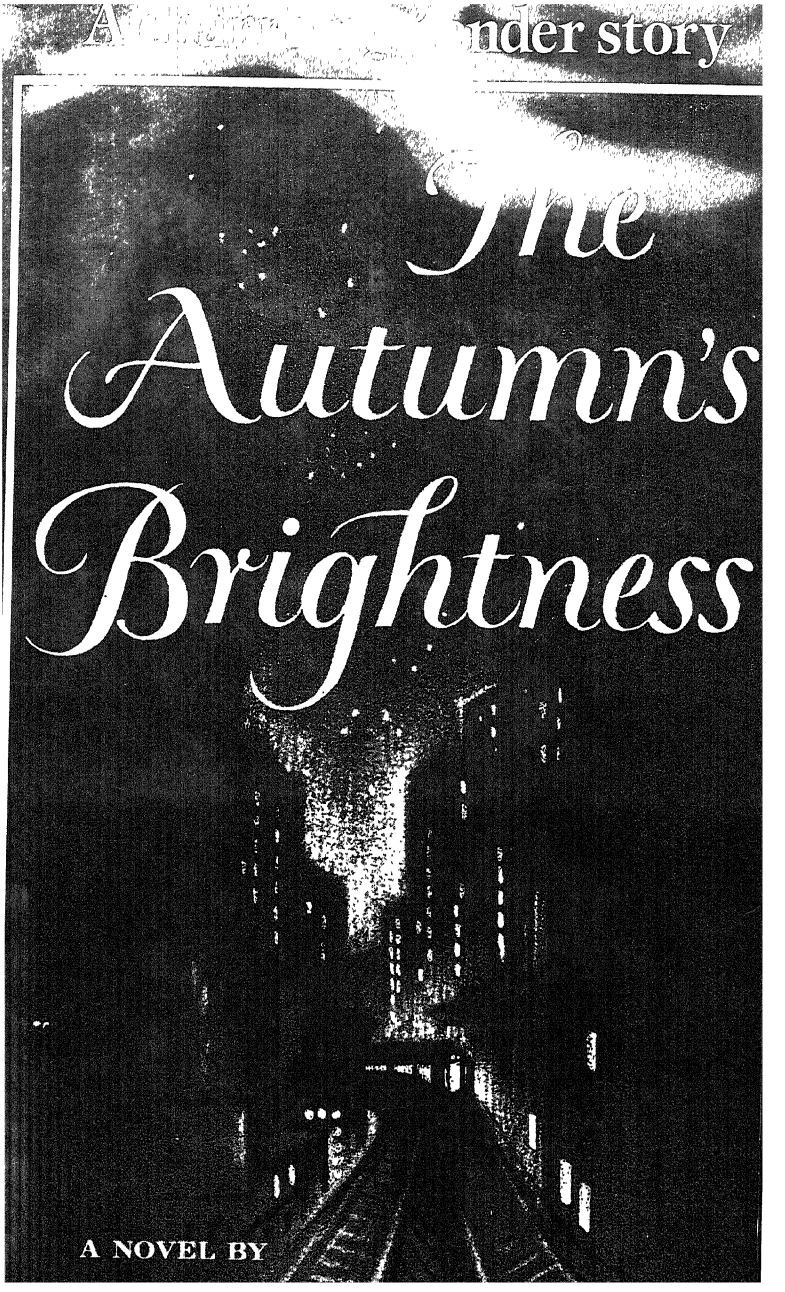
nder story
The
Autumn's
Brightness
A NOVEL BY

Her visit to New York was supposed to be a special treat for Dilly. At least her sophisticated New York cousin Elmira planned it that way. But for Dilly, a widow of 52, all the nice parties couldn't make up for the fact that she was homesick for Kendal, Rhode Island, with its Quaker meetings and its community projects.

She was about to go home when she met Durand, a gentle yet persuasive man. He called first on business, but he came back to give Dilly a most important gift — a view of the city through the eyes of an imaginative guide. A new world opened to Dilly, for Durand's presence lent enchantment to every incident: a rumbling, wonderful ride on the Third Avenue El; Roman punch at the 14th Street automat; Central Park Zoo on a frosty December afternoon.

Yet, the ways of Dilly's former life argued against her continuing her friendship with Durand, and she returned home convinced that she was past the age for romance. She couldn't forget, however, the man who sang her a nursery rhyme, shared penny chocolate bars with her and taught her to feel excitement and the delight which young hearts take in ordinary wonders.

In these days it is an event to come across a book as refreshing, as bright and mature, as free from easy sophistication as *The Autumn's Brightness*. Here is a charming, tender novel by a deft writer with a deep understanding of human nature.

FICTION

Newman, Daisy

The Autumn's Brightness

By Daisy Newman

Now That April's There

Diligence in Love

The Autumn's Brightness
(Published in England under
the title *Dilly*)

DAISY NEWMAN

The Autumn's Brightness

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For
DICK AND *POLLY*

Now that the Third Avenue Elevated is being laid off bit by bit, its run curtailed, its schedule cut, there hardly seems any necessity to disclaim living counterparts for Dilly and Durand. Though the structure of the El is still there and its six-car trains operate with the faithfulness of the aging servant, though the crimson windowpanes and potbellied stoves still grace the waiting rooms, the El is none the less slipping into the unreality of yesterday. Dilly and Durand travel in that unreality. Indeed, of all the characters, only Henderson aspires to being a likeness. His prototype, compounded of many strains, is everywhere.

Yet, in one respect, even Dilly and Durand are drawn from life. They live in the sensibility of any who may have discovered tender companionship in an unlikely place, at an unlikely time, or who may have known supreme excitement in dividing—with the proper person—a pennyworth of chocolate.

D. N.

Hamden, Connecticut

The Autumn's brightness after latter rain.
—John Greenleaf Whittier

The Autumn's Brightness

*

September

CHAPTER 1

WE'LL HAVE *a gay fling,* Elmira had written in that girlish style of hers, and to Dilly, back in Kendal, her cousin's invitation had sounded full of promise. She'd been wanting something.

She didn't really know what she'd been wanting, what she hoped to find in New York, for she had never found it anywhere. To catch, perhaps, some reflection of the color and excitement in other people's lives . . . As if, by rubbing her own against theirs, she could give hers new luster . . .

But it hasn't made me shine, Dilly told herself ruefully, now that the visit was half over. Even with all the people I've met, the parties and plays I've been to, all the rushing around—

No, the jangling brilliance of her cousin's world only made Dilly homesick.

Alone in the apartment, waiting for Elmira to come back from the hairdresser's, she stood at the window looking at the wall of the building next door. One couldn't see the sky here unless one fell out.

It made little difference, for what Dilly really saw, standing at Elmira's window, was Kendal as it had looked the morning that she left—the river, gray-blue and golden, and the maples which bordered it aflame in the September sunshine.

She had almost lost her nerve that morning. Till then, she'd been looking forward to going, yet when she stood on the piazza watching Anne open the garage—little Anne, unbelievably old enough to drive her mother to the station, to go off to college—

Dilly had suddenly had this feeling. She lingered on the piazza, slowly closing the door, certain she'd forgotten something, clinging to the brass knob which all these years had secured her going out and her coming in. Finally, as Anne drew up, Dilly started down the stairs.

But, halfway, she was struck by a thought that made her stand still: all this she was leaving—it would never be the same.

One would think I was going to Europe, she had told herself mockingly. It's only New York, only two weeks.

And she had tried to laugh at her nervousness. Instead of laughter, terror filled Dilly's throat, for she knew nothing is ever quite the same again, not even home, once you leave it.

It'll never be the same, her heart cried, as Anne blew the horn. And Dilly, standing stock-still, decided to call the whole trip off.

Too late for emotion, the urgent toots insisted.

No. Let the train come in. Let it depart. Dilly wasn't going. Her mind was made up.

Her mind. But her feet, indifferent to her mind, bewitched by those silly toots, began to run. Like a character in a drama fulfilling a destiny, Dilly hurried to the car.

So she'd found herself in the train, kissed goodbye by Anne's lipstick; she'd found herself in Grand Central, greeted by Elmira's.

Funny, she reflected now, Diligence Fuller's daughter, eighteen, and Diligence Fuller's cousin, fifty-eight, use the same shade of red!

Incredible, how she could feel herself so *there* in Kendal, so very there, when she was actually here, in Elmira's modern living room on Sixty-sixth Street. ("Two doors from Park," Elmira would always throw in, when giving her address.)

Still staring at that wall next door, Dilly played with the idea of going home. Now—today—or if not, certainly tomorrow. It would be lonely there without Anne and Will, after they'd been home all summer, but Dilly had to get used to that anyhow, sooner or later.

Would Elmira let her leave before the time was up? Sweet,

generous, Elmira was also very determined and she'd set her mind on showing Dilly a good time.

"But I have tickets for the *theater*," Dilly could just hear her cousin exclaim. Or, "But the girls are *expecting* us for cocktails."

The sound of the telephone drew Dilly from the window.

I'll just have to stick it out another week, she thought, sighing.

She never liked answering the telephone in somebody else's house. It's different if you know people. But Elmira's friends—

This, however, turned out to be the doorman.

"Mr. Durand Smith's here to see Mrs. Bliss."

"Mrs. Bliss isn't home."

Dilly started back to the window. All this "service." She liked doing things for herself.

The telephone rang again. It was the same voice.

"You Mrs. Bliss's maid?"

"No. I'm her cousin, Mrs. Fuller. I'm staying with Mrs. Bliss."

"Excuse me, ma'am. I ought to've known, seeing you go in and out with Mrs. Bliss. This is Joe, the doorman. There's a Mr. Smith here to see Mrs. Bliss—"

"She isn't home."

"Yes, ma'am. That's what you said. And I told the gentleman, but he has a gift for her he'd like to deliver personally and I want to know should I let him come up."

Dilly stood in the foyer waiting for the chime.

So men called on Elmira! Men, in the middle of the morning. With gifts. She'd just assumed Elmira's friends were all women. One never guesses these things. At Elmira's age—

Don't be catty, Dilly told herself sternly. He's probably just one of poor Harry's old friends. Besides, why not?

That Mr. Smith must have changed his mind or he'd have been here by now. But when you live in a whole house yourself, you forget what a person has to go through to get up to one of these apartments. First, finding the elevator and then perhaps waiting. The day Dilly arrived, Elmira had rung three times and they'd stood there in the lobby, waiting and waiting. Glancing at the telltale hand over the gate of the elevator, Elmira had muttered:

"On the roof. Smoking, I suppose. The service in this house is something terrible." She'd stuck her finger in the bell till the elevator arrived.

In Kendal, one simply ran up the steps of the piazza, pushed open the door, and there one stood, in the hall. The familiar air of the house rushed forward in welcome: the cannel coal of the parlor grate and that damp-wool smell which seemed to linger since the days when the children's mittens were spread on the radiator. Not that the hall really smelled of mittens, after the airing and scrubbing and painting of all the years between. It was only in Dilly's memory that damp wool still greeted her.

It seemed as real as the low blanket chest by the stairs, in which they'd always kept their rubbers, and the stand where Willard's umbrella still waited, though he would never take it out again. To come home in the evening—step from the darkness of the piazza into the soft light of the lamp, to have the buff-and-white patterned walls reach out and enfold you . . .

The chime rang softly.

Dilly glanced at herself as she passed the mirror, laughing at the incongruity of her New England Quaker face reflected against Elmira's furniture.

I don't even *look* quite like me here, she thought with amusement, as she went to the door and opened it.

He stood there, this Mr. Smith, well groomed and dignified. As he took off his hat, what struck Dilly with such surprise that she almost giggled, because his mature appearance made it so unexpected, was the fact that he was towheaded, like a little boy.

"Mrs. Fuller?"

How did he know? Elmira must have told him. But Elmira had told Dilly nothing.

"May I trouble you to present this to Mrs. Bliss?" He seemed short of breath, a shade anxious beneath the friendly smile.

A nice man, Dilly decided. She was so glad for Elmira.

He held out a box neatly done up in white tissue tied with a cherry ribbon. As Dilly accepted the package, she saw at once

that no salesgirl had gift-wrapped it in the course of her day's work. Only a man could have achieved so lopsided a bow.

"Oh—" Dilly exclaimed.

It was certainly not a fitting response to his greeting. But the feel of the package in Dilly's hand suddenly brought back those birthdays when the most precious of all the gifts she received had been done up with the same touching clumsiness.

The man didn't seem taken aback by her exclamation. On the contrary, noting Dilly's appreciative glance at the package, he dispensed with preliminary remarks.

"I didn't like leaving it in the lobby," he confided, not at all like a stranger.

They might have been friends from way back.

"That doorman was obliging, I must say," he went on smiling. "But they are so forgetful. Not that they mean to be," he added quickly, speaking rather sharply now and fixing a reproachful eye on Dilly, as though she had made an accusation.

"Of course they don't mean—" Dilly agreed instantly. She hadn't for a second thought so.

"It's just," Mr. Smith broke in, no longer severe, "that they have too much on their minds."

"Oh," Dilly exclaimed a second time, for such a possibility about doormen had never occurred to her. Then, regaining her poise, she said, still holding the package in one hand and clutching the knob with the other: "I'm sorry Elmira isn't here. She'll regret missing you. She went to the hairdresser's and I don't expect her back for at least an hour."

"That's all right," Mr. Smith said. "I'll come again."

But in spite of the brave words, he looked disappointed and he didn't seem to be making any move to leave. There was something appealing about him, as if he were a child who'd set his heart on this, and there was also something undeniably weary in the outline of his shoulders as he stood there, so that instinctively Dilly asked, "Won't you come in?"

He looked so glad.

CHAPTER 2

WITH WHAT she recognized as exaggerated care, Dilly placed the package on the table in the foyer.

Mr. Smith laid his hat down and threw his topcoat across the waiting chair. "How's Leggy?" he asked, smiling so warmly that again she had the impression of being with an old friend.

Ushering the way into Elmira's living room, she hastily searched her mind for Leggy, someone she was supposed to know, some acquaintance this man and her cousin had in common but whom she, Dilly, had never, so far as she could remember, even heard of.

"Leggy?" she repeated finally, settling herself on the davenport.

Mr. Smith stood politely, waiting for her to look comfortable. Then he took the armchair opposite. There was a touch of elegance about his movements which bespoke the charm and manners of another century.

Though he can't be that old, Dilly argued with herself.

"Yes, Leggy," he said, leaning back in obvious contentment. He looked at her indulgently.

It doesn't matter, his expression seemed to say to her. It doesn't matter if, as I can readily see, you're an outsider here and don't know your way around. You and I can make friends on our own, can't we?

Aloud he asked, betraying doubt now: "Isn't that what she calls her? Well, apparently not. I just thought— Don't mind me, Mrs. Fuller. I have a bad habit of making up nicknames. Allegra —I was referring to Allegra. It just struck me that your cousin would call her Leggy. With those legs—" He laughed.

"I don't think I know whom you refer to," Dilly murmured coldly.

A moment ago, he'd appeared so delightfully gentlemanly, al-

most old-fashioned in his courtesy. Now he was joking with her about some other woman's legs.

Seeing Dilly's embarrassment, he himself began to look confused. He leaned forward anxiously. "Hasn't Mrs. Bliss—hasn't she a great Dane she calls Allegra? Spayed female, a year old—"

"No!" Dilly broke in vehemently. "Elmira doesn't have a dog."

"She *doesn't*?" He looked suddenly dashed.

"No." Dilly was firm. "Come to think of it, though," she conceded, just to alleviate his distress, "Elmira did write me once that she was about to *get* a dog. That was a while ago, however. There's none here now."

"Well," Mr. Smith said, relaxing visibly, "that explains it. Your cousin *did* have a dog called Allegra. I know that for a fact. Something no doubt happened to poor Leggy in the meantime. New York is precarious," he assured Dilly earnestly. "And a great Dane—" The very thought appeared to make him shudder.

"I should say so," Dilly cried. "New York is terribly precarious." And then she added, hoping to bring the conversation around to a topic they could discuss as equals, "The *traffic*, Mr. Smith."

"Things are better where you live, I take it," he inferred amiably.

"Oh, yes, in Kendal we—"

"Kendal?"

"Kendal, Rhode Island. It's inland from Little Narragansett Bay. Just a small town. Used to be a great place for shipbuilding in the old days but it's quiet now. You can park all around the Green, except on the west."

"Why not the west?"

"The river runs along the bottom of the Green, down to the ocean," Dilly explained. "I wish you could see the gulls come up with the tide."

"I'd like to."

Dilly drew a quick breath. She hadn't meant it that way, as a sort of invitation. When she said, "I wish," it was only a figure of speech, to describe the gulls. The words weren't supposed to *mean* what they *said*.

Perhaps Mr. Smith realized this. At least, he changed the subject.

"New York has charms too," he observed. "Don't you think so?" And he peered at Dilly as if it would please him personally if she liked New York.

"Well, it's interesting," she admitted. "But there doesn't seem to be—" She turned and looked out of the window, not knowing how to describe the loneliness she'd felt in this crowded city, not intending to disclose it to anyone. Yet, "Maybe," she acknowledged, still not facing him. Then she stopped.

"Maybe?" he repeated, almost in a whisper.

You can tell me, his gentleness seemed to say.

Though her face was still turned, Dilly could feel this encouragement extending toward her across the room. The man was a stranger; the gentleness in him was, oddly enough, completely familiar.

"Maybe I don't appreciate things," Dilly confided with a rush, swinging around so that her eyes encompassed Elmira's whole living room in one unfavorable glance. "You see, it's the first time I've come to New York since my husband died."

"Oh," he exclaimed softly.

"Not that we came much. Just every few years to go to the Numismatic Society."

"The—?"

"Numismatic Society. That was Willard's hobby—coins. Ancient, mostly. Egyptian and Syrian."

To this Mr. Smith said nothing.

"And I thought," Dilly continued, "it was going to be good for me, coming here, now that college is open and my younger children are away again. My married daughter lives in Stonington and I'm all by myself in winter. I thought it would help me over that first lonely period. But somehow, though it was sweet, you understand, of Elmira to invite me—"

"Things are dull, flat, insipid," he concluded for her.

"Exactly! So, while I'd hoped it would give me something to take back, actually—"

"Something to take back?" he repeated. "Something to take back?"

"Don't you know?" Dilly asked, leaning forward in the desire to make her meaning clear. "A little reflected beauty, a—well, a glow."

"Not reflected," Mr. Smith pleaded, interrupting. "Dear Mrs. Fuller, I beg of you, not reflected. Only an actual experience of your own—"

"But everything I've seen," Dilly argued, "is such a manufactured kind of gaiety. It doesn't stir me."

Funny the way one can tell a stranger things, Dilly thought. This is how one confides to a stranger in the train.

"You see," she said aloud, rushing on impulsively, almost against her will, "we never were gay, in that sense. Just the opposite of Elmira, really. Living in New York and being married to Harry changed her." She looked at Mr. Smith for confirmation. After all, being in Elmira's circle, he would know.

But he didn't respond.

So Dilly went on. "I don't mean Willard and I didn't have lots of fun. Only, our amusements were of the family type—picnics and sails and skating parties. Our parents were what we call 'plain' Friends—Quakers. And while our generation—Willard's and mine—doesn't disapprove, the way theirs did, of dancing or a little card playing—"

"I should hope not!" Mr. Smith broke in.

"Still," Dilly assured him earnestly, "if you've been brought up plain you never quite get over it. Even occasional drinking—in moderation, I mean, naturally—doesn't seem altogether right. Willard wasn't the kind to like those things, anyhow."

"He had his coins."

What an understanding person! Or could he, in his kindly way, be poking just the least fun at Willard's hobby, the way the children used to do?

"They were an absorbing pleasure, especially in his last years. He was quite a bit older than I."

She turned to the window again, suddenly horrified at the way

she had chattered about her own affairs, confiding her feelings to Elmira's caller.

"Life has robbed us both," Mr. Smith murmured.

Dilly turned back and met his eyes. They were a calm blue, like the ocean on a windless day, but the calm was of the sort a northeaster leaves behind.

I needn't have thought that about Elmira, Dilly told herself, looking away again hastily. This man is still in love with his dead wife.

Neither of them spoke for a moment. Then the mood of intimacy passed.

"I suppose," he said, "she takes you around a lot, Elmira?"

"Oh, yes," Dilly exclaimed, facing him.

She began to list what she had seen: the movies and musicals, the restaurants and shops. Fifth Avenue, Greenwich Village. For the short time she'd been here, it was indeed a list.

"Tourist spots!" Mr. Smith snorted. "My dear Mrs. Fuller, no wonder you're not having a good time. Elmira simply doesn't know the right places to show you. *Fifth Avenue—*"

His tone was horrified, as though there'd been some outrage.

"But it *is* beautiful," Dilly insisted. "Breath-taking—"

"Glamour and glitter," he expostulated. "*Fifth Avenue!* You should see Third. Now *there's* a place that has romance, life, color—"

"I don't think Elmira will ever take me to Third Avenue," Dilly had to admit. "You know how she is. And it seems it's not a place for a woman alone."

She looked at him a little hopefully, to detect, if possible, his sanction of a lone woman on Third Avenue.

"*I'll* take you," he offered gallantly instead.

"You—oh, thank you. Very kind of you, Mr. Smith. But I couldn't let you."

"I'll take you," he repeated firmly.

"I'm sure," Dilly said, "you're very busy. I never saw anything like the way New Yorkers rush around."

"Nonsense," he exclaimed, waving away the thought. "I'll *make* the time. Nothing would give me greater pleasure." He stood up. "Now, when? Tonight?" He didn't pause for her answer. "I'm afraid I can't ask you to dinner. If I'd known sooner— But after dinner, will you come out riding with me after dinner?"

"Oh," Dilly exclaimed. "I—well, I don't know what to say. Tonight—it's Thursday, you know—Elmira's Bridge Club. I'm supposed to go with her, though I don't play. She's just taking me to be nice."

"If I may be permitted to say so, Mrs. Fuller," Mr. Smith observed gently, "you were never designed to be a fifth hand at a bridge table. In my eyes, you should be the *center* of every gathering."

Dilly felt suddenly shy. It was such a nice thing to say. Mere blandishment, of course, and yet the genuine note in the man's voice made the compliment seem sincere.

"Let Elmira go to her Bridge Club," he said, putting on his topcoat and taking up his hat. "You and I will explore Third Avenue."

He started for the door. Dilly opened it.

"I'll come at nine," he promised, making a little bow and quickly walking out.

But in the corridor he stopped, apparently remembering something. Then he turned back to the foyer, picked up the package Dilly had so carefully placed on the table, and carried it away with him.

Dilly stood on the threshold of the apartment, watching him ring for the elevator. "You'd better come earlier," she called. "Elmira will be leaving at eight and you want to give her the gift."

"No," he answered, chuckling as if to himself. "I think not."

"I don't understand," Dilly cried.

But just then the gate opened and Mr. Smith, turning for a friendly wave with the hand that wasn't holding the package, disappeared into the elevator.

CHAPTER 3

"WHAT DOES HE LOOK LIKE?" Elmira asked. She sat at the dressing table in her flowery bedroom.

But Dilly, standing behind Elmira and watching her glance from side to side in the triple mirror, didn't know what to answer, how to convey the vitality of the man's presence, though she could still feel it. Now that she wished to describe him, she discovered with surprise that she'd failed to observe his features or his build, noticing only his personality.

"He's towheaded," she answered slowly. "That's all I remember. Rather young, I think. Well—I'm not *sure*. Maybe not."

"Durand Smith," Elmira murmured, still concentrating on herself. She patted her back hair. "Durand Smith." Her reflection shook its head three times. "No, I never heard of him."

"But you must have," Dilly insisted, just as she'd done when she first told about him, the moment Elmira came home. "Think," Dilly begged, placing an encouraging hand on Elmira's plump shoulder. "Just try to think. You must know him. You couldn't have forgotten someone as nice as that, someone who cared enough to bring you a gift."

"Durand Smith," Elmira repeated. The frown on her pretty forehead showed she was trying her best. "So many Smiths," she complained. "Do you think he could be related to Pauline Beetle? She was a Smith, you know. I don't mean by birth. Her second husband—"

"But Durand—" Dilly broke in. "That doesn't make him an ordinary Smith. There's something very distinguished about the combination."

"Well, I don't know him," Elmira stated flatly.

Dilly tried desperately to think of some way to stimulate her cousin's memory.

"It must be a precious gift," she observed. "He wouldn't even

trust it to the doorman and I'm quite sure he did the wrapping himself. It looked—quite touching. But you'll see tonight. Though, as he was leaving," she was forced to add, "I think he said—"

There was no reason to finish, since Elmira wasn't listening.

I'm not so old, each of the three faces in the mirror seemed to say—not crowing, but as one accustomed to receiving attentions —I'm not so old that men, very nice young men, aren't still inspired to bring me gifts. Men I can't even remember.

"As a matter of fact," Dilly was obliged in all honesty to mention, "he hasn't been in touch with you recently. How long is it since you had that great Dane?"

Elmira turned thoughtful again.

"You did—" Dilly pleaded, almost gasped. "You did have a great Dane *once,* Elmira?"

Because if it should turn out that Elmira couldn't recall the dog either, then obviously the whole thing was just a ghastly mistake and Mr. Smith had actually intended the gift for some other Mrs. Bliss. Then he was no friend of theirs at all.

Please, she implored Elmira silently, please don't say you never had a great Dane.

"Let me see," Elmira answered slowly, getting up from her dressing table with a backward glance. She paused to yank at her skirt. "It was just a short time—a week or two before I went to Mexico. The kennel wrote me. I was so heartbroken. Do you think she pined away?"

"Never mind," Dilly murmured, faint with relief. Elmira had once owned that dog. The circumstances relating to its demise didn't matter.

Reaching for her coat as they were getting ready to go out, Dilly brushed against Elmira's. Her own was good—Scotch tweed the color of heather, so good that Dilly, mindful of people who had no coat, thought it unforgivably luxurious when buying it in Boston last year. Yet now, beside Elmira's Persian lamb . . .

"I've such a dreadful memory for names," Elmira was deploring, putting on the lovely fur. "It was something whimsical."

"Allegra?"

"That's right! Allegra. It all comes back to me now. She used to jump on the davenport. Filled it end to end."

But Dilly wasn't interested in the antics of Allegra. "Thank goodness," she cried, buttoning her coat. "For a moment I was afraid—"

"I had to have it reupholstered," Elmira recalled, sighing as she buttoned hers.

Going down in the elevator, Dilly glanced furtively at Elmira. How terrible! An old friend—Elmira couldn't remember him. Her dog, her own pet, who had pined away for love of her only last year—she couldn't even remember her name.

Maybe I ought to suggest she see her doctor, Dilly thought. It's up to me.

Elmira had no children to look after her if she was sick. Not like Dilly.

But, glancing again at Elmira, at her smart figure standing its ground in the descending car, Dilly had to admit that her cousin looked extremely well.

Once in the street, Elmira started walking west.

"How about going to Third Avenue?" Dilly asked, not really thinking that her cousin would. Just on the chance—

"Don't be ridiculous, Dilly. Even with the new Federal increases and State Income and Sales Tax and all, things haven't got to the point where we have to buy our clothes on Third Avenue *yet.*"

Dilly meekly turned westward. "What did you want to get?"

"Well, I was thinking, now that my hair's done, I might try on a hat."

"But you have your hair done every week, don't you?"

"Certainly," Elmira replied, glancing questioningly at Dilly, as though she could see no connection between the one and the other.

They walked downtown, skirting the Park, which to Dilly's Kendal eyes was like a soothing lotion.

"I was very lucky," Elmira bragged, as they crossed the Plaza

to look into Bergdorf's. "I managed to get an appointment for you with Miss Yvonne. Not till next week, though."

"For me?" Dilly cried. "I don't want an appointment. I always take care of my own hair. There's nothing wrong with it, is there?"

"I knew it!" Elmira exclaimed. "I just knew you'd say that." She looked supremely cocky, as if she'd won a wager with herself. But then, noting Dilly's stubborn profile, her own expression hardened. "Now don't be difficult," she begged, commanded. "You have very nice hair. I always used to think it was the prettiest hair of anyone's. But you don't make the most of it at all. Around the temples—just a little tint in the rinse water—"

"But I've hardly any gray. A few strands. At my age, that's nothing."

Elmira wasn't listening. "Miss Yvonne is a real artist," she rattled on. "She used to be with Antoinette and now she has this little place of her own where you can get the exact same styling for half the money. It's a real find."

"I don't care," Dilly blurted out so vehemently that a man passing stared at her.

Surprisingly, Elmira backed down. "All right," she said, her mouth going pitiful. "I was only trying to help you."

Oh, dear, Dilly said to herself, it wasn't nice of me. She wants her friends to think I'm chic. But except for the children, this is the only thing of Willard's I have left—my personality—and I'm going to cling to it.

A hat in Bergdorf's window diverted Elmira's attention, so that she was instantly herself again, forgetting Dilly as she stood worshiping before a shrine of sequins that dripped like icicles from a white satin pillbox. Beneath the hat Elmira was seeing, no doubt, instead of the lifeless model's, her own elegantly sculptured head, her own hair, several shades darker than nature intended.

"You'd look nice in that."

"Mmm."

Elmira nodded. She knew she would. She also, apparently,

knew the price. And she was weighing the one reality against the other. "Shall we go in?" she asked finally, as if certain already what the outcome would be, adding as an afterthought, "It might look nice on you."

"Oh, no," Dilly cried quickly. "On Anne, maybe. It's not my type."

"Don't be silly. Women our age wear the same hats as the young things. That black velours isn't bad, but it doesn't *do* anything for you. In a Bergdorf you'd be stunning. Your profile is so good. White would set off your coloring."

"It's not my type," Dilly repeated firmly, hoping this wouldn't make Elmira try to improve her again.

But Dilly needn't have worried. Elmira seemed to be reconsidering the hat for herself and she'd practically decided against it. She half turned from the window, looked back, then took Dilly's arm. "Let's go," she said. "We'll have lunch at the St. Regis."

Willard had never tried to improve her, Dilly reflected, as they went on down the Avenue. He was satisfied with her the way she was. Just this satisfiedness was what *had* improved her, what had transformed her from a shy, lonely girl into a confident and happy woman.

In that moment, Dilly made a surprising discovery. Trotting along, so occupied with her memories that she was deaf to Elmira's chatter, she felt it burst upon her.

"That's what he's like," she announced, overwhelmed, so that she stood stock-still in the middle of the Avenue, indifferent to the streams of people crowding by. "Elmira!" She pulled her cousin's sleeve to hold her back. "He's like Willard."

"Who is?" Elmira asked, stopping, but only, as it were, with one foot. The other was poised to go on.

"Mr. Smith. He's like Willard."

"Like *Willard?* You mean bald and heavy-set? Well, I don't remember anyone like that. You said he was young."

