group here and heard the light tinkle of glass and ice, the incongruity of this spectacle superimposed upon the other moved him almost to ribald laughter.

"Mysteries—how perfectly quaint!" chimed Drusilla Kirkways, a middle-aged, horsey woman whom Quentin had never been able to abide.

"But are you doing nothing to find out about the—" Nancy began, persisting as usual.

"I am waiting for the guilty one to return to the scene of his crime," Quentin interrupted with a flickering grin.

A little later Nancy asked about the *Sirius*. They had seen it lying on the Reef as they entered the narrows.

"There's no mystery about that, at any rate," Quentin told her. "The skipper just didn't know his way around."

"The skipper?"

“Yours truly.”

“You mean *you* ran her on the Reef?” Nancy’s fine eyes grew incredulously round.

“Not only that, my dear relative. I think I did as neat a job as anyone on the coast could have done, given what I had to work with. The old *Sirius* is there for keeps.”

Briefly Quentin told them the whole story of his adventure at sea and of that last night when the gale, blowing itself out, roused to its final wrath and fell upon him in the darkness. Nancy inhaled her cigarette with vexed little jerks, and Eunice laughed and threw back her head with delight. Thus, as was their wont, they made for each other a picturesque foil, the dark woman and the blond. Quentin sighed wearily and glanced toward the lounge door.

“How delectable, Quenty!” Eunice cried, patting his knee in a frankly proprietary way that made him set his teeth. “But to think that you might have been killed, darling!”

“An intriguing story,” one of her male satellites mused subtly over his cocktail. “The sea’s playful gesture of contempt—for mankind!”

Quentin raised an eyebrow and looked at the fellow as Eunice smiled and let her hand flutter upward to the speaker’s shoulder.

“Arthur, you’re so dramatic, precious!”

“Dramatic, piffle!” Nancy snorted. “I see nothing dramatic about it. It’s a very commonplace experience, out of which my beloved brother will probably get exactly nothing.”

“Meaning what, Sis?” Quentin asked tiredly.

“Haven’t you had enough experience here by this time to realize that you just don’t belong?” she demanded. “Or haven’t you the intelligence to see that the whole business was a senseless undertaking from the first?”

“I’ll explain that to you—later,” he retorted significantly. Being civilized for the benefit of these meaningless sycophants who were gracing *The White Falcon* as its guests was beginning to pall on him. Then, too, he sensed that Eunice, with pretense of childlike simplicity, was growing more confident by the minute.

Nancy became suddenly more guarded. “Well, it’s strange. First your boat goes on the rocks—then your house burns to the ground—and you

probably haven't a penny in your pocket! Nevertheless you act as if it didn't matter a bit. It's damn curious, Quentin!"

His face darkened as he stared across the Inlet. Why wait until he was alone with Eunice? Why not tell them all, he thought for a reckless instant, that last night he had held Nona Darnell in his arms and within him had been rekindled a hope bright enough to illumine all darkness? He was convinced that for a magnificent moment last night she had responded to him in spite of herself and the enigmatic aloofness that protected her. That moment was with him still, buoyant as a flame.

"Perhaps I'm just getting philosophical," he said; then, as he made to rise from his chair, "I suppose your Aunt Laura is having a nap, Eunice?"

Eunice's pink-nailed fingers twinkled up toward him, and with impersonal courtesy he helped her to her feet. She laughed and glanced toward a cabin window near by.

"Auntie, darling!" She waited a moment, then laughed. "She went to lie down, but I'll bet she's awake and listening to every word we're saying. She's never very far away when anyone has a good story to tell. Auntie!" When there was no response Eunice turned her pretty palms upward. "She's quite unguessable."

"Aunt Laura and I," Drusilla Kirkways nickered persuasively, "have come to fish for the herring fish that live in the beautiful sea! I hope you'll take us out in a boat, Quentin dear. We're both dying to go out."

That was too much.

"I should like to, very much, Mrs. Kirkways," Quentin said and bowed with only the faintest irony, "but I'm afraid I'll be much too busy. There are plenty of boats in the village—and plenty of good fishermen who would be glad to be of service to you, I'm sure."

Eunice took his arm suddenly and turned him about. "It's time all you good people were dressing for dinner," she announced to her guests. "Quentin and I haven't had a moment alone."

"You'll stay, won't you, Quent?" Nancy asked as he moved away.

"No—I should feel too much out of place," he said and did not smile. "I'm not dressed."

"You're being very damned conventional all of a sudden," Nancy retorted, her eyes narrowing and little red veins appearing in her cheeks. "Don't leave without seeing me, anyhow."

“As you wish,” said Quentin.

Eunice went before him into the small but irreproachable lounge that was paneled in walnut and appointed with glowing tawny leather. He closed the door behind him, walked across the room and drew shut the door leading to the afterdeck. Then he turned and looked at Eunice who was sunk deep in a chair, her fingertips steepled together under her pretty chin, her white flannel trousers peeling up along her slender bare legs.

“Well, darling,” she said, searchingly, slowly, “you are being very obscure, aren’t you? I thought for a while—out there—” she indicated the deck with her sunny, close-cropped head—“you were going to be almost human, and not too difficult.”

He looked at her thoughtfully for a moment, then threw himself into a chair facing her.

“Out there,” he said evenly, “I was putting on a show for your friends.”

“Oh!” Eunice smiled and adjusted a cigarette in her long ivory holder. He struck a match and she leaned forward to receive the light. “Then it was just a show, was it?”

“What else?”

He remained bowed toward her in his chair, his eyes fixed gravely upon her face, his hands clasped loosely between his knees.

“Was that necessary?” she asked.

“I have nothing in common with that crowd.”

But he had not reckoned with Eunice’s strategy, nor her small, formidable will. Before he knew what she was about, she had laid her cigarette on the tray and had sprung toward him and crouched beside his chair. She laid her hands flat against his chest and looked at him, her eyes nakedly meaningful.

“Aren’t you going to kiss me?” she asked huskily.

She did not resist when he put her hands away from him, but sat back on the floor and gazed up at him unbelievably.

“Is that what you came up here for?” he asked her. “I can’t understand your coming at all—after the last letter I wrote you.”

With a little moan she got to her feet and stood wringing her hands.

