

# Day of Departure

By

LESLIE GORDON

BARNARD

*Illustrated by C. J. McCarthy*

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Grandfather's house was strangely quiet and composed. There was no voice in it to herald so auspicious a day. The windows were open, but no air stirred the curtains or draperies. Andrea, a sudden panic upon her, finished her packing and went downstairs. It seemed queer that there should be no apprehension, no sensitiveness in the place that had sheltered her so long. In the library the eyes of her father and mother—dim memories out of childhood—looked down on her from the panelled walls without reproach. Clocks ticked everywhere with normal pulse. Cook was singing over luncheon preparations. A lawn mower clicked across the grass at Davies', directly opposite. A butcher boy took a brown, smudgy parcel up the side drive to the Fenton house. It was all so ridiculously usual.

The telephone startled her.

"It's for you, Miss Andrea."

"Yes, Jane."

Jane seemed to notice nothing; she went off with a duster casually in her hand.

It was Paul, of course.

"Yes. Yes, dear. Oh, Paul, you haven't found Joe yet? I know it's not your fault—but hurry, hurry!"

Paul was to have closed the deal for the boat last night; for a further five dollars Joe would deliver it at Penville Locks. There was a rectory at Penville—such a dear place, embowered in plum blossoms just now. She and Paul had driven out last week and it was in promise then. All the way back she had clung to him, afraid of her happiness—and worrying, of course, a bit about grandfather. One couldn't help that since he and Paul had quarrelled. Now the house seemed suddenly too full of reproach, as if the telephone call had startled it. The clocks ticked faster. And one's heart. Andrea went upstairs to grandfather's room. Its masculinity was pronounced, with a smell of leather and of tobacco, though grandmother looked down from the wall—grandmother as a girl about one's own age. Curls and a sort of poke bonnet, and eyes eagerly crying out to life.

“He's been different,” thought Andrea. “He walks around sometimes as if he didn't see me. It's Paul, of course. I can't help it. I wish I didn't love them both so much.”

**D**own on Joe Docstader's wharf, Paul was thinking of Andrea's grandfather, too. An obdurate old big business man, Henry Stoddard. Had too much his own way in life, thought Paul. It had probably been a fatal mistake to approach him on personal matters there in the great office, with him seated at the huge, cleared desk, grunting out:

“Well, what is it, Paul? Busy morning, but—sit down, sit down. What've you and Andrea been up to now? Last time you came in, standing on one foot and then the other like a feverish stork, it was merely matrimony. You and she, no less, wanted to get married. What is it now? Not calling the deal off, are you?”

“No, sir.”

“Because now's the time to do it. I should be bored stiff in a divorce court, and afterward would probably shoot you, which, I take it, would mean further court proceedings.”

“It's just this, Mr. Stoddard. I—I appreciate more than I can tell you what you've done for me. You've kept me on here, on the publicity end, when others were let out. And you've offered us quarters with you when we get married. But—”

“Ah,” said Henry Stoddard heavily, “so that's it? I guess it had to come. Don't fancy bunking in with the old man, eh? Can't blame you for wanting a nest all your own. Have you got a house in mind?”

“It’s not—not a house, exactly.”

“Uh? Apartment?”

“No, sir.”

“Then what the deuce—?”

“It’s a boat.”

“A which?”

“A cabin cruiser, Mr. Stoddard. She’s tied up right now down at Joe Docstader’s. I can get her for a thousand; she’s worth three or four times that at normal values. No end roomy, bunks for four, Diesel engines, electric light, refrigeration, roomy cockpit big enough for wickerware to lounge in.”

“Are you trying to sell her to me?”

“No, but—”

“Then omit the details, please. Am I to understand that my granddaughter and her husband, when married, propose to live in some derelict tub by the waterside? Will you come to work in nautical costume?”

“But, Mr. Stoddard, we—you see. I’m resigning my position here. Andrea and I—well, we’ll be just cruising round here and there.”

“Oh, here and there! Of course. Forgive my stupidity. Is it permitted me to ask how, on this vagabond enterprise, you propose to live? I might point out that my granddaughter, while fragile in appearance, has the general attitude toward food of a starved newsboy.”

“I propose to write, sir.”

“Write what? Cheques—or letters home soliciting aid?”