"Not bald," Dilly answered slowly. "He has a lot of yellow hair. And not heavy-set, either," she went on, picturing Mr. Smith as

he had stood in the foyer saying that sweet thing about her being the center of any gathering. "Not heavy-set," she repeated.

"Well, Willard was," Elmira argued. "He was a heavy-set man. I always used to say to Harry, Willard ought to—"

"Yes, Willard was," Dilly broke in hastily. "But this Mr. Smith isn't like that at all. He's quite thin, I believe. I remember now thinking he could stand some feeding up."

"Then he's not like Willard. Come on, darling." Elmira started walking. "You're holding up the traffic."

Dilly moved obediently, but as in a dream, not conscious of where she directed her feet. She was trying to remember . . .

Yes, there was no doubt left in her mind; her new acquaintance was strikingly like Willard, though it was also true that he *looked* quite different. He really was . . .

And suddenly Dilly halted her mechanical movements, stood still a second time, there on the crowded Avenue, for now she saw in a shattering flash how Durand Smith resembled her dear husband: not in appearance, no, not at all in appearance, not the least bit. It was in the way he made her, Dilly, feel, that this strange man reminded her of Willard.

CHAPTER 4

NOTHING that had happened in the four years since Willard's death ever brought his memory back so vividly to Dilly as this chance meeting with Mr. Smith.

But there isn't any *connection,* she argued wildly with herself, following Elmira up a flight of white-rubber-matted steps into the St. Regis.

Nevertheless, none of the devices which the years of grief had turned into a ritual—studying her husband's picture, managing the investments and running the house as he would have wished,

keeping each piece of furniture where he'd placed it before they were married—none of these had given Dilly such an immediate sense of his presence as she now had far from home, recalling a man so very, very unlike Willard.

How can I feel this here, she asked herself glancing around, when Willard never even once stepped into this hotel? Yet . . .

She was suddenly dizzy. The swirling marble of the lobby floor spiraled before her eyes.

"I'll go see about a table," Elmira was saying, not noticing. "You wait." As she started for the restaurant she murmured with pride diminishing to doubt, "The head waiter knows me, I *think*."

Gratefully, Dilly dropped into a chair.

Letting her head sink back against the upholstery and shutting her eyes, she began to have an odd sensation: she was floating out of the place. Without moving a muscle or exercising her will, she was drifting past the reception clerks in their gilded cage, past the patient bellboys, out through the door and down over the rubber-matted steps. By the time Elmira returned, Dilly would be a long way off.

She was, in fact, already gone.

"Thee'll remember."

An incantation. She didn't believe in that sort of thing. Yet over and over the past four years she'd repeated those words and they'd always comforted. They carried her back more than a quarter of a century to the warm May morning when Willard had whispered them, Willard in his blue serge suit and stiff collar and that polka-dot tie he always referred to afterward as his "wedding finery."

The song of a thrush came through the open window of the Meetinghouse. It was music enough for Friends, as the rock pinks and mauve-white violas growing over the granite steps outside were flowers enough. When Dilly walked up the aisle with Willard, only the silence of the gathered guests accompanied them. They took their place in the center of the facing bench, where Dilly's parents were already seated on her side and Willard's relatives on his.

He was so confident, not in the least gulpy like Dilly. Seeing she was nervous, he bent and whispered that reassuring "Thee'll remember."

He thought she was gulpy for fear that, when they stood up and took each other by the hand, she'd forget the words of her vow.

But that wasn't what made Dilly gulpy, not altogether. It was the awful unknownness, the whole lifetime during which she was promising to be faithful, though she couldn't tell what it would hold.

"In the presence of God and of this assembly, I take thee, Willard . . ."

Actually, in the first years, little had been required of her. Willard knew just how the house should be run. He'd had the care of his invalid mother so long, he could manage everything. Though his mother was dead by then, it seemed to Dilly that the old lady in the long brown dress and Quaker bonnet still decided how they should act, how their food should be cooked and even whether they liked it. Lois had been named for her.

A hard ghost to live with, Dilly acknowledged now.

The sudden admission freed something. Never before had she allowed herself even to think critically of the old lady.

It was she, too, who determined, when Willard came home from Law School, that he should settle there in Kendal, a small place for his talents.

Still, Dilly always thought of him as much more than a lawyer. The town looked to Willard as the helper of anyone in trouble. Even if he'd been gay—and the idea of Willard gay made Dilly smile—there'd never have been time for amusements. His work and community interests kept him busy till late.

No matter how weary he might be, though, Willard never retired without looking through his coin collection—his one great pleasure—without balancing the household accounts, banking the furnace, reading a chapter from the Bible that lay on the candlestand between his bed and Dilly's.

He was the same in love, embracing his wife with unfailing

regularity on going to sleep and on waking up, when he left for the office and when he returned.

A kiss at noon—I never would have dreamed of it! Dilly told herself. But I didn't mind. It was a dependable, even love. In ebullient marriages there are often cold spells. Nothing like that ever happened to us.

It hadn't all been plain and ordered either. Dilly wondered why she seemed to recall so much of that part. They had had a lot of fun together too, particularly when the children were young and Willard had his old gaff-rigged Herreshof, the *Gulielma.* "Gooly," the children called her—such a sweet little sloop.

All those summer afternoons when they sailed down the river past Certain Draw and Colonel Willie's Cove, westward to Napatree Point . . . Near the ruins of the old fort they unpacked their picnic basket, the enamel dishes, the bone-handled knives and forks stuck through elastic ribbons in the lid, the thermos, the blue-checked tablecloth, the chowder kettle.

On one side the bay, calm and warm enough for the children to swim in, across the dunes the open ocean heavy with surf. Fishers Island, the Dumpling. Terns hovering over the water. Dilly remembered once when she'd wandered through the coarse grasses growing in the sand. Suddenly there was an uprush of wings at her feet. A flock of little terns streaked up and made a circle around her head. She had stood quite still, holding her breath, awed by her whirling halo.

"Look!" she cried at last, to share the wonder with Willard.

He turned and smiled, so that she imagined he experienced the same delight. But then he called to her, "Thy coming frightened them." And in his scholarly voice, "Least terns nest in that dune grass."

It was, of course, true. Dilly had frightened them. That was why they flew around so fast. But till that instant she'd thought of their flight as something else—companionable, beautiful, almost a heavenly wonder. She'd known a corresponding uprush of her spirit. Then, with Willard's words, the ecstasy fluttered away,

flying as surely as those terns, which were already gliding out to sea. She was left standing there. . . .

She turned her back on Willard; she didn't want to look at him. If she could ever have hated him, it was then.

As she faced the other way, she saw young Will running toward her with a long skate's egg case, laughing proudly because he was bringing his mother so fine a gift. That must have been the summer he was seven because it was before the hurricane. After all those people were drowned on the Point, they never had the heart to go back.

But that day, it was still a happy place. Nearby, on a tussock, Anne was singing to herself as she gathered beach pea in a little bunch.

For me, Dilly thought, watching the small brown body bend and straighten up.

Lois ran by with something for Willard. Her treasures were always for him.

The world was bright again. Happiness surged through Dilly as she stood there on the dune, making her tingle, warm, like the quickened circulation in a cramped foot.

It brought grace with it: she saw how unjust she'd been toward Willard. He'd done nothing wrong, nothing unkind, merely stated a scientific truth. He wasn't given to poetic fancies, like her. And, swift with impulse, she turned around again, forsaking the two children coming toward her with their gifts, turned and ran through the grass that scratched her too quick feet, straight to Willard, and flung her arms around his neck.

He looked startled, even a bit shocked at such a wild demonstration. But then he smiled lovingly and she knew that to him she was like a child, infinitely dear yet beyond understanding.

After all, Dilly thought now, heaving a sigh, he was so much older. And I—poor Willard!

Of his last illness she seemed to recall scarcely a detail, only a compassion so elemental that nothing but the anesthesia of fatigue had made it bearable.

When it was over, there'd been very little to do. Willard's desk

was in perfect order, each letter in its file, the top cleared save for a blotter and photographs of his parents. At the office it was the same. He had arranged his affairs so that Dilly and the children would be very comfortably provided for with the least trouble.

Dilly opened her eyes a second.

After all, she was right here, in the lobby of the hotel where Elmira had left her. She had floated out of the place, but not for good. Things looked straighter. She dared glance briefly at the marble floor.

Then she closed her eyes again. That was more comfortable.

Suddenly it became imperative that she see Willard with greater reality than any person who was still living. She strained her memory for a glimpse of him as he'd looked in those last awful months.

Don't come back yet, she silently begged Elmira. Stay away another minute, just till I get one glimpse—

But she couldn't catch it.

She could only see Willard as he had looked so long ago, standing out there on the beach that summer before the hurricane, his grave brown eyes scanning the ocean. She could see him on his knees shaping a mound of sand into a table and covering it with the checked cloth held down against the wind by the enamel plates. She could see him sitting cross-legged beside the table using the bone-handled knife and fork with the same propriety with which he ate at home.

But in those last days, she couldn't see him.

Elmira was back. Her smug expression told Dilly she'd secured a table.

It's all known to me now, Dilly thought sadly. That lifetime of years which made me so gulpy at the wedding—it's over, lived up.

Her heart was heavy. Yet she tried to smile, to look eager, of-the-present, for Elmira's sake. For herself, there was nothing left but to remember. . . .

CHAPTER 5

ELMIRA was bursting with excitement. "Guess who's here!" she cried across the lobby. "Having lunch. I spied him when I spoke to the head waiter." She rushed up and pulled Dilly by the arm. "Rex Harrison!"

"Oh."

"And Lilli Palmer. All wrapped up in each other," Elmira gurgled, dragging Dilly toward the restaurant. "I *think* it's Lilli. Hard to tell from the back. It ought to be, anyway, with Rex."

"Do you know him?"

"Not to speak to. But I've seen him loads of times. He's simply marvelous."

Dilly, who'd always felt so young and inexperienced with Elmira, smiled at this girlish passion for an actor.

"Don't look now," Elmira whispered as they entered the restaurant, "but over by the wall on the left. See him?"

They were ushered to a table a long way from the wall.

"You take that chair so you can see," Elmira urged. "I'll turn my back to him."

"No, you take it. I don't really care."

But Elmira was firm in generosity, and they sat down as she decreed.

"Isn't he nice?" she asked, glancing at Dilly over the top of the large menu.

Dilly studied the gentleman sitting by the wall. He was handsome, with a vivacious, boyish expression which did seem nice.

"Yes," she said to Elmira.

To herself she said, But not so nice as that Mr. Smith.

Elmira was dictating a list of courses to the waiter at her shoulder. Dilly felt relieved. The menu was so large, she could never have read it through. And then to decide, to choose the one dish, the very one, out of so many—

"Lobster salad," Elmira commanded. She glanced at Dilly again over the top of the menu. "Wouldn't that be nice?"

Dilly nodded.

"For dessert," Elmira murmured reflectively, running her eye down the list. "*Sorbet de citron au menthe verte!*" she cried at last. "Next to no calories. And *Café diable.*" She handed the menu back to the waiter.

How pleased Elmira looked in anticipation of the food!

"All right to peek now?" she asked Dilly eagerly. "I want to know if it really is Palmer." Without waiting for an answer, she turned circumspectly in her seat and stared. "No," she reported, suppressing a squeal, "it's another woman!"

Delightedly scandalized, she gave Dilly a meaningful nod, then turned to stare again.

Dilly's eyes followed.

Not nearly so nice, she repeated to herself, observing the man.

When Elmira looked back a second time at Dilly, her face was deflated, all expression flattened out. "That's not Rex Harrison," she muttered, dejectedly breaking a roll. "It's somebody else."

"Oh."

"Looks a lot like him, though."

Dilly tried to say something that would take her cousin's mind off the disappointment. "Won't you come and stay with me some time? Kendal's quiet but—"

"It isn't that I don't want to come, darling, only that I'm so terribly busy."

"I know."

It took Elmira half the morning to recover from the damage of the previous day's passing. Time pressed indentations on her face which had to be filled in and at other points on her person it made embossments which had to be rubbed down. Then, the fitting adornment—

"Couldn't even find my way around Kendal any more," she was saying reflectively. "Eighteen when I left. *Forty years.* Can you believe it? I wouldn't want a soul to know."

The lobster salad was set before them and Elmira brightened considerably.

"It's the same old place," Dilly went on, passing over Elmira's age. "Of course, Edmund Mansfield—remember him, that friend of Father's?—he's always saying how changed things are. But he's eighty-seven."

Elmira, giving herself fully to the food, was indifferent toward her birthplace. "I went back, naturally, for the funerals," she recalled between bites, "but the minute I could get away again—" She put down her fork and began counting on her fingers. "Grandma's, Aunt Augusta's, Uncle Clement's, Uncle Eli's, Grandpa's, Aunt Amelia's—"

Dilly couldn't stand this. "Lois's wedding!" she broke in quickly. "You came to that three years ago."

"Oh, a *wedding*—I'll come if there's a wedding," Elmira promised with new interest, starting to eat again. "Just ask me."

"Anne's too young," Dilly murmured. "And I don't think Will—"

Elmira had been working away at the salad. She suddenly put down her fork and looked straight at Dilly, narrowing her eyes. "What about you?"

"*Me?*"

"Why not? I always thought that Philip Ludlow was so charming. He's still around, isn't he?"

"Elmira! How can you?" Dilly felt her cheeks flush. "How can you possibly say such a thing? Philip's a dear. He was one of Willard's very best friends and I've known him all my life. But what you're talking about—"

She was afraid she was going to cry, not so much from grief as sheer anger.

"Darling," Elmira drawled, "all *right*. Don't take on so. I was just thinking how nice it would be. He's such a handsome man."

Dilly fished in her bag for her handkerchief and blew her nose.

This lobster, she thought, staring at it. She couldn't get it down.

"What happened to that doctor son of Philip's?" Elmira asked. "Sort of medical missionary in the Orient, wasn't he?"

"He contracted a fever out there. Seems he'll never get well."

This annoyed Elmira. "Those Quaker boys always think they have to do such hard things," she cried.

Dilly clutched her handkerchief. Her own son had done the opposite of John Ludlow, forsaking the Quaker peace testimony and enlisting. That had been hard, too. Having been taught since childhood that he must love his enemies, he'd almost been broken by the inner conflict.

But Dilly didn't intend to discuss Will's feelings with Elmira.

"Philip's other boy, George, is still overseas in Friends' Service," she told her instead.

Elmira was growing bored. "Why do they do these outlandish things?" she asked peevishly.

"So people in trouble will know somebody cares," Dilly answered. "That's the only way war will ever be stopped—translating the Beatitudes from words to actions."

"Darling," Elmira cried, laughing now. "You sound just like Grandma and Grandpa! I can remember them talking that way. But these problems are too *big* for individuals. The U.N., the State Department—that's where history's made today. You aren't eating, darling. Isn't it good? Mine's delicious."

Elmira smiled across the table, warm with affection for this simple cousin who had lagged behind in Kendal.

"What does Philip do with himself," she rattled on, "when he's not working?"

"He's always busy with some concern. Right now it's what we call 'Bart's Boys.' They're the ones who used to follow Bart Brown when he was working on the riverbank, couple of years ago. I don't know if you heard about him."

Elmira shook her head.

"He was wonderful. Boys in trouble—with the law, I mean—just naturally gravitated down to that beach where Bart was working on some boats. He was the only person they trusted—the only one who trusted them. He dreamed of getting them started

in a little business that they could own and manage themselves. But before he could do anything about it, one of the boys fell in the river and Bart was drowned saving him."

"I remember now. You wrote me."

Elmira shuddered, looking as though she preferred not to be told about something so unpleasant.

"It was awful," Dilly couldn't help saying. "Afterward a lot of people who hadn't thought much about those boys before began taking an interest—wanted to carry on for Bart. Remember the shed behind the Meetinghouse where the horses used to be tied up during Meeting when we were kids?"

"Don't tell me that's still there! We used to play in it."

Dilly nodded. "It was about to fall down," she explained. "But Friends are letting the boys rebuild it for a workshop. That was Bart's idea too. They're going to make boats there. It's hard to put the whole thing into words. We're trying to help these so-called 'hard characters' become self-respecting both economically and spiritually. We think the two go together. There's this couple in the Meeting who came from New York two years ago, the Hills—they've put heart and soul into the project. And Philip goes around finding lumber and machinery firms who'll let the boys have stuff on trust."

"That's what I mean about Philip," Elmira explained. "You're naturals for each other, both good angels."

"But that's no reason—"

"No," Elmira broke in, looking off across the restaurant, obviously washing her hands of the whole idea, "if you don't *care* for him, that's different. I just thought—"

CHAPTER 6

"KNOW SOMETHING?" Elmira mumbled behind her lipstick, making up to go to the Bridge Club. "You're a fast worker." She turned to Dilly and smiled bright red. "Here you've hardly been

in New York a week and already you have a date. While me, I'm spending the evening with three other widows."

Dilly laughed, but she felt a little flustered. It hadn't occurred to her at all that her appointment with Mr. Smith might be termed a "date." That would have been out of the question for her. He had simply offered very generously to drive her through a section of the city he felt she ought to see.

"You're the one he brought the gift to," she said quickly.

"And you're the one he's taking out," Elmira added, pulling on her gloves. "Well, you're younger."

"Only six years."

"Nobody'd think you a day over fifty," Elmira assured her. "It's that lovely skin."

There was no malice in her, no envy. Dilly had known this all her life. Elmira was silly and vain, but envy was a curse which had never touched her.

"Couldn't you wait till he gets here?" Dilly begged. "Maybe then you'll remember—"

"And be late to the *Bridge Club*? No! But I'll stay up till you get back and we'll have a drink. And Dilly—"

"A *drink*?"

"He and I. You can have tomato juice," she conceded indulgently. "And, Dilly," she reiterated, bustling toward the door, "don't forget the coffee Frieda made for you. It'll keep hot in that thing."

Dilly waited for Mr. Smith. It seemed as though she'd been waiting quite a while. But it was still only a quarter to nine.

The after-dinner cups were arranged on a little tray in the center of the coffee table. Dilly turned them so that both handles faced the same way. She scrutinized the polish on the spoons. Finally she got up and examined her hair in the mirror, though only a minute ago, when she last looked at it, every upswept strand had been in place.

Yes, Elmira was right. Dilly really did have some silvery hair, but only a little, only the slightest sprinkling. Certainly not

enough to warrant the fuss Elmira had made. There was still a great deal of brown.

One comfort: her lashes, at least, would always stay dark and so accent the gray of her eyes, with those little green glints Willard used to like so much.

But to someone who didn't love her, Dilly thought, studying her face more closely, perhaps even the color of her eyes didn't make up for the softening folds beneath them and the sad little line which Willard's death had given to her mouth. To someone who didn't love her, wouldn't the well intentioned but quite unimpressive nose, the naked lips and country skin add up to a face that was practically negligible?

At least, she decided, judging her whole figure now, the turquoise wool she had got herself in Providence for this visit was really nice. It did make her look younger, slimmer, bring out the glints in her eyes.

This seems to be catching, she thought, smiling ruefully at her reflection. I don't believe I ever look in the mirror at home, except to dress.

It was now only ten minutes to nine.

Dilly tried picturing herself in Mr. Smith's car, but what kind of car would it be? Not a sports car, she hoped, shivering at the far from impossible idea. For, she thought, there was just a touch of the daring about him.

The chime rang softly.

Forcing herself to wait a moment—a patient-seeming moment —Dilly opened the door.

He stood there smiling at her with that gentleness she recognized as completely familiar, this man whom she'd met for the first time only this morning. And now Dilly wondered why she hadn't been able to describe him to Elmira, because he looked exactly the way she expected.

That smile was so much more than a formal greeting. It reached out to Dilly like a friendly embrace. There was something in it though, that was a little bashful too, and yet—this seemed odd—almost proprietary.

But he had no package. Poor Elmira!

Dilly watched him place his hat on the table and his topcoat on the foyer chair.

"You didn't bring Elmira her gift."

"Gift?"

Could he have forgotten?

"Oh," he murmured, following her into the living room. "The Worcestershire Biscuits. No. She wouldn't care to have them. I thought, when I came this morning— No matter." He grinned engagingly. "That was just kind Fortune's way of introducing you and me."

"Do sit down," Dilly said, leaving him. "Elmira's maid left us some coffee."

But when she came in with the carafe, he was still standing, waiting till she had taken her place on the davenport. Then he relaxed in the armchair.

She felt a little shy, covering up this feeling with a serious inquiry into his tastes. "Cream? Sugar?"

"Black!" he expostulated, as if the mere suggestion of some other possibility were a desecration. "Black, of *course*. That's the only way it's gustable. Don't you prefer black yourself, Mrs. Fuller?"

"Oh, yes," Dilly admitted. "I always take it black."

"We have a lot in common," Mr. Smith observed. The discovery seemed to give him pleasure.

Dilly watched him sipping.

"Oh," she exclaimed, noticing his hair. She put her hand to her mouth in the hope her visitor would think she had coughed.

But it had actually been an exclamation, an uncontrollable burst of surprise, as, watching him sip, Dilly discovered that Mr. Smith wasn't towheaded at all. Elmira's apartment was so dark in the daytime— Now, with the lights on, Dilly saw that his hair was really a yellow white, like her wedding dress up in the attic at home.

If he suspected the surprise within the cough, he gave no sign of noticing.

"That was superb," he said, putting his cup down on the table. "Please thank your cousin for me. Nothing like after-dinner coffee." He looked suddenly wistful. "I'd almost forgotten—"

"Don't you usually?" Dilly asked. "Does it keep you awake?"

"Me? Awake?" He laughed at the very idea.

This pleased Dilly. She admired men who could eat and drink everything, who slept perfectly, who didn't become preoccupied with their health as they grew older.

"No indeed," he assured her. "Randy—that's the baby—he keeps me awake quite often. And Humph gets these nightmares. But coffee—never. I could drink it in the middle of the night. That's why I hanker so for it—"

"But, Mr. Smith, if it doesn't hurt you—"

"Mary says it does," he explained gravely. "Thinks it's very bad for me. And I don't like to contradict Mary. Sometimes, though," he confided, whispering, "I slip down to the corner for a nightcap. They make wonderful coffee at that place on the corner. Strong, you know. Gustable."

"Who's Mary?"

"My daughter whom I live with, Mrs. Humphrey Day. She's a good girl, Mary is. Takes wonderful care of me. But I never contradict. She has to be right, you see. It's more important to her to be right than to me to have my coffee. And there's always that place on the corner." He paused.

Dilly said nothing. She wasn't liking Mary.

"I understand her," Mr. Smith added gently. "Her mother was a little like that, though not nearly so much as Mary. When you understand, it's immaterial."

"Does she resemble your wife in looks, too?"

"Mary? Oh, no. Doesn't have her voice, either. My wife, you see, was a singer. I don't mean one of your prima donnas. She never sang anywhere but at home, though her voice was good enough to, I can assure you. Just, as she went about the house, she warbled over everything."

"How beautiful!" Dilly exclaimed, forgiving Mr. Smith's wife a little for always having to be right.

"When I came home in the evening," he recollected, "she'd be sitting in a corner of the davenport, just like you're sitting there, and I'd stretch out with my head in her lap and she'd sing to me. Ballads. That's what she liked most—folksongs from every country. She'd always sing the funny, foreign words to them, too, though neither of us knew what they meant. And you know, I'd have come home tired and maybe bitter—" He hesitated, peering at Dilly a little anxiously.

"Bitter?"

"Yes. Because I wasn't more successful in business," he explained, looking at her squarely. "I would have liked to give her things. Beautiful clothes and good times. I couldn't. But as I lay there listening, I didn't mind any more. It was a little world my wife made for me that no trouble could squeeze into."

"How beautiful," Dilly repeated. She wasn't quite sure that the tears she felt burning inside her head wouldn't rush to her eyes.

"Yes, it was." He seemed thoughtful a minute. Then he said: "She was no hand at cooking, though. She did her best. Be*lieve* me, she did her best. Things just never turned out the way she meant them to. Not that it mattered," Mr. Smith assured Dilly, forbidding her with a look of surprising sternness to pity him. "I have an excellent digestion."

What a sweet person, she thought. He was as nice as she'd suspected in that first instant, when he came to the door with his gift.

"It's a great pity," he was murmuring. "Our grandchildren—that my wife wasn't the one to have the care of them. She would have known how. I'm not good at that kind of thing. Do my best. But I'm clumsy with the baby."

Now, why should he be taking care of a baby? Dilly wondered. Why wasn't Mary on the job? And where was Humphrey Day?

"You're too young for grandchildren," he observed, smiling.

Dilly laughed at the preposterous compliment. "Lois has been married three years," she exclaimed. "But she and George don't

have any children yet." And, noticing surprise in Mr. Smith's expression, she added, to convince him. "Lois is *twenty-five.*"

"Really!"

"I have two still at home," Dilly went on, eager to complete the family picture for him. "Will's twenty-three. He's at Harvard." She thought, sadly, of all there was to tell about Will. But she quickly went on. "Anne's at Radcliffe." And because it was so much in her mind, she added, "There's this boy, goes to Dartmouth—" But that was no affair of Mr. Smith's. "I can't wait to get home," she said instead.

"Not going soon, I hope?"

"A week from tomorrow."

Dilly could see his face fall. Now that she spoke the words, they did make her leaving sound terribly close.

"I tried to get Elmira to go to Third Avenue," she said. "But of course—" She giggled at the idea. "So I'm glad you're taking me. After what you said—"

"Shall we go?"

Dilly went into the bedroom to get her things.

Glancing in the triple mirror as she put on her hat, she thought, How different I look!

Excitement animated her face. But the hat—Elmira was right. It didn't improve her.

Scowling at herself, Dilly pulled it off. She would go without.

Mr. Smith stood in the foyer waiting for her.

"Elmira can't seem to remember you," Dilly confided as she joined him.

She hadn't intended to say that. It oughtn't to get around that Elmira's memory was failing. But the sense of being friends with someone who understood things, someone in this strange city who seemed to feel the same way about life, was growing every minute. So it just slipped out, as she was walking toward the door, reaching for the knob, "Elmira can't seem to remember you."

Putting on his topcoat, Mr. Smith turned to Dilly without showing surprise. "Naturally," he remarked. "How could she?"

"What do you mean? She acts as if she'd never even heard of you."

"Naturally," he repeated. "She never did."

"*What?*"

The word escaped.

"I was hoping to make her acquaintance when I called this morning," he explained. "We've never met."

"Then," Dilly blurted out, horrified, "then you aren't a friend of Elmira's at *all?* But you seemed to know everything—that I was visiting her, my name. I thought you two were old friends and that she'd told you all about my coming. You took me in," she reproached him.

"I'm sorry," Mr. Smith said sadly, but with great dignity. "I never meant to take you in. Your obliging doorman mentioned the fact that you're visiting Mrs. Bliss. 'It's her cousin, Mrs. Fuller,' he said, after he telephoned up. So naturally, when you opened the door I—"

"Then you aren't a friend of Elmira's at all?" Dilly repeated incredulously.

"Not at all," he affirmed. "But does it follow that we—you and I—can't—"

"But I don't know you," she cried, opening her coat again. "We were never even introduced. You don't think the doorman or Fortune—" Her voice broke. She turned away, back into the living room, and flung her coat on the davenport. This was just about the most terrible thing that had ever happened to her.

"I don't go by conventions," Mr. Smith explained. "One can't trust them. I go by my instincts, and they are infallible."

She wouldn't meet his forlorn gaze as he stood there in the foyer, but out of the corner of her eye she could see how unhappy he was.

And yet, there was that dignity about him still, which showed he didn't regret his behavior.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "I hope you will forgive me." He took up his hat and started for the door.

Dilly faced him suddenly. "But Allegra," she cried, hoping

some satisfactory explanation could still be found. "All that. How did you know about Allegra?"

"That, dear Mrs. Fuller," Mr. Smith replied, opening the door for himself, "is, I regret to say, a trade secret."

And before Dilly had a chance to inquire what this could possibly mean, the man was gone.

CHAPTER 7

"DON'T BE A FOOL, Dilly," Elmira cried. "You're not in Kendal now. This is New York and nobody cares how people meet. So you go to a cocktail party and your hostess introduces you. Does that prove anything about the man? Or make the situation more correct, really?"

Dilly didn't answer at first. Finally she said shakily, getting up from the davenport where she'd been lying when Elmira came home, "What do you take me for? A bobbysoxer going on a blind date? I'm a middle-aged—"

She threw herself down again.

"But it wasn't a blind date," Elmira argued, putting her coat away. "You knew the man."

"I only just met him this morning, by accident."

"My meeting Harry was an accident," Elmira murmured dreamily.

It sounded funny, only Dilly didn't feel like laughing. Instead she asked, "If he doesn't know you, why do you think he came?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"And he had that gift," Dilly persisted. "That is, the first time. Could it have been—" she asked reluctantly, "something—"

"Something what?"

"Something for you to—maybe—buy?"

She couldn't meet her cousin's eyes. In her misery, she turned

and buried her face in the davenport. It still smelled faintly of dog.

"Oh, no," Elmira exclaimed with conviction. "Salesmen aren't allowed in this house. The management is very strict about that. Those doormen have orders."

"The doormen might forget," Dilly murmured.

"Well, they do forget sometimes. Once, when I—"

"Not that they mean to," Dilly broke in, turning. To her complete surprise, the words threw her into sobs.

Elmira came over and sat down on the edge of the davenport. "Look, darling," she said, caressing Dilly's cheek. "I came from Kendal once too. Of course I was younger and Harry— But what I mean is, I understand what it's like to be brought up plain and it doesn't necessarily have to blight your life."

"Blight—"

Dilly was so furious, she stopped crying and jumped up.

"Oh, all right," Elmira drawled soothingly. "Lie down, Dilly. What I mean is, it doesn't have to stop one from having a good time for ever."

"I've had my good time," Dilly declared. "Nobody could have been happier than I was while Willard was living. It's only since— The past four years—"

The tears sprang up again, but Dilly managed to keep them behind her eyes, where they burned and anguished but didn't show.

Elmira must have guessed. Or maybe she was sorry she'd been so blunt. At any rate, she tried to cheer Dilly.

"Listen," she exclaimed. "I couldn't wait to get home and tell you. It's the most wonderful thing." Her enthusiasm bubbled over. "I'm going to get a dog."

"A *dog*?"

"Yes. I heard about him at the Bridge Club. This friend of Pauline Beetle's down on Long Island, she breeds them. His name is Henderson. Isn't that cute? *Henderson!* Aristocratic, don't you think?"

"What kind of dog?"

"I don't know exactly. Several kinds, I think. That's why he costs more."

"More?" Dilly expostulated. She wanted to add, In Kendal they give them away. But she didn't.