“Oh, Quentin!” she wailed through starry tears. “Why do you want to torture me? I’ve suffered enough since—since the night you ran away from me. I came up here because I want you back. I want you more than ever, now that I’ve seen you again. You’re so—” She looked at him helplessly while she searched for the right word. Then, as she flung herself down into her chair once more, she added with a flash of the temper he knew so well —“so damned vital!”

“This is getting us nowhere, Eunice,” he said, realizing that he would have to keep the reins taut on his own feelings if he were to tell her what he had come to tell her. “I don’t want to torture you and I don’t want to be brutal. But I’ve got to face facts that are as unpleasant to me as they are to you.”

“Go ahead, darling, and get it over with,” she said resignedly.

“The business that brought you here—with Aunt Laura—is so crass that I hate to mention it. What—”

“Aunt Laura!” Eunice panted, clutching her cheeks. “You know she has nothing to do with it. I used her offer only to coax you back to me.”

“You don’t want me back—and Aunt Laura’s proposition is no inducement to me. I told you that when I wrote you. I lived long enough on your money to know it can’t be done. We wouldn’t make any better go of it on Aunt Laura’s. Let’s be civilized, Eunice. It takes something more than money to keep two like us together. And that’s the thing we haven’t got—and never had.”

A narrow flame of intuition lighted her eyes to sudden cold fury.

“So that’s it!” she said softly. “I might have known. Nancy told me what brought you up here, but I refused to believe her. I thought you’d have more decency.”

He got up and thrust his hands into his pockets as he looked down at her. “Well, what did Nancy tell you?” he asked coolly. “There’s no reason for any secrets between us now.”

But a more appealing look than he had ever seen in Eunice trembled now across her face. It was a look of fear. She got up and seized his lapels with nervous hands.

“Quentin—I can’t say it—because I don’t want to believe it,” she quivered. “I—I couldn’t stand it!”

He moved to release himself. "It doesn't matter what she told you. Nancy doesn't know one half of it. If you want to know—I'll tell you."

"I don't want to know!" she declared wilfully. "I don't care what it is, so long as you come back with me. And I don't care about Aunt Laura's money, if you don't want it. I—we have plenty without it. But you've got to come back. You can't bury yourself in this awful place. It would break my heart—and yours, too, after a while." She moved closer to him. "Darling, I've been so miserable!"

He caught her arms and held her from him. "Eunice!" he exclaimed, a wretched feeling overwhelming him.

She shook her arms free and threw them about his neck.

"Let's not talk any more about it, dear—not now," she begged. "Stay with us tonight." Her lips were muffled against his breast. "We can be alone, Quentin, all night—"

Her voice was almost humid, he thought in desperation. He drew back, but held her for a moment as he looked steadily down into her eyes.

"You just don't know what you're saying, Eunice," he remonstrated, and wondered how he was going to tell her what he would have to tell her now.

She tore her hands away and her downcast face was pale.

"It's true, then," she said sullenly. "You've been carrying on again with that little—"

"Stop it!" His fingers bit into her wrists.

Her smothered scream filled him with sudden, all but uncontrollable rage, an upheaval within himself that was, he knew immediately, the cumulative effect upon him of all her supine malice and calculated hysterics in times past.

"Sit down!" he commanded and let her go as he took his own chair again. "Since you force me to do it, I'll tell you just how things are with me."

"You don't have to tell me!" she gasped, and half fell back against the arm of her chair. "Nancy told me what a little adventuress she was—and still is, no doubt! Getting you into her clutches—"

The forward door, midway of the lounge, which led into the passage, had swung open peremptorily during Eunice's tirade. Aunt Laura stood there like a small old bird surprisingly equipped with a lorgnette.

“What’s this, what’s this?” she chirped eagerly, looking across her inquisitive beak of a nose at the two in the room. “Who’s an adventuress? Ah, Quentin, my dear boy!” With a rustle of violet taffeta she scurried toward him, snapping down and hooking her glasses below her breast-bone as she came.

He had risen and bowed now as civilly as he could over her fragile claw of a hand.

“How are you, Aunt Laura?” he enquired with more equanimity than he thought he possessed. “Did you enjoy the trip?”

“Of course! Why not?” she retorted briskly, and reaching up she pinched his cheek. “If I’m not too old to patch up a romance, I’m not too old for a couple of days on the water, am I?”

She spun about with amazing alacrity and regarded Eunice, who sat now in her chair smoking and gazing fixedly at the ceiling.

“What ails you, Nitchy?” she demanded. “He’s here, isn’t he? It was my impression that that was all you needed—”

“My dear,” Eunice broke in somberly, “you entered at the right time. Quentin is about to unfold the story of his deathless love for a fisherman’s daughter.”

“Deathless love? Deathless love? My word, what is this, Quentin?”

But he had stalked over to the window looking aft, and stood there with his arms crossed on the sill. Everything, including himself, suddenly refused to make sense. Whatever he had known of the strange thing called beauty, with tragedy and heartbreak in it, would have to submit to a desecration now.

He turned slowly, wearily, at the touch of Aunt Laura’s fingers on his arm.

“Whatever it is, my dear,” she was wheedling, “we can forgive, and forget. Come—tell us all about it. Confession is good for the soul. And a young man must sow his wild oats!”

A spring seemed to break inside of him at that.

“Confession!” he barked, and rushed past the old lady to stand in the middle of the room. His face was livid, and even Eunice recoiled. He shook his fist in the direction of the channel. “My son was drowned on that Reef the night I came back here! And you talk to me about confession. His

mother broke her heart first over me, because I was a gutless coward. Then she almost died at the loss of our boy. And you two silk-swaddled females talk to me about confession! And wild oats! You can go back to Vancouver, or you can stay here, as you damn please, but in ten thousand years I'll never come near you again."

In his stride to the starboard entrance he swept up his hat. Aunt Laura, who had collapsed upon a settle which had, unfortunately, no back, cried out to stop him, and got up in agitation.

"Quentin! Don't leave us like this!" Her hands were groping along his arms before he could open the door.

Quentin looked stonily past her to Eunice. His wife seemed oddly unfamiliar, as though he had merely dreamt her during some illness. Her transparent skin had the tinge of a lemon not quite ripe, her lips were parted and her breath was coming too quickly.