“Articles,” said Paul crisply.

“You don’t mean anyone’s accepting—and paying—for them? Good lord! So the goose hangs high, eh? Only it’s a wild goose, and you propose to take Andrea chasing it with you.” His fingers beat a tattoo on the desk. “Well, why come to me?”

“We thought we ought to tell you.”

“Thank you so much,” said Henry Stoddard.

He rose and paced up and down, then brought up at a window that faced south. Beyond the roofs of buildings lay blue water. Such trees as the

commercial district had not squeezed to death were already green. Spring haze clouded the horizon. He stood grimly facing this prospect.

“I’m sorry,” said Paul at last, “that you feel this way about it. You’ve been no end good to us. But this isn’t a snap decision. I’ve seen so many men who’ve been caught for life, who were never able to get loose again—never. I’ve seen it in their faces and in their walk. They’re in a rut, and they can’t get out. The nearest they ever get to adventure is in books. Andrea agrees with me, sir. We’re going to take our chance. I’m sorry about the job, sir, but there’ll be dozens ready to snap it up.”

Paul was startled at the look on Henry Stoddard’s face as he turned from the window. He had expected opposition, but not anything so bleak and so—confusing—as this expression indicated.

“Get out,” shouted Henry Stoddard, “and take your adventures in idiocy with you. If you and Andrea have to eat chub and catfish and steal vegetables from the fields under cover of dusk, don’t blame me. You make me sick, the two of you. You make me wish . . .” His voice softened, then crisped again. “Make your own bed,” he said, “and then go lie in it. Tell Miss Jones to send Mr. Sandford in.”

**H**ere, on Joe Docstader’s wharf this morning, Paul remembered the interview again, every detail vivid. He’d never mentioned it to the old man again, but in turbulence of spirit put in his resignation, and went ahead, with Andrea, making plans.

Yesterday, sitting across from each other at *The Green Teapot*, they had faced the final act and decided that it must be done immediately, before, perhaps, one’s courage failed.

“And can’t you see,” cried Andrea, “what our doing it this way will mean to your work? Can’t you see the headlines? ‘Granddaughter of Prominent Magnate Runs Away with Young Writer—Happy Couple Embark on Adventure in Motorboat Living—Will Contribute to Leading Journals.’ Don’t you see?”

Paul said, quite readily, that he saw. He added that he thought she was going to make a wonderful wife for him. The world seemed to hang between them, suspended, leaving them breathless, as if it might fall and break to pieces before their eyes. He said they’d go right down and see Joe Docstader and close the deal. There was no use wasting any more time.

But Joe was not at home. Mrs. Docstader, shrieking maledictions at two of her offspring who threatened to drown themselves in the washtub, put a red, harassed face around the door, and gave it as her opinion that Joe would be back sure in the morning, and if he didn't so much the worse for him. Mrs. Docstader stood watching them as they went off arm-in-arm. After a time she slammed the door very hard.

But this morning there was still no sign of Joe. Disconsolate, impatient, Paul awaited his arrival. The cheque for \$1,000 was ready in his pocket. That would leave, of his savings, \$100 in cash. By the time it was gone there would be other articles sold. They'd make out. Excitement grew in him, and the cause of it all lay tied to the wharf. He went over again to look at the boat.

There was enough stir to the harbor waters to move her gently. Her lines—stubby bow, generous beam—would have shocked anyone demanding speed and class, but to a loving eye she was not devoid of a beauty of her own. Hers was the beauty of honest building, of seaworthiness, of a keel familiar with the hiss of waves in fair weather and foul. Paul's heart went out of him again at sight of her. He saw her—himself and Andrea snugly aboard—nosing into unknown waters, free as the air to come and go at will, facing an adventure in the simple life. A freighter, tug-escorted, went by. On a barge in midstream a woman was hanging out washing, and two sun-browned children were playing with a dog on the after part. Gulls circled above. Their wings, extended in flight, seemed motionless; they dropped, shrilling greedily, when a dirty-coated steward on the freighter tossed scraps overboard.

A youngster, so freckled his eyes seemed lost, appeared on the wharf. Paul recognized him as Docstader's eldest.

“Me mudder says me fodder'll be home in an hour. He just telephoned her.”

Paul's face brightened.