"Certainly," Elmira cried. "So much per strain, you know. Pauline told me all about it. This is the very latest thing in dogs. Seems the more strains they have, the healthier they are. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Well—" Dilly murmured.

"Henderson," Elmira repeated affectionately. "I love him already. We're going out there tomorrow and bring him home, you and me." She looked radiant.

Dilly sighed and sat up. She must pull herself together. Obviously, after this, there would be no time left for grieving over her unfortunate experience with that Mr. Smith.

"It's all because of you, darling," Elmira rattled on. "I would never have thought about getting one myself. It was your mentioning Allegra gave me the idea. So I asked Pauline. She belongs to the Canine Club, you know. What I mean is," she amended quickly, "Pauline contributes money. Only the dogs belong, naturally."

Dilly nodded.

"Henderson belongs," Elmira stated proudly. "He was registered the minute he was born. Like he was going to Yale."

"Registered!" Dilly cried. "But I thought you said he was several strains. They don't register those."

This hurt Elmira's feelings. She got up from the davenport and walked away. "Maybe not in Kendal," she remarked coldly. She went into the bedroom.

Dilly followed. "Elmira," she asked, "would you mind terribly if I went home? I mean, tomorrow?"

And then she wished she hadn't. Because Elmira looked crushed, simply crushed.

"But *darling,*" she exclaimed, forgetting she was insulted,

"I was counting on you to go out to Long Island with me and get Henderson. I thought you'd hold him on your lap while I drove home. And I was hoping you'd help me train him."

"Oh."

"You were always so good with dogs," Elmira pleaded. "Maybe if I started right at the beginning with this one, I could teach him not to jump on the davenport. But you'd have to show me."

"I will," Dilly promised, defeated. "But even a week isn't long enough to train a dog."

"No," Elmira agreed, looking suddenly stricken. "I guess I'll have to send him to school, the very first grade in nursery school. Dilly, couldn't you stay? Do stay through October. Stay all winter."

Dilly was touched. But her mind was made up. She shook her head. "I belong at home," she said firmly.

She was thinking of Mr. Smith again. Nothing like that could ever have happened to her in Kendal. People knew her; she knew everyone. The social conventions were clearly defined. One couldn't be taken in by a chance caller.

But what she told Elmira was not about Mr. Smith. Anne, she said, might want to come home for a week end. Anne still needed an occasional boost.

"Anne?" Elmira cried. "Why, Anne's a big girl. Isn't she eighteen?"

"Yes," Dilly admitted, "but she's shy, just the way I was at that age. You know, I wouldn't be eighteen again for anything. One suffers so."

"I don't remember," her cousin stated frankly, as they were getting into their beds.

"No. Because you weren't shy. You were so much fun. I remember all the boys who used to come to your home. But I—I was afraid I'd get left behind. When Willard asked me, it was such a relief."

"I never understood it," Elmira confessed. "He was so settled."

"That was what I wanted."

"Then."

Dilly glanced swiftly toward the other bed. What did Elmira mean by that? But Dilly couldn't tell, for in that second, as she turned and looked inquiringly, Elmira switched off the light.

When Elmira spoke again, in the darkness, she didn't make her meaning any clearer, for her attention had already been shunted back to her own affairs.

"I'm so thrilled," she exclaimed. "I feel exactly as if I was going to have a baby."

October

CHAPTER 8

NO DOUBT Henderson was, as Elmira had been so pleased to think before his coming, aristocratic. He certainly had a forceful personality. But from the moment she let him into the apartment, it was clear that Henderson was completely deficient in the social graces.

"Do you think he'll ever learn?" Elmira kept asking Dilly.

He looked like nothing Dilly had ever seen. "Bull fore and fox aft," was the way one of Harry's friends described him. While that accounted for Henderson's major tendencies, it still left a great deal unsaid.

Yet it was the dog's appearance which, oddly enough, gave Elmira the greatest pride.

" 'Mule Terriers,' they call them," she would explain when anyone inquired into his possible pedigree. "It's the very latest. Scientific blends, you now. That's what makes him so *active.*"

Which, indeed, he was.

All the second week of Dilly's visit was devoted to improving the dog's manners. But on the last evening, when she was beginning to pack, Dilly realized with a shock that she would have to stay longer. Obviously, she couldn't leave her cousin in the lurch.

Elmira's no match for this Henderson, she thought sadly.

True, Elmira cooked for him—the most alluring little dinners: Shepherd's Pie and Eggs Benedict; she let him sleep on her bed. She fondled him. And when the members of her Bridge Club repeated the sayings of their grandchildren, Elmira interrupted

to tell about Henderson. She could sometimes get him to do a few tricks. But she couldn't teach him to keep off the davenport.

"It's darling of you to stay," she told Dilly. "I just don't know where I'd be without you."

Early in the morning, after every meal, last thing at night, Dilly went down the elevator and up again with Henderson. She got to know the house staff best of all the people she'd met in New York. If Mr. Smith should ever call again, Joe, the doorman, would know who Mrs. Fuller was, all right.

But Mr. Smith couldn't very well call again, after the dismissal Dilly had given him. Besides, he must be thinking of her as already back in Kendal.

If he thinks of me at all, Dilly added sadly to herself.

Dilly thought a good deal of Mr. Smith on her walks with Henderson. Each time she saw a man of a certain age coming along the street, she gave him a second, eager glance. But he was never quite thin enough, never so elegant in his movements, so youthful-seeming.

How could I have been rude like that? she asked herself a hundred times. Even if she was unable to go out with the man, she could at least have sent him off with a feeling that they were friends.

I must have cared more than I realized, she admitted now, explaining herself to herself.

If only she could meet him again! A second chance— She was sure that somehow they would be able to straighten out their difficulty. Perhaps he would give an explanation for his coming which would make everything right; perhaps they would discover that he was a friend of a friend of Elmira's. Dilly couldn't exactly figure out the way this would be managed. But naturally, the first step was to find him.

Third Avenue—Dilly always hoped that by some chance she'd run across him there. With Henderson for escort, she had gone that far several times, but she had found neither Mr. Smith nor the romance and color he had spoken about.

No, she told herself sadly, looking up and down the dingy

street, it isn't really exciting. His eyes see it that way, is all. That vitality in him makes something charming out of even a place like this.

Suddenly, overhead, a train came bearing down on Dilly, shaking the pillars that supported the tracks, so that she scurried back as fast as Henderson would go to the safety of Park Avenue.

Day after day she entered the fine food and confectionery shops in Elmira's neighborhood, demanding Worcestershire Biscuits. No one seemed ever to have heard of them. Dilly tried Sherry's, where Henderson made quite a stir, and Dean's, and even crossed Fifth Avenue to inquire at Hicks. Nobody knew what Dilly was talking about.

"It's new, I believe," she would murmur, going out. "Very new."

But actually, after a time, Dilly began to wonder whether such a biscuit really did exist. Wouldn't someone have heard of it?

Reluctantly, on the last day of her stay in New York, Dilly gave up the search. She pulled Henderson around and started up Madison.

As they passed a grocery store where fresh coffee was being ground, Dilly felt a sudden stab of fear.

Gustable, her memory repeated fondly, as she sniffed the aroma.

So that's why I stayed, she said to herself in horrified surprise. Not to help Elmira, though I did want to. But not really on account of Elmira. Behind all that I was hoping that by some strange chance . . .

Her heart began to pump violently. She wanted to run back to the apartment, but Henderson chose to loiter.

What had happened to her?

Diligence Fuller, she said to herself scornfully, a responsible widow who knows how to manage her affairs, make out her income tax, keep the family united, who never so much as looked at any man but Willard in her whole life—

What had happened to her? She was under a spell.

Remembering now the vague sense she had had when she left home of some unknown destiny awaiting her, Dilly hurried and hurried, dragging Henderson's stiff, unwilling body after her.

By the time they reached Elmira's building, she felt calmer. That terrible moment was past. It would be lovely at home, she told herself, going up in the elevator. The winter quiet. Ice on the river . . .

At the door of Elmira's apartment, she bent and spoke to Henderson. "Now, remember," she said warningly. "Down. Down. No jumping on the davenport."

Keeping a hold on the leash with one hand, she turned the key in the lock with the other. But as they entered the foyer, Henderson got away from her. With a leap he was in the living room and Dilly's heart after him. For Elmira was sitting on the davenport. Beside her lay a little white package tied up with cherry ribbon, and opposite her, in the armchair, sat Mr. Smith.

CHAPTER 9

ELMIRA rose to the occasion with the quick tact of a highly experienced hostess.

"Oh, Dilly," she observed casually, looking up at the sound of the door. "It's you. Come in and meet my guest, Mr. Durand Smith."

He stood up.

Dilly, walking into the living room with her coat and hat still on, felt the color rise in her cheeks.

"This is my cousin, Mrs. Fuller," Elmira continued with a perfectly straight face, though her voice was pitched a little high. "She's been spending the past month with me."

Mr. Smith smiled on Dilly as one would smile upon a stranger.

When he spoke, formal reserve tempered his tone. And yet, it suggested just a note of interest, the hope of making friends with this stranger.

"Are you enjoying your stay in New York, Mrs. Fuller?"

He never batted an eye.

But Dilly—Dilly was speechless.

Like the solicitous mother of a shy and awkward girl, Elmira answered for her. "We've been having such a gay fling," she gurgled. Her eyes telegraphed encouragement to Dilly.

As if I was Anne, Dilly thought.

Mr. Smith seemed determined to make Dilly speak for herself. "Have you got off the beaten track a little, Mrs. Fuller?" he asked. "Seen Third Avenue, for instance?"

"Yes," Dilly managed to say. "Henderson and I went there several times. But I couldn't see what you described that—what there is special about it. I thought it rather depressing."

"On the ground," Mr. Smith admitted. "It's definitely depressing on the ground. One must always get above things. As you whiz through the sky, it has an ethereal quality."

"In a plane?" Elmira asked.

"No, on the Elevated, Mrs. Bliss. The Third Avenue El," Mr. Smith asserted gravely, "is one of the most romantic places in New York. Surely you don't intend to let Mrs. Fuller leave without having seen it?"

"I never travel that way," Elmira declared.

So that was what he meant when he asked Dilly to go riding! Not, as she'd imagined then, in his car. He had been inviting her to go riding with him on the Third Avenue El.

"But you will take your cousin before she goes?"

Dilly suddenly found her tongue. "I'm leaving tomorrow," she put in quickly. "Early tomorrow. I've already stayed nearly three weeks longer. Some other time, maybe, if I come—"

She dropped her eyes, for Mr. Smith had turned to her with an expression that was frankly pleading.

"Wouldn't it be possible, then," Dilly heard him say, "to go this afternoon? Right now? Couldn't you manage to squeeze it in be-

fore dinner?" Without waiting for Dilly to answer, he went on. "If Mrs. Bliss is too busy to accompany you, Mrs. Fuller, I should be honored. Just a short ride—to Fourteenth Street."

As Dilly said nothing, still didn't look at him, he asked softly, "Will you come?"

Dilly shot an appealing glance at Elmira. But her cousin, so detached a second ago, looked distraught.

"Oh," she wailed loudly, "oh, look, Mr. Smith! Just see what Henderson has done, the naughty dog. Your darling present! He's gone and chewed it open."

So he had. Henderson lay curled on the davenport enjoying himself as never before. Strewn about were little bits of cardboard and cherry ribbon.

"Oh, dear!" Elmira groaned. "Mr. Smith, what will you think of poor Henderson? No *savoir faire* at all."

Far from appearing annoyed, Mr. Smith seemed highly pleased. "Don't blame the dog," he admonished Elmira. "It's the aroma of the biscuits. Naturally he couldn't resist that."

"He doesn't usually care for cookies," Elmira remarked petulantly, as if remembering all the spurned little tidbits she had offered him.

"Of course—cookies," Mr. Smith allowed. "Sugary things, intended for human beings. But Worcestershire Biscuits, a purely canine confection—you see the difference. Worcestershire Biscuits are scientifically designed to nourish a dog, not alone in body but, shall we say," his voice dropped a little, "in soul."

"Soul?" Dilly repeated, not believing her ears. She could only think of Henderson as an incarnation of the devil.

"Certainly," Mr. Smith said coolly. "That entrancing Worcestershire flavor, suggestive of an underlying slice of beef, roasted and succulent, or even," he conceded magnanimously, "one of the better cuts of steak—"

"You mean," Elmira broke in angrily, "the Worcestershire flavor makes him *think* he's eating meat, when it's nothing but a dog biscuit?"

"Precisely!"

"Why, it's contemptible!" Elmira cried. "Fooling poor Henderson like that."

"Dear Mrs. Bliss," Mr. Smith said patiently. "I haven't made the point clear at all, if that is what you think. We're not fooling the dog. We're merely furnishing him with a golden dream to revel in while he's chewing his biscuit. It's not rigorous reality which makes life piquant for man," he assured her with his very charming smile, "but a dream of unattainable felicity. Why not for a dog, as well?"

Elmira glanced at Henderson. He had stopped chewing the box and was lying very still now with his head on his drawn-up paws. She narrowed her eyes, evidently seeing her pet in a wondrous new light.

Dilly speculated on Henderson too. Was it the golden dream that gave him such an unusual expression? He was thoughtful and still in a way he'd never been.

"I understand," Elmira said slowly, turning once more to Mr. Smith. Her voice was a little awed. "You know, I never would have believed it—all that about dogs having souls. If you hadn't told me, I never would have believed it."

"It requires imagination," Mr. Smith admitted. "Now you take a Mule Terrier like that," he added briskly, "and you put it on a diet of Worcestershire Biscuits—"

Elmira interrupted him. "You're the very first person to recognize Henderson's breed," she cried delightedly. "None of my friends had even heard of a Mule Terrier." She seemed deeply impressed by Mr. Smith.

But Dilly looked with new respect at the dog.

"I am gratified, though not at all surprised that you are finding this introductory gift immediately living up to its promise," Mr. Smith observed happily. "Unfortunately, Worcestershire Biscuits have not as yet been patented. In a few weeks, perhaps. Until then, they will not be available in the stores. Therefore, if you would care to place with me an order for six or a dozen cartons—"

"So it *was* a sample," Dilly cried.

She hadn't meant to say it. The moment the words were out, she would have given anything to call them back. How could she be such a snob—reproach a man, a very nice man, for the way he made his living? She couldn't bear to look at him, lest she see how she had hurt his self-esteem.

If those dreadful words hadn't escaped, she might never have gone out with him. But in her remorse, she realized that she had left his invitation to go riding on the El unacknowledged. It was up to her to answer now.

"How long do you think it would take?" she asked, turning to him. "I mean this ride?"

"We could be back within an hour, if you wished," he said, looking at her hopefully.

Dilly turned to Elmira. "Would you mind?" she asked.

Elmira made no objection. She was staring at Henderson with fondness and pride. Her Mule Terrier, complete with soul!

Mr. Smith stood up. It was then that Dilly noticed she was ready to go out. Coming in, she had never taken off her hat and coat. *So excited!*

As Mr. Smith said goodbye to Elmira, Dilly wondered how long he'd been here. Had Elmira found out anything? If only there were some way of getting her into the kitchen for a second on a pretext—

"Do you mind?" Dilly asked again, trying to catch her cousin's eye.

But it was hopeless. Elmira was wrapped up in Henderson.

Leading the way through the foyer to the door and looking back, Dilly was herself impressed with the spiritual aspect of the dog. That meditative expression! He certainly did look uncommonly soulful.

CHAPTER 10

GOING DOWN in the elevator, feeling a little fussed, so that she didn't directly meet Mr. Smith's eyes, Dilly remembered how, coming up not half an hour ago, she'd been wishing . . .

"It's a surprise, it's magic," he said happily, taking her arm when they stepped into the street. "You said that day—"

"I couldn't leave Elmira in the lurch with Henderson," Dilly told him earnestly. She thought she sounded convincing, but the color was rising in her cheeks.

As if they were old friends, as if their association had never been violently interrupted, he asked, leading her eastward, "How's everybody—Lois and George and Will and Anne?"

"How sweet of you to remember them all!" Dilly exclaimed, surprised.

"And the Dartmouth boy—"

"Parky, she calls him. I don't even know his name. But I'm afraid Anne's—I rather think she's set her heart on him."

There! It was out—Anne's little secret, which Dilly'd never dreamed of telling anyone.

"And he?"

"Well, I don't know. That's just it." Then Dilly exclaimed, as she'd done when speaking to Elmira, "Oh, Mr. Smith. I wouldn't be eighteen again for anything!"

He turned and looked at her in a way she couldn't understand. It was as if he were laughing at her a little and at the same time as if he were—yes—almost loving her.

She couldn't understand. But she thought, trotting to keep up with him, This is what I stayed on for really. . . .

She was excited, elated. She was also aware that her behavior wasn't entirely correct. What was she doing anyhow, running around town with a dog-biscuit salesman who had somehow got

past the doorman? Even if Elmira had "introduced" them—Elmira wasn't particular about such things. Suppose Dilly's children could see her now, going out with a man whom she didn't—

But I *do* know him, her heart kept pounding to her ears. I do. There's that same gentleness in him that was in Willard. I recognized it right away.

She couldn't be mistaken. Glancing sideways a little at Mr. Smith, she was overwhelmed with certainty. The niceness of his profile, of his long, rhythmic strides . . .

It wasn't, she hastily told herself, that she felt there could be anything wrong about *him*, only about the situation. It was, to say the least, unconventional.

Still, they walked on together in a companionable silence. The sun had begun to set, leaving the October earth cold. At Third Avenue, where Mr. Smith guided Dilly up a long flight of iron stairs to the El station, she pulled the collar of her coat tighter about her neck.

With every mounting step, she felt her qualms fall off. They clung to the surface of the city like its covering of grime, while Dilly rose into the clear upper air, freeing herself of all reluctance. By the time Mr. Smith held open the swinging door at the top and Dilly passed into the old-fashioned waiting room, she couldn't even understand why she'd felt hesitant down in the street. It was as if she'd known this man a long, long while.

"Look," she cried, pointing to the potbellied iron stove with a scuttle full of coal beside it. "I never thought I'd see one of these in New York. The old Kendal station had one. I can just remember."

It was cozy.

The crimson windowpanes, etched in a scroll design, reminded Dilly of home, too. Not that there were any crimson panes in Dilly's house now, but years ago the front door had been fitted with little lights that color, before Willard had had the glass replaced by wood. They weren't in keeping with the period of the house; someone must have added them in the gaudy Nineties, Willard had pointed out.

Someone, Dilly thought now, with a fondness for the things that children love, like this man, who was dropping a coin for her into the turnstile and escorting her onto the platform.

As they stood waiting for the train in the half-light he asked, looking at her with his appealing friendliness, "What was that your cousin called you?"

She told him.

"Is it your name? Really?"

"Yes. No, not really. I mean, that's what everyone calls me. It's short for Diligence." She searched his face anxiously.

He didn't laugh. Yet everyone always laughed, hearing her name.

"Diligence," he repeated, cocking his head a little, as if listening both to the sound and the meaning, trying them on her. "Diligence," he repeated with feeling. "I like it."

"Nobody ever has," she confided. "It's so peculiar. The old Quakers ran to virtues, Patience and Prudence mostly."

"I like it," he said again, and she was happy.

Suddenly, to her complete surprise, he began to sing, very softly so that, out of all the people waiting on the platform, only she would hear:

"Lavender's blue, Dilly, Dilly,
Lavender's green.
When I am king, Dilly, Dilly,
You shall be queen."

She loved it.

"My wife used to sing that," Mr. Smith explained, shouting now, because the train was coming. "But I never knew Dilly was a person whom I would some day—"

The rest of his words were lost because the train rumbled in, shaking the wooden platform. It was a little six-car toy train, just sociably full. They quickly found a double seat.

It didn't seem repugnant to Dilly to be jammed in so close. She felt merely a welcome protection in having Mr. Smith be-

tween her and all the other people in the car, in the world. She sat back against the hard straw seat, easy, unconcerned, flying away as the train started moving, flying over the city with a lightness of heart that even in childhood she couldn't remember. . . .

They moved at a comfortable speed, so that Dilly could see everything—people and pushcarts under the lamplight in the street below, and bright shop windows. Mr. Smith, leaning past her a little, breathed hard in his eagerness.

"My," he said, as they passed a market, "just look at those vegetables."

Dilly, peering down, anxious not to miss anything, caught a glimpse of lettuces and artichokes and eggplants piled in careful pyramids and looking from overhead not like vegetables to be eaten, but tidy, miniature, like a lovely, lasting still life.

It was a neighborhood of antique shops. The things they displayed were different from the restrained pieces valued in New England. They were full of curves, foreign-looking in their delicacy. Window after window—

"The harp!" Mr. Smith exclaimed. "Did you see the harp?"

Dilly'd missed it. Turning to study his face, she tried to imagine the association which had made the harp so precious. But she didn't know enough about him to guess. An accompaniment to his wife's voice, perhaps. As they traveled by, the harp had struck a chord of memory for him.

"Now," he admonished Dilly, "watch carefully. We're coming to the crystal place. Lovely as a palace."

And there it was, a shop whose ceiling seemed to be hung solid with crystal chandeliers all blazing with lights.

"Oh," Dilly exclaimed, touched by the beauty.

But in a second they were past.

Over the roofs of nearby houses, they looked west at the skyscrapers whose lighted windows twinkled against the early evening. The tall buildings didn't appear incredibly remote here, as when Dilly had stood in the street looking up, but close, personal.

"We could step over these roofs, start on the low ones and walk right into the Empire State or the Chrysler building," Mr. Smith said seriously. "If we had longer legs," he added.

Dilly laughed. But she knew what he meant. There was an intimacy with the skyline here that made it, for once, as engaging as it was marvelous.

Now the view was cut off. Directly on their level, in a large upper hall, they could see couples dancing.

"We'll do that too," Mr. Smith promised, even as the dance hall was left behind.

Dilly was seized with panic, not knowing whether he meant "some day" or right now, not sure that he wouldn't insist on getting off the El at the next stop and going back there to dance.

"But I can't," she cried, turning to him earnestly.

He looked unconcerned. "I don't mean these crazy rhumbas and congas—all that exotic, neurotic stuff. I mean the steps we learned when we were young—younger."

"But I didn't. I never learned."

"Never?" He couldn't seem to believe her. "Not even foxtrots and waltzes? You must have learned those."

Dilly shook her head. "We weren't allowed to, when I was growing up," she explained. "Later, at college, I might have. My parents didn't mind any more. They were becoming more worldly. They even said 'Sunday' for First Day and 'Monday' for Second Day, except amongst themselves."

"And still?"

"It was hard to begin dancing then. I felt awkward and there would have been no use after all, because I married Willard."

"What a queer idea," Mr. Smith was murmuring, "not dancing." He shook his head.

At Fourteenth Street they got off. It was quite dark by this time. Dilly expected to be taken across Third Avenue and up the other side, back to Sixty-seventh Street. But Mr. Smith had hold of her arm and he was leading her westward through the passing crowd, away from the El.

There were bars everywhere, drunks sprawled across railings,

dark cellarways, rubbish and garbage kicked about the streets. And in spite of the hard glare of electric signs, there was an uncertain, eerie feeling.

Where was the man taking her? A minute ago, up on the El, Dilly wouldn't have asked. She would have let him lead her wherever he saw fit. Up there she had had an almost enchanted belief in him. Now, on the ground, she was her cautious self again.

"Where are we going?"

A moment ago, she wouldn't have asked. Now she was frankly frightened. Was he really taking her somewhere to dance? Somewhere else, perhaps? She would have to insist on going home. If necessary, even, give him the slip. But he had firm hold of her arm.

Oh, why had she come? *Why had she?*

"Where are we going?" she repeated, unable to control her voice, uncertain whether to stand still and have it out now, before it was too late.

She felt herself break into a cold sweat.

In proportion as she had trusted him before, his apparent goodness and gentlemanliness, so now she was terrified. She was only a country woman, the kind most easily taken in. Every day the New York newspapers reported—

He didn't answer her question. Instead, he drew her off the street, into a swiftly revolving door.

CHAPTER 11

"EVER BEEN in the Automat before?" he asked her.

But Dilly was too overcome with relief to speak. And there was a lot to see.

The place was crowded with the strangest characters. Foreign types, like the ones on the El, people with different bone structure in their faces, men with beards, women wearing shawls, not

at all the kind of people Dilly was used to meeting in Elmira's neighborhood or back in Kendal.

Mr. Smith changed half a dollar into nickels. Then he led Dilly to the food compartments. Before the cake section, he stopped, looking earnestly into each little window up and down the wall.

"Crumb bun?" he read, turning to Dilly. "French cheese cake? Lemon cream?" He peered at her anxiously, as if giving Dilly pleasure were the most important function in his life. Then he moved on to the next section. "Bee cake?"

No, Dilly thought. That costs three nickels. I surely won't choose that.

"Apricot bar?" Mr. Smith inquired. "Prune bun?" He looked at Dilly once more, then back to the wall. "Roman punch?" This seemed to catch his fancy. "Roman punch?" he repeated persuasively.

"What is it?" Dilly asked. "I've never heard of it." *Punch!* "Is it something—to drink?"

"Want to try it?" he asked, not answering the question. "It's good."

And because she wished to please him, she said, "Yes. That's what I'd like."

But now he was grave, as if he feared that by urging he had pressed on Dilly something she wouldn't enjoy. "You're sure?" he asked, keeping his eyes steadily on her.

Dilly searched her heart for any lingering doubt. "Yes," she said at length. "I'm quite sure."

"Want to work it yourself?"

"Please."

He gave her two nickels. She dropped them in the slot and turned the handle. The door opened. Dilly had her Roman punch.

It turned out not to be a drink at all but something rather like a cupcake covered with jelly and shredded coconut, not nearly so exciting looking as its name.

Mr. Smith got himself a portion too.

At the coffee spigot he handed Dilly two more nickels and showed her how to set her cup well under before turning the lever.

"Let's sit in the balcony," he said, carrying the tray toward the staircase. "See the crowd better. No floor show like this anywhere in the city." He puffed a bit, climbing with the loaded tray.

They found room at a table with a Chinese who was reading a newspaper in native characters. As Dilly and Mr. Smith sat down, the Chinese never raised his eyes.

This is fun, Dilly said to herself, looking down on the colorful people milling about below.

"Something special about this Fourteenth Street Automat," Mr. Smith was telling her, as he transferred their dishes to the table. "People stay here all day, some of them. Come here to keep warm in winter and cool in summer, eat a little, so they won't be put out."

He took a paper napkin and carefully sopped up the coffee he had let spill on to Dilly's saucer in transit.

For the first time, she noticed his hands, the refined hands of a man who never digs in a garden, never takes down storm windows, puts up screens, does an emergency job on the plumbing. A city man's hands. They looked beautiful, though, to Dilly as, with an act of offering that was, she thought, almost devotional, they placed the Roman punch before her.

"I couldn't think where you were taking me," she confided, only half admitting—

"I know." He looked up at her mischievously, like a little boy. "It was to be a surprise." He sipped his coffee with gusto.

There was such simplicity in his obvious enjoyment, such innocence in the "surprise" he had prepared for Dilly—how could she ever have been afraid?

The Roman punch was still just a cupcake with jelly and coconut, but Dilly thought, taking the first bite, that she had never

tasted anything so good. It was unusual, almost exciting in flavor, stirring her with a sensation she couldn't define.

"Because they named you Diligence," Mr. Smith asked, putting down his cup, "do you have to work harder than other people?"

Dilly giggled. Maybe she was still a little unstrung. "No, it's not that. Diligence-in-love is what it stands for, what you would call 'brotherly love'—liking people, caring for them, even when it's hard."

This Mr. Smith seemed to find impossible to grasp. "Do you mean," he asked incredulously, "loving people who aren't lovable?"

"Well, yes. Very often they're not. That's just when one has to be diligent."

He pushed back his chair in a movement of exasperation. "I couldn't love anyone who isn't lovable," he stated flatly. "Could you? Could you really?"

"I try," Dilly answered, then added quickly, "Don't think I'm a good person. It's just an ideal I try to live by, to see the lovable in everybody—to—well, act as if it were there."

He stared at her wonderingly. Then his expression changed, softening into humor, and he drew close to the table again. "Even in an old reprobate like me?" he whispered, smiling gently at her.

"Even in an old reprobate like you," she answered, smiling back.

Now I'm flirting with him, she thought. This is how Lois used to act with George, before they were married. It's shocking of me.

She couldn't help thinking that it was also rather fun.

They seemed to be alone, sitting there, looking at each other across the table. They didn't even pretend to hide their delight in provoking each other's interest. To Dilly the stern voice of propriety was for the first time beyond earshot. The whole experience seemed so touching, so beautiful, such an unexpected gift that she would have felt ungrateful to turn from it.

The Chinese got up and left the table. He must have been there all along. But it was only now, when he was leaving, that Dilly became aware of his presence again, only now that she noticed the people milling around on the floor below.

Suddenly Mr. Smith glanced at his watch and looked startled. Perhaps he had an engagement to see another client, to meet a friend. Perhaps Mary was waiting for him to come home to supper. No doubt Mary was as uncompromising about his punctuality as she was about being right. Dilly wished she knew.

It was borne in on her how little she really did know about this man. So strange—how could she feel easy, comfortable with him, as though they were old, old friends, when almost everything in his life was hidden from her?

Swallowing the last remnant of Roman punch, she thought: But this is real. This pleasure in being together is a reality. The rest doesn't matter.

"Shall we go?" she asked aloud, to spare him embarrassment.

He looked reluctant as he nodded and then rose from the table.

They walked back to the El. Now Dilly didn't mind the drunks, the dark corners. Climbing the long flight of steps to the uptown platform—slowly now, for they were both tired—she thought, I feel safe.

As they stood waiting for the train, Mr. Smith found two pennies in his pocket and with them he drew two miniature chocolate bars out of a slot.

One for each of us, Dilly thought, watching the childish gravity with which he concentrated on the operation, so that the two little pieces of chocolate took on more sentimental significance for her than a whole boxful.

Watching him, Dilly felt an unaccountable rush of tenderness, as she used to feel for her children when they were little, still did for Will in his confusion, for Anne, loving that boy.

Mr. Smith didn't, as Dilly'd expected, give her one bar and keep the other. Instead, he opened them both and very carefully

broke each in half. Then he extended his hand and offered her the divided chocolates lying on their outspread wrappers.

"Half of mine for thee, half of thine for me," he whispered.

She was touched. "That's Quaker speech. Did you know?" she asked him.

"No. I thought it was just old-fashioned."

When she'd taken her share, he ate the remaining pieces, throwing the wrappers in a container under the machine.

"The other night," he confided, "I was standing here thinking —well, about you, so I forgot what I was doing. First thing I knew, I'd thrown the chocolate away and put the paper in my mouth."

Dilly laughed. She suspected that was what he wanted. But really, she felt like crying. Fortunately the train arrived then and in the business of getting on, of finding a double seat, more difficult now, in rush hour, Dilly regained her composure.