Aunt Laura rushed on. "I'm old enough, my dear, to know that people recover from these things. Don't be too hard on yourself. Come back with Eunice and begin all over again"—she hesitated and wiped her eyes—"as a man should, with a view to security, and a family—to grow up and make you proud. You'll thank God—"

Mechanically he patted her shoulder. "Sorry, Aunt Laura. You don't seem to get the point. I'll always be in love with Nona whether Eunice divorces me or not."

In a step he was outside, and the door swung to behind him.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Interlude

WHEN QUENTIN walked into Bart Lesher's office early the next morning he had a feeling that everyone in the village was watching him and knew just why he had come. He found Lesher seated behind his desk, chewing on a half-smoked cigar.

"Good morning, Wingate," he greeted Quentin. "I'm glad you dropped in. I was thinking of running over to see you a little later, when I got a half hour to spare."

"I should have been in yesterday," Quentin replied, "but I had too much on hand."

"Naturally. Help yourself to a chair." Quentin seated himself. "I see your visitors arrived last night. Are they going to stay in the Cove for a few days?"

"I don't think they've set a time for leaving just yet. It will depend somewhat on the weather. Besides, I can't offer them the hospitality I had hoped to. They'll have to stay on board."

"Of course. Too bad. Not that they'll suffer any hardship on the yacht. She's a beauty. I understand your people owned her a few years ago."

"My father had it built," Quentin told him.

"So I'd heard."

Quentin opened his cigarette case. "I came over, of course, to talk to you about the note, Mr. Lesher," he said. "The loss of the lodge leaves me more or less in a hole."

Lesher waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. "It was a tough break, all right, but I don't think we ought to have any difficulty adjusting things. You've probably given it some thought since the night of the fire. What's your suggestion?"

"I've thought about very little else," Quentin admitted. "I had hoped that you might have some suggestion to offer, perhaps. You'll want additional

security, of course.”

Lesher chewed for a moment on his cigar. “Well, Wingate,” he said at last, “I suppose if we’re going to do business at all we ought to do it on a business basis, eh?”

“Naturally. I don’t think you need to have any fear about my taking up the note when it falls due. I’ll have my first shipment ready by the end of next week. I’ve wired the company and they’re sending a boat in to pick it up in about ten days or less.”

“And in the meantime?” Lesher enquired.

“That’s the point. I’m hoping that you may be able to carry me for ten days or so—until I—”

“A lot of things can happen in ten days, Wingate,” Lesher reminded him.

Quentin smiled. “A lot of things have happened in the last two or three days.”

“Precisely. As a matter of form, I think we’d both feel more comfortable with a new arrangement that would cover, say, the next two weeks.”

“Absolutely, Mr. Lesher,” Quentin replied with composure. “Perhaps you would like to suggest something.”

Lesher took his cigar from his mouth. “Well, hell—you’re not stuck, are you? You still have your plant and equipment left. That, with the island—”

“When we first talked about it—if you remember—I think I told you that I had certain sentimental reasons for not wanting to place any encumbrances on the packing plant, Mr. Lesher.”

“I remember. I might have told you then—sentiment and business don’t mix, Wingate. A few have tried it and have gone on the rocks.”

Lesher got up from his chair and came out from behind his desk. He stood in the middle of the floor and looked down at Quentin.

“By this time, Wingate, you must have got wise to the fact that this business is a pretty big gamble,” he said pointedly. “Especially for a young fellow like yourself who has had little or no experience in the game.”

“I’ve learned that much, at least.”

“It isn’t a business in which a man can afford to take any chances—except what the Almighty throws in his way, and they’re plenty.”

"I understand that perfectly," Quentin replied.

Leshner blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "You have lost your boat—and you have lost your house," he went on presently. "You can charge the loss of your boat to the Almighty, if you like—and to your own lack of experience. But I have a suspicion that some enemy of yours set a match to the lodge. It's the second fire you've had, you know. There are still a few people in the Cove who haven't much love for your name."

"I'm aware of that."

"Let us suppose one of them took it into his head to kindle a fire at one end of your packing plant some windy night—how long would it take to wipe you out completely?" Leshner asked.

"I am taking precautions against that."

Leshner gave him a thoughtful look. "I'm going to make you a proposition, Wingate," he said abruptly. "You're a young man—with a whole lifetime ahead of you. I've been watching you. The truth is, Wingate—I wouldn't say this if I didn't like you—but the truth is you're out of place here. You're not cut out for this life. You'd be a fool to stay around here—with opportunities—"

"I have been told that before," Quentin said impatiently. "I'd like to hear what your proposition is, Mr. Leshner."

"I'm going to give you a chance to get rid of the whole works at a decent profit," Leshner said promptly. "What do you want for the plant—season's catch and everything?"

"I was afraid you were going to ask that. I don't want to waste either your time or my own. I intend to go on with the business, somehow, until I find it hopeless."

"You certainly love punishment," Leshner retorted with a laugh. "I should think it would look pretty hopeless to you right now. You've lost plenty—and you've taken on a heavy obligation with nothing to back it but the prospect of a clean-up on your first season's pack."

"It's more than a mere prospect, of course," Quentin returned. "I've had a good catch—and the pack is ready for delivery."

"And what would the whole pack be worth if it failed to pass inspection, for example?" Leshner demanded. "Not a damn!"

Quentin got to his feet. "We don't seem to be making much headway, Mr. Leshner," he said quietly, in spite of his rising anger. "I have arranged for inspection before delivery, as a matter of fact. The company is sending a man in on the next boat to look after it. I shall know in a couple of days just where I stand. But that's all beside the point. I wanted to come to an understanding—"

"An understanding without guarantees, eh?" Leshner chuckled. "I suppose I ought to be tickled to death over that! I'm not. I could sue you and attach everything you have—you know that—but before I could get a judgment you may be no better off than your father was when he left here."

Quentin was finding it almost impossible to control himself. "I don't care to discuss my father's affairs with anyone just yet," he said. "When the proper time arrives, however, I shall deal only with those directly concerned. I have a complete record of his obligations."

Leshner drew himself up in surprise. "So—you're going to redeem the family honor, eh? Well! I begin to see the light at last. I had no idea what sort of a damned fool I was dealing with." He walked back to his desk and sat down. "Under the circumstances, there's only one way out of it for me. I'll take the boat back and hold it till you're able to pay for it."

Quentin leaned toward him over the desk. "I'm sorry, but the boat is in service and I've got to have it for the next few weeks—or go to the wall."