“Tell him to wait here.” he said. “I'll be back, likely, though, before he gets here. And here's a dime for you.”

He went on up the market slip, crossed the cobbles and headed uptown. There were things one could do in an hour that would save time later.

By Cotton's drugstore, where one turned into Main Street. Paul ran into a man, apologized, then saw that it was Herb Dillon who had occupied a desk next him before his resignation.

“Hullo, Paul,” said Dillon. “Wise guy, aren’t you? Got out before the bust-up. Sandford’s a little ray of sunshine goin’ round telling the gang their jobs are safe enough, but personally I’m doing a bit of mental budgeting with the shekels I’ve got stored up in the hive. Anyway, I’ve a notion to throw my job in their teeth by way of protest. Look here, you don’t say you haven’t heard? Why, it’s all over town. Come on down street and have some coffee, and I’ll give you an earful.”

Dillon poured out the liquid with a hand not quite steady. He was tremendously excited.

“I’ve got it from Len Sandford himself,” said Herb Dillon. “He was in the board room, of course, all the time, taking notes. He said old Henry was magnificent. Here were all the bigwigs of finance sitting round the board room like a jury. Len was over in one corner, watching. He said it was like a play, only better. ‘Either you agree,’ says old Etherington—you know the pot-bellied old gent?—‘either you agree,’ he says, ‘or we have no alternative. Don’t be a condemned fool, Stoddard,’ he says. ‘The proposition’s going through. You can’t stop it any more than you can stop the tides. You might as well step aboard and benefit by it.’

“Old Henry looked pretty grey about the gills, Len said, but he just shook his head. ‘Well,’ says Etherington, ‘I guess those demand notes of yours we hold come due at once, then.’ Len says old Henry looked them all over, one by one, then he leans forward and says, very quiet: ‘Very well, gentlemen.’ Then his voice gets deeper. ‘It’s men like you,’ he tells them, ‘that’ve brought us where we are today. It’s men like you who breed revolution and all manner of distress. Big business, eh? Well, I’ve done big business most of my life. But I’ve done it clean. I’ve done it with a thought of the other fellow. I’ve never taken a fellow by the throat when he was down, and shaken the last coins from him. And I don’t propose to be a party to it now.’

“Len says Henry’s hand was shaking as he opened a drawer and hauled out a memorandum and a chequebook. ‘Well, gentlemen,’ he says, ‘I’ve sold pretty well every security I own to keep concerns going that would mean putting men out of work if they smashed. I’ve mortgaged my house to the hilt. What I’ve got left realizable is in that chequebook. But I’ve seen this coming. I’m ready for it. How much do I owe you altogether, gentlemen?’ he asks.

“Len said they were kind of quiet then, and a little fellow with a squeaky voice gives the figures. ‘We agree on one point,’ says Henry, ‘That’s what I



make it.' So he snaps out his fountain pen and begins to write. He puts his signature to it, tears out the cheque and chucks it over to 'em. 'We're quits!' he says. 'I'm through. You'll find Mr. Sandford here has all details in hand.' Then he looked round the board room once, stalked out, put on his hat and coat, and went home."

Joe Dillon produced a large handkerchief with red dots, and blew his nose. Paul sat silent. His voice, when it came at last, seemed not his own.

"Do you mean he's flat?"

"Pancake flat, Len says. Len ought to know. He says it was worth bartering away ten years of life to see the directors looking at one another after Henry got himself out from among them. Have another cup?"

"No, thanks," said Paul hastily. "I've got to be getting along."

He went out. The sun lay lazily on the pavements. For the moment no motors were in sight, but coming by were the two Miss Moscombes, who lived next to the Stoddard place and still clung to the customs of an older day. They were driving now in their victoria, with a beautifully matched team, and they bowed gently to Paul. Paul removed his hat and stood looking after them. It seemed as if, for that instant, time had been put back and he was a contemporary of Henry Stoddard in the eager days of the latter's youth.

**A**ndrea let him in.

"I knew you'd come," she said. "I've been watching from the window." She tried, with her eyes, to atone for the whiteness of her face. She knew now she had been too secure in her world. She had to go on talking. "You've heard, of course? Is it true? I can't get much out of granddad. But the servants all have it. He told me to tell them they'd be looked after."