When she was settled at the window, looking out into the night she saw that the city was very ugly here, the houses, shadowed by fire escapes, stood so close to the El with windows so bare, uncurtained, that, as the train went by, Dilly could see into lighted rooms, catching the inhabitants in a moment of their uncharitably exposed lives.

Aching with compassion, Dilly turned her head away, toward Mr. Smith. Their eyes met.

When Dilly looked out of the window again, she thought with surprise, Now I'm seeing it differently, with his eyes.

For there was suddenly a delicate overlay of beauty on the ugliness, taking the sting out of the sordid scenes, a kindly significance which had escaped Dilly before. People sitting around a table, poor people at supper, children climbing into big bedsteads. It was a panorama of humanity bent on making a home, even in a tenement beside the El, a panorama so swiftly moving that it merged into one impression of family devotion.

And for a moment, sitting there on the hard straw seat, Dilly had the feeling which almost never came to her except when she was sitting in the Friends' Meetinghouse in Kendal, the feeling

of understanding life serenely through some faculty other than the baffled mind.

"It's funny," she murmured to Mr. Smith, though she hardly turned her head from the window, since she no longer wished to look away, "I don't know why this makes me think of our Meetinghouse."

"What is it like?"

"Plain and quiet. Not a bit like this, but still, it makes me feel . . . There's a maple outside the south window. I used to watch it when I was little and tired of sitting quiet. When the leaves of the maple rustled, I used to pretend they were dryads dancing. In the fall their dresses would turn such beautiful colors. Then, of course, they'd wither and drop off. I wish you could see it."

"I'd like to."

And this time, Dilly thought, I meant it when I said, "I wish." Not like the first time when I spoke about the gulls.

"I'm glad you didn't miss the opportunity," Mr. Smith was saying. "Next time you come to New York might be too late."

"Why?"

"They're going to take the El down."

"Take it down? Oh, no!"

The news gave Dilly a scare, as if she'd been advised that demolition crews were actually at work this second, knocking the supports out from under the very track she was riding on.

"Yes, they want to build a subway." He sounded sad. "Ride in the bowels of the earth then. Won't be able to see a thing but chewing gum."

The rest of the way, they spoke very little. Mr. Smith seemed content to be quiet. It never occurred to Dilly to make conversation. She'd been brought up to express her deepest feeling in silence and she was feeling very deeply now.

At the door of Elmira's apartment, with the elevator waiting for him, Mr. Smith stopped and held out his hand. "Good night," he said.

But Dilly knew that it was more than "good night." It was "farewell forever."

"Remember what you asked me before we went out?" she managed to whisper, though her throat was tightening. "Whether I'd enjoyed my stay in New York? Well, I have."

They shook hands quickly, like strangers, yet their eyes lingered on each other in the dim corridor, as though in this last minute they searched for something, some confirmation. Not anxiously, Dilly thought, but with the easy heart of those who know, even while still searching, that they already have discovered what they seek.

Then the sound of the elevator closing pierced Dilly with sadness. She would never see this man again.

CHAPTER 12

ELMIRA was stretched on the davenport, crying.

She did mind my going, Dilly thought, hurrying over to her. She cares for Mr. Smith. Oh, dear—

"Dilly!" Elmira wailed. "Oh, *Dilly!*" She broke down, unable to speak.

Dilly couldn't say anything either. She simply stood forlornly looking at her cousin. What was there to say? This was just the way things happen in life—Dilly had been the one Mr. Smith wished to take out.

"You wouldn't have liked the El," she said truthfully.

But Elmira paid no attention to what Dilly was saying. "Something terrible's happened," she finally managed to explain between sobs. "Henderson's sick. That wasn't his soul making him so quiet, it was his stomach."

"Oh—" Dilly exclaimed, collapsing into a chair. "Is that all?"

"*All?* He might *die.* He woopsed all over the rug."

Henderson, lying on a cushion at Elmira's feet, really did look pretty seedy.

"Elmira," Dilly said gently, "woopsing doesn't mean he's going to die."

"But it was terrible," Elmira moaned. She managed to sit up a little. "What'll we do? Do you think Mr. Smith would know?"

Dilly couldn't allow the memory of Mr. Smith to be dealt with so lightly. "He's not a vet," she said coldly.

"But he brought the Worcestershire Biscuits. That's what made Henderson sick."

"Elmira! How can you be so ungrateful? Mr. Smith came out of the kindness of his heart and brought you these remarkable biscuits and now you say they made Henderson sick."

"Not the biscuits," Elmira broke in quickly. "The box. Henderson ate the box, don't you remember? The box and the red ribbon. He never touched the biscuits, just sniffed at them and walked away."

This nettled Dilly too. After all, Mr. Smith had been very proud of the special flavor of Worcestershire Biscuits. He had brought them as an offering to Henderson's soul. And Henderson hadn't even noticed them. She didn't care what happened to that dog.

But she was sorry for Elmira, who, noting Henderson's rapidly deteriorating condition, dissolved into tears again.

"*I* think you ought to call him up," Elmira sobbed.

"Oh, I couldn't," Dilly exclaimed, frightened at the thought. "Why don't you wait awhile and see if Henderson doesn't feel better?"

They sat there an hour, talking in low tones, keeping watch by the sickbed.

"Did you have a nice time?" Elmira managed to inquire.

"Yes. It was sweet of you to pretend you were introducing us, as if he were a friend of yours."

This made Elmira giggle. "I was so afraid you wouldn't get home in time! Could you tell by my voice that I was putting on an act?"

"You were marvelous."

"He's handsome." There was unmistakable admiration in

Elmira's tone. "Very intellectual too, the way he recognized the breed. Pauline Beetle says he knows quite a lot about dogs, though he's just beginning that biscuit business."

Dilly gave a start. "Pauline? Does she know him?"

"Well, she's heard of him. At the Canine Club. Seems he goes there and looks up the dogs who've been registered and then he comes around, the way he did to me, with that sample."

"That's the trade secret!" Dilly blurted out. "That's how he knew about Allegra. And about Henderson being a Mule Terrier."

"Very enterprising," Elmira murmured, "only I don't see how he can make much money, if the dogs don't care."

"Is that why you introduced us, because Pauline—? Did you know before I went out with him, or—?"

"I phoned to her after you left. I thought maybe she could tell me what to do for Henderson. And she said to ask Mr. Smith. They think very highly of him at the Canine Club."

"You know," Dilly said slowly, "it does seem a little peculiar—a man like that, so distinguished and all, just selling dog biscuits. At his age."

"Yes. It does. But you needn't worry, darling. Pauline promised to find out all about him."

Dilly felt hurt. There was no need for Pauline Beetle to investigate her friend Durand Smith. And yet, she was glad to hear that he wasn't exactly unknown. She couldn't help wishing that Pauline had found out a little more.

"Pauline wants me to join the Canine Club," Elmira was saying. "For Henderson's sake. She's positive they'd put me on a committee. And I've been thinking— It's noble and it's deductible. At least," she added, a note of uncertainty creeping in, "I *believe* it is."

They were in the throes of another crisis.

"I think you ought to call him up," Elmira repeated, when the cushion had been cleaned and returned to Henderson. "I think you really should He must have lots of those boxes. He could

look at one and see if it says anything about an antidote, like on the iodine bottle. We can't. Henderson ate ours up."

"I don't know his number."

"Don't you know where he lives? Poor Henderson!"

"His daughter—Mary—he lives with her," Dilly admitted grudgingly.

"Maybe we could find it in the book," Elmira said, jumping up. "Mary Smith. I'm afraid there are a lot of Mary Smiths."

"Wait a minute," Dilly cried. "That isn't her name. She's married."

"And you don't know—?"

Suddenly Dilly remembered that she owed a good deal to Henderson. If it hadn't been for him, Mr. Smith would not have come back.

"I think he said it's Mrs. Humphrey Day."

Elmira turned on the lamp by the telephone and riffled through the book.

"Do you think it's all right?" Dilly asked, longing to deter her. She didn't want to speak to Mr. Smith about Henderson. "Do you think we ought to call up his home? Willard always told me not to bother men about business matters after hours."

"But this is an emergency!"

Elmira dialed. Her excited gestures compelled Dilly to go over and take up the receiver.

"He isn't in," a woman's voice told Dilly. "No, I don't know when he'll get home. I wish I did." Her voice moved away, but became so strident that Dilly couldn't help hearing. "Humph," it cried, "stop that. No, this second. Stop it! I can't hear a word." To Dilly the woman said, coming back, "I don't know where he is. Wait a minute." And she was gone again. "Randy, get down off that radiator. Get down or I'll—"

It wasn't an agreeable voice, even allowing for maternal exasperation.

I wish I hadn't called, Dilly thought.

Because she began to suspect what Mr. Smith's home life must be.

The harassed voice came back to the telephone. "I don't know where he is," it repeated plaintively. "I counted on him to sit for me. Then I come home after working all day and he isn't here." She didn't even try to disguise her crossness. "If you leave your name and number I'll put it by the phone."

"Never mind," Dilly said. "Thank you just the same." And she hung up quickly.

She didn't want Mr. Smith to find out that she had had this glimpse into his family life. Willard's rule should certainly be followed—one had no right intruding into a businessman's private affairs.

At least he won't find out, she said to herself, going back to Elmira and Henderson. How horrible! I suppose he stopped for coffee, poor man.

Elmira was sitting up and acting quite cheerful. "You know," she said to Dilly, narrowing her eyes and looking at the dog. "I believe Henderson feels better. There's something about being a mother—one can tell these things."

She got up and repaired the damage to her face. "Let's go to the Plaza," she mumbled from behind her lipstick. "It's your last night in town."

CHAPTER 13

"GOODBYE, darling. Now don't worry about Henderson. I'll look after him," Elmira promised.

"You've been sweet to me," Dilly said.

A redcap opened the taxi and took her suitcase.

She got out, looking back to wave, but Elmira was already being driven off to her massage. It would barely be over in time for the appointment with her broker. With that schedule, how could she take Dilly all the way to the train?

Grand Central opened vast and a little frightening.

I'll be all right, Dilly told herself, following the redcap down the slippery stairs and through the station. I'll be all right soon as I'm settled.

People were waiting by a closed gate. Pushing between them, the redcap set down the suitcase. He would come back, he assured Dilly, when the gate opened.

She drew away, detaching herself from the crowd, clutching her purse as she felt rather than saw a man edging closer.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, looking up. She was face to face with Mr. Smith.

"So you're really going this time," he said sadly. But the gentle smile Dilly had come to delight in deepened as he looked at her.

She couldn't speak. She could only nod her head.

He held out a little package done up in white tissue and tied with a cherry ribbon. "Something to take back," he said, giving it to her.

"Oh!" Dilly cried again. "Mr. Smith! How very kind." And she meant it, because it was a touching thought, even if she didn't happen to have a dog, which he couldn't know. "Thank you, Mr. Smith!"

"Don't you think," he asked shyly, "now that you're leaving and our enchanted journey is over, don't you think you could manage to call me Durand?"

She looked straight at him. "Yes, Durand."

Her acquiescence seemed to inflict on him even greater shyness, for he promptly gazed off at a distant corner of the station, as if he had no connection with Dilly at all.

She wasn't hurt. She thought she understood. And she felt a great longing to be very gentle with this man toward whom, judging by the sound of things on the telephone last night, life was unnecessarily harsh.

"How did you know?" she asked, to give him ease again.

He turned to her inquiringly.

"That I was leaving?" she added.

He smiled then. "You said you were going today."

"Yes, but I mean—I didn't say the train."

"Not so many trains stop in Kendal. I found that out. And when you weren't here for the first one—"

"But that leaves at seven-thirty."

"Yes."

"You mean—" she asked, "you mean you've been here since seven-thirty? *Nearly four hours?*"

"Oh, no." He spoke as if it were nothing at all, his getting up so early and waiting around all morning for her. "First I had some coffee. Then I went to Bryant Park and fed the pigeons. Those people in the Public Library have their minds so much on books, they overlook the pigeons. And this time of year—"

To think he'd come so far, waited so long!

"Your business," Dilly cried. "You've lost the whole morning."

"That's secondary," he announced gallantly. But in a tone that was almost discouraged, he added, "As a matter of fact, I've rather run out of leads. People don't get dogs much in winter. Still," he went on, brightening into his usual self, "as soon as we procure that patent—register the trademark—we'll expand. Sell to the stores. With greater production, we'll cut costs, increase earnings—"

The gate opened. The crowd surged forward.

"That redcap," Dilly said, looking about anxiously.

Mr. Smith took up the suitcase. "We mustn't wait longer," he told Dilly. "I want you to have a good seat. By the window."

Dilly protested, but he went through the gate. She followed, carefully carrying the package.

"There," he exclaimed breathlessly, when he had her installed in a seat of his choosing. Her suitcase was overhead. The package lay in her lap.

He was happy. Dilly could see that finding her had made him happy. Finding her—but she was about to leave.

He held out his hand. "Goodbye, Diligence."

"You can call me Dilly," she assured him. "Everybody does. It isn't the least bit—" She searched for a word. "Familiar."

"Not familiar enough for me," he answered, clasping her hand. "If everybody else calls you that, would you mind if I said, 'Diligence'?"

"But it's such a funny name," she murmured, as he let her hand go. "People always laugh."

"I haven't laughed," he reminded her, though he was smiling, but only in his friendly way. He lifted his hat and inclined his head a little. "I like it," he added, turning to go, "very much."

As he left the car, Dilly peered out of the window to watch him walk by, but he stayed on the platform, waving, separated from her by the glass.

He's so thin, she thought.

The train started. Picking up speed, it drew Dilly past Durand, away, away, faster and faster, into the tunnel. . . .

She didn't move. She remained perfectly still, just as she was with the package in her lap, as if by sitting motionless she could cling to the sight of him waving outside the glass, as if by her immobility she could will the train to cancel its swift advance.

When it finally emerged from the tunnel and rushed into the noonday glare of Harlem, Dilly lay back against the upholstery and shut her eyes. That was over.

She was going home. The "gay fling" she'd looked forward to before she left Kendal was behind her—all the glamour that had made her homesick, that crazy Henderson, the strange and touching "enchanted journey" with Mr. Smith.

Durand, I mean, she corrected herself.

She was going home, back into her world. She would get off the train quickly, since it hardly stops a minute in Kendal. The taximan who'd been there years and years would drive Dilly to the house. She would mount the piazza, fit the key in the lock, and the front hall would reach out and enfold her.

In the raffia basket hanging by the door, there would be a letter from Anne, maybe one from Will. They would tell her what train they were going to come home by on Friday. Lois and George expected her for supper. But even before that, as

soon as the neighbors saw that the house was open, they would drop around. In no time, Dilly would be caught up on all the local gossip.

Kendal . . . But Kendal was suddenly gone, the bright dream of coming home, the warm welcome pushed out of Dilly's mind as the train, rushing through Westchester, passed a festoon of gay, gigantic Lifesavers suspended from a factory.

Durand would love that, Dilly thought, wondering whether he'd ever seen these enormous candies, realistically colored in every flavor, spilling out of their wrappers. That's the kind of thing Durand delights in.

It was the cherry Lifesavers which reminded Dilly of the package in her lap. She looked down at it fondly, running her finger over the lopsided cherry bow, considering for an instant the idea of opening it. She'd never really seen the box. Henderson had done away with it before there was a chance.

No, Diligence Fuller, she said to herself, scornfully, you're not so far gone that you have to sit in the train gazing at dog biscuits which even a dog doesn't fancy. Where was I before those Lifesavers . . .

Neighbors and friends would drop in. She could catch up on local gossip. The Zoning Commission. She was very anxious to hear whether they had been able to put through the regulation protecting the old Bradbury residence from being bought for a funeral home.

At New Haven, a lot of people got on. Dilly thought she would have to share her seat. But they moved up ahead. As the train began pulling out of the station, she took off her coat and laid it on the empty space beside her. The package she kept in her lap.

Looking out, Dilly's eyes found themselves suddenly on a level with a line of toy trains and an Erector bridge in a huge show window. She could just picture Durand sitting on the floor with his grandchildren, running those trains. . . .

Sighing, she turned away quickly. From now on, would every

appealing, childlike thing she passed, wherever she went, remind her of Durand?

If she opened the package and looked at it now, she could throw it away, leave it on the train. *No!* Hadn't he presented it to her as "something to take back?" How could she think of throwing it away? Still, what would she do with it at home? Give it to Lois and George for Rob? Then she must leave it unopened.

"A present for Rob, all the way from New York."

But would Rob, who was so choosy, relish Worcestershire Biscuits any more than Henderson?

Should she just keep the package in the house somewhere, put it away in a cupboard, dusting it every spring and fall, remembering . . .

Not that! I mustn't do that, she cried vehemently to herself. *Going moony over a box of dog biscuits!*

And suppose she died, suddenly. They would sort out her belongings, Lois and Will and Anne. There, hidden away, would be Mother's Secret. Elmira would recognize it, tell the children . . .

No, Dilly said to herself quite firmly. Whatever I do, I mustn't put it away.

It had been sweet of Durand to bring her the gift, but now she must exclude it from her life, just as it had been sweet knowing him, but now she must forget.

I can't leave it on the train, though. That would be irreverent. I'll take it with me and dispose of it decently tomorrow.

Yes, it would be easier tomorrow. Dilly'd have other things to occupy her then. The house would need a thorough cleaning after being shut. And with the children coming for the week end—

She'd have to go to that meeting of the School Board, pack clothes in the basement of the Meetinghouse for the homeless in Korea. Or was tomorrow the day she'd promised to help at the Baby Clinic?

Dilly's mind was speeding faster than the engine. Though the

train was still in Connecticut, running beside a beach, so that Dilly was only looking at Long Island Sound, her mind was way ahead. It was already home.

But in Mystic, passing the tremendous cake of Tar Soap, maybe a hundred times life-size, painted silver and emblazoned with banners just like the actual one, Dilly was again reminded of Durand. It was another of those things that he would love.

And suddenly, she was overwhelmed by the constant presence of him, so that without listening to reason, which warned her that the train would soon be in Kendal, she pulled open the cherry ribbon and, clumsy with haste, tore the tissue paper.

WORCESTERSHIRE BISCUITS*
A Canine Confection

*Pat. Applied For — Durand Smith Co. New York, N.Y.

Hurriedly scanning the label, Dilly opened the box. Surprise and pleasure brought a rush of tears.

For instead of dog biscuits, she found a whole collection of miniature chocolate bars neatly packed in rows. Durand must have drawn them one by one out of the machine on the El. No doubt that was why he was so late getting home.

"Half of mine for thee, half of thine for me."

Remembering, Dilly felt the tears spill.

That's how it happened that the conductor, walking through the car as the train slowed down, found Dilly still sitting in her seat, fumbling with a box. That's why he had to hustle her into her coat, grab her suitcase, practically lift her down on to the platform. Because that train hardly stops a minute in Kendal.

November

CHAPTER 14

HALF AWAKE, listening for the factory whistle across the river, Dilly remembered suddenly that it was First Day. Only the early express hastening by told her she must get up.

No time to stop in such a sleepy place, it screeched, dashing past Kendal.

As Dilly closed the window, she could see the new coaches like a succession of scoured loaf tins already disappearing into Connecticut. She shivered. But she had to have a look at the day.

The wind was from the southwest; the tide was coming in. Though clouds shadowed the surface of the water, the air was bright with herring gulls flying straight up the river, outscreeching the train.

Novemberish already, Dilly thought. But it's going to be nice.

The trees had changed so during those five weeks she was in New York. The elms and maples were completely bare. While a few brown leaves still clung to the oaks, they looked sad, flapping singly in the wind.

They're stubborn, Dilly reflected, as she turned away to dress. But they'll fall too.

Opening the top drawer of her bureau, she allowed her eyes to linger a second on the box of chocolates Durand had given her. It nestled half hidden under the handkerchief case, where Dilly had tucked it the day she came home.

Still, the trees'll come into leaf again next spring, she thought,

hunting for a pair of nylons good enough to wear to Meeting. Summer after summer they'll bloom, whereas I—

And, sitting on the edge of her bed, stretching a leg and wiggling its toes as she gathered a stocking in her hand, she exclaimed to herself, But I *feel* years younger. How can I? Just because a strange man was kind to me?

She tried, while she combed her hair back, to see herself as he had seen her, to discern in her face the essential character which had appealed to him.

Had he noticed the glints in her eyes, as Willard used to do? Was it because the breeze coming up the river had blown her cheeks permanently pink? Or was it the person behind the face whom he'd discovered and—she couldn't help thinking—liked?

No, she said to herself honestly, turning from the mirror, it wasn't me. Just that he's lonely and that Mary—

She finished dressing and pulled back the bedclothes with a shake—the shake she wanted to give Durand's daughter. Then she crept quietly down to the kitchen, careful not to wake Will and Anne.

I've a lot more pressing things to do, she reminded herself scornfully on the stairs, than mooning in front of that mirror like some silly teenager. With both children home and Lois and George coming to dinner—

The coffee smelled good but Dilly let it stand, rushing off to the freezer for some of her garden broccoli, which she set on the drainboard to thaw. Then she scalded the stone-ground meal so Will would have his johnnycakes.

"That's what I come home for, your johnnycakes, didn't you know?" he always told her with the affectionate gallantry he might show a girl.

When he's sweet like that to me, Dilly said to herself, he seems to be trying to make up for Willard. . . .

She glanced hurriedly at the clock. But why all this rush? There was really plenty of time before Meeting. Just that she was so eager to have everything nice.

Salad, she decided—Belgian endive and watercress, Will's favorite. Anne liked it too. As for Lois—she was pleased with any food she hadn't had to prepare herself.

And George, Dilly thought quickly. I mustn't forget George.

Even after three years it was sometimes hard to remember that he was a fixture, not simply one in that series of boys who'd hung around for a spell and then disappeared; that he'd carried Lois off to a little saltbox of their own in Stonington.

Did George like endive? Dilly couldn't recall. But she would chance it.

Now for dessert—what? She pondered, stuffing the chicken.

She'd always baked something special when the children had had vacation from boarding school, some little surprise. Every homecoming had been a festival. Since they were grown up, it wasn't the same. The old standbys didn't delight them any more.

An apple pie? That would take too long. Besides, Anne didn't really care for pie.

When Dilly had finished her breakfast, she put the question temporarily aside as she went into the parlor, took the Bible off the shelf and sat down.

They'd always read a chapter or two together after breakfast on First Day. When the children were little, there was a pattern in which they arranged themselves: Lois, looking very cunning in one of those smocked voiles Dilly used to make the girls for best, on the sofa next to Willard; Anne squeezed into the rocking chair beside her mother, and Will lying on the floor playing quietly with Shadrach.

Shagrag, he used to call that dog, Dilly still remembered.

Willard began the reading. His voice, big and strong like his frame, his definite tone gave authority to the Scriptures. Sometimes he would call on Dilly or Lois or Will to read a second chapter.

As long as they were little, the children seemed to like the practice. There was that time Willard and Dilly went away for the week end and came home to find that the two older ones

had read to Anne. It was touching. Only, in their innocence, because their father never read from it, they chose the Song of Solomon!

It hardly seemed any time before they were all three away at school. They no longer said "thee" and "thy" to their parents when they came home for vacation, though they never seemed to mind being addressed by them in plain speech. Indeed, secretly, Dilly surmised, they rather cherished it.

They no longer joined in the First Day readings in vacation either—they were generally asleep.

Then Willard died.

Sometimes, like today, it was too hard for Dilly to sit here reading by herself. The words wouldn't settle on the page. But she always tried, taking the place on the sofa where Willard had sat, and when the print became blurred she rested the worn book in her lap and gazed out at the river.

A southerly breeze was blowing whitecaps over the water.

"Sit loose," her father used to say.

As a child, she'd closed her ears to that phrase, wishing he wouldn't use it just at the moment when she wanted to be comforted. It seemed hard, this way of saying, Give up willingly what thee cherishes, take willingly what God lays on thee.

Suddenly, breaking irreverently through Dilly's meditation, an idea popped into her head.

I know what I'll do, she thought, elated, while half ashamed of the intrusion. I'll make Roman punch!

She closed the book gently, as if she didn't wish it to feel slighted. But she was already jumping up and, with indecent haste, replacing it on the shelf.

Roman punch! The prospect excited Dilly so, she could hardly concentrate on the ingredients. Cupcakes (but she would bake huge ones in muffin tins), jelly, shredded coconut. With her cake batter and the currant jelly she'd put up last summer, she would produce something a lot more tasty than that second-rate concoction at the Automat.

Was there time? Yes, yes! She'd hurry!

Without even consulting the clock, she flew about the kitchen gathering the tins, the flour, sugar, milk and butter, the shredded coconut. She ran down cellar for two glasses of jelly.

But when she came up again and held the jelly to the light, though she saw that it was a beautiful clear crimson, Dilly felt suddenly uneasy. Mightn't there be complications?

"What's this?" someone, Will perhaps, would almost certainly inquire when the new dessert was served.

And Dilly would have to answer as casually as she could, "Roman punch."

"*Roman punch?* Never heard of it."

"It's a surprise," Dilly would explain quickly and no doubt add, to divert Will's attention, "because thee and Anne came home. Doesn't thee remember how we always used to have a surprise?"

Maybe Will would leave it at that. He would be too busy eating to say more.

Only then George, who loved to tease Dilly, would probably rise to the chance and ask, "Got a kick in it?"

That wouldn't call for an answer, just a smile for his childish humor.

But would George's jibe mark the end of the matter? Hardly. By this time one of the girls would surely ask, "Something you had in New York?"

And Dilly would have to acknowledge this, beginning all over again to defend her secret. If Lois put the question, she wouldn't rest till Dilly was pinned down. "Where did you have it?"

"In a restaurant."

"One of those snazzy places Aunt Elmira was always taking you to?"

Just the cue to set Anne off! "Which one?" the child would want to know. "Sardi's? The Stork Club?"

"As a matter of fact, Anne," Dilly would have to admit, offhandedly as possible, "since thee insists, it was the Automat."

Could this admission fail to call for further particulars? The children wouldn't need to be told Elmira had never taken Dilly to the Automat.

Now her imagination was running so wild that she could already hear Will asking, "Got a boy friend, Mother?"

No, she cried vehemently to herself, coming back to the present. She put down the jelly glasses. No!

Will would only have been joking, knowing that Dilly could never think of any man but Willard. Yet she wouldn't want him to joke about a matter like that.

I'll bake a pie, she resolved.

Yet something in her craved the Roman punch.

I must think this over, she told herself distractedly. I can't just go off half cocked.

But her hands wouldn't wait for her to think. They were already measuring butter into the mixing bowl, adding the sugar. The left one was already clasped around the bowl, drawing it close against her body, while the right one was beginning to stir. It stirred and stirred, compelled, bewitched.

Entirely against her will or judgment, Dilly was baking Roman punch.

CHAPTER 15

LONELINESS caught hold of Dilly when she left her sleeping children to walk up the empty Sunday street by herself. A golden beech leaf fluttered past her face, a single, dying leaf.

But as she neared the Meetinghouse, she no longer felt alone. The old building, plain and white, stood back amongst the trees waiting for her. Though the syringas in the Yard had withered, the low yews by the door were always green.

Mounting the steps Dilly felt that expectancy which had enlivened her coming here ever since she was a little girl. Just as in those days she used to watch her grandmother wrap herself in her shawl, so now, passing the rows of Friends already seated in

the quiet room and taking her place beside Philip Ludlow, Dilly drew the silence around her, shutting out the winds of the world.

She'd fussed over the preparations for dinner till the moment she left home, even wondering as she came here whether she'd added a pinch of salt to the cupcakes. Now, in the hush of worship, these and the other absorptions of her daily life dissolved.

Imperceptibly the gathered Meeting drew her in.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, Dilly quoted to herself, settling back on the bench, *He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom.*

She was still out of breath from walking and her eyes hadn't accommodated to the light indoors. Closing them, she bent her head a little.

Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

As if, instead of saying this to herself, Dilly had been quoting aloud, inspiring her neighbor, Philip Ludlow stood up and began to speak.

"Yesterday I was driving over to Wakefield," he said. He paused to button his coat.

At the sound of his voice, Dilly opened her eyes and looked up at him standing beside her—Philip, her lifelong friend. He always fidgeted with his coat like that when he got up to speak in Meeting.

I'm sure he isn't conscious of it, Dilly thought with affectionate amusement.

"Not far from the Johnnycake Trail," Philip went on, his coat being now buttoned, "I stopped by a field close to the beach and got out to look at a pile of stones. The old people around there say it was once a barn and that George Fox held a Meeting there when he visited Narragansett."

This wasn't the poetic imagery of Isaiah, just a simple account of Philip's own experience told in the words which came into his head as he stood there, yet Dilly felt it extend rather

than interrupt the meaning of the passage she'd been repeating to herself.

"That may not be the exact spot," Philip conceded, "but we know Fox held a Meeting near there. People came from miles around. Afterward the magistrates declared that if they had money enough, they'd hire Fox to be their minister. When he heard it, he said, 'It is time for me to be gone. For if their eye is so much to me or any of us, they will not come to their own Teacher. Our labor is to bring all men to their own Teacher in themselves.'

"Standing there in the sunshine nearly three centuries later," Philip went on in his quiet New England voice, "I thought of the ineffable glory these words confer on man: that rich or poor, educated or ignorant, of one race or another, he is himself the tabernacle in which the Teacher dwells, that every human being carries in him a touch of the divine.

"It brought it all home, so close to Kendal. As I looked across to Block Island I thought of Fox and his companions sailing away in their open sloop 'exceeding wet,' he observes in his Journal, and landing on Fishers Island for the night but being driven off by the mosquitoes. Next day they tried to cross the Sound but, he says, 'our boat could not live in that water' and they hove to.

"It took them three days to reach Long Island. Yet this was nothing compared to the hazardous voyages Friends were making to all parts of the world. Often their reception was rude. But still they went forth, believing they must publish their news, for surely no one who heard it could ever harm another human being, the dwelling-place of God. Henceforward men would deal reverently with one another, taking away the occasion for all wars. It seemed a small thing to die, if need be, carrying news like that around the world.

"But events didn't turn out the way these gallant Friends had hoped," Philip concluded sadly. "Much was won; much is still to be achieved. We whose turn it is to publish the news must still go out with it, but we must start in our own lives, in our

own homes, our own communities. We must each begin exactly where we are."

Very quietly, Philip sat down again beside Dilly.

In the silence which followed, she reflected on what he had said.

Presently someone behind her rose and, gripping the back of the bench with such earnestness that Dilly could feel it shake, began to speak.

"When we go out," he said slowly, as if he wasn't at all sure what was coming next, "may God make us lanterns through which His light can shine."

Dilly couldn't turn around to look, but she guessed it was one of the students who came over to Meeting from the University at Kingston.