"Are you trying to tell me that I can't have it?"

"It amounts to that, Mr. Leshner. I bought the boat and gave you a promise to pay for it in ninety days. If I fail to meet my obligation—"

"I see." Leshner bit off the end of his cigar and spat it across the room. "Just because we happen to be a few hundred miles from civilization, you're going to do what you like with other men's property!"

"You're forcing me into a difficult position," Quentin said carefully. "I'm trying to make it clear to you that I'm not going to be kicked out of the Cove without a fight."

"Well, young fellow, you can have what you're looking for," Leshner replied sourly.

"I didn't say I was looking for it," Quentin retorted. "I'm—"

"If that tugboat isn't delivered within forty-eight hours," Leshner interrupted, "I'll go and take it."

"I'm afraid you'll meet with some stiff opposition," Quentin warned him with a set jaw.

"That suits me," Leshner assured him.

"Right you are!" Quentin replied and left the office.

Nancy Wingate was not in her most pleasant mood that afternoon as she walked with Eunice toward Bjork's store. They had seen nothing of Quentin since the evening before, and while Eunice had alternated the hours with stormy weeping at the blow he had dealt her pride and with outlining of ridiculous schemes that would magically mollify him and restore him to her, Nancy had endeavored in vain to point out to her the folly of hope. She knew her brother, she thought privately, better than his conceited and egoistic little wife would ever know him. Finally, what with the effort of consoling and at the same time disillusioning Eunice, and maintaining a semblance of ease on board the yacht in behalf of Eunice's guests, Nancy felt spent and irritable.

Her suggestion this morning that the sagacious and dignified thing to do was to head for open water and home had met with such a tempest from Eunice that she had thereafter diplomatically held her tongue. Even Aunt Laura, who had seemed bemused and in a trance ever since that scene in the lounge with Quentin—which Nancy enviously regretted having missed—came abruptly out of her absorption like a gray chicken waking on a roost, to protest volubly against their immediate departure. "*We must*," the old lady had exclaimed, "see Quentin once more, anyhow, before we resign ourselves to the worst! Or rather, I should say, before we resign *him* to it. Of course the boy is proud. You wouldn't want him back, Nitchy, if he weren't. Besides, his son's drowning must have been a great shock to him—when he didn't even know he had a son! His conscience—" "A shock to *him*!" Eunice had squealed. "What d'you s'pose it is to me?" Then, placatingly, Aunt Laura had added, "Well, I think you and I had better go and see him tonight if he doesn't come to see us again in the meantime."

Nancy had an ironical vision of what that visit would be, but she said nothing.

Now, when they had left the tiny rowboat in which the engineer had brought them across to the south shore, Eunice looked with haughty resentment up and down the little street.

"Was she pretty?" she asked.

“Who?” Nancy enquired innocently.

Eunice became angrily petulant. “I believe you’re enjoying my misery! You know well enough who I mean. This girl—”

“Oh, Nona Darnell! I suppose she’d be called pretty. She’s never had any chance for improving herself, of course.”

In silence Eunice bit her lip, and they entered Bjork’s store. Karl looked over his glasses, then straightened up and greeted his visitors.

“Miss Vingate! Vell—I’m glad to see you!”

Nancy smiled with genuine pleasure as she shook hands with the storekeeper. “You remember me—how nice! This is Mrs. Wingate, Mr. Bjork. I wanted her to see what kind of a store we have in Heartbreak Cove.”

Karl bowed to Eunice, and behind his smile his eyes were brightly sharp. “Not much of a store, eh, for a city girl—but ve get along all right for where ve are.”

“We want to take back some souvenirs,” Nancy told him.

“Sure! Here iss some,” he said, turning to a small case that stood near him on the counter. “But vait—I’ll show you more.”

He came from behind his counter and led the way to the front of the store where stood a table piled with bits of beadwork, baskets neatly woven of fragrant grasses and reeds, miniature totems, tiny canoes, and gaudily colored shells. They spent some time making their selections, but Bjork attended patiently and became almost garrulous in his replies to Eunice’s questions about the curious craftsmanship of the natives.

So occupied were all three that even Bjork was unaware that Nona Darnell had come quietly into the store and was standing at the counter just inside the doorway. Eunice was the first to notice her, and it was Eunice’s speculative stare that drew Nancy’s eyes to the girl. Nona’s cool, lifted profile was toward them.

With a faint, disinterested smile Nancy met Eunice’s suspicious eyes and nodded her head.

Suddenly, then, Eunice broke into a tinkling laugh and pointed to a rack of garish neckties on the counter.

“Oh, Mr. Bjork!” she cried gaily, “I simply must take that bright red tie back to my husband! When we were first married Quentin always had at

least two of them at a time. Now the poor dear hasn't *one*!" Her back was turned to Nona as she whipped the scarlet tie off the rack. "This will be simply delectable for the cruise back home!"

In spite of her vow to remain detached, Nancy winced and dropped her eyes from the suddenly rigid figure of Nona Darnell. Then, to her amazement, she saw Nona turn slowly and smile at Karl Bjork, a smile of sheer, untroubled loveliness. And Bjork twinkled at her over his glasses while he wrapped up the red tie.

Nona walked down to the other end of the store, then, without so much as glancing at the two women who were to Quentin more, and infinitely less, than she had ever been. Nancy felt an abrupt sense of shame, and hurried Eunice into the street.

"I can always tell when you're having one of your funny fits," Eva remarked as Nona came into her bedroom on her return from the store. "Have you been talking to that Quentin Wingate again?"

Nona, who was deftly remaking Eva's bed while the patient sighed and moved delicately, replied without looking at her. "I haven't seen Quentin Wingate since the night before last—and I'm not likely to see him again for some time. Lift your right foot. There."

Eva lay back against her pillows and smiled. She was feeling much stronger today, and had even spoken of getting up and sitting for an hour before the window so that she might "see what was going on"—whatever that meant, Nona had thought. But Mrs. Pringle had summarily rejected the suggestion.

"That was the night of the fire," Eva mused. "Everybody that's been in to see me since has talked about how funny it was for Ivar to give a party for you and Quentin. Especially just the night before his wife came. Selina Patterson said—"

"I don't want to hear what Selina Patterson said. Let me have that pillow." She took it to the window and shook it energetically.