"Where is he?"

"In the library, at his desk. He's going through some papers or something."

Paul looked at her. He said slowly:

"I want to tell it to you just as I got it. It came right from Len Sandford. He was there."

There was an alcove in the hall—built-in seats of white-enamelled wood, green ferns and a pot of saffron tulips. Andrea sat fingering a tulip that bent low on its transparent stem. She had grown them, tardily, from bulbs, indoors here. She thought suddenly: “That’s like me. I’ve always had everything done for me; I’ve never faced anything much before.” She remembered how Paul had teased her once when she had called herself a modern. “You,” he laughed, “you a modern? Oh, sure; about as modern as Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.” She had cried out, “Paul, you’re a perfect beast,” and he had sat up, silly as you please, like an animal begging, saying in a ridiculous voice, “Then you could find a place on your farm for me, couldn’t you, Rebecca?” Dear Paul. She watched him now, then forgot him in the story he was telling. She saw, instead, grandfather facing the financial bigwigs and throwing down before them his declaration of independence.

“Andrea,” said Paul, “I guess our own deal’s off.”

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak. She watched him go to the library door. He knocked and entered.

“Oh,” said Henry Stoddard, “so it’s you, Paul?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Anything I can do for you?”

Paul fidgetted. He said impulsively:

“I hope you won’t mind what I have to say, sir. I hope you’ll take it the way it’s meant.”

“Humph. The latest bulletin on vagabondage?”

“We’re not going—just now, anyway, sir.”

“Oh?”

“It’s this,” said Paul. “I happen to have a little in the bank. A mere drop in the bucket, of course, but if you’d let me turn it over to you temporarily I’d feel most awfully honored, sir.”

He dared not look toward old Henry. It was like standing on the rim of a volcano. He fumbled in his pocket, and drew out a cheque and proffered it.

Henry Stoddard took it and held it for a moment.

“Pay to Joseph Docstader,” he read aloud, “one thousand dollars.”

Paul flushed.

“S-sorry,” he stammered. “I—this other is the one I meant to give you.”

Henry Stoddard accepted the exchange silently; then looked from the new cheque to Paul, and back again to the blue slip in his hand.

“Thank you, Paul,” he said. “It’s very good of you. I could use a thousand dollars to good purpose just now.” He folded it and placed it in his pocket.

Turning to go, Paul hesitated.

“I think I ought to tell you,” he said, “that Andrea and I had planned to get married and go off. It happened to be today that we chose for making the break. I’m sorry. It doesn’t seem quite sporting now—behind your back that way.”

Henry Stoddard nodded.

“It has been done before,” he said. “But there’s something in what you say. May I ask where, and at what time, this event was to take place?”

“The Penville rectory, sir. Five o’clock.”

“All arrangements made?”

“Yes, sir.”

Walking over to the window. Stoddard stood for a moment in the full flood of noon sunlight.

“It seems a nice day for a wedding,” he said briefly. “I’ll arrange to have the car take you over. If I’m not able to get there in time to sign the book myself, go right ahead.”

“But—”