"May we become clearer than we ourselves are, because of the light within," he added gravely.

Amen, Dilly said silently to herself, when the young man sat down.

As Elmira's guest, she had heard nothing like this. Now she was back in her own world, where people weren't afraid to use such phrases. And it was as much in thanksgiving for her homecoming as in concurrence with the prayer that Dilly's spirit echoed, Amen.

She herself had always felt too negligible to petition anything of God. It didn't seem as though she ought to ask Him to alter His plan in favor of hers, however deeply she might desire a blessing for someone else, if not herself. To her, worship meant sitting and listening in the Teacher's school. She knew that perhaps long afterward, in a moment of decision, she would be guided because of this communion. But to ask for something was beyond her.

And that was why, sitting there, listening with the ears of her soul, as she thought, she was almost shaken off the bench by the cry that suddenly came from her heart. It made no sound, never got past her lips, yet it shook her whole frame with its inner intensity, its utter unexpectedness.

Please God, please grant him his patent and make Mary kind. . . .

Oh!

What had got into her? How could she have been taken unawares by such a plea? She hadn't even been thinking of Durand, had she?

Did she care so much that she was bothering God about him in a way she'd never dared do for anyone before?

Oh, no! she assured herself. I hardly even *know* him. And besides, here—

She drew her arms to her ribs, drew in her soul, trying to squeeze it to the essence, to that part which alone she could properly present to God.

But Durand was still there.

Perhaps all along, though she'd been unconscious of it, he'd been with her here in Meeting, the last place she'd have expected to find him.

Dilly felt shaken, but she sat tense and motionless, holding her elbows to her body, waiting for the time when she would be calm again and she might center down. For she knew it would come, if she waited humbly. It always came, this complete reduction of creaturely caring, of any awareness save of the presence and the peace of God.

Her heart began to beat quietly once more. She let her elbows go. As Dilly stopped struggling with herself, a small sigh of relief escaped and she shut her eyes contentedly.

She was standing on the shore of the world now, on its very outer rim. The wind-blown turbulence lay behind her. Pebbles hurt her feet and the sands were unsure, but as she looked seaward Dilly saw that the shining expanse before her was in reality the ocean of God's concern for man.

Little waves lapped about her. Suddenly a mighty one came and loosed her from her foothold, carrying her out, far out.

The shore of the world became indistinct. Dilly couldn't see the pebbles any longer, not even the outline of the trees inland. This was how the world must look to God as he covered its

edges night and morning with the tide of His love—all one piece. Not nations and continents cut off from one another by water, but groups of people everywhere held together by this tide.

Floating in radiance Dilly drifted, forgetful of the land, unaware of anything but infinite goodness. Then the very wave that had carried her out and supported her washed her back to the place from which she'd come.

But she wasn't the same person any more.

Thinking of Lois and Will and Anne now, she saw each one with the understanding and compassion with which she imagined God saw them.

She was burning with concern for people in need everywhere. Because of it, in the week to come, she wouldn't mind so terribly collecting garments her neighbors ceased to fancy; she wouldn't turn in disgust from the rips to be sewn and the repulsive stains, from the shape and odor of the donors' bodies still clinging to the cloth, remembering only that in some forlorn place, perhaps thousands of miles away, these garments would preserve life.

Opening her eyes again, at peace with herself, Dilly gazed out at the branches of the maple framed in the window.

At the back of the room, a very small girl who'd certainly been patient long enough asked in a whisper everyone could hear, "Is it over?"

No one else stirred. Against the child's vibrant voice, the hush was intense.

Once again, quite clearly, Dilly saw the shore from which a moment ago she'd felt herself swept by the mystical tide. Only now, to her surprise, she recognized it—the sands, the pebbles, the trees inland.

That was the beach at Napatree Point where she'd often stood looking across to The Folly and Stonington, on a clear day even to Noank. She'd often stood there when she was a girl, watching the terns travel in a wide circle from the bay to the ocean and back. Then she had walked home, in the direction of the Lighthouse. . . .

"Now is it over?"

If the mother gave the child a reply, it wasn't audible.

Friends clung to the sense of covering, joined in the closing silence. The child's voice hadn't touched it, not seeming a present sound at all, but more like speaking in a distant neighbor's field.

Dilly understood the urgency of her whisper. She could remember how she herself had felt here at that age—her legs all pins-and-needly, her little seat all prickly from sitting still. Wedged between her father and mother, Dilly had looked appealingly from one to the other and her father had always taken her hand and stroked it. She could remember his face, serene and loving as he looked down on her. Worship completely engrossed her mother. She never seemed to notice Dilly wriggling, never heard the big sighs coming out of the little mouth.

Yet even at that age, Dilly thought now, even then I had this feeling of something greater than myself within me. After a while it made me willing to sit still. The plainness became beautiful. I wonder why my children don't seem to—

They'd been patient in their turn, when she and Willard brought them. Yet as soon as they were old enough to decide for themselves, they stopped coming, even Will, who'd suffered so much. But Dilly never gave up hoping that some day they'd feel inclined again.

It isn't easy, she thought, without a minister or an order of service, without music or flowers or visible sacraments, nothing to look at but whitewashed walls and pine benches, nothing but inwardness. And very young people—

"Is it over now?" the little girl asked again.

Yes, Dilly thought, sending her an unspoken message of hope, it's over.

For Philip was preparing to break the Meeting. He hadn't moved yet, but his body, relaxed while his soul was withdrawn, had become alert.

The noon train sped through Kendal, whistling as it went.

Philip turned to Dilly and stretched out his hand.

She took it, realizing that at first it was merely a movement which Philip, as the head of the Meeting, felt called on to make; that his spirit, lagging a little, wasn't ready to return to the bustle of life. Though he was looking straight at Dilly, his eyes gazed inward still. Then gradually they lit up with their usual out-reaching friendliness and Dilly saw they were taking her in.

Neither Philip nor she spoke immediately. They sat a moment longer, just smiling at each other, while everywhere, along the bench and in those opposite, Friends began to shake hands.

Slowly quiet conversation broke out all over the room. The rise of the Meeting had come.

CHAPTER 16

STILL ENFOLDED in the tranquillity of the past hour, Dilly stood beside Philip Ludlow on the step of the Meetinghouse, visiting with Friends.

There were always a few who lingered, gathering about the Yard in little clusters, as though the experience they'd just shared made them unwilling to part. They spoke of commonplace matters now, laughing, even poking gentle fun at one another, yet their voices somehow remained low, for the sense of otherworldliness still held them.

But the children stretched their lungs as well as their legs.

Edmund Mansfield was, as usual, telling the Hills about the old days in Kendal. He was eighty-seven and he didn't seem to remember that they'd been here two years and that he'd told them very much the same thing many times before.

Vaughn and Denny appeared to be enjoying it, though, and certainly their children weren't just pretending interest.

Nice, these Hills, Dilly thought, as she and Philip stood beside them.

They'd come to Kendal for a vacation that awful summer Bart Brown lost his life and they'd never left again, moving into the little house where Bart and his family had lived.

With their help Bart's Boys were getting started in business, not just repairing boats any more, but making them. Denny was showing the boys how to purchase materials and keep books; Vaughn worked out a plan for doing very effective advertising on a shoestring. A flood of happy energy seemed released in the Hills when they came here. They couldn't do enough for others.

Their children, Neil and Susan, took to Kendal with a zest that Dilly considered downright pathetic. All their first years they must have been starving for a life they'd never known.

"Town's changed," Edmund was telling them, shaking his head sadly and waving his arm in a gesture which took in the whole area before the Meetinghouse. "Not so much since the turn of the century," he threw in, as if that were only yesterday. "Before then. Those houses over there. Used to be nothing but pasture, when I was a boy. And the elms—I remember the day they were planted. Lost my kite."

The elms, Dilly mused. From the day the small boy lost his kite till Edmund was in his seventies, he must have considered those majestic trees more enduring than any man. Then, without warning, the hurricane swept by and in a matter of minutes half of them were blown down.

No more attached, it seemed to Dilly, recalling those uprooted giants, than dandelion seeds in an offshore breeze. Now blight threatened the survivors. Soon they might all be gone. And what would Kendal, what would New England be without elms?

"In the woods back of the pasture, wading along the brook—which isn't there any more—we used to catch turtles."

Susan was listening wide-eyed. Edmund noted the child's interest.

"Thee could whittle a boat," he told her, delighted with his audience, "launch it in that brook way up the pasture and run alongside till it reached the river. Thee could follow it, if thee

ran fast, as far as the place where the shipyard used to be, but thee could never run fast enough to see it float into the ocean."

Susan gazed at him, enchanted, her bright hair falling back from her head as she lifted her face to the old gentleman's. There was an exceptional charm about this girl, Dilly thought. Her movements were beautiful.

"Nearly every day," Edmund went on, "an ox train loaded with granite went down from Quarry Hill to the depot. Civil War monuments for Gettysburg and Antietam."

Vaughn turned to Denny. "I didn't know those came from here," she whispered, "did you?"

"The wheels of the trains stood twenty feet high," Edmund continued impressively, before Denny had a chance to answer Vaughn. "It took twenty yoke of oxen to draw them."

"Gee!" Susan murmured.

Edmund noticed the boy standing on the edge of the group. "Thee," he said, to draw Neil in, "thee should have seen the river when the paddle wheelers steamed up and down in those days, all carved and gilded. Magnificent, they were." The old gentleman's eyes flashed. "The *Julia,* the *Sadie.*" His voice quavered with emotion as he recalled the names of the boats that had colored the world of his youth. "The *Golden Star,* a huge double-ender. I wish thee could have seen them, my boy, on a summer evening, when they docked down there at the foot of Commerce Street with the band playing, 'Home Sweet Home.'

"We'd be sitting under the butternuts by the side of our house, watching the sun set behind the trees over in Connecticut, listening to the frogs croaking and the katydids in the grass. And the sound of that music would come to us over the water. . . ." The old gentleman's voice seemed to fade away. "Then," he murmured, "the gaslight would go on upstreet and glitter on the river, a new moon would appear. . . ."

Young Neil Hill, standing there listening, had to look *down* on Edmund. He, more than anybody, caught the old man's feeling for the river life, Dilly thought, as she observed eagerness quicken in his face.

That boy, she said to herself. He's like Will, when he was fifteen. Soft and sweet, so you can see his heart right through his eyes and it almost hurts to look at it. Yet manly, too, in a way you have to respect.

It touched Dilly to see him and remember. . . .

Suddenly, seized with alarm, she cried to herself, The *dinner!*

She said goodbye as hastily as possible. Turning to take leave of Philip, Dilly saw he wanted to go with her.

He often walked her to her door after Meeting, though it was out of his way.

It's just because we're such old friends, she thought as they left the Yard together. He can talk to me about the times when my children were small and George and John . . .

But Philip didn't mention his sons.

"Never been more beautiful weather," was what he said when he and Dilly reached the tree-lined street. "But doesn't thee think there's something wrong with autumn nowadays? Meetinghouse doesn't smell familiar."

"*Smell?*"

"Used to reek of mothballs. Everybody's winter clothes brought down from the attic. Like leaves burning outside, it was an equinoctial phenomenon."

"Mothballs!" Dilly exclaimed, wrinkling her nose.

"It isn't that I *liked* the smell," Philip assured her, grinning. "Just that I depended on it. Now people use these sprays, I don't know what time of year it is unless I look out. And my hat smells like somebody else's."

Dilly laughed.

As they were nearing her house she asked, "How's thy George?"

Philip's face lit up. "Fine," he answered. "Had a letter yesterday. Still glowing over the success of the work camp he helped set up in Israel last summer. Jews, Arabs, and Westerners all working and living together in friendliness. Everyone had said it couldn't be done."

Looking at Philip and seeing how pleased he was with this

son's little part in fostering goodwill abroad, Dilly couldn't help thinking of the other boy, who'd come back from working in that hospital in China hopelessly sick.

"John better?" she asked gently.

Philip shook his head. "Thee knows," he confided sadly, "it was of John I was thinking in Meeting. Not all the martyrs lived centuries ago. It seems to take as much courage to follow Christ's teaching today as in any other age." He turned his face away.

Dilly ached for him. "Won't thee come in?" she whispered. "Stay for dinner. Will and Anne are home and Lois and George are coming."

"Thank thee, Dilly," Philip answered, adding, not very convincingly, "I must go."

And Dilly knew that he simply didn't want to break into her family circle.

He started off, but when he'd gone only a step or two, he returned and took Dilly's hand. He took it formally, just to say goodbye. But he looked down on her with moving tenderness.

If it wasn't that he'd always looked at me that way, Dilly said to herself, I'd think—

They had a lot in common. Elmira was right. Dilly'd always taken him for granted. That he and she were "naturals" for each other, as Elmira put it, had never entered her head.

Had it occurred to Philip?

No, Dilly decided, glancing after him as he walked down the street. I don't think so. There's more than that to marriage.

And yet, the way he'd looked at her—with so much feeling. Perhaps, were it not that he sensed the impersonal quality in Dilly's affection for him, Philip might—

She'd never thought of that before.

CHAPTER 17

As *a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing,* Dilly thought happily, waiting for the children to wander into the dining room. She was already in her place behind the steaming platters.

When they were seated, George and Lois on one side, Anne on the other and Will at the foot of the table, Dilly bent her head. She could feel her family joining her in the silence and her heart overflowed. That even now she should have so much. . . .

But as Dilly raised her head again and began carving, she wondered suddenly whether her shaking hands could do it. Fear clutched her. Those five portions of Roman punch in the pantry!

She knew it was silly and yet—

"Sorry I didn't see you the night you came home from New York," George was saying to her. "We've been working late all week."

Intent on carving, Dilly gave him a sidelong smile. George was always sweet. Because he'd lost his own parents early, he was attached to her.

George went on, looking at her with that nice, good-natured expression of his, "Lois says you had a great time."

"*Yes!*"

The little word popped out of Dilly's mouth with the whole force of her suppressed excitement. All around the table, faces turned to her curiously, or so, at least, it seemed. Certainly no one could be left doubting but that Dilly'd had the most delightful time.

"It's funny," Lois remarked. "I never thought you'd take to the big city."

"I know." Dilly nodded as she handed up a plate. "I was terribly homesick for Kendal at first. But then—New York has charms too."

This seemed quite reasonable to Lois, judging by her expression, but to Dilly it was frightening that, without even thinking, she had quoted Durand.

"Mother went to see the Balinese Dancers," Anne was telling Will. "Imagine Mother—" She giggled.

"Did you like them?" Will asked.

"Well—"

Everyone laughed as Dilly paused, hunting for words to describe what she'd felt as those brown young bodies—

"Kendal Quakeress quits calm cottage craves quivering cacophony in café capital," Anne murmured. Then she picked up the wishbone and began to gnaw, peeking at Dilly from under her lashes with teasing eyes. But with so much love in them too.

She's still just a little girl, Dilly thought fondly. Aloud she said, trying to sound cross, so as to join in the game, "Oh, all right. Thee's just jealous."

At last—a break in the conversation. Everyone was eating.

Dilly took a deep breath and slumped a little against the back of her chair. Now if only she could get through the rest of the meal!

Presently, Anne cleared the table and brought in the dessert, running back and forth to the pantry as if she were still at college, her head and shoulders leading her faded denim legs. She moved with her old grace, but the anxiety of making class on time had changed her walk.

"What's this?" Will asked, as she set the Roman punch before him.

Quickly, Dilly turned to George. "How's thy business?" she inquired solicitously, though to her knowledge there was nothing wrong with George's business.

"What's this?" Will repeated, before George could open his mouth.

"I don't know," Anne said, giving Lois and George their portions. "Mother made it."

Dilly kept her eyes on George, but he seemed to be more interested in the food before him than in his business.

"Looks good enough to eat," he observed, instead of answering her.

Forced by George's inattention to turn to her own plate, Dilly had to admit it did look nice. The crimson jelly shone through the snowy coconut. Only, her fork, she noticed as she took it up, shook.

No one said anything. They were all engrossed in food.

Managing somehow to control the fork, Dilly got a little of the Roman punch into her mouth. Eagerly she waited for the taste to thrill her tongue, anticipating the excitement the first bite had aroused that evening, up in the balcony of the Automat.

But, no. It didn't stir her. It was a good dessert, nothing more.

I'll never bake this again, Dilly resolved silently, so disappointed that she was almost angry.

She pushed the plate away.

There was no enchantment. She'd wanted to recapture the excitement of that evening, of the ride on the El and the intimate little moment when she and Durand sat looking at each other across the table, so wrapped up in their discovery of each other that they hadn't even noticed the Chinese. There'd been a tang to life then.

But now, now it was quite gone. The spell which was supposed to evoke it again had flatly failed.

Dilly pushed the plate still farther from her. The others took no notice. They seemed to be enjoying themselves.

"Say, Mother," Will exclaimed finally. "That was wonderful. Any seconds?"

"Finish mine," Dilly urged, handing it to him. "I'm not hungry any more."

"Neither am I," said Anne, patting her little stomach contentedly. "That was yummy."

Even Lois praised the Roman punch. But no one inquired where Dilly had learned to make it. As far as they were concerned, it might have been one of the old standbys. They didn't even ask whether the dish had a name.

I needn't have worried, Dilly thought, weak with relief.

Yet in a way, she couldn't help admitting to herself later, as she gathered the place mats and waxed the table while the children did the dishes—in a way, she would have liked to tell them. If she hadn't been afraid they'd think it ridiculous or even improper—She would have liked them to know.

About Durand, I mean, she explained to herself, as if herself couldn't possibly guess.

She'd never see Durand again. What harm would there have been in telling the children?

Especially since she no longer cared. The flatness of the Roman punch proved that. True, Durand had interrupted her meditation in Meeting, making her pray most strangely. But that was before she'd tasted the Roman punch. Now she had ceased to care.

After Lois and George went home, Will and Anne stayed on talking to Dilly by the fire.

They were companionable with her, these two, really sweet. Lois had always kept things to herself. But Will and Anne rattled away about their work and their friends. Dilly could share their lives.

Yet, they didn't belong with her any more. She knew that too. They were somewhat on the order of guests. Because they'd once gone away, there was a strangeness when they came back, not reserve, but the world from which they'd come was their home now. Though everything in the house was the same as when they left, their rooms unchanged, though their comfortable old clothes still hung in their closets and their cherished books stood on the shelves, they were merely visitors. Tomorrow they would be gone.

Tomorrow, their worried frowns seemed to say, as they spoke of impending exams, we won't even be here.

But they're with me now, Dilly cried to herself, determined to make the most of the moment. They're mine today.

Clinging thus to the warmth of their presence, she felt even

then, watching the coals in the fireplace burn small, the cold that was creeping in.

"Say, Mother," Will asked, "do you have plenty of eggs? I'd like to take one back to school."

"An egg? Don't they feed you enough?"

"Shell's all I want. Guy in the next entry glued half a one on his loudspeaker and you'd be surprised what the added mass on the cone does. Cuts down transient response and puts bite into the violins."

"I see," Anne observed caustically. Then she laughed at Will. "You're just like Parky. All you two ever talk about is your sound systems."

Pointedly ignoring her, Will got up, stretching. "Guess I'll run down to Lotteryville and have a look at my boat, Mother. Mind if I take the car?"

"Not a bit." And Dilly added, perhaps to hold him a minute longer, but hesitantly, because it was always hard to talk about the past with the children, "Will, does thee remember the 'Gooly'?"

"You bet!" His face lit up. "I loved her. Used to dream about when I'd be big and have a boat of my own. Now I have."

Dilly looked up at him and thought, I'm so glad he has some things that make him happy.

She knew he was still troubled, but he made a cheerful appearance and a handsome one standing there, tall as Willard but better proportioned, lithe and slender. The firm gentleness that characterized all his features came out particularly in his eyes, the color of Dilly's own. But his hair was lighter than hers, more like his father's.

"I can remember the 'Gooly' too," Anne was saying. "Well—only a little. I remember being scared."

"But we always stayed in the river or the bay. We never went outside," Dilly reminded her, surprised.

"I was scared, though," Anne said. "It was when we made the mooring. I used to hide in the cuddy till I knew it was picked up."

Will nodded his head gravely. "Father used to be nervous making the mooring. I remember that, too. If he thought you were going to miss, he'd rush forward and grab the boathook."

"Very fierce," Anne put in.

"Nervous," Dilly corrected, looking at her admonishingly.

This wasn't the way she wanted the children to look back on those days with their father. She wanted their memories to be all beautiful. She herself could only remember happy times with Willard. Even those rare occasions which had brought Dilly anguish, which had demanded patience and forbearance on her part, had had happy endings. Why should the children be so coldly critical?

"Thee knows," she said to Will, "I'd like to go sailing again some day. It's been such years and it would be fun. Will thee take me next summer?"

"Sure," he said, putting on his old windbreaker. He gave his mother a look of affection. "Sure, we'll go next summer."

He left.

Anne had studying to do and Dilly decided to go up and lie down.

But she couldn't sleep. She lay savoring the satisfaction that had come to her since dinner, when she realized suddenly that the little excitement over Durand was past, that she could even have talked about him to the children. She was herself again, in command of things, sensible and strong, the mainstay of the family. Pleased and a little proud, she lay still with her eyes shut. But she couldn't sleep. Just the realization that she'd got over that excitement seemed in itself to excite her.

It wasn't long before Anne came in and threw herself across the foot of Dilly's bed, lying on her stomach with her chin propped in her hand.

"Sick of studying," she explained. Then, in a strangled whisper, as if she couldn't hold it back any longer, she confided what she'd really come to say: "Had a wonderful time last week end."

"Tell me about it."

"Parky came down from Hanover and we just spent the whole week end going around together. It was wonderful."

That was all she seemed able to tell. Where they'd gone, what they'd done that had been so wonderful, she couldn't relate or even, it seemed to Dilly, recall.

I know how she feels, she thought, studying the child lying there looking so pensive.

Anne had caught her hair back in a scrap of ribbon, making it into a wispy little cowtail that didn't flatter her as much as when she wore it well brushed out and curling softly around her neck, but it did show off her ears.

Dilly remembered thinking when this new baby was brought to her, This one has the prettiest ears of the three. And she'd felt guilty gloating over a baby's ears when millions of people were out of work.

Anne's ears were still pretty, hardly any bigger, now that she was grown up, just as delicate in coloring. Everything about Anne was sweet—her straight little nose and her mouth that looked always ready to make a joke or else respond to one, that *had* looked so, at least, before this Dartmouth boy, this Parky—

Dilly thought, so fervently that this too might have been a prayer, I just hope he loves her.

She got up and, opening the top drawer of her bureau, took out the chocolates.

"Have one," she said to Anne, holding out the box. The lid, with the Worcestershire Biscuits label, she hastily thrust back into the drawer.

"How cute," Anne said, raising herself on one elbow. She took a chocolate, unwrapped it thoughtfully, and put it in her mouth. "He's thinking of going to med school," she went on, mumbling with her mouth full, the way she used to do long ago, to Willard's disgust.

But I'm not going to reprove her now, Dilly thought stubbornly.

"That takes years and years, doesn't it?" Anne asked.

"Years and years," Dilly echoed. She ached for the child. "An-

other," she urged, unable to think of anything else to say, and she offered Anne the box again.

She herself didn't care for any.

"They're good," Anne observed. "Mind if I take two? I never saw them put up like this." Then she remarked, looking at Dilly as she unwrapped the chocolate, "You really did have a nice time, didn't you? I can tell. You look—well, more alive than when you went away."

"*Alive?*"

"Not that you looked dead before," she assured Dilly, laughing. "But what I mean—you seem to be—" She dropped her eyes, breaking off in the middle of the sentence. "Where did you get these?"

"Present. Somebody gave them to me."

But how can I speak this way to her? Dilly asked herself, horrified. Brush her off with a noncommittal answer, when she's just been telling me—

"A going-away present," she explained aloud, smiling, "from a man I met in New York, a very nice man."

Anne sat bolt upright and stared at Dilly, quite obviously surprised. But she spoke in a controlled voice, hiding any feeling she might have, as she asked quietly, "A friend of Aunt Elmira's?"

"Well, not exactly a friend," Dilly had to admit. "But I did meet him at her house. She introduced us. And he was kind enough to take me out riding on the—"

"You mean," Anne asked, no longer hiding her surprise, "you went on a date, Mother?"

"No, dear," Dilly cried, though she was trying to sound patient. "Of course I did nothing of the sort. Thee knows I don't mean anything like that. He merely was kind enough to show me one of the sights—"

"Unhun."

Anne didn't ask what the sight might have been. After this exclamation she fell silent.

Dilly, looking out of the window, said nothing either. She was

thinking of the El, of the crimson windowpanes and potbellied stove in the station, of the two people who'd stood on the platform waiting for the train in the early evening light.

They were set apart from all the other people on the platform, so that only the woman could hear the song the man was singing to her. They were set apart from all the other people in the world, caught up in something neither of them fully understood. . . .

Slowly turning and facing Anne, Dilly saw with a shock that the girl had been watching her. No doubt she was wondering—

Moved by an impulse, Dilly took the whole lot of little chocolate bars and quickly dumped them into Anne's denim trouser lap.

"Thee take them back to college," she said, thrusting the empty box back into the drawer with its lid.

She stood staring at the bureau.

Then she murmured, her back turned to Anne, "It was an enchanted journey. And like all enchantments—"

December

CHAPTER 18

THANKSGIVING had been beautiful, with the children staying for the week end. Ever since they came last, when Dilly got back from New York, she'd looked forward to this holiday. But in no time it was over. Monday morning she could hardly believe it was already lived, used up, like four thin pages on a calendar, which must be torn off.

Here she was again, left with no one to cook for, nothing to do except clean up, empty the ashtrays, plump up the sofa cushions, change the beds, see to the laundry—

Nothing to do?

How can I feel this way? she reproved herself sternly, with so many things, frightfully important things I have to attend to *at once.* Millions of things.

The house. The Baby Clinic. The Park Commission—she must write out that list of plants to be ordered. And the Ladies' Guild of the Hospital wanted to know whether she'd be responsible for the surgical dressings on Thursdays. *So many things!*

I must start at once, Dilly insisted, meaning to drive herself.

But instead of starting, she sat in the wing chair looking out at the river. So often, on clear winter mornings like this, it had that beautiful light. Without the leaves to shade it, the river looked straight back at the sky. The smallest cloud that passed over the earth lay on the water too.

It's cold out, Dilly decided. I must put on my heavy suit to go uptown.

She didn't stir, though.

Could she be getting the grippe? Her throat wasn't scratchy or anything, she didn't feel achy, but it certainly wasn't like her to be so listless. This was the way she'd acted last winter before she got sick.

Such a sleepy river . . . Hard to imagine it in the last century, crowded with ships, those paddle wheelers steaming up from Watch Hill, the coasters coming in under sail. What a sight that was! the old men used to exclaim, implying that the town had been *something* in those days, a great seaport, one would think hearing them talk by the fire—Dilly's father, Edmund Mansfield, and others of their generation. Edmund was the only one left now, darling old Edmund. But the ships were gone long ago, so long that Dilly couldn't even remember.

The grandfather clock struck. Ten.

Dilly forced herself to turn from the window, but still she didn't get going. Instead, opening the *New York Times,* she read it through, dallying over the sections she usually skipped, even the society page, on which she studied every bride-to-be.

Suddenly she sat up, shaken loose with surprise, for there on the page before her was a startling picture: Elmira at her very best—charming, pleased with herself, possessed of that inner importance that makes a middle-aged woman handsome.

Above the picture was a caption which Dilly had at first overlooked, *Aide for Benefit.* And underneath:

> Mrs. Harry Bliss, chairman of the committee sponsoring the Pedigree Prom to be given at the Waldorf-Astoria December 13th for the benefit of the Canine Club, shown with her Mule Terrier Henderson.

It was the portrait of Henderson, seated with elegant poise beside Elmira, which transfixed Dilly. The photographer had caught his whole devilish character, aristocratic, aloof, as only a pampered mongrel can look.

A dog of distinction, Dilly thought. And she laughed out loud.

Now, all at once, she felt like doing something—anything. She would just forget about the beds and dishes and laundry and all

those community concerns. Cut loose. She'd never done such a thing, but why not, once? Get in the car and drive off. Where, in December?

With one more glance at Elmira and Henderson she put the paper aside and rushed upstairs to dress. She'd go to Providence.

What for? Well, she didn't know yet. She still had a lot of Christmas shopping. She might visit someone. There were so many people she was always meaning to see. The Museum—she might go there. It was years since she'd been and she'd always loved it. A little innocent excitement.

She got out the car and went.

In Providence, Dilly parked the car downtown and began looking in the shops. She knew she wouldn't buy anything for herself; there was nothing she needed.

I'm not quite like Elmira yet, she thought, smiling.

But she dropped into that nice place where she'd bought the turquoise wool before going to New York and glanced idly about, just passing the time.

And then something caught her eye—a dinner dress of burnt orange moiré, the loveliest she'd ever seen.

As well as the last thing a person like me would ever use, she said to herself ruefully.

But it was beautiful and she enjoyed just looking at it. The soft folds played with the watered silk, alternating sheen and shadow, warm with a vitality Dilly's dresses seldom had. Yet it was demure too, for all its brightness, cut in perfect taste.

How would it look on? Would she dare—?

She wasn't going to buy it, she was certain of that. But she couldn't resist the temptation of seeing herself in such a bit of sheer frivolity.

If a saleslady had given Dilly any attention, she most certainly would have refused to set foot in a fitting room, for that would have misled the poor thing. Dilly didn't want to give the impression that she was considering the dress. But every saleslady on the floor was busy and Dilly only just managed to ask one in passing whether she might try this on, please.

"Certainly, madam. Take Room Nine. I'll be with you when I've finished with my customer."

It was as simple as that. Dilly went in and pulled the little curtain. She had the dear dress all to herself.

And now she stood in a triptych of mirrors, viewing herself from every side, almost overwhelmed by the effect. She'd never dreamed she could look like this—slender, taller, with an elegance created by the softly shining silk that—

She couldn't define the grace it gave her; she could only look from one to the other of the mirrors. She felt wickedly happy, standing there in the narrow fitting room, wickedly but quite supremely happy until—

Her hair!

What had happened to it?

Suddenly, without notifying her, it had turned gray. When Elmira made those cruel remarks a couple of months ago, Dilly had hardly been able to detect any sign. Yet now— Oh, how could it have crept in so quietly, overtaking her during the night?

It was the dress that revealed it, the beautiful burnt orange showed up her mousy colored hair. The first few moments, she'd only noted the effect upon her figure, but now that she looked straight at herself—

Her fingers shook as she fumbled with the hook and eye, the zipper. She slipped the lovely dress off and flung it across the chair. By the time that saleslady had finished off her customer, Dilly would be back in her old clothes. She would be gone.