"Oh, dear! Well, anyhow, Mrs. Malcolm said that she thought it was a gentlemanly thing for Ivar to do, and she thought she'd invite Quentin to the Malcolms' silver wedding jubilee. She was in just a little while ago. But young Mrs. Clough was with her, and she said she thinks Quentin is going back with his wife, because he's fed up with all the trouble he's having here."

Nona slapped the pillow into place behind Eva's head.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised."

"All these things would happen, of course, when I'm not up and around," Eva lamented.

"You haven't missed much, as far as I can see," Nona replied crisply.

Eva looked up with a playful pout. "Is that sarcasm, dear? After all, lying here day after day is no fun."

"You might try reading."

"My eyes always feel so tired after I've had a baby."

"Yes, it's a terrible strain on the eyes," Nona remarked solemnly. "I'll lower this shade a little."

"No, dear, please. I love the sun. Oh, dear! I don't suppose anything has been seen of Ethan Ashe lately."

"Not that I've heard."

"By the way, is Ivar really leaving on the *Princess* tonight?"

Nona stood at the window, looking out over the Inlet. "Yes, he's going."

"Do you know what I think?" Eva fastened her eyes shrewdly on Nona's straight back. "I think he's heard from Julie Cartaret and he's going in to see her."

"Quite possible. But what makes you think so?"

Eva laughed with comely artlessness. "Hesper Thorpe told me she saw him coming from the post office the other night with a letter in his hand. He opened it on the street in front of Thorpes' place and stood there reading it as if he was rooted to the ground."

Nona smiled. "I think he is."

"You think he is—what?"

"Rooted to the ground."

Eva frowned with annoyance. "Really, you say the craziest things sometimes. Do you know why he's going to the city?"

"That happens to be Ivar's business." Nona turned and looked at her expressionlessly. "I hear Emily coming with your lunch. I'll look in on the baby and get back home."

“But, Nona! What *is* taking Ivar in—”

“Oh, for the love of heaven! How should I know anything about it?”

“But you’ll see him off on the boat tonight, won’t you?”

“Yes.” Nona walked to the door. “All right, Emily.”

The girl entered the room with a tray.

“Good-by,” Nona said as she went out. “I’ll come up and see you later tonight.”

“Good-by, dear,” Eva called, “and thank you for—”

Nona heard no more.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Rain

IT was Timothy Entwhistle—the only man in the Cove with enough leisure to act upon a suspicion—who came upon Ethan Ashe's skiff beneath a jutting shelf of rock on the Wingate Island that afternoon. The skiff had been tied securely to the exposed root of a pine tree.

For two or three hours, then, after Timothy had brought the news to Bjork's store, every available craft in the Inlet searched the shores, lingered in the little bays, and plied back and forth through the quiet waters in the hope that some trace of the mysterious hermit might yet be found. Quentin Wingate, with the help of three of his men, laid aside the charred remains of the lodge on the island without coming upon anything that might lead to an explanation of Ethan's disappearance.

It was Silas Darnell and Ivar Hansen who finally brought the search to an end. Skirting the shadows of North Cliff, not more than half a mile from the island, they had been hailed by two Indians and had gone ashore. There, just before sunset, when the tide was full, they had discovered Ethan Ashe, his frail body lying less than two feet beneath the surface of the water, bound closely by the brown kelp that entangled his limbs. Ethan Ashe had gone the way of his Marie, but as an ironical final decree the Inlet still separated them—Marie had found peace at the foot of the cliff on the south.

Nona had come home from Eva's to find the house deserted save for old Toby, who got up from before the door and stretched himself lazily by way of greeting. From the kitchen window she had looked out and seen the Inlet covered with boats moving in apparent aimlessness to and fro. It was not until Lydie Thorpe came in that she learned of Timothy's discovery of Ethan's skiff and the search that was going on. It was the first time she had seen Lydie since Hesper Thorpe had exercised her maternal prerogative following Nona's encounter with her on the morning after the wreck of the *Sirius*.

Lydie remained standing beside the door while she told Nona the news.

"Come and sit down while I start supper," Nona invited.

But Lydie was obviously ill-at-ease. “I can’t, Nona. Mom doesn’t know where I am. I saw you coming back from Eva’s and I knew you’d be alone. I wanted to ask you to tell Jorgie I’d be at the dance on the *Princess* tonight. I haven’t seen him since—”

“I’ll not only tell him, Lydie,” Nona interrupted, “I’ll take him down with me if there’s no other way of doing it. It’s simply nonsense that you two have to be kept apart because of something that I’ve done.”

“I’ve told mother that—though I don’t see anything wrong with what you did. Besides, now that Quentin’s wife has come for him—”

“What has that to do with it?” Nona asked sharply.

“I didn’t mean it that way, Nona,” Lydie apologized. “I’m sorry—it’s all such a mess. If I had been in your place I’d never have given him up. I’d have made him marry me.”

Nona cleared her throat. “It wasn’t quite as simple as all that.”

“Well, anyhow—you know how sorry I am, Nona. The yacht is leaving tonight, I hear.”

“Tonight? I hadn’t heard about it,” Nona replied absently.

Lydie urged her once more to speak to Jorgen, then left. Nona stood and watched the girl go down the street, wondering just what she should say to her brother when he came in to supper. Jorgen had scarcely spoken to her since the morning of Hesper Thorpe’s visit in the garden. He had made one sarcastic comment on “the party” that Ivar had given for Quentin, since when he had been morose and almost unapproachable.

She went to the kitchen and started a fire in the range. If she gave herself enough to do there would be less time for thinking. Once, she glanced from the window and saw *The White Falcon* poised on the glassy Inlet. Tomorrow the boat would not be there. Eva had said so—and now Lydie. But that Quentin should be going too was unbelievable. He would have told her, surely—somehow—he would have sent her a message, at least. And yet, today she had seen Eunice buying a red tie for him to wear on the way back. She had heard that from Eunice’s own lips. It couldn’t be true!

Silas Darnell brought both Ivar and Timothy home with him for supper. For an hour or more then Nona was forced to listen while the tragedy of Ethan Ashe was turned this way and that, each contributing his own opinion of what had happened to him, all coming finally to a conclusion which Timothy had expressed when they sat down to the table. While they were

drinking their coffee, he reiterated it in his characteristically cautious fashion.