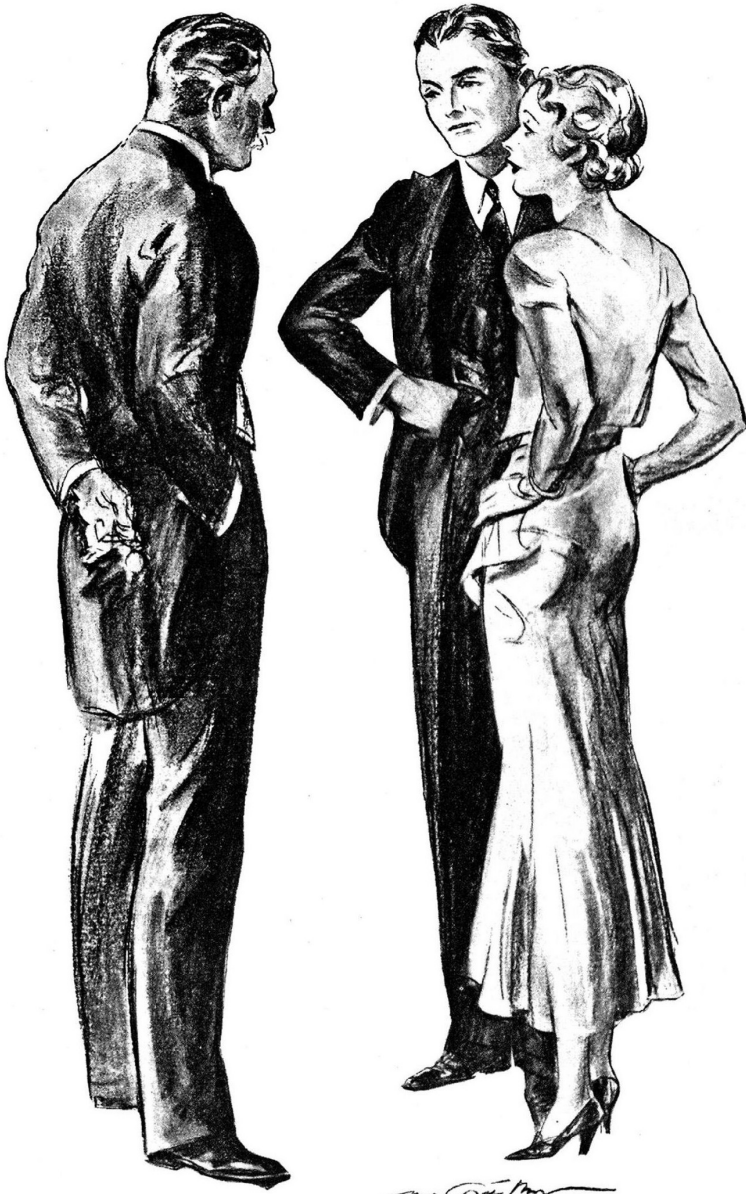
“Paul,” said the old man grimly, “this has been a rather unusual day for me. It’s not been an altogether easy day. I stood for a good deal of bullying this morning, and I’m fed up with it. Do you propose to bully me now—or will you do as I say?”

“That’s up to Andrea, too.”

“Of course. Go and talk to her.”

Andrea took it well. She stood with her back to the tulips and the open window, and the sound of the Moscombe carriage homeward bound with a scrunch of gravel, and said it was great. She said cook could manage a

dinner of sorts, with a bang-up cake and candles, and after Morton had driven them over and back they could celebrate that way.



"What? No honeymoon?" cried old Henry.

“What? No honeymoon?” cried old Henry. “Nonsense. Haven’t you any cash left, son?”

“A hundred or so.”

“Blow it,” said Henry Stoddard. “You take my advice and go to it. I’ve seen people who put off their honeymoon and never got round to it. Make an adventure of it still, son. Take your duds along, and let Morton take you as far as a good hotel, if you fancy that. If I can join you at Penville in time for the event I will; if not, go ahead and God bless you. I’m going out now. There are some things I’ve got to see about.”

They watched him go, brisk still as if his world, too, had not crashed about his ears.

“Paul,” said Andrea. “I’ll never forget that you stood by him.”

“Say, what do you think I am?”

“A dear.”

“That’s your guess.”

He held her in his arms. A small, half-smothered voice came up to him.

“Paul.”

“Well?”

“Do you think we’ll ever have a b-boat and go c-cruising?”

“Sure we will, kid.”

“It isn’t that I won’t be happy with you in a h-hotel room. You know that. It’s only . . .”

“I know,” he said.

They stood for a moment listening to the deep-throated call of a freighter down in the harbor, and the answering shrillness of a tug. The noon whistles, as if in answer to a challenge from the waterside, penetrated the air with imperious voices.

**A**ndrea looked a little frightened when the ceremony was over, the words solemnly said, the vows taken. They went out under an arch of plum blossoms.

“But where’s Morton gone with the car?” said Paul.

Beyond the gate was the road, and beyond the road a line of willows and then the canal, with Penville Lock not far away. Of Morton there was no sign. They stood for a moment, conscious only of the quiet water, the trees drowned in it, the sunlight slanting on green banks. They looked up and down the road. Two white hens came out of the rectory gate and investigated the road with them, scratching on the muddy margin for food. Plum blossoms fell on them like fragrant confetti when a wind stirred. The willows rustled gently; the drowned trees blurred.