Dilly dashed out of the store, not knowing which way she would turn. No, she didn't care to visit anybody, not today. She wasn't in the mood for the Museum.

I *must* be getting sick, she thought.

She had never felt like this. It was as if something had slipped out of place in her, not an organ, but her lifelong serenity, driving her with an aimless restlessness she'd never, never known before.

Hastening to the car, she started home, stepping on the gas,

impatient to reach Kendal though she didn't know what she'd do when she got there. Suddenly she glanced at the speedometer. She, Diligence Fuller, no doubt the most law-abiding person in the State of Rhode Island—she was doing sixty!

I'll kill myself, she thought, appalled, or at the very best I'll get arrested.

She managed to check her speed, but her mind kept racing.

It was three o'clock when Dilly reached Kendal. She hadn't had a thing to eat since breakfast. Yet instead of going home, she stopped in the Square. For she had made up her mind to something: she would have her hair done. Just those little places at the temples.

That beauty shop next to the post office, where Martha Hadley always went. But shouldn't she ask Martha about it first? No. Then it would be too late. The shop would close. What was so tremendous about Dilly having her hair done? Didn't practically every woman?

Parking the car, she entered the shop.

There was something reassuring in the very smell that greeted her—a close, but pleasant, astringent smell which seemed to say that Dilly was in the right place, that here she could count on being made alluring.

Oh, but I'm not really out for that, she told herself, following a girl to a booth. It's not vanity—not exactly. I'm sure that's not what made me come. Just that I don't want to look any older than I am. Naturally. After all, I owe it to the children—

Yes, she owed it to the children. Of course. That was why she was doing it. How could she have failed to see this sooner? For the children's sake—

Sitting down, she let herself be swaddled in a knee-length bib.

The girl looked at Dilly thoughtfully.

She's puzzled, Dilly decided, sorry for the girl. The request doesn't quite match my face. But I mean it, I really do.

"It's just this part," she explained aloud, trying to indicate her temples. She couldn't; her hands were imprisoned in the bib.

"I'll have to rinse the whole head," the girl told her. "It won't affect the dark hair at all."

"Whatever you think best," Dilly answered meekly.

She'd have liked to say more to the girl, something friendly, perhaps even confide what had happened in that fitting room, the shock she'd sustained.

But the girl wasn't the talking kind. She said nothing, while her slender fingers moved sensitively over Dilly's scalp, as if they understood precisely what to do. They lifted a lock so the color could be examined; they lathered Dilly's scalp and rinsed it clean. Competent fingers.

It was turning out to be rather a nice experience, Dilly reflected, sitting under the dryer. She had decided on impulse, yet now, thinking it over soberly here in her deafening oven, she was glad. It was, as the girl had pointed out, better to take steps at the first sign.

After all, Dilly said to herself sensibly, I'm only fifty-two.

Yes, she felt satisfied with her decision. But also, as she sat there, unable to hear anything that was going on in the shop, her whole head encased in burning air, she felt a little sad.

For it was sad, when you thought about it, that people should start aging at the very time when they were really only just beginning to understand. Dilly understood so many things now which puzzled her earlier.

Now, she said to herself, when I've hardly any chance to use this painfully acquired wisdom, except on the children, who aren't around very much.

And, of course, they didn't always tell her things.

Once in a while, if she saw trouble in somebody's eyes, she'd stay close, listening, and the trouble usually came tumbling out. It was a help, simply to listen.

But these occasions, when Dilly could apply the understanding life had drilled into her were rare since Willard died. The pity was that it had taken her so long to learn.

Maybe, she thought, a wife can only give her husband this perceptive tenderness when she sees her son growing up.

It wasn't till she had observed the cross-currents and eddies troubling the boy's emotions that she realized they were present in the father also, not on the surface, clear and direct, as in young Will, but rippling beneath it, so well concealed that he himself was never conscious of turbulence. She hadn't understood this about Willard until just those last few years.

Since then she'd felt compassion for the vagaries of other men, her friends' husbands, whom her friends, by their own account, often found exasperating. It was wasteful to have learned these things at a time when there was no longer any occasion to apply them.

If I were an artist, Dilly said to herself, slumping in the chair to save her scalp from burning, I could express it all in something beautiful and moving—a painting or a poem or maybe, if I hadn't been brought up in a family whose near ancestors considered music sinful, in song. But I'm not an artist.

The girl switched off the dryer. What a relief, to be able to hear again!

Actually, Dilly decided, as she left the place, except for that dryer, it was quite a painless proceeding. And I look years younger.

She was thrilled. She couldn't wait to get home and look at herself again.

Wouldn't Elmira be surprised!

CHAPTER 19

IN THE MORNING, she had a shock. Jumping out of bed eagerly to admire herself anew, Dilly found her hair was green. *Absolutely green.*

She couldn't believe it. The light in her room must be bad. But when she ran to the bathroom and looked in the mirror, she saw there was no doubt, no possible doubt.

Something had to be done at once. There wasn't time to lose.

The longer that stuff stayed in her hair— Dilly turned the faucet on full speed and soaked her head.

Laundry soap. That would work if anything could. Lemon juice? Vinegar, perhaps. What did one use to remove dye? It might be wiser not to tinker with it—go back to the shop. That girl would know.

But would she? Yesterday Dilly had had such confidence in her. And now, just look!

She toweled her head furiously, then turned to the mirror again. The shampoo had done no good at all. That laundry soap merely made her hair stand on end. Otherwise there was no change. The green might be less noticeable dry, but it was there all right.

Seven-thirty. The shop wouldn't open till nine. And the girl herself mightn't even be able— Maybe it was too late for anyone.

Where will I go? Dilly asked herself, letting the tears stream down her cheeks. Where can I hide my head? I'll have to leave town.

Who would help her?

Lois, she thought first. I'll go over there.

But no, Lois would give her small comfort. She would be shocked at her mother's scandalous behavior and the worst of it was, she would be right. While Lois wouldn't utter a word of reproach, Dilly would feel it.

Now Anne—but Anne just had that room in college. Dilly couldn't stay there.

Whatever happens, she said to herself, thinking of Lois again, she must never know.

Mary Lancashire, Vaughn Hill—any of the women in the Meeting would help her. Martha Hadley, her other friends and neighbors. They would be sympathetic, even if she'd been a fool. But Dilly didn't want them to know.

Wiping her eyes, she dressed mechanically and went downstairs, though she didn't care for breakfast. Better to light a fire in the parlor and dry her hair.

Picking up yesterday's paper, Dilly started to crumple it, then

stopped short with the sheet between her hands. Elmira and Henderson—

Oh, she said to herself, suddenly so overcome that she sat down on the hearth chair in the cold. Oh—that was it! That was what made me act like that.

She'd seen the picture in the paper and rushed off to Providence, playing at dressing-up like a little girl. She'd rushed to the beauty shop to be transformed into a grotesque imitation of her actual self. Now she looked neither like the person she was nor the one she wished to be.

Something had torn her loose from the mooring where she'd been securely fastened all her life. Those few weeks in New York had parted the lines which held her fast. For years and years they'd been so dependable and now— Drifting, not knowing where she would land, Dilly felt afraid.

Where will I land? she asked herself, sobbing.

When the distress had spent itself, she drew the back of her hand across her eyes and took one last look at the picture in the paper.

The Mule Terrier, the Canine Club, all that nonsense which Dilly had felt she must accept while she was Elmira's guest—how could recalling that have roused such odd impulses in her, now that she was home again, where values were so different? Her behavior had been positively ludicrous.

What caused it, she couldn't understand. Perhaps she never would, she thought, throwing the paper down. But she was going to pull herself together.

I'm going to cook a sensible breakfast, she decided, getting up, though the intention was more resolute than real.

Yes, from now on, Dilly was going to take hold. She would begin immediately catching up on all those duties she'd so frivolously pushed aside yesterday. She'd go down to the Baby Clinic, telephone the Ladies' Guild at the Hospital, the Park. . . .

But my hair, she exclaimed to herself, I must take care of that first.

Only, it was still just eight o'clock.

Dilly got a cozy fire started. Her hair was practically dry by now so she sat down at her desk to rejoice with Elmira.

It's marvelous, she wrote, referring to the picture. *You look so young and happy! And Henderson!*

What else could she write? That she herself was green and miserable? No. What good would it do to mention that? Some day, if Dilly ever went to visit Elmira again, she'd tell her. By then this predicament would probably seem funny, even to Dilly, and they'd have a good laugh over it together. But just now—

She rested the pen on the desk and looked out the window, not seeing the river at all. She was picturing Elmira in her apartment with all that uncomfortable furniture and the television set, with Henderson lying on the davenport—all the things that had seemed so strange to Dilly the other time. Now there was something rather nice about them actually, now that she was remembering. Something that had become part of her own life. . . .

The grandfather clock struck nine.

Dilly jumped up, leaving the letter unfinished. She put on her coat and the old hat that came way down over her ears, stuffing all her uncombed hair inside. No one uptown must see—

Once again she was in a booth, swaddled in a bib. But the girl seemed cooler than yesterday.

"It's the fault of your hair," she said, squinting at it. "Doesn't take to the chemicals."

"What are you going to do?" Dilly cried. No use arguing, though she did think it unjust to blame the hair. "You'll have to do something."

The girl studied Dilly doubtfully. "If you ask me," she said, "I wouldn't touch it. That little color will wear off."

"Oh," Dilly cried, "*wear* off? Can't you *do* something?"

"Well," the girl said, "I don't mind applying some color remover if that'll make you feel better. But by now—"

"Do," Dilly begged. "Please try. Anything. I can't go around like this—"

The girl went to fetch her paraphernalia. Dilly sank back in the chair.

I must stop being so tense, she told herself, studying her reflection. It isn't nearly so bad as I thought.

Naturally, in a little place, they didn't understand these delicate operations the way they did in New York. Elmira hadn't urged Dilly to have her hair done in Kendal.

Suddenly Dilly sat upright in the chair, electrified by a new idea.

She jumped to her feet, tore off the bib, put on her hat and coat.

"Never mind," she said to the girl, who was coming back with a tray of bottles.

And Dilly brushed past her, out of the shop. She almost ran home.

In the house, she didn't even stop to remove her outdoor things, but sat down at the desk and took up writing where she'd left off.

I've had the most awful experience, she wrote hurriedly. *You know how you were always urging me to have my hair done? Well, I finally decided it was wrong to be so stubborn, so I went to that little place next to the post office and—*

Dilly stopped and put down her pen.

Would Elmira realize what it meant to feel this way? She always had such expert treatment.

You won't believe it, Dilly continued, her handwriting growing large and emphatic, *you simply won't believe it, but, Elmira, when I got up this morning my hair was green! I ran right down as soon as they opened, but you know how they are in these country places. There wasn't anything the girl could do. She said it would wear off. Do you think it will?*

Otherwise everything is fine, Dilly concluded, *but this got me upset. I hope you're as well as you look in the picture and that Henderson's learning to mind. I'm a little homesick for him.*

Now that, Dilly said to herself, is going too far. I'm a schemer, but I'm not a liar.

She crossed out the last words. And yet, she thought, she had to admit, it would be good to see even Henderson. Just to be back there—

Rushing out to the letter box, Dilly only hoped Elmira would catch on. Maybe she'd make light of the thing, advising Dilly to be patient till the green wore off. Maybe she'd simply shrug it off with, "I told you so."

Dilly needn't have worried. Elmira sensed the urgency of the situation perfectly. She didn't even take the time to write.

"Darling," she exclaimed over the telephone the very next evening, "I got your letter. How tragic, darling. I can't bear it. But, Dilly, listen to me. You've got to do what I say."

"Yes," Dilly answered meekly. "What is it?"

"You've got to," Elmira repeated sternly, paying no attention to Dilly's acquiescence. "The minute I opened your letter, I flew right over to Yvonne's. She was giving a permanent, but I explained it was an emergency, so she came right out with her hands full of those bobbin things and I told her. She thinks—Dilly, are you listening?"

"Yes. What does she think?"

"She thinks you'll have to come to New York."

"Oh."

"First thing in the morning," Elmira commanded in a tone that brooked no argument.

"Oh," Dilly exclaimed again. She was thankful Elmira couldn't see through the telephone. "Do you really think I should?"

"Now, Dilly," Elmira scolded, "don't be balky. You can't go around with your hair all green."

"It's quite a lot better already," Dilly was obliged to admit.

"That doesn't matter. Now, listen, Dilly. Yvonne says she doesn't promise—she can't promise, you know—but she says she *thinks* she can do something. It all depends how much rinse they left in."

"Very well," Dilly murmured. "I'll come. You sure it won't be any trouble?"

"Darling," Elmira exclaimed affectionately, "don't be a fool. I've looked up the trains. Now you catch the ten-thirteen and I'll be in Grand Central. We'll take a taxi straight to Yvonne's."

"Thanks," Dilly murmured sincerely. "You're sweet to me, Elmira."

For the first time in a month, she felt lighthearted.

If I just knew how to sing, Dilly thought happily, as she hung up. And, taking a long breath, she let it out in, "Lavender's blue, Dilly, Dilly—"

The sound of her own voice made her laugh.

As she turned from the telephone and glanced at herself in the mirror, Dilly wondered whether the green streaks would be at all visible by the time she reached New York. They'd been fading rapidly since yesterday. By tomorrow— But, never mind. That part was completely unimportant.

She laughed again, delighted with the change that had come over the face in the mirror. Then the face suddenly turned grave, very grave.

Durand would have no way of finding out that she was there.

CHAPTER 20

IMPRISONED in a petunia pink cubicle, swathed in a knee-length bib of the same color and attended by an exuberant woman in smock to match, Dilly was growing more and more alarmed.

Her understanding had been, when she agreed to come here all the way from Kendal, that Miss Yvonne would wash out the last green traces of the fateful rinse. But not at all. The green

hair—what was left of it—was never washed. It was cut off without so much as a by-your-leave for Dilly. So was a lot that wasn't green, not even gray, but still a good young brown.

As if it didn't belong to me, Dilly thought, wincing under the shears. She doesn't ask if I want it cut. I'm only the organism that grew it.

"You're having a scalp treatment, aren't you?" Miss Yvonne asked.

"No!"

"Shampoo and set?"

"No!"

"Facial? Manicure?"

Merely academic questions. Dilly declined; Miss Yvonne went ahead. She shampooed and set Dilly's hair, she smeared her face with creams one after another—slapped on, rubbed in, newly slapped on.

"After fifty," she explained, slapping extra hard as if Dilly were at least a hundred, "we need to supplement the hormones."

Elmira had obviously engineered this, ordered a complete rejuvenation job. There was nothing for Dilly to do but let Miss Yvonne have her way.

Only if she makes a pass at my fingernails, Dilly resolved, I'm going to sit on my hands.

She kept them well shrouded in the bib lest Miss Yvonne, seeing them, faint.

It's not as if they were as nice as a scrubwoman's, Dilly reminded herself, suppressing a giggle.

A scrubwoman's hands were rough but immaculate, whereas Dilly's always retained a shadow of the earth beneath the cuticle, clean them as she might. There was a rustic look gardening gave her hands which would yield to no beauty treatment.

Every Christmas Lois arrived with a pair of work gloves, very pretty ones—sometimes cream-colored with blue knitted wristlets, sometimes leather, cotton-backed. Dilly always expressed gratitude and put them in the attic. For if she couldn't feel the

soil flow through her fingers, what would be the good of gardening at all? She might as well hire a man. If she couldn't hold the tender seedlings in her palm, couldn't press them gently and firmly into their beds—

I'd die, she thought. The Seed—that's what early Friends called God's indwelling presence.

Suddenly she felt homesick for spring. She wanted it, ached for it more than she could ever remember. Here in New York, in this stifling cubicle reeking of banana oil, steam heat, and lanolin, Dilly longed for the renewal of her garden.

She longed so intensely, unbelievingly for spring's arrival, one might have thought she was a child of two who hadn't seen the miracle take place year after year, who had no grounds for being sure it would recur. First, the southern clematis by the kitchen window, then the forsythia and the crocuses, the daffodils and violets, the flowering almond and the quince. She could see them appear in quick succession, as the warm days followed one another into May.

In May, she thought rapturously, closing her eyes so the cream could be removed from her lids, in May, the rosy tulips standing proudly at the four corners of her little sunken garden. Long ago, in Willard's boyhood, it was the pigpen. Dilly had transformed it into a blooming haven. The solid planting of forget-me-nots, like sky beneath the tulips . . .

Oh, I can't wait, she cried inside herself.

Jerked back to the present by the removal of her bib, Dilly stood up, not daring to face herself in the mirror, even once.

Elmira had been whiling away the hour with self-improvement of her own. Though it was hard to imagine how she could look any more *soignée* than when she met Dilly at the train, she emerged from her cubicle with an entirely fresh lacquer of complacency.

"Darling," she exclaimed happily, seeing Dilly. "You look simply marvelous. I *knew* Miss Yvonne would fix you."

All the way to the apartment, she chattered about her Benefit, the Pedigree Prom sponsored by the Canine Club, and

she enlarged upon the burdens of preparation which rested on her shoulders. Crushing burdens, they sounded like. Yet Elmira was ecstatic.

"It's going to be simply stupendous," she gloated. "The Waldorf, you know. I'll show you my dress the minute we get home."

They reached the house. The taxi was opened. Dilly and Joe, the doorman, renewed their old acquaintance.

In the elevator, Elmira asked, obviously on sudden inspiration, "Darling, why don't you stay for the Benefit? I have an extra ticket."

She asked sincerely; she really meant it. But the Pedigree Prom wasn't for Dilly Fuller.

"Thanks, Elmira. You're sweet. You've been wonderful to me. But I have to go home and get ready for Christmas. Coming unexpectedly the way I did— When you telephoned, I just dropped everything."

Elmira looked a little piqued. "The Benefit's a week from Saturday," she argued. "You could go the next morning. That still leaves ten days for your preparations."

Dilly shook her head. She would stay over the week end. She would buy some pretty presents for the girls. And then—

Because she realized now that the idea of running into Durand, which had crossed her mind at home, was childish. In a place the size of New York one didn't run into people the way one did in Kendal. And to telephone to him was out of the question.

"Thanks," she repeated. "I must leave Monday."

Henderson was taking his ease on the davenport when Elmira and Dilly entered the apartment, but he remembered Dilly with sufficient devotion to make a flying leap across the room and claw two devastating runs down her new nylons. Then he turned his attentions to Elmira.

"Isn't he sweet?" she cried, reaching out to fondle Henderson and at the same time drawing back in defense against his assaults. "Don't you think he's grown?"

"He's enormous," Dilly answered truthfully, by-passing the first question.

She took off her coat and hat, looking about the familiar room with pleasure, happy seeing even Henderson again.

His demonstrative nature exhausted, the dog had retired once more to the davenport and Elmira turned to Dilly.

"Darling," she exclaimed, "you look simply marvelous."

Dilly, examining her reflection in the foyer mirror, had a shock. She did look nice, very nice indeed, much nicer than she'd dared hope. Only, she hadn't expected to turn out quite so *different.* She looked like someone else, several others—like the women she passed on the street, here in Elmira's neighborhood.

And yet, Dilly had to admit as she ran to the bedroom and studied herself more carefully in the dressing-table mirror—she had to admit the facial made her look much fresher. Those worry scrawls under her eyes were gone. And the short hair gave her almost a little-girl appeal.

I wish Anne could see me, she thought.

Elmira came in and hung her cape away.

"It's very short, isn't it?" Dilly asked, running her hand up the back of her head. She asked anxiously, but in fact she was delighted.

"It's perfect," Elmira assured her, arranging the cape carefully on a hanger. "Just right. Not a poodle, darling. Definitely not a poodle. I wouldn't have stood for that."

"I should hope not."

There was a certain air about her, Dilly thought with pleasure, gazing and gazing at her reflection. She started to tear herself away, but she couldn't. For she detected something in the eyes looking back at her from the mirror, something that hadn't been evoked in the beauty shop. A new person, almost.

Elmira had been fussing in the closet. Now she emerged with a flowery garment bag.

"Look," she cried, running up the zipper. "I couldn't wait to show you." She sounded breathless with excitement.

Dilly knew before she saw it that this was the dress Elmira had had made for the Benefit.

"Champagne satin," Elmira announced in a reverential whisper, as she held up the hanger with one arm and draped the train of the dress over the other. "It's a sheath," she explained gravely. "I look divinely statuesque in it. And this is the stole, burgundy velvet. They're making them enormous like this now. Isn't it sumptuous?"

It was indeed. And it made Elmira so happy.

Dilly jumped up and put her arms around her cousin. "You'll be beautiful in it," she exclaimed.

"Isn't it just made for my tiara?" Elmira asked, beaming, first at Dilly, then back at the dress. "Harry's wedding present. I'd never expected to wear the thing again. It just lay in the bank all these years. Now, with sweet little Elizabeth—"

It was obvious Elmira felt chosen and special, as if she herself were crowned.

"You'll be beautiful," Dilly repeated.

Then she couldn't look at the dress any longer. It made her feel guilty, not giving Elmira's toilette more attention, but she was compelled to go back to the mirror.

That new person she'd seen a moment ago drew her back. It was someone she'd never guessed existed—an alternative self, full of promise—daring, even—young (but not in the sense of the little-girl appeal the short hair gave her, something else). An inner possibility shone from her eyes and lifted the sad little lines around her mouth.

It was as if impulses quite undreamed of were surfacing and a woman taking shape whom she'd never met—the woman she would have turned out to be under other circumstances, if life had offered other choices, if the surroundings of her childhood had happened to be different. It was only a flicker in the eyes of that woman who looked back at her from the mirror and it passed again in no time, but it left Dilly wondering. . . .

Elmira had come over and stood beside the dressing table.

"I knew Miss Yvonne would fix you!" she cried, bursting with

pride over her achievement. "I'm so glad, darling." She reached out and patted Dilly's arm. "So glad. On account of tonight."

"Tonight? Oh, yes, I remembered coming down on the train. Thursday. The Bridge Club."

"Yes. How bright of you to remember! It's at Dolly Packard's house. I said I might be a little late. She invited you but—"

"I'm tired," Dilly broke in quickly. "I'd rather just—"

"If you're tired, take a nap right now. I'm going to jump in the tub."

But Elmira didn't go. She stood there trying to catch Dilly's eye in the mirror.

Feeling this, Dilly responded briefly. She couldn't concentrate on her cousin right now. Her gaze flew back to her own face, wondering whether that new person, so full of promise—daring, even—was still—

"All right," she answered. She wasn't quite sure that person—

Forcing herself to face Elmira in the mirror, she saw that her cousin was trying to tell her something important.

"Get nice and rested before dinner," Elmira urged, "because—" She paused dramatically. "Durand is coming."

CHAPTER 21

"DOES HE KNOW I'm here?"

"Naturally. Why else would he come? Henderson won't touch those biscuits."

Dilly's heart stopped working. She stared at Elmira, unable to speak. Durand coming! He knew.

"But how?" she managed to ask finally.

"Silly," Elmira cried, taking off her pearls and unfastening the buckle of her belt, "I called him up last night, soon as I'd talked

to you. No sense you two being in the same city and not meeting."

"Oh."

Now Dilly's heart was working so furiously, she thought Elmira must hear it across the room.

But Elmira, kicking off her pumps and stepping into her mules, was too delighted with herself and the way she'd arranged things to notice.

"First, when I told him," she reported, evidently pleased to relive this conversation, "he—"

"He what?"

"Keep still and I'll tell you. First he said, 'Dear Mrs. Bliss, God bless you,' in that heartfelt way he has."

"I know what you mean! His eyes crinkle up and they're so full of feeling and yet his voice—"

"Let me finish," Elmira broke in. She was standing at the door of the bathroom in her negligee, waving her hands. "Next he said, 'Give Diligence my fond regards.' Imagine anybody calling you Diligence! I never thought I'd live to hear that again after Aunt Amelia and Uncle Clement—"

In the midst of her excitement and the joy of getting Durand's message, Dilly felt sobered by this allusion to her parents' death.

But Elmira was carried away by her story. "'See here, Mr. Smith,' I told him. 'This Diligence and I are first cousins and if you and she are on a first-name basis, we'd better get on it too, *Durand.*' What do you suppose he said to that?"

"I don't know."

"'*Goodbye, Elmira.*'" She smiled as she recollected, lingering over the words till they sounded sentimentally significant. "A nice man!"

This made Dilly sick. Of course Durand was nice. Who knew it, if not she? But this girlish going on about him— One would think Elmira was the one who—

And yet, Dilly reminded herself in fairness, it was kind of her to invite him.

Overwhelmed with happiness, she ran and put her arms around her cousin.

Through the negligee they sank into unsuspected plumpness.

"It's a beautiful surprise," Dilly whispered. "I never thought I'd see him again."

Elmira looked smug. "Pauline Beetle's crazy about him."

As if struck, Dilly let go and sprang back. "You don't mean—really?"

"You know how she is. Any man. But they never seem to care. I don't understand it. She's not bad looking. And all that money. Well, anyway, she found out a lot about Durand."

"*What?*"

"Seems he was quite well off till his wife got this long illness."

"Oh."

So that was it—in his love, he had sacrificed everything. That was why—

"After she went," Elmira continued, disclosing, Dilly thought, not half the feeling she would have lavished on Henderson, "he was laid up himself—heart or something. I don't remember. That's when he got the idea for this new line. I wish it were more promising, don't you?"

She disappeared into the bathroom.

Yes, Dilly had to admit to herself, she did wish it.

She sat down on the bed, suddenly sad in spite of Durand's coming. Her heart ached for him.

So he had once done better. She was pleased to know that.

But I liked him before, she insisted. I respected him before I knew.

There wasn't time now to think about these things. In little more than an hour, Durand would be here. The knowledge sent such a thrill of happiness through Dilly, nothing else seemed of any consequence.

How could she possibly take a nap? she asked herself, standing up. She was much too excited.

She started to unpack, flying about Elmira's room, pleased to

have it to herself for a few minutes, putting her things away where she'd kept them before. This was like coming home.

I must lie down, Dilly said to herself when everything was in place, or I'll look haggard when he gets here.

She started to stretch out but suddenly, drawing up the comforter, she had an awful thought. He might not recognize her!

Rushing to the mirror, Dilly felt relieved. The first glance told her she needn't worry. She looked charming, but she was still herself.

And then she noticed something.

There was a little redness on her forehead, spreading under her eyes. A redness, a swelling—

She ran her finger inquiringly over the skin. Even as she did this, the puffiness increased.

"Elmira!"

"What is it?"

"Come here. *Quick!*"

"But, darling, what is it? I'm in the tub."

Tears sprang into Dilly's eyes, for the swelling was fanning out so rapidly and she was growing so red, she knew Elmira couldn't help her. "Never mind," she wailed. She dropped her head and arms on the dressing table.

Oh, why did I? she asked herself. Why? It's my own fault for being so vain.

Elmira came rushing in, hugging a towel around her, dripping on the carpet.

"My face," Dilly blubbered, lifting it for her to see. "Look at me."

"Darling," Elmira exclaimed. She sounded deeply concerned. But then, to Dilly's unbelieving surprise, she burst out laughing.

"Can't you see? I'm all broken out in hives. *My whole face!*"

Elmira was still giggling. "I can't help it," she said. "You look so funny."

"What'll I do?"

"It must be the facial," Elmira concluded, turning grave. "I

bet you're allergic. Are you? You should have told Yvonne."

"I don't know. I never had one. I didn't want it."

"Too bad." There was real regret in Elmira's voice now. "She fixed you, for fair. Lie down. I'll get a wet towel. Maybe ice. Would ice be better?"

She scrambled into her negligee and ran to the door. "Frieda!"

When the maid arrived with the ice and saw Dilly, she looked so horrified that it was obvious the swelling must be worse.

Elmira bustled around, wrapping ice in a towel and blacking out everything for Dilly.

In the damp darkness, Dilly still cried. She cried for herself and for every woman who'd ever wished to make herself beautiful on somebody's account. She'd never known till now what others suffer.

When Friends spoke of a "beautiful woman" they meant one whose spirit was lovely, whose inner light shone through, serene and outreaching. Not one with a rinse and a facial. All her life Dilly tried to cultivate that inward kind of beauty, all her life, till she'd met Durand.

But he liked me the way I was first, she said to herself. He liked me plain. Why did I try to be different?

The sound of a zipper, faint but familiar, told Dilly that Elmira was putting on her girdle. Another announced she was in her dress.

"Darling," she murmured, laying a new compress on Dilly's numb face, "I'm so sorry. How could I know?" She bent over her anxiously. "Does it hurt?"

"No," Dilly moaned through the towel. "But Durand will be here any minute."

"Never mind about Durand." Elmira wiped away the drops that were trickling into Dilly's ear. "If he doesn't like you the way you are, he isn't worth bothering with." Her bracelets tinkled as she straightened up.

"That's the way I used to talk," Dilly mumbled.

It's different when you care, she discovered, pushing her finger up under the towel to feel the bumps. I used to say things like that to the girls. I believed what I said. But now, when it's come to me—

Through the damp coldness, scent penetrated powerfully. Elmira was putting on her perfume.

What's happening to me? Dilly asked herself. How can I be so changed? And, thinking of Durand again, she wondered, conscience-stricken, I'm not misleading him, am I?

Not that Dilly was the one who'd thought of asking him to dinner, but still—

Did he, perhaps, attach more significance to this very tenuous friendship than she did? Would he, could he conceivably imagine it might lead to something more?

In the cold darkness Dilly felt frightened.

What am I doing? she asked herself for the first time. Am I starting something I can't finish? I musn't hurt him too, on top of all he's been through.

But no. No! This was just nerves. Durand loved his wife still, as Dilly loved Willard. They both had their children to look after. They were simply enjoying each other's company, finding this unusual delight in being together, easing their loneliness. Moreover, other women seemed to be interested in Durand. He, perhaps, was interested in them. Why should Dilly think she was the only one?

How could I make so much of it? Dilly asked herself now, embarrassed, so that her cheeks felt hot against the compress. How could—

An explosion in the foyer.

"Elmira, are you there? What's the matter with Henderson?"

"Nothing. He's just greeting Durand."

Tearing away the compress, Dilly jumped off the bed.

CHAPTER 22

"HENDERSON!" Elmira cried, running out to catch him. "Come here! Henderson, will you keep still?"

His barks denoted anything but greeting. Vicious growls, they sounded like a warning to keep out.

Dilly rushed to the dressing table. What she saw in the mirror was unbelievable. The swelling was down. She looked positively pretty. Overjoyed, she reached for her shoes, her comb and brush. Her hands shook so, she could hardly do anything and she was in such a hurry.

Henderson was still snarling.

"I never saw him act so," Dilly heard Elmira confiding to Durand in the living room. She spoke charmingly, bright with amusement, an indulgent young mother laughing at her insufferable child. "It's cute of him," she gurgled, "to remember all this time."