“There’s no doubt in my mind, at any rate, though I may be wrong. I always had a fancy for the poor old fool, and I’d be the last to blacken his memory. But it looks as if he set the fire to the lodge. I have my own idea about that warehouse fire. I don’t think he had anything to do with it. He always held a kind of spite against the lodge. It was the symbol of the Wingate grandeur, as he used to call it himself, and he held that to account for what happened to Marie. When the shoes were found, Ethan knew there was no more hope of Marie’s returning. He settled the account in his own way and no one will ever know exactly what happened after that. Whether he came to his end accidentally or deliberately doesn’t matter. The Cove will never be quite the same place to me—after today.”

“It may be a more comfortable place,” Jorgen spoke up. “The lodge was an affront to a lot of people we know.”

Timothy’s brows pulled together disapprovingly. “A lot of people we know, young fellow, wouldn’t be able to look at the Garden of Eden without trying to find the serpent. I have little time for such.”

“Quentin Wingate doesn’t seem to mind the loss so much,” Ivar observed. “I was talking to him this afternoon while we were looking for Ethan. He calls it poetic justice.”

Poetic justice! Nona looked unseeingly at her coffee cup. With the burning of the lodge had gone all her memories of ecstasy. She pressed her lips tightly together and said nothing.

“Well,” Silas remarked, “we seem to have guessed wrong when we picked Bart Leshner for the culprit. Unless there was some connection between him and Ethan.”

“I don’t think there was,” Timothy replied, “though there’s no telling, of course. What’s this I hear about one of his men prowling about the Wingate storehouse last night?”

Ivar averted his eyes from Nona. “Big Axel was in the storehouse and saw him come in. He grabbed him and threw him off the end of the dock. It looks to me as if Leshner is behind all this business, in spite of what Tim says. He wants to get Quentin out of the Cove, though I can’t see why there isn’t room for two plants here.”

“He has his reasons, no doubt,” Timothy said.

Silas Darnell looked sharply at his old friend. “What are you trying to hide, Tim? It seems to me you know more about Bart Lesher than you’re telling.”

Timothy looked whimsically into space. “A man can have his ideas, Silas—even when they’re wrong, eh? If I told you that Bart Lesher isn’t a fisherman and never was—and doesn’t care a tinker’s dam whether his plant works or not, you wouldn’t believe me, would you?”

“He seems to have done very well at it, nevertheless,” Silas declared.

The Major drained his cup and set it aside. “I’m talking too much for my own good,” he said and moved back from the table.

Ivar glanced at his watch. “Gosh, I’ve got to get going. I have to pack a bag and get down to the boat.” He looked at Nona as he stood up. “Will you come along now, Nona, or—”

“I’ll walk down after I’ve done the dishes,” she said.

Ivar said good-by to the others and was gone.

While Timothy and Silas sat in the living room and smoked, Jorgen began to help Nona clear the table.

“You don’t have to do this, Jorgie,” she said when they were in the kitchen together. “Why don’t you go down to the boat and dance with Lydie? There’s a fog coming up—so there’ll most likely be quite a crowd there tonight.”

Jorgen went back to the table without speaking and returned a moment later with a stack of cups and saucers. He halted beside the sink, the dishes still in his hands. “Since when have you begun to take an interest in Lydie and me?” he demanded.

Nona raised her eyes desolately toward him and thought that all she had gained from the experience of the past several days was the enmity of her favorite brother. “Jorgie! Will you please go down to the dance tonight? Lydie is expecting you.”

“How do you know?”

“I was talking with her today.”

He turned to set the dishes in the sink and as ill-timed bad luck would have it, a cup slipped from the top of the pile and crashed to pieces on the floor. It took no more than that. Nona sat down on a chair and buried her face in her hands.

“Nona!” Jorgen stood awkward and flushing in front of her. “What’s the matter, for Pete’s sake!”

“Go on, you damned fool!” she stammered. “Don’t stand here till the boat leaves!”

Jorgen rumbled the back of his blond head. “Aw, hell!” he said and went back into the living room.

Nona gazed vacantly after him.

With sundown an ochre-colored fog had settled on the Inlet and now that it was dark a fine rain seemed to wreathe and hover, never quite falling. Nona and Ivar, approaching the *Princess*, saw her as if she were floating in a nimbus, her strong lights indistinguishably washed one into the other. The music from the band on the sheltered deck flowed strangely toward them as though the sound had taken on the opacity of the night. Now, drawing nearer, they could see the close, blurred figures swaying to the rhythm of a slow waltz, the melody pouring out and setting into dreamful motion the myriad wraiths of the fog. Nona caught her breath and stood still.

Music—and Lydie dancing with Jorgen. Ivar would bring Julie back with him—she knew that as well as she knew her own name—and they would dance together to the music of the ship’s band. Somewhere, too, Quentin would dance with Eunice—she knew that now though she had refused to admit it to herself until today. Life was beginning all over again. For others.

She laid her hand on Ivar’s arm as they went together up the gangplank. Her lips tightened as she smiled up at him with a quick, almost angry decision. “Let’s dance, Ivar!”

He was perplexed and uneasy as he set his suitcase aside and led her out upon the deck. There were some who almost stopped dancing to stare in surprise at them as they moved through pools of light and shadow. But she seemed unconscious of them, Ivar thought with relief. Her eyes, when the light caught them, were wide and brilliant, her lips parted with a new eagerness. How could he guess that her mood was wilful, determined?

It was while they paused beside the deck rail during an intermission that Jorgen and Lydie came up to them. Jorgen’s manner was unnaturally tense and furtive. He glanced hastily about him before he spoke to them in a low tone.

“I’ve just overheard something—behind the life-boats on the other side of the deck, there. Leshner’s men are going to grab that tugboat of Quentin Wingate’s tonight. You don’t happen to know where he is, do you?” He looked from Ivar to Nona.

Color smarted in Nona’s cheeks. “How should I know where he is?”

“He’s probably on the yacht,” Ivar suggested. “They’re going out tonight.”

Jorgen gave Nona a curious stare, half indignation, half bewilderment, then caught Lydie’s arm. “Come on—I’ve got to see Heck Malcolm.”

He was gone, taking Lydie with him, and Nona’s eyes, distraught and dark, met Ivar’s. Her lips moved, but her words were almost inaudible. She raised herself, clinging to his arms, and kissed him quickly.