“What are we to do?” cried Andrea. “Paul, we . . .” Her voice died away. Paul had caught tight hold of her arm. Something was moving whitely behind the willows. They made out the stubby nose of a boat and, seated atop the bow, grinning at them, Joe Docstader’s freckled-faced boy. Joe put his own head out of the cockpit and hailed them.

“Go to the wharf!” he shouted.



Andrea started him running with her.

Paul stood nonplussed. It was Andrea who caught his hand and started him running with her. The hens scattered before them with agitated cluckings. Dust covered Andrea's newest shoes. The stubby nose of the boat bumped gently against the wharf; Joe threw a rope. Aft, in the cockpit,

familiar wicker chairs stood invitingly. In one of the chairs, immaculate in white duck, smoking a fat cigar, was Henry Stoddard.

“Come aboard,” he called. “Sorry to be late for the ceremony. But Joe’ll tell you we had the deuce of a time smuggling that wicker stuff down from the sunroom, and getting the engines greased up and the fuel in. But she’s working like a charm. You’ll find your bags stowed away below. A roomy old tub, all right.”

Paul was white as a sheet.

“I don’t quite get the idea, sir.”

“Wedding gift, son,” said Henry Stoddard. “Had to borrow a thousand from a lad I know, but here she is. Tut, don’t stammer. I know what I’m about. Not quite in my dotage yet. Don’t thank me until you hear the conditions. D’ye suppose you youngsters could stand a third member of the crew for a while—after you’ve honeymooned a bit? By the time I do a bit of salvaging I’ll be able to chip in my share at least. And at the worst, Paul, there’ll always be chub or catfish overside.” He leaned forward, ashing his cigar. “Paul, you never knew, did you, how sick with envy you made me the day you sprung this on me? I’ve been wanting all my life to go vagabonding, but I hadn’t the courage to cut the painter. Too rich and busy to be able to afford the simple life. Well, what about it? Could you stand me for a while if I joined up in two or three weeks?”

Paul shot a glance at Andrea; a quick understanding flashed between them.

“It’s this way, sir,” said Paul eagerly. “Can’t you come along now? If you can stick a couple of spoony kids, we’d like awfully well to have the crew intact from the start.”

Henry Stoddard almost jerked out of his chair.

“You mean that?” he said gruffly. “It’s a proposition you’re taking on.”

Paul grinned.

“We’ll risk it.”

“All right,” said old Henry. “The crew’s signed on. Now shift me if you can.” He sank back luxuriously in his wicker chair. “Where’s Joe?” he said. “Oh, Joe; you and the kid go and find Morton down the road where I told him to wait. He’ll tote you home. And tell him, Joe, if anybody wants anything I’ll write my address when I get round to it. Anything you want to ask Joe about the engines, Paul?”



“No, sir. I’ve been over them till I know ’em backward.”

“Good. Well, suppose you climb into old duds—you’ll find some below—and get us under way. We’ll head up and lie overnight in Chennel’s Reach.” He saw Paul’s quick amused glance at Andrea. “Got you,” chuckled old Henry. “Too used to giving orders and managin’ things, I guess. I’ll tame gradually.”

He settled down in the chair again. Opposite him, looking a little dazed still, was Andrea. Joe and his freckled son went ashore. Paul cast off.

“Andrea,” said old Henry. “Here’s my kodak. I brought it along to take a snap of you two, but there’s lots of time for that. You might, while I feel like it, just take one or two of me sitting here, will you?” He chuckled again, but when he spoke it was quite soberly. “I’ve got a notion to send one each to my former colleagues,” he said. “I’d kind of like to let ’em know their old president has just begun to live.”

The engines sounded now like the pulse of a strong heart. The bow began to cleave the waters upstream. A scent of orchards came to them; a girl driving cattle home stopped to wave as they went by, and the clear barking of her collie reached their ears. Gradually, behind them, the smoke of the town became only a smudge, scarcely perceptible against the lessening blue. Andrea looked at Paul, his face eager as he steered the boat, at her grandfather drowsing over his cigar in the chair, at the willows bending low to lay green beauty in the water.

“I have never been so happy in my life,” she thought. “I have never been so really happy in my life.”—*The End.*

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

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[The end of *Day of Departure* by Leslie Gordon Barnard]