"*Cute?*" Dilly heard Durand repeat above the racket.

Even against this strident welcome his voice sounded nice, so like him.

"Intelligent," Elmira explained. "He remembers."

"But he doesn't seem pleased," Durand protested.

"It's your *biscuits.* That's why he's naughty. He remembers how they made him sick."

"*Mrs. Bliss!*" Then, apparently recalling the telephone conversation, Durand, still reproachful, corrected himself. "*Elmira!*"

"The box, I mean," Dilly heard her amend hastily. "It was the box that did it," she assured him. "Henderson never touched—"

Dilly dropped her comb and rushed to the living room. She had to break this up.

"How are you, Durand?" she inquired in a loud voice even before she saw him.

Elmira, glancing at her anxiously, fell silent in mid-sentence, as Dilly had intended that she should.

And for a moment Durand himself gave no answer. He came toward her, smiling his warm, almost tender smile, but he seemed shy, the way he'd been in Grand Central when he saw Dilly off. Then he found words.

"The most wonderful things are constantly happening!" he cried, without bothering to reply about himself.

His face betrayed his happiness, yet to Dilly it seemed not unusually alive. This was how he had looked at her the first time. He was so much like the picture that had been in her mind all these weeks—the calm blue eyes touched with past grief, the thick hair, the little hollows in his cheeks which made her long so to feed him up—that seeing him was suddenly almost too much to bear.

For he was what she remembered of him and also more; he was what she remembered of a time completely forgotten till now, when she was hardly any older than Anne. She couldn't put the finger of her mind on the memory, couldn't name or explain it to herself, she could only feel that he had, in a sense, always been with her, part of her life.

But this was no moment for indulging in fancy. Durand was talking to her, Elmira was making signals with her eyebrows, registering satisfaction in Dilly's appearance, and Henderson was still barking.

"Such weather for December," Durand exclaimed. "Is it as fine as this in Kendal?"

"Oh, yes," Dilly said, "I think when I left this morning—I think—" She couldn't remember the weather in Kendal.

Unable to meet his gaze any longer, she turned away, grateful to discover that Elmira was decanting the sherry and needed her help.

As she handed Durand his glass, Dilly wondered whether she shouldn't break her lifelong abstinence just this once and take a little herself. The occasion seemed to call for something special. Wouldn't it be gracious to join in with a few token sips?

"Tomato juice for *thee*, I suppose?" Elmira inquired teasingly, in the plain speech of their childhood.

"Well," Dilly answered uncertainly. "I think maybe—"

Elmira turned to her in utter astonishment. Then she broke into a smile and handed Dilly a glass of sherry. "Your face is fine," she whispered, giving Dilly's cheek a little pat.

Dilly sat down on the davenport. She was weak.

Durand came and touched his glass to hers, making a tiny tinkle. As he did it, he looked down on Dilly with sheer joy.

Yes, it was as if he'd always been with her, no further away than the distance between Kendal and New York, a few hours' ride in the train. For how else could Dilly respond instinctively and with unhesitating knowledge to a virtual stranger?

She took a sip of wine.

Savoring it for the first time in her life, Dilly wondered why she'd been taught to abhor it. There was nothing disturbing about the taste. It reminded her a bit of the raisins she put in the nutbowl at Christmas, with just an added tang. So she drank more, feeling strength and well-being rapidly spread through her. She was very happy.

Durand stood, glass in hand, watching her intently as she drank the sherry down.

Yes, it was the same for him as for her.

Not more, though. Surely not more, she said to herself so definitely that she knew she was full of doubt.

But she was far too ecstatic to worry about anything at present. It was enough just to look at Durand.

He was wearing a gray-blue suit of a soft material with a narrow white stripe running through it, the same suit he'd worn the other time, though Dilly hadn't remembered till this minute.

"Wonderful things do happen," Elmira agreed, nodding at Durand as she sat down with her glass. "Just think, when Dilly was here last I wasn't even a member of the Canine Club. And now, the whole Pedigree Prom—"

"So I hear."

"Of course," Elmira babbled on, "my committee's been simply

marvelous. But if one wants things done right, one does have to attend to them oneself. Isn't that true? It's a great responsibility."

Dilly, sitting back on the davenport, relaxed and a bit remote, hardly listened. She was singing.

I'm going to have him all evening, she sang over and over inside her head. I'm going to have him to myself!

"If only Kendal weren't such a fascinating place," Elmira was now observing, with a playful glance at Dilly. "Just think, Durand: going back there on Monday, *when one could be in New York.*"

There was no need to rush to the defense of Kendal because just then Elmira got up to fetch the decanter and refill first Durand's glass, then her own. She didn't offer Dilly any.

"It's very good, don't you think?" Dilly remarked. "Like the raisins at Christmas." She held out her glass.

But this time Elmira didn't look so pleased. As a matter of fact, she refused to give Dilly more.

"You've had enough, darling."

Dilly was hurt. Why, if Durand was having a second? If it had only been Elmira who took another, Dilly wouldn't have asked. But Durand was having one too.

"Please," Dilly said, holding her glass still closer to Elmira.

After all, this was a very great occasion, one which would never come again. It wasn't as if she made a habit of it.

Yes, she thought, gulping the second glass down quickly because Frieda had come in to announce dinner, it made her feel a lot stronger. She was full of life, radiating with it to the tips of her fingers and down to her very toes.

On the way to the dining room Dilly detoured past the foyer mirror for a quick look at her face. She had a little trouble finding the foyer. Everything seemed dreamy-distant. But at last, reaching her hand out, she managed to touch her image. It was oddly wavy and Dilly had to press her finger against the glass real hard to keep it still. Just the same, it looked so fresh and gay that Dilly started singing again.

I'm going to have him all evening. . . .

Durand came out to the foyer for her and, seeing how hard she had to work to keep her image still, took her arm with such steadying firmness that Dilly leaned against him a little as he led her into the dining room. It was a great relief to have someone to lean against when everything was so wavy.

"You're hungry," he whispered. "Soon as you've had a bite to eat you'll feel different."

But Dilly didn't want to feel different. She loved the way she was feeling, tingling all over, walking in to dinner on the arm of Durand.

"Dilly on my left," Elmira commanded as they stood fascinated by the splendor of the dinner table with the candlelight gleaming on the best crystal and china and the pale yellow roses in the center. And when Durand, having seated Dilly, was pushing in their hostess's chair at the head of the table, Elmira said, still ceremoniously, "You take the place on my right."

Opposite Elmira, in Harry's old chair, Henderson was already comfortably installed, supercilious but decently tolerant.

"We should have drunk to our host," Durand remarked as he sat down.

Dilly giggled.

But Elmira seemed touched. She looked fondly across the table between the tapers in their heavy silver candlesticks and beamed on Henderson.

He was wavy too, at least, his nose and whiskers seemed to twitch.

"You know," Elmira confided, as Frieda was passing the crackers to go with the bisque, "I haven't told anyone yet. But some day, when he's grown up, don't you think Henderson ought to have a little family?"

Dilly, peeking across at Durand from under her lashes, thought he looked pained, but she wasn't quite sure, because *he* was wavy, too.

"A beautiful creature like that," Elmira was saying, not wait-

ing for anyone to answer. "We really should, don't you think?"

Durand cleared his throat, as though he were about to make a reply, but Elmira didn't let him speak.

"That is, only," she stipulated, "if we can find a pretty little Mule Terrier for Henderson, one with all the proper strains."

She was silent a moment while, serving spoon in hand, she contemplated Frieda's whipped potatoes. Then, with a guilty look, she helped herself substantially.

"It might be difficult," Durand put in, grasping the chance. He gave Henderson a sidelong glance. "Indeed, it would certainly be very difficult to find one with *all* those strains."

His remark seemed to please Elmira.

"That's just it," she gurgled. "Then, too, it would make him so much less valuable, if there were that many more Mule Terriers in the world. *They* might have families."

Dilly gazed fixedly at her plate. She knew that if she caught Durand's eye she'd giggle again. She didn't feel certain she wasn't going to giggle anyway.

Everything had settled down quite normally. Durand was right —she must have been hungry, faint. No wonder, with all the excitement. Come to think of it, she'd had nothing since breakfast, in Kendal.

"One would be walking along the street," Elmira went on very earnestly, helping herself to hot rolls, "and there would be people out walking with *their* Mule Terriers. What I mean is, right now, Henderson's practically unique."

Durand laid down his knife and fork and eyed her sternly. "I should go further, Elmira," he said emphatically. "Much further. I should say Henderson *is* unique."

CHAPTER 23

"GOODBYE, children," Elmira said, waving her gloved hand from the foyer as she was leaving for the Bridge Club. "I'll be back early and we'll have a drink." She started to go, then turned and added, "Henderson will chaperon you."

And he did.

Not that Durand would have so much as taken the seat on the other end of the davenport from Dilly, but if he'd tried to, it would have been impossible. For, the moment Elmira closed the door, Henderson jumped up and extended himself full length, snuggling against Dilly without constraint. He crowded her so that, half from necessity, she put her arm around the dog's head and scratched his ear.

Durand sat down opposite them in the armchair.

"Now tell me everything," he begged, leaning forward eagerly, "everything. From the time the train pulled out till this minute. What did you think about on the way home? Did anyone meet you at the station?"

"No, nobody met me, just the man who drives the taxi—he's been there must be going on twenty years."

What more could Dilly say? All the way to Kendal she'd simply thought of Durand.

"The chocolates!" she exclaimed. "Such a lovely present."

He peered at her searchingly. Did he need to be convinced that she'd been pleased?

A vague memory seeped into Dilly's mind: an occasion she hadn't thought of in years, not, probably, since she was a very little girl.

"Somebody gave me a chocolate bunny once, for Easter," she recalled, like telling a secret. "Mother couldn't understand why I wouldn't eat it. I just kept it." She could see the precious crea-

ture now, as though this had happened yesterday, could feel the joy-despair of that first love. "It turned pale and crumbly and finally I had to throw it away."

Durand smiled with pity. Nothing, his eyes seemed to say, not even an event touching his own fortune mattered so much to him as Dilly's childhood sorrow.

No one had ever looked at Dilly in quite that way before. But then, she told herself quickly, to be fair, she'd never spoken this way to anyone.

"There was a specialness about that bunny I never felt afterward." Though the bunny hadn't crossed her mind at all in the train, now Dilly said, "Till I opened your box." Seeing Durand's joy, amounting almost to wonder, she added, practically in a whisper, "I gave some to Anne."

Suddenly shy, Dilly turned away, feigning interest in Henderson, whom she'd completely forgotten. She scratched his ear again. He was either asleep or indifferent.

"What else did you do when you got home?" Durand was asking, almost demanding, as if he felt he had the right to know.

"Oh, well—" She turned back but didn't quite meet his gaze. "I can't remember everything."

"But the important things. One remembers those, Diligence."

"It's nearly six weeks."

"A long time," he assented, relaxing in the chair again.

Her evasion seemed somehow to have given him the answer he was pressing for.

He wants to find out whether I thought about him once in a while, whether I even, maybe, missed him a little, Dilly realized, staring down at her hands. And he thinks—yes—he thinks I did.

"It seemed even longer," Durand murmured. "If I'd known you were coming back, I'd have crossed off the days on a calendar. You never told me."

Swiftly, she looked at him. He'd have crossed off the days!

"I didn't know," Dilly said vehemently, for he sounded re-

proachful and she didn't want him to feel slighted. "I wasn't planning to come. It was quite unexpected. I—well, I had an accident and Elmira urged me—"

He stared at her. "Diligence, nothing serious, I trust."

"Oh, no," Dilly answered, regretting she'd put it that way. But she did so want him to believe she hadn't been holding out. "Not at all serious. Well, it *was* when I discovered it. I wrote Elmira right away."

"She didn't mention a thing. I never guessed you were in trouble. And you look so well—what I thought, when I came in tonight was, you look younger and lovelier even than I'd remembered. Really, you do."

Dilly dropped her eyes.

"An accident!" he murmured, shaking his head.

Oh, dear, Dilly said to herself, why did I tell him, using that dramatic word?

"It's all fixed," she affirmed, looking him right in the eye.

Nevertheless, he still seemed worried.

The thing to do was to speak of something else. But Dilly couldn't speak. She was in the grip of a preposterous turbulence. She wanted to explain more fully, not leave Durand guessing. She wanted to confide in him, as one well might in so good a friend.

It was, of course, ridiculous. A lady keeps her cosmetic activities to herself. Moreover, Dilly didn't care to tell Durand or anyone else about her beauty shop fiasco, though in a way, now it was over, the incident was rather amusing. And she'd come out of it looking so much nicer. But at the time, at the time . . .

They seemed so close, talking here together, so warmly understanding, as if they'd stood by each other in moments of stress all their lives. What more natural than to share the little personal experiences?

With these conflicting impulses fighting in her, Dilly was powerless to control the conversation. To her horror she suddenly heard herself saying, "I was all green."

"*Green?*" he repeated aghast.

"Yes. I woke up in the morning and—but it's all right now, really," she cried, beside herself.

"Green!" he exclaimed again.

"It was nothing, Durand. Believe me. Nothing at all to worry about. I—don't know why I told you."

"I'm very glad you did," he said, obviously still anxious. The nice blue eyes took in Dilly with compassion. "Thank heaven Elmira urged you to come. We have the finest specialists, the finest in the world."

"Mmm," Dilly murmured. And at last she thought of something to talk about. "The best part is, I can do my Christmas shopping while I'm here—get some nice things for the girls."

"The very cream of the medical profession," Durand declared, disregarding this.

"I believe Will would like a barometer," Dilly hurried on, her voice rising. "To put up in his room at Harvard. Don't you think that would be nice for Will?" She didn't stop to let Durand answer. She was in a frenzy of conversation now. "The Kendal shops," she blurted out, "they're hopeless. In New York—"

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I'm glad to hear you look with favor on New York."

Dilly felt relieved. The terrible moment was past.

"There must be a big selection of fine instruments at a place like Abercrombie's," she went on earnestly. "Only, I don't know the people, the way I do in the shops at home. Do you think I can rely on the salesman to help me choose?"

At this, Durand almost jumped out of the chair. He looked horrified.

"*I'll* help you," he said. "You can't depend on the salespeople in any of the stores during the Christmas rush—makeshift employees. They don't know the stock, don't know the customer. I'll help you. Now, when? Tomorrow?"

She'd see him again tomorrow!

"It will have to be," Dilly answered, regretting, not for the first time, that she'd told Elmira she'd leave Monday.

"You're not really going away again? Not so soon, anyhow?"

He sounded like a little boy who simply couldn't believe life would be so cruel.

"Well, you see—" She couldn't face the disappointment in his eyes. "The children will be coming for vacation and there's so much to do. Of course, now that they're older, there's not so much as there used to be. I—" She didn't finish.

He looked dashed. But all he said was: "I haven't found the right presents for Humph and Randy yet either. They're demanding bicycles. Where would they ride them?" He sighed. "And up four flights of stairs!"

Bicycles, for little boys, in New York!

"Tell me about yourself," Dilly begged, wondering why she hadn't thought of asking earlier. "How have things been with you?" She didn't dare ask after Mary.

"Up and down," he answered, without further explanation. "But I have prospects." His tone was, as always, hopeful.

Dilly remembered how valiant he had been when she was here last. At that time his business had obviously not been succeeding, but he was full of expectation. She glanced at him, eager to discover whether these prospects really existed or whether he was only fooling himself. But she couldn't tell.

"I've registered the trademark," he announced importantly. "Hereafter no one else will be able to put Worcestershire Biscuits on the market."

The knowledge seemed to give him satisfaction. Dilly couldn't understand why. Would anyone care to put those things on the market, anyone but Durand? Even Henderson preferred cardboard.

She wondered whether she ought to tell him. His business was none of her affair. But oughtn't she to point out that his efforts would be better devoted to a more worthy product? Perhaps he didn't know. A real friend doesn't withhold the truth

just because it's unpleasant. And Dilly did so wish to be Durand's friend.

But she couldn't hurt him.

"I'm so glad about the patent," was all she managed to say. "I know you wanted it."

Hadn't she prayed?

"Yes. Such an original idea, it would be a pity to have it imitated. The way I stumbled on it—I was in the hospital last spring and—"

"You were?"

He nodded. "I got to longing for a piece of steak. You know how it is when you've nothing to take your mind off things and the food isn't very attractive—you get these notions."

"Oh." She felt so sorry for him.

"That's when I thought up this formula for synthetic meat flavor. I'd been in chemical engineering all my life, you see, so I had some training in chemistry and I amused myself while I was lying there working out that formula. Later, when I was well again, trying to find a new occupation, I thought of applying it to dog biscuits."

Dilly was still under the impression that she ought to enlighten him. Yet, now that she knew he'd been so sick, she was more than ever determined not to say anything discouraging.

"It must be quite hard getting a product launched," she observed.

He assented gravely. "It's simply a question of capital. Once I have that, the rest will be plain sailing." He broke into a smile. "Now about tomorrow. What time? Shall I come at noon?"

Polite inquiry; gracious invitation. Yet there was a firm note in Durand's voice, clear warning that he wouldn't take a refusal.

And Dilly, speechless with pleasure, instead of answering properly nodded her head, like a little girl.

"We'll have lunch at the Zoo," he decided happily. Then he

turned thoughtful. "Maybe you've been there too often? It's so nearby. But one can't go to the Zoo too often."

"I've never been."

"Never been to the Zoo?" He couldn't seem to believe it.

"Last time, I always went out with Elmira. She had such important things to do. Or else I went with Henderson and he wasn't allowed in. Besides, I'm not a zooey person. I don't like seeing imprisoned creatures."

"We'll skip the lions and tigers," Durand promised. "I don't like seeing them pace a cage myself. But the seals and the little zebras, the elephants. And there's a baby buffalo this year. You'll love those. We won't stay if you don't like it."

He didn't need to urge. Dilly's heart was set on going to the Zoo.

"I'll like it."

"Then that's settled." He looked pleased, but he stood up.

"You're not going? Elmira said—"

"You ought to rest now. Can't be too careful," he said with some severity. But the severity quickly melted away. Holding out his hand, he looked at her lovingly.

"Good night, Diligence."

She smiled at him.

But when he let her hand go, she turned anxious. "What time did you say? Did you say noon?"

He nodded.

She was reassured about tomorrow, about all the days to come. Reluctantly she watched him walk to the foyer and take up his coat and hat. She followed, slow to see him off.

"You know," she said, as they stood by the open door, "I never expected to see you this time. Elmira surprised me."

"Some day," he whispered, taking her hand again, just for a second, "if things turn out— Some day, *I'll* surprise you."

CHAPTER 24

"HOW DO YOU FEEL TODAY?" he asked anxiously, when Dilly opened the door to him the next noon.

Radiant! was what she wanted to exclaim, seeing him step into the foyer. But she managed to answer demurely that she felt very well.

He was wearing the same suit, only a different tie—dark blue silk with little white designs like snow crystals. His unchangingness, his being just the way he'd appeared to her throughout the half wakeful night and the slowly moving morning stirred Dilly more than she'd foreseen.

"Beautiful day," he announced, "made to order for you and me."

"*Thee* and me."

Popping out so surprisingly, Dilly's words threw her into confusion. She'd never intended to correct Durand or suggest he use the language of her people. But somehow, when he looked at her this way, the plain speech, which nowadays implied an equivalent of family ties, seemed suitable. Yet in actuality, it wasn't suitable at all.

"Do you speak like that to everyone in Kendal?"

"Only to the children. And in Meeting, to Friends."

"And in New York to me." He looked pleased.

"Not usually," Dilly cried quickly. And then, lest he think—"Friends used to say 'thee' to everybody. They considered it undemocratic to say 'you' to their betters and 'thee' to their equals or inferiors, the way other people did. So they said 'thee' to everybody."

Durand was obviously disappointed. "I thought," he confided, "when you said 'thee' to me just then it meant something special—like part of the family."

"It does now," Dilly blurted out. But Durand wasn't part of the family. Nevertheless, "It does now," she repeated, as if compelled, not knowing how to get out of this mix-up, not clear what had been in her mind when she said, "*Thee* and me."

He saw her embarrassment and dropped the subject. But Dilly felt uneasy. So, apparently, did Durand. They stood there in the narrow foyer seeking assurance in each other's eyes, unbelieving and at the same time certain.

Then it came over Dilly that they couldn't just stand there, staring. She moved to the living room.

Following her Durand asked, before she had time to fetch her things, "No relapse?" He asked in a whisper, as a man might inquire of his wife about some very personal complaint.

Dilly didn't immediately grasp what he referred to. Then the blood surged up and burned her cheeks. Instead of green she felt bright red.

"No," she murmured, scrutinizing the rug, waiting for the blush to recede, "I'm fine, really. You mustn't think about that any more."

He respected her wish, asking politely after Elmira.

"Committee meeting at the Waldorf. Terrible lot of work, arranging a benefit. Did you realize that? I had no idea."

"Yes," Durand answered absently. Then, in a different tone, his face lighting up, he asked, "Diligence, would you—?" But he broke off and didn't finish. "Well, as I was saying—such a lovely day. We'll go everywhere, have lunch at the Zoo, get the barometer, look at the Christmas decorations—" He became worried again. "All that won't tire you?"

"I'm never tired."

This wasn't altogether true, but it seemed to satisfy Durand.

What had he started to ask? Dilly hoped, when they were leaving the house and walking out into the wintry sunshine, that he'd return to the question. But he didn't.

"First lunch," was what he said. And a little later, as they neared the Park, "I can't get over it, your never having been to the Zoo."

He walked fast, in a headlong way which Dilly remembered. This is how he'd walked the night they rode on the El. Rediscovering his characteristics, she thought happily, It's like taking up an old friendship.

They could already see the huge Christmas wreath hanging between the turrets of the Arsenal. Crossing Fifth Avenue, Durand led Dilly around to the north of the building, into the Zoo.

They were in a dell here, a scooped-out place amongst the skyscrapers which came as a surprise. A ring of trees stood guard against the traffic, against the noise and the sentence to cross quickly under pain of death. Pigeons and sparrows and children laughing—these made the only sounds that filled the happy dell.

"Now I know why no one ever brought me," Dilly cried delightedly, standing still and surveying the scene. "It's a secret place."

"No, it's public."

"Secret like poetry," Dilly murmured vaguely, not knowing how to put into words the charm of the place: the eagerness of the youngsters grouped around the sea lions' pool, the gay balloons flying happily from little fingers and sadly from high branches in the trees. "City children can keep pets here."

He understood her now. "Any kind," he said, "ponies to elephants."

But in the monkey house Dilly's enthusiasm vanished. She hated the chatter and smell and the sight of locked-in creatures. Durand sensed this at once and took her out. The fresh air was wonderful.

"When we come here next spring," he promised, "the animals will be outdoors and then you can make friends with them. The Zoo's quite another place in the spring. Wait and see."

Dilly glanced swiftly at Durand. *In the spring!* Would they be coming here again in the spring? And in the summer too? Would this go on and on?

She didn't ask him. Instead, seeing some young people sitting

in front of the pavilion at little garden tables having lunch, she exclaimed, "Imagine eating out of doors in December!"

"Do you think it's too chilly for us?" Durand asked wistfully. "The sun's so good. But no. Our food would get cold."

In the cafeteria Dilly was reminded of her quandary at the Automat. She looked for a dish which didn't cost much and she tried to act as if she were disregarding the price. A hamburger and jello—these, she assured Durand, constituted her heart's desire.

"I want you to see the seals," he said over the tray he was carrying. "You'll love them."

He found a table by the window, a small one for two, which offered a good view of the pool. But Dilly and Durand didn't see the seals. They were too intent on watching each other. They would glance down at their food a second, then back again to each other's eyes as raptly as when they'd stood in the foyer of Elmira's apartment. But they were no longer unbelieving.

In the spring, Dilly was exulting to herself.

Then she felt a cold fear. Could this idyll, this game they were playing, last till spring? Durand must realize too that it was a game, the kind children play—real for them but for no one else, not an entity in the surrounding world.

Maybe Dilly ought to go into this, speak out while they were alone here at the table. It was the perfect moment.

But why spoil the game? she asked herself, chewing her hamburger. Why make it serious by denying what didn't exist? To speak of it would be to transform something that was nothing at all into a heavy situation.

No, she said to herself, pushing fear aside like the empty coffee cup, I'm not going to be an overanxious mother to myself, going all a-twitter because some man happens to take a little notice of her daughter.

Durand was sighing. "Wish I could think of something better for Humph and Randy than those bikes," he said, "something they could have fun with like kids in the suburbs."

The moment when Dilly might have spoken those words which would prevent Durand from attaching too much importance to their relationship was slipping from her. She did nothing to hold it back. Instead she asked, swallowing, "Where's their father?"

Durand shrugged. "Don't know. He and Mary didn't hit it off. I always thought he was nice, but she—"

It seemed so hard for him to speak of these things that Dilly wished she hadn't asked.

"Mary has this job," he went on slowly, "and after I was sick last spring, hanging around the house, I saw things needed doing for the boys, so I took over."

"You look after them?"

"Oh, no. Just dress them and get breakfast and then I leave them at the nursery. Mary picks them up on her way home. Very fine place, that nursery. Serves a wonderful lunch. Evenings I'm there anyway."

He stared at Dilly sternly, with a kind of defiance, as if he were ready to stick up for Mary if Dilly should criticize her. "When this new business gets going," he added more cheerfully, "Mary can engage a competent woman."

Dilly didn't criticize. She only looked hastily at her empty plate lest Durand see the tender compassion which suddenly swept over her.

"Well," he said, getting up and helping Dilly into her coat, "maybe we'll think of something nice while we're window shopping."

They walked off in the direction of the Plaza, past cages of exotic animals, past a shed with charming pony carts which reminded Dilly of her childhood.

"I'll remember this when I'm back home," she said softly.

Durand smiled on her, almost, it seemed, in gratitude for her liking the Zoo. Then he looked sunk.

He doesn't want me to go . . .

She didn't like his looking sunk. Still, she was glad he minded. Reflecting how soon it would be Monday, she felt sunk herself.

It's true that I'll remember, she thought. I'll remember as long as I live.

Durand appeared to have some plan. He escorted Dilly across the Plaza to the east side of the Avenue into a mass of shoppers. "Some store windows I want you to see."

A festive spirit pervaded the crisp air, a seasonal goodwill which Dilly found, for all its evanescence, touching.

When they reached Bonwit Teller's, Durand stopped. "This is the place," he said. "Look!"

The windows were full of snowmen, life-size, realistic, with that bright but rather sorrowful expression snowmen get after the sun has shone on them awhile.

There was a newsboy with tweed cap and holly in his buttonhole, there were carolers with pinched faces whose eyes were made of marbles, noses of pink thimbles and mouths of red ones, inverted.

Dilly loved the skating couple, whose marshmallow eyes were attached to their heads with colored hatpins. They had nuts for noses and autumn leaves for mouths. The gentleman's hair and mustache were made of sponge.

"See his earmuffs?" Durand cried. "Scouring pads!"

The best part, for Dilly, was watching Durand out of the corner of her eye. That cardboard sprinkled with artificial snow should evoke such delight in a man! It evoked nostalgia too, she could see—not just for his own childhood, as it must for every person passing, but for the kind of childhood he longed to give his grandsons. Here it was, behind glass.

Durand must have seen her attention wander from the window, for he drew her to the next one, where a gentleman in white tie and top-hat was dashing to a party. In his icy arms he carried a bouquet and a bottle of champagne.

"Look at his elegant white gloves," Dilly said, giggling. "They're really for gardening. I'm supposed to wear a pair like that every time I pull a weed. But I never do."

She looked up at Durand, confiding her secret sin, and he laughed.

In the next window a Salvation Army lassie with a trumpet turned her beautiful face to a beggar.

"Diligence!" Durand cried, bursting with sudden excitement. "That's the place! That's where we'll shop for the boys."

"Where?"

Not Bonwit's, certainly. Or was Durand springing some surprise?

"The Salvation Army store. Up in Harlem, near Third Avenue. They have all kinds of things. Used, of course, but sometimes still quite good."

Dilly's heart ached.

It isn't fair, she thought. I can go into practically any shop and buy what I like, while he—

Durand must have read her thought, for he turned to her squarely and said with painful bluntness, "I'm not a checkbook Santa Claus, you know." Then, relaxing again, "If only you were staying longer, you could go up there with me."

If only she were!

"You'd come, wouldn't you?" He looked at her hopefully now. "They might have some little bikes or tricycles there that I could put in shape. Souped-up bikes would do for a start. Maybe next year—"

"Souped-up? Oh, yes—I know." Will spoke that way about an old car. "But in the City? The boys are still so little."

"Yes," Durand agreed doubtfully. "Maybe a sandbox— We could keep it in the bathroom, pretend the tub is a pool. But Mary would object."

"Speaking as a housewife," Dilly told him, trying to say a good word for Mary, "I should myself."

He gazed at her fondly. "No," he protested softly, "not you. You're not the objecting kind." Studying her face, he asked, "Tired?"

How could she possibly be tired? She could go on forever.

But he was insistent. Maybe he was tired. No doubt this morning, after dressing and feeding the boys and taking them to the nursery, he'd run around with his biscuits.

"St. Thomas's," he said. "We'll go in there."

And he took Dilly across the street, up a tall flight of steps into the church.

CHAPTER 25

SHE WASN'T PREPARED for a burst of gothic glory, here in the middle of New York. To pass from the brightness and bustle of the Avenue into the grace of this quiet sanctuary—

"Oh," she exclaimed under her breath, as they stood at the inner portal. "How beautiful! I've gone by St. Thomas's so many times but never came in."

This is why he insisted on resting, she thought. Something else he wanted me to see, the loveliest of all.

It was as if they'd stepped off the busy earth into some still and timeless universe nearer man's aspiration.

"The windows," Dilly whispered to Durand, when they were seated in one of the rear pews and looking up along the vaulted nave to the chancel. "Don't you think they're—?" She couldn't find words to describe the moving splendor, magnificent yet almost personal.

"Yes," he answered in a hushed voice.

Sitting beside him in silence, Dilly tried not to think of him. She tried to draw her spirit in, center down as she would have done in her Meetinghouse at home. But she couldn't detach herself from these surroundings. The colors of the stained glass in the lofty windows held her entranced. Their beauty was so piercing that it brought tears.

Pushed to share the feeling, she turned to Durand.

He smiled gently, accepting her emotion. "I'm not a religious man, you know," he whispered, leaning toward her a trifle.

She nodded.

All the men she'd known well—her father and grandfather, Willard, Edmund Mansfield, Philip Ludlow, young Bart Brown who gave his life for another—they were all concerned men. She felt the difference.

And still, Durand had brought her here. Just because it was a place to sit down in? Because it was so beautiful?