“Good-by, Ivar—and good luck!” she said breathlessly.

“Good luck, kid!” he replied. “If I had time, I’d go with you.”

The window of the tugboat’s cabin was a rectangle of light. Nona flung the door wide. Quentin Wingate confronted her as though he had heard someone approaching and had hurried to open the door. In the cabin behind him were a small, sharp-eyed old lady swathed in a Paisley shawl, and Eunice, wearing an ermine-collared, black velvet evening wrap.

For an instant only, Nona’s eyes swept over the two women with wooden indifference, then returned, direct and blue, to meet Quentin’s.

Her voice came, coldly staccato. “They told me—over at the yacht—that you were here.”

His fingers closed about her arm; he seemed to be shaking her, she thought, but the sensation came from far away. “What’s the matter, Nona?”

As he drew her in from the doorway, the small lighted space with its two women spun briefly about her. Then her lips shaped a firm smile, her head came up quickly. Drops of rain still glistened on her loose, blown hair.

“Bart Leshner and his men are on their way to take the boat,” she said deliberately.

Suddenly, everything seemed to be telescoped down to a very fine point. The very fine point was the steely light in Quentin’s eyes as he gripped her

arms. "I've been waiting for them since yesterday," he told her. "Thanks for the warning."

He swung about toward the two women. "Aunt Laura—Eunice—this is Nona Darnell. You'd better get out of the way before any trouble starts. Nona will take you across to the yacht."

Aunt Laura got up excitedly from the bench on which she had been sitting. "If there's going to be a fight, I'm going to stay where I am," she declared stoutly, her eyes flashing. "I haven't seen a good fight in forty years!"

"There's no time for talk, Aunt Laura!" Quentin said with force.

"I'm not talking," the old woman snapped. "I'm staying!"

Quentin turned to Nona. "Will you look after them, then?" He pointed to the corner of the room. "In that cabinet over the wash-bowl you'll find something to protect you if you need it. My men are waiting for me in the bunkhouse."

"Where are you going?" Eunice cried shrilly as he strode to the door. But the door had slammed shut behind him.

Nona turned the key in the lock, then walked calmly forward, her hands clenched in the pockets of her reefer. She looked down at the tiny, gray-haired old woman who stood plucking agitatedly at the fringe of her shawl. She could not bring herself to look at Eunice. Something was smoldering within her now that would not, for the moment at least, bear that test.

"You want to stay here?" she asked.

"I'm *going* to stay!" Aunt Laura shook a bony finger at her. "And you're not going to put me out, young lady."

Nona laughed, not harshly. There was a sparkle in the fierce old woman's eyes that she could not help liking. "You can look from the window, then," she said, and found herself facing Eunice at last.

"Aunt Laura!" Eunice wailed, her eyes terrified. "Call him back!"

"It's too late for that," Nona said as a shout came from the wharf.

"Let him fight!" Aunt Laura cried as she rushed to the window. "Oh, my Lord—look, Eunice!"

But Eunice quailed back as a blare of voices reached them from outside. "They may kill him! Why didn't he take the gun with him?"

“We don’t use guns in the Cove,” Nona explained laconically, “unless we want to kill something.”

And while Eunice, trembling and resentful, watched her, Nona walked to the cabinet above the wash-bowl, opened it and took carefully into her strong brown hands the shining weapon she found there. When she turned around again and saw Eunice collapse on the bunk against the wall, she laughed softly. Had she looked at Aunt Laura she might have seen a certain lively smile on that sharply lined face.

From the dock alongside the tug, the gathering rumble of voices mounted to a menacing roar. Nona blew out the lamp and took her place beside the open window. Through the fitful rain the light from the warehouse opposite threw a pale radiance over the pier.

“What are you going to do?” Eunice gasped from the bunk.

But Nona made no reply. Beside her, Aunt Laura was talking to herself, or so it seemed. “That was the Boxer rebellion—my husband was a missionary. When we escaped into the mountains we met bandits— Oh, Lord save us, look at that big fellow!”

“That’s Alaska Axel, one of Quentin’s men,” Nona told her.

The old woman was breathless for a moment, her eyes staring from her head. “We met bandits—and I found I could shoot straight in a pinch, too, though—”

Eunice was behind them now. “I’ll never forgive him for this. A vulgar brawl—”

“You’ll make a fine fisherman’s wife!” Aunt Laura shrilled above the din. “My heavens, did you ever see—”

Eunice moaned. “It’s just another of his childish gestures. Fisherman—bah! He’ll brag about this all the way back to town—and for a year after we get home!”

“Let him brag!” Aunt Laura cried incoherently. “Look—they’re coming this way! That fellow—what’s your name, young lady?”

“Nona Darnell.”

“See that paunchy brute with the club? He looks to me like the villain in the piece, eh?”

Nona, getting a glimpse of Bart Leshner, forgot the unbelievable little person at her shoulder. She took a firmer grip of the weapon in her hand. But

now the palely white night outside had suddenly become a violence of grotesque, dark, clashing forms, a clamor of inseparable curses. It was impossible to tell Quentin's men from Lesh's.

In the cabin behind her she heard Eunice sobbing. Aunt Laura was evidently unaware of her grand-niece's distress. The uproar on the dock had risen deafeningly now. As the men, milling more and more thickly, surged toward the boat, Nona began to fear for Quentin. Lesh's crowd was forcing his men to the dock's edge. Quentin might be nothing to her now, but Lesh must not win.

In spite of herself she was growing cold at the spectacle of a mass of men cursing, bellowing, striving insanely, like a huge blurred knot pulled this way and that—near and yet remote as a nightmare in the sliding angle of the rain. Once or twice she had discerned the huge form of Axel Lindstrom flailing about him as he flung himself against the advancing body of Lesh's crew. She strained forward and saw Quentin at the same moment that Aunt Laura must have seen him. The old woman struck her palms together in unleashed excitement.

"Lord, Lord!" she cried. "Hit him—come on, Eunice and look at this! Kill the brute, Quentin!"

A smothered sound that was unrecognizable as either fright or rage came from Eunice, huddled on the bunk, but Aunt Laura continued to peer avidly out of the window.

Something quite unexpected, Nona saw, was happening out there on the dock. There was a curious, amazed backsway of Lesh's men, while their prodigious cursing seemed to stop in their throats. Suddenly across the din of the struggle Jorgen's voice rang out—Nona could have sworn it was Jorgen's. Then, as the mob lurched back from the edge of the dock, she knew what had occurred. Led by Jorgen, a dozen or more of the young men from the Cove had crossed the Inlet and were clambering upon the dock, hurtling themselves recklessly into the struggle on the weaker side. The promise of a good fight had been all that was necessary to rouse their blood. There would always be a fresh leaf in her spirit, she knew now, that would tremble to the lawless and natural impulse that was, under everything, the true spirit of Heartbreak Cove. The next moment she laughed aloud and threw her arm about the thin shoulders of the little woman who was bobbing up and down at her side.

"They're driving them back—the boys from the Cove!" she cried.

It was just at that moment that she saw Bart Leshar go crashing backward, his heavy boots out-flung, his head plunging downward too swiftly for the eye to follow against the low timber that edged the dock. There was a forward surge of men toward him as he rolled heavily sidewise and fell into the darkness. A cry of alarm arose, the fighting ceased, and silence followed. Nona straightened herself away from the window. Something had happened out there—something for which no one would ever get the blame, or the credit.

Aunt Laura was crying out, whether in shocking glee or shocked consternation Nona did not know, did not care. She walked back to the lamp and lighted it. Eunice was standing haughtily in the middle of the floor, her velvet wrap wound about her, her eyes flaming.

“This is just a little too much,” she announced with an imperious toss of her head.

“You little fool!” Aunt Laura exclaimed. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. You have a man out there, even if—”

“Don’t speak to me! I never want to see him again!”

The little old woman smiled shrewdly at Nona. “She’ll get over that, if she has any sense. Come, my lamb,” she said to Eunice, “we’ll go out and get him.”

Nona went directly to the cabinet above the wash-bowl, replaced the revolver, and then without a glance at either of the women took three or four long strides to the door, unlocked it, and was gone.

On the deck she did not pause to glance at the pier. She slipped down the ladder to where her own skiff was tied and a moment later she was rowing swiftly across the Inlet to the opposite shore.

About the tables in the taproom of the Dragon’s Eye, the young men sat in grave recapitulation of the night’s events. But it was around the stove in Karl Bjork’s store that the master spirits of the Cove gathered in solemn conclave. Earlier in the evening, one of Quentin Wingate’s men had come in and posted a notice just inside the doorway. There the notice hung now, clear in black and white, inviting all who had claims against the estate of Edmund Wingate to submit such claims within thirty days.

Timothy Entwhistle had just come in. The men about the stove were listening to him now as he spoke slowly, judiciously.

“An ugly thing has happened among us tonight—a man has lost his life through his own perfidy. But perhaps if we could know the whole truth, his going was not as ugly as it might have been.”

Fred Malcolm impatiently rubbed the end of his nose. “Do you know any more than the rest of us, Major?” he asked.

“There’s a great deal that happens in the Cove, Fred, that leaves us much to guess at. I have had my own opinion about Bart Leshar for some time. I’m not going to force it on anybody else, though I don’t mind giving you a hint of what’s in my mind. Not long ago I was loafing up the coast after a China boat had been sighted a mile or so off the Reef. Bart Leshar’s launch went out there—and for no good reason that I could think of at the time or since. It was no coincidence, either—I happen to know that he has gone out there more than once, under like conditions. You’ve heard enough about the traffic between the Orient and somewhere along this coast. Narcotics have been dropped off and picked up and cached away and delivered on the mainland when it happens to be convenient. I don’t have to tell you what my opinion is. And I don’t have to tell you why I think Bart Leshar wanted to keep Wingate out of the way. Have any of you noticed Bart Leshar visiting the Wingate Island before Quentin came back? Well, I’ve seen it. But no one has seen him over there since Quentin began living in the house. You can form your own opinions, but I have mine. If Leshar had lived—but that’s no matter. If he had lived, he might have fared worse—and I’m not one to wish disaster on anyone. May his bones rest in peace!”

“Peace!” Lucius Crane spluttered. “Is there anyone here thinks he deserves it?”

His rheumy eyes glared about him for corroboration, but the others were too dumfounded to speak.

“He would ‘a’ cheated us out o’ what was comin’ to us, if he’d ‘a’ had his way,” Fred Malcolm said at last.

“What do you mean by that, Fred?” Timothy asked.

Fred shook an eloquent finger in the direction of the sign beside the door. “Didn’t you see that, then?”

Timothy stepped over and glanced at the paper tacked on the wall. His smile was gentle as he turned away and faced his little audience. “I’ve known about it, of course,” he said, and fondled the bowl of his pipe. “You see, it’s just possible that Quentin Wingate has come back where he belongs, after all. The Spaniards may never dance in the moonlight again, now that

Ethan Ashe is gone. We may never know what secrets Marie took with her into the sea. And the White Reef may stand against the winds for an eternity. But there's a mystery greater than any of these. It's the way a man can never be shaken from the purpose that was written alongside his name when he came into the world."

For some reason everybody had fallen silent and sat gazing straight ahead. And on the roof of Bjork's store the rain thrummed rhythmically and indifferently as time.

Before her the Inlet streamed under darkness to the outer edge of the sea. Nona pulled her reefer more tightly about her as she glanced back at the light in the Darnell window. Her father was there alone, too sensitive to come out and urge her to return indoors from the rain and her own solitude.

Running, invisible water chuckled hollowly against the shore rocks, and nearer the slow rain beat its meaningless sadness upon driftwood and sand and stones. She drew her knees up close to her chin, wound her arms about her legs and stared across the channel to the constellation of lights which was *The White Falcon*.

When Quentin, without speaking her name, came and seated himself beside her, she did not at first turn her head. Steadily she told herself that she knew he would come to her there.

"Your father told me where to find you, Nona," he said simply. "You were expecting me, weren't you?"

She faced him. His coat gave off a tang of salt air and tar and ship's ropes and fog.

"Yes." Her voice was low and even. "I *had* to expect you. I could never have lived otherwise."

His arm came about her shoulder with sudden hard urgency. She heard his short, rough laugh.

"Look!" he said.

Nona lifted her eyes. The lights on the yacht were already moving slowly down the Inlet.

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 *The White Reef* by Martha Ostenso]