No, it's more than that, Dilly said to herself, staring at him through mistiness. Maybe it isn't clear even to him, but he has this natural, simple goodness. He doesn't have to work at it, the way I do.

Then she thought, blinking the tears away, He is tired. How selfish of me not to notice.

He looked thin, too, but serenely happy as he sat back again, still smiling down on her.

Their eyes wouldn't leave each other's face. In the pews around them, people came and went. But Dilly and Durand were alone, caught up once more in the enchantment that had overtaken them weeks ago on the El.

More than enchantment, Dilly thought. It's a favor.

She wouldn't have dared say this to him or anyone, but to herself, here in the quiet church, Dilly could use the term whereby Friends mean a gift of God. Being with Durand had become, for her, a favor.

Realizing this, she turned from him, looking down into her lap, where her gloved hands lay still. She felt a deep tranquillity.

And now Dilly centered down, forgetting Durand and the beautiful windows, everything about her, absenting herself from all but her soul's rest.

Where art thou? Art thou in thy soul's rest? Let thine heart answer.

It wasn't till Dilly came back, when her heart had finished answering, that she thought of these words, which her father used to quote. But what her heart had said in its seclusion, the answer it had given only an instant ago, she couldn't remember. She could only savor the tranquillity.

Durand was leaning toward her again. "Too bad there's no music," he whispered. "I'd have liked you to hear the boys sing."

She didn't tell him that she wasn't used to worshiping to music, that to her the silence of two or three gathered together was in itself a hymn. He would have thought this as strange, no doubt, as her overlooking the Zoo. And it would have been absurd to say it, for what she felt now, more pervasively than ever in her life, transcended all form, all belief.

She turned back to him and they stayed there like that a little longer, clinging to the marvel of their closeness, though they sat apart in the pew without touching—the intense togetherness, separate from everyone.

It remained with them—at least, with Dilly—after they'd left St. Thomas's, while they walked on downtown through the thickening crowd.

She wasn't used to crowds. They frightened her a little and she always made a point of avoiding them. But now, with Durand holding her arm, Dilly felt no terror, press as people might around her. She was safely encased in his protection.

Even so, there was nothing possessive about the way he linked his arm in hers almost unconsciously, nothing but the solicitude of any gentleman for any lady.

It's what I feel, she thought, trying to be honest with herself, that makes it seem something more.

They passed Rockefeller Center, stopping to admire the thousands of tapers in the flowerbeds, like tall lilies amongst the evergreens. Continuing downtown, they walked east against the wind to Abercrombie's.

As they entered the store, Dilly, surveying the boats and beachballs, cutlery, punching bags and bicycles, suddenly felt her throat tighten. She stood still, dazed.

Willard. This was where she used to come with Willard. She'd almost forgotten. The picnic basket, the chowder kettle, many other things belonging to their happy leisure—these they had bought here, long ago. In later years they hadn't needed things like that. There was so little leisure.

Durand stood still too, horror-stricken. "You don't feel well. Oh, Diligence, I've worn you out."

"No."

He peered at her, troubled and loving.

"Willard," she explained, still dazed. "We used to come here. It's so long ago . . ." She looked away across the store. She didn't want to see Durand now.

With his usual formality, yet infinitely cherishing, he took her arm and, saying nothing, drew her to the counter where the barometers were on display.

Now Durand became a different person, a man of business, sure of his powers, demanding, judging, exercising caution. He waved aside the sales talk, requesting that the whole stock be removed from the showcase and lined upon the counter for inspection.

Watching him, Dilly regained her control. All at once she saw through her own trick—it had been shameless the way she'd asked him if she could rely on the salesman, she who didn't have to rely on anyone in selecting a barometer. Hadn't she grown up amongst yachtsmen?

As punishment she would have to let Durand do the picking and she did hope he wasn't going to insist on the hideous object with the spokes, the fake wheel, which Will would most certainly despise. That big thing, like a mantle clock with a built-in thermometer, was no good either.

Would Durand know? He wasn't a sailor. Poor Will!

Durand was taking his time, examining each piece.

"This one looks like good workmanship," he told Dilly, holding up a smallish instrument in a wooden case. "Clean-cut mahogany. Can't see the insides of any of them, so it's hard to tell. But I wouldn't take one of those fancy things with spokes and do-dads. Will doesn't care for that."

One would think he and Will were chums!

"No," he said then, rejecting the mahogany case, "Will would prefer this brass one. Made in England, must be a good quality. It's a bit smaller, but more shipshape. Yes, get him this one."

Dilly felt a great relief. The more she studied the brass barometer he put in her hands, the more certain she was that if she had come here alone, this was the one she would have chosen.

He took satisfaction in the purchase, beaming on it, then on Dilly.

But she was preoccupied. Her eyes kept wandering to the corner of the store where she had seen the bicycles, bright red, blue, with sparkling handlebars and spanking new tires. Durand's grandchildren ought to have sturdy, dependable bikes like these, not souped-up ones that might fly apart at any minute. Dilly sighed, wishing there were some way—

She noticed, as they were leaving the store, that Durand was very careful not to look in the direction of the bicycles.

Back on Fifth Avenue he said, "Something I'd like to show you a few blocks down, only—"

"I'm not tired," she broke in.

She couldn't help thinking, This is the way I must have pleaded at bedtime, when I was six or seven.

As they passed the Public Library, Durand burst out laughing. "The lions," he cried. "Look at them, Diligence."

Each of the large stone lions couchant beside the broad steps wore a holly wreath around his neck, a bright, domesticated collar studded with candles. Each, proud of his appearance, held his supercilious nose in the air, snubbing the men and women who hurried by below.

"We're coming to it," Durand promised, a little farther on. "Then we'll take the bus back."

He led her past the throngs that were trying to see into the windows of Lord & Taylor, on to the entrance of the store.

Dilly couldn't imagine what Durand would possibly have to show her in this luxurious establishment, so she passed through the revolving door before him expectantly, curious yet uninquisitive, for to be with him was in itself to have all things explained.

"Look," he commanded, pointing overhead, once they were inside.

Dilly lifted her eyes to a vista of snow-covered branches that

spread like a forest the length and breadth of the store, high above the swirl of shoppers and the laden counters.

It was a snow-covered forest transported from some world in which the grown-up's dream of all that isn't possible finds fulfillment far beyond the Christmas morning of any child. For on every wintry branch bloomed roses—fresh, pink roses as lifelike and heart-lifting as those that grew in Dilly's garden all summer long.

The snow-white branches under the ceiling glistened, the roses bloomed. And Dilly couldn't look away. It seemed minutes before she faced Durand.

When he saw her expression, he seemed satisfied, for he smiled back and drew his arm through hers a little tighter.

But he made no move to go and Dilly looked up once more at the roses blooming in December. Contemplating the grown-up's dream above her head, she was almost knocked off her feet by someone rushing by. Durand held her steady.

"Diligence," he whispered suddenly with that eagerness of a little boy whom no one could possibly cross, "do stay longer."

She turned to him swiftly, surprised by the emotion in his voice, shaken by it.

"Stay just one week and one day more. Stay and go to the Benefit with me."

"You mean, the *Pedigree Prom*?"

He nodded, beseeching her.

"Oh, but I told Elmira—" How could Dilly accept *him* now? How could she refuse him? "I—well, you see, she invited me. But I thought—I didn't know you were going."

"Not surprised," he muttered. "I don't belong with that crowd. Purely business. Club sent me the invitation."

"It's a dance," Dilly cried, suddenly apprehensive. "A dinner dance, isn't it? I can't—"

"Don't think I've forgotten that," Durand broke in. "That, or anything else you've ever told me. What I thought was, we could sit it out. If you went with me," he declared in such a

low voice that Dilly had to watch his lips to catch the words, "I should be so proud."

She stared at him in unbelief. *He* would be so proud? *He?*

"Diligence," he whispered, "all this—" He glanced away from her only long enough to indicate the wintry forest overhead, "it's for you and me, don't you see?"

"You mean, the roses—the miracle of them, blooming in December?"

He didn't answer. He only looked at her.

And then, because the shoppers crowding by looked on Dilly and Durand not as two spirits gathered in a rare togetherness (if they had, they certainly would have stopped to gaze at them in tender wonder) but simply as two obstacles that had to be demolished, he drew her gently around, out of the store.

CHAPTER 26

"Now, Dilly," Elmira began firmly, when she lighted her after-breakfast cigarette the next morning.

Dilly steeled herself for whatever might be coming. From the introductory note she knew it wouldn't brook resistance.

"If you're *going* to stay for the Pedigree Prom you'll simply have to get something. I could lend you a wrap, but the dress you'll have to get."

Self-pity for one afflicted with a Kendal cousin, resolve to make this unfortunate connection presentable and—not least of all, by any means—genuine love mingled in Elmira's voice.

I *could* go home, Dilly was thinking.

But she knew it was a lie. She could no more go home without attending the Benefit in the company of Durand than—

"Yes, Elmira," she murmured meekly, adding, for at least the tenth time, "Sure you don't mind my accepting Durand after I

told you—? It's just," she tried to explain again, "that he didn't seem to have anybody."

"I'm thrilled," Elmira assured her warmly. "I wouldn't have been able to do much for you, being so busy seeing everything goes right and everybody's having a nice time. But the thing is, now we have to attend to your dress."

That burnt orange moiré in Providence—if only Dilly had bought it. Even if her hair— Well, what she wore wasn't important. It was the way Durand had asked her that mattered.

"Have you any suggestion?"

Elmira concentrated. When she finally made her pronouncement it was in an oracular voice. "Carnegie," she declared. "Nothing less will do."

"Carnegie?" Dilly repeated incredulously. "Isn't that terribly expensive?"

Not that she couldn't afford it, but when one thought of all the people who had nothing this Christmas—

"That's the only place," Elmira stated flatly. "You might be able to get away with it at La Fontaine—she copies the Paris models. You just might be able to get away with it. But I don't think we ought to run the risk. One doesn't, with a thing like that."

Elmira was certainly taking Dilly's wardrobe very much to heart. But Dilly—

"Is it such a problem in New York?" she asked impatiently. "I saw a very lovely dinner dress in Providence last week. Quite reasonable, too. Burnt orange moiré—"

The beautiful color, the watered silk, sheen and shadow.

"Moiré!" Elmira exclaimed, horrified. "That's *finished.* You couldn't possibly appear at the Pedigree Prom in moiré. Last season—yes. It would have been fine, the very latest thing. But this year—" She looked aghast. Yet she managed to add tolerantly, "How would they know, in Providence?"

"It's a very nice store," Dilly cried, nettled by this time. "And I might have bought the dress, only I didn't think I'd need it. If I'd had any inkling—"

"One always needs clothes. Well, we'll go, soon as Henderson's had his bath. He'll love the walk."

"But he'll catch cold!"

Why must Henderson assist in the selection of Dilly's dress?

"He can wear his jersey."

Dilly didn't really mind. Anyone as happy as she was couldn't object to a dog. She was going to have another whole week here, another whole week with Durand!

"The most wonderful thing has happened," she confided. "Durand told me last night. He's registered his trademark." She waited for Elmira to rejoice. As her cousin's expression didn't change, Dilly added, to drive the point home, "His business will pick up now."

"Trademark? For the dog biscuits?"

"Yes. They're patented. Hereafter nobody else will be able to put Worcestershire Biscuits on the market," Dilly announced, trying to offset Elmira's disparaging tone by an extra coating of optimism on hers. "All Durand needs now is capital."

Elmira said nothing. Instead of being thrilled by the news of Durand's good fortune, she merely appeared disdainful and, for some strange reason, worried.

"How is he going to raise it?" she asked, staring at Dilly sharply.

"I don't know. He didn't say."

"Mmm."

After that mutter, Elmira was silent again. She stared at Dilly in that worried way a second longer and then got up to fetch the pine oil for Henderson's bath.

Dilly was worried about Durand too, but she couldn't figure out why Elmira should take his difficulties so hard, except that Henderson didn't fancy the biscuits, which, after all, wouldn't have any appreciable bearing on Durand's success. Dilly couldn't figure it out. But then, she so often failed to understand her cousin.

When they were walking down the Avenue later, Elmira, on

the leash, described the *toilettes* that were being assembled by the patronesses of the Canine Club.

"Pauline Beetle took Venetian lace."

"Oh."

That was all Dilly could think of to answer. For she was trying to prepare herself for the hideous, outrageously extravagant outfit which she clearly saw awaiting her.

I'm not going to let her make me get it, Dilly decided stubbornly. I'm not.

She wouldn't pay a penny more, either, than they'd asked in Providence. Well, if need be, a little more. But she'd stick to her price.

"Did you see that man?" Elmira was asking in a lowered voice, still straining at the leash. "Did you see how he stared at Henderson? Must be he recognized us. Saw our picture in the paper." She giggled. "In the Public Eye, that's what we are."

Dilly smiled mechanically. She was taken up with her thoughts.

Why fuss so? she asked herself. Durand would admire her in anything, even moiré! Durand would admire her; no one else mattered.

Through the tide of Christmas shoppers ebbing and flowing at the same time along the Avenue, Elmira and Henderson and Dilly navigated bravely. But they never reached Carnegie.

They were nearing there, passing through a side street, when Dilly saw her dress displayed in the window of a very distinguished shop.

The minute Dilly caught sight of it she knew the dress had been created for her, for her alone, of all the women in this gigantic city. Even before she tried it on, before she knew whether it fitted, before she so much as felt the quality of the velvet between her fingers, while she was still standing on the street, the dress reached out to Dilly through the glass, begging that it might become the loving enfoldment of her body.

It was, indeed, already part of her.

This Dilly knew without the slightest question, as she stood on

the pavement with Elmira looking in, drawn to the dress by the regal simplicity of the design and the warm color, for which she could find no worthy name, since it was neither russet nor brown—not these at all—but a subtle blending of the two. She simply had to have it.

She didn't admit this to Elmira. "Let's go in," was all she dared say.

Elmira made no protest. And Henderson was willing.

As they entered the shop, Dilly could feel herself tremble. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before.

Suppose the dress turned out to be very expensive, as well it might in this establishment? Would she, she asked herself, forget her resolve, her self-denial before the utter necessity of making it the outward wrapping of her personality?

There was something, however, about the interior of the shop which calmed Dilly. "Ladylike" was the word which came to her mind as she noticed the quiet, the spaciousness, the discreet lighting. It was almost as if the appointments of the place and the soft-spoken woman who came forward to make her acquaintance were reluctant to part with whatever might be locked in the half hidden wardrobes. Aside from a confection of sea-green chiffon tossed on a settee, no gowns were in evidence.

Only for a moment did the saleslady glance at Henderson with evident want of enthusiasm. Then she devoted her attention to Dilly.

But she was so unhurried that Dilly could hardly control her impatience—more than impatience, the fear, which had hold of her now, that the dress might by some mischance fail to become hers.

At last she stood inside it, stood with it molded to her figure and, in some inexplicable way—yes, to her spirit.

Even Elmira, sitting in judgment on a little gilded chair with Henderson presiding on his haunches in the foreground, seemed overwhelmed, for she was speechless.

Dilly paced ceremoniously before them, suddenly recognizing the blend of brown and russet.

"Chestnut color, isn't it?" she asked, almost breathless, standing still and facing Elmira and the saleslady eagerly. Then she looked down on the velvet falling softly over her breasts, covering her feet. "There used to be an old Greek in Copley Square who roasted them," she recalled, "years and years ago."

When school closed for Christmas, her parents always took her up to Boston for a treat and, late in the afternoon on the way to Back Bay, her father would stop at the cart in front of the Old South Church and buy a little bagful for Dilly to eat in the train going home. Crossing the Square, she would hold a hot chestnut in her mitten and rub it till the shell became burnished. She would put it to her cheek and the sweet, warm smell on a frosty evening . . .

"Under the gas lamps," Dilly exclaimed, turning impulsively to share her excitement with Elmira, "after I'd rubbed it so hard, the chestnut looked this color and—"

"The hem would have to be altered," Elmira broke in, addressing the saleslady, cold to Dilly's memories. "Otherwise," she admitted, "it fits perfectly. It isn't bad. Quite nice."

Nice? Dilly felt like a queen.

The burnt orange had been too young for her, had showed her age to disadvantage. This, on the other hand, made the most of her coloring, setting off not alone her complexion, even her hair. The moiré had reflected the light, repelled it sharply; the velvet absorbed it, holding the warmth half hidden, like the pierced shell of a chestnut. This conferred pride on middle-age, made it so serene a state, so winning that to a younger generation it could only seem downright enviable.

Dilly gazed at herself in the mirror.

All at once, with a rush of happiness, she knew that it did make a difference about Durand, even if he didn't care what she wore. She cared. She wanted to be as beautiful as this for his sake, to appear before the world with all the grace of her response to him.

Inquiring the price, she took no notice of the answer. She thought she saw Elmira raise her eyebrows, she even thought,

carelessly glancing at her cousin out of the corner of her eye, that she saw her wince. But Dilly didn't take the figure in, so absorbed was she in contemplating her reflection.

She smiled at it dreamily, enamored, detaching her attention only just enough to say she'd take the dress.

When the saleslady had left to call the fitter, Elmira broke into an agitated whisper. "Dilly, you're out of your senses. You could get something at Carnegie for half. I'm positive. Just half. This is one of the most select places in New York. You wouldn't know, naturally, but—"

"I don't care," Dilly broke in placidly, without turning from the mirror. "It's my dress. Made for me."

"You look nice in it," Elmira conceded, still in the agitated whisper. "Its plainness becomes you. But Dilly, you're a fool. How can you spend so much on something you'll maybe only have occasion to wear once? Why, it costs more than I spent on *Henderson.*"

"I'll have it all my life," Dilly said solemnly, as if she were taking a vow. In the mirror she met Elmira's troubled eyes. "Even if I never go to another Canine Club Benefit," she assured her, "I'll have it to look at. I'll keep it in my—"

"You couldn't wear it to the Pedigree Prom again," Elmira interposed. "Everybody'd remember."

Dilly didn't wish to discuss this any more. She was gazing at her reflection again, smiling that little smile.

How could she turn her back on the dress, as Elmira suggested, walk out in search of some bargain, when this was hers, her very own, when it cried out, begging to embrace her?

She couldn't even bear to take it off. But something of its beauty, the loving enfoldment, lingered with her, even when she had her old suit on again.

At the little writing desk in the rear of the shop, Dilly wrote a check without regret while Elmira stood beside her, awed, and Henderson went off to size up the establishment on his own.

Not a shadow of regret, Dilly said to herself.

She would economize in other ways, go without things, so

that she could still share as much as she'd intended with those in need. But this she had to have.

It wasn't, she told herself, an extravagance, even if the amount she was now spelling out in such a lot of words was far beyond the top figure she'd grudgingly decided on half an hour ago. It was simply ransom for the release of a beloved. She must pay the required price, not haggle. It was a privilege to pay it.

"Well I never," Elmira muttered, staring at Dilly as they left the shop.

They turned into the Avenue, instantly surrounded again by the Christmas shoppers hurrying on their errands with anxious faces.

Curious and full of enterprise, Henderson laid out a zigzag course. Shreds of sea-green chiffon dangled from his whiskers.

Best overlooked, Dilly decided.

Elmira hadn't noticed. She was still staring at Dilly in admiration and amazement. And she said nothing, all the way home. She must indeed be overwhelmed. Surpassingly.

So am I, Dilly thought, pushing gaily through the crowd.

CHAPTER 27

Now they were on the El again, riding over the City between shabby tenements and lofts. The train would spurt uptown a few blocks, jerk to a halt, start once more. Durand and Dilly bounced against each other on the straw-covered seat.

"I could hardly stand it all week end," he confided to her in a whisper, "not seeing you. Mary had these engagements."

"Oh."

Dilly had sat jumpily before the television screen with Elmira, listening for the telephone.

"Besides," Durand added, sounding as if he hoped to be con-

tradicted, "other people you want to see. Mustn't take up all your time."

Dilly would have blurted out that there was no one else she cared to be with, had she not suddenly been tongue-tied.

"Anyway, we have five more days," Durand exclaimed. "So many things we can do when we've finished this Christmas shopping. Maybe tomorrow we'll go down to the Battery." He turned to see if this would please her.

Tomorrow!

All the joy that Dilly was capable of holding seemed concentrated in that one word.

But grief and loneliness are still with me, she assured herself quickly, loyal to Willard. They haven't been pushed aside.

Just now, though, she felt only the wild certainty that there could be no greater happiness than this, together with the knowledge, making the present even sweeter, that the happiness wouldn't last. When she was home again, it would be merely a recollection.

I'll have that, at least, she told herself proudly. It won't be as if I'd never known him. I'll have his presence that way all my life.

Not daring to face him, lest he read in her eyes all that he'd come to mean, she turned to the window, seeing nothing, for the tears had sprung up.

"It might be windy at the Battery this time of year," he was saying, evidently unaware of Dilly's emotion. "We'd better wait with that till you come back."

Till she—! What excuse would she have for coming back?

"And another time," he went on, "when it gets real warm—" He stopped.

In control of herself once more, Dilly faced him inquiringly.

He seemed to be catching his breath. Was he trying to think up something? Or was it too precious a plan to divulge?

"We'll go for a sail!" he whispered.

"Oh," Dilly exclaimed, "a sail! Are you a yachtsman? I didn't think—"

"No, no," he answered, waving away the idea. "That's not my style. You know me. But I should love to take you for a sail, Diligence. I can just see you sitting in a boat, looking so beautiful against the sky. Not a motorboat, you understand," he added sternly, as if she'd suggested such an outrage. "A little cockleshell."

"Of course."

"With a colored sail."

"Colored?"

Dilly had sailed all her life. But never in a boat with a colored sail.

"A pretty color. We want everything to be pretty."

She realized now that he'd probably never set foot in anything more than a ferryboat, that he was playing a game with her, like an imaginative child. Where would they sail in New York, anyhow?

"We used to have a little sloop when the children were small," she told him, "the *Gulielma,* named for the wife of William Penn."

He looked almost, she thought, hurt.

I shouldn't have mentioned that, she reproached herself. He doesn't want me to think about any boat but one we can be in together.

"It had only just a white sail," she said aloud, deprecating the "Gooly" for his sake, "a grayish white."

This seemed to make things better.

"Next stop 125th," he announced, appearing more satisfied. He began buttoning his coat.

It was cold on the street. In the short afternoon, the winter daylight was already beginning to peter out.

The Salvation Army store was only a block from the El, but in that little distance Dilly took in the character of Harlem. There were no decorations like those on Fifth Avenue. The people who passed didn't express the gay anxiety of the Christmas shoppers downtown, only the intentness of those who are preoccupied with securing a meal.

But though the drabness of the neighborhood and the windows of the store itself, crammed with secondhand stuff, should have prepared Dilly, it wasn't till she and Durand were inside that she felt the shock of contrast between this and the places where she had done her shopping.

The floor was so clean that the bentwood chairs, which might have graced some ballroom long ago, the blackened toasters and waffle irons, standing in a corner, the old-fashioned radios and lifeless mattresses looked starkly forlorn. Dark-skinned girls rummaged through racks of fumigated clothing and men examined the stock of worn shoes.

This didn't seem to strike Durand as pathetic. He had an adventurous, eager expression.

"Never know what may turn up here," he told Dilly. "That's half the fun of coming. Always some surprise—an article someone has given away which is just what you've been wanting."

He spied a couple of bicycles standing by the wall. They were big and battered. From where Dilly stood she could see they would be of no use. Durand left them to poke through a pile of toys.

Not those, Dilly cried in her heart, please not those!

Toys ought to be handed down, but they should *look* new; they should work.

Durand wandered to the back of the store, where a passage was piled high with bedsprings and bulky odds and ends.

A sweet old lady with the face of a missionary came up to Dilly and asked what she was looking for.

"We're just—just browsing."

The woman went away and Dilly stood still, crushed by the guilt of possession. All the plainness Elmira found so ludicrous, all the comfortable simplicity of the house in Kendal, were an extravagance beside this poverty. Dilly's concerns, the good works she engaged in, the money she gave away, couldn't wipe out the guilt of living in ease while others were deprived. The chestnut velvet dress alone—

"Diligence," Durand cried, coming up suddenly behind her,

"I've found the most perfect presents for the boys! Perfect!" He could hardly contain his delight. "Come and see." Laughing, he led her to the passage at the back.

He had discovered a set of monkey bars and a short slide, the kind of equipment Willard had had installed in the back yard when the children were learning to climb.

"I can paint them," Durand explained hastily, to forestall any disappointment on Dilly's part. "Main thing is, they're not rickety. Sound and strong." He shook the metal frames, glancing at Dilly to see if she approved.

In his joy, he opened his arms wide, as if to hug her. But he didn't hug her. He turned back to the monkey bars.

"How much, I wonder," he murmured. "Ten dollars apiece, I bet. And that's dirt cheap compared to new." Then he said, sounding more down-to-earth, but sad, "One would be enough to start with." He looked at Dilly with an expression of wavering firmness, which was meant to convince her that this was so. Yet he couldn't help adding, "But I'd love the set. Might be snapped up if I wait."

They went to find the missionary lady. Durand sounded breathless as he asked the price.

"Depends if you'll take the two," the lady answered with finality. "They've been here months, using up space. Nobody wants stuff like that in the City. Five dollars, if you'll take the two."

Dilly didn't look at Durand. She feared his joy would be too much for her to bear.

He gave an address on Columbus Avenue.

Till that moment, she hadn't even known where he lived. So much she didn't know about him!

Then she thought, *Columbus Avenue.* Would there be back yards there?

"Send some strong men on the truck, please," Durand was saying. "It's four flights up."

Four flights! But this was playground equipment.

"I know," Durand murmured to Dilly, seeing her amazement. "It will be a bit peculiar, but I think it will fit. And the boys'll

have things like kids in the country. Isn't it a stroke of luck, our finding them? Happened because you were along."

Dilly smiled, touched by the compliment, but she still wondered. There must be a roof, she decided, a walled-in, flat place, where the children played. One of those penthouse apartments.

It was almost five o'clock when they walked back to the El. Night had begun to close in. Upstairs, in the cozy waiting room, the potbellied stove was glowing. Dilly felt her cheeks tingle.

"Durand," she said softly, so that the man in the ticket office wouldn't overhear their secret, "these windows—they're like St. Thomas's. I mean, the colors."

She went over to them and followed the scroll design with the tip of her gloved finger, curve on curve etched in the colored glass.

The comparison was ridiculous. These cheap Victorian windows bore no resemblance to the magnificent stained glass. It was only that Dilly had the same feeling now as she'd had that day sitting in the church with Durand, the feeling of being truly in touch with the reality and goodness of life.

He didn't ask her to explain. He simply, having paid the fares, helped her through the turnstile and out onto the platform. They were alone, standing there, waiting for the train. Down at the end, an old Negro was whistling a carol and way off, as far down the track as Dilly could see, misty twilight softened the skyscrapers.

She turned and looked at Durand.

His ears were red. His eyes were half closed against the wind. There was such deep contentment in the lines about his mouth, as though he had at that moment everything he wished for on earth, and, as he answered Dilly's look, such tenderness, that she suddenly felt an overpowering desire to reach out and caress him. To run her hands lightly over his temples and along his cheeks, to kiss—

What *is* this? she asked herself, shocked. What kind of woman am I, thinking these things?

She'd given herself to Willard selflessly, grateful that she

could please him. What she felt standing beside this comparative stranger on the El platform in the winter twilight was emotion of another sort, urgent, undefined. She didn't know whether it was simply a mothering instinct—surely it must be!—or the prefigurement of a love unlike any she'd ever experienced.

She must have surmised the truth, for suddenly she turned away from him, her eyes rushing toward the exit. She would dash through the turnstile, run down the stairs, run away—not from him—from the strange force that was hurling her so swiftly out of her settled self.

Anguished, determined, already a step farther, Dilly glanced back over her shoulder only to explain, say goodbye quickly.

The train rumbled in.

"Durand," Dilly cried, backing off, shouting to outdo the screeching brakes, "I—"

He came and took her arm gently, barely touching it.

Unresisting, Dilly let him lead her into the train.

CHAPTER 28

"I'M ORDERING the corsages," Elmira announced next morning. "What will go best with your dress?" Pencil and pad in hand, she looked very businesslike.

But Dilly was in a daze.

All night long her mind had raced. She had thrashed around in bed, careful to move noiselessly so Elmira wouldn't know Dilly was losing sleep over Durand. All night she'd thought and thought.

Yet now she couldn't think of the name of a single flower.

"What was it you called that color?" Elmira was asking.

"Chestnut."

Elmira concentrated. "How about two tiny cymbidium orchids —very restrained? Golden brown would blend in beautifully. On

the other hand, with your complexion, a single pink camellia—"

"Oh, I don't care."

Glancing at Dilly swiftly, Elmira narrowed her eyes. "You look washed out," she remarked. Then, in a too high voice, as if afraid to ask, "You're not being foolish, are you, Dilly?"

"Foolish?"

"About Durand, I mean." Color rushed into Elmira's cheeks, but she pressed on. "I wouldn't want you to do anything that—"

"Well," Dilly admitted, facing her cousin honestly, "I did tell him I'd come to his house this evening. But if you think—"

At this Elmira's eyes flew wide open. "What for?" she snapped.

"Baby-sit. That Mary leaves everything to him, it seems. And there's the children's Christmas present he wants to show me. Do you think it's—all right?"

Elmira burst out laughing.

"Darling, this isn't Kendal. What I had in mind was money. Just don't commit yourself." Visibly relieved, she turned her attention once more to her notes.

"Oh," Dilly murmured indifferently, "*money.*"

What was the good of it, if she couldn't share with Durand? She felt an adolescent rebellion against a world which blocked her helping a friend.

It isn't fair, she said to herself.

The very words restored her objectivity. How young her thinking could be! This was the phrase Anne was always using when propriety interfered with some innocent impulse: *It isn't fair!*

To Elmira, Dilly said, never guessing how provincial it would sound, "Why don't you leave it to the florist—whatever he has in stock?"

"*My* man *always* has *everything,*" Elmira answered. "Never mind. It'll be a surprise. I'm treating." She looked full of magnanimity.

Suddenly, instead of being grateful, Dilly was furious. She saw in a flash what Elmira had meant: that Durand was playing on her feelings in the hope of getting money.

Dilly choked, groping for words strong enough to lash at her cousin.

The chime of the door saved her.

It was the chestnut velvet being delivered in a box of deceptive simplicity. Untying the string, lifting the dress out of its tissue blanket with trembling fingers, feeling the softness and the warm color reach out to her again, Dilly became calmer. Yet she couldn't bring herself to face Elmira.

So *that* was what she took Durand for! *That* was what she thought: no one could care for Dilly for her own sake.

But he does, he does, Dilly cried to herself, hugging the knowledge to her heart with the dress. He's too nice to want anything from me but friendship.

And when, after supper, he came, standing in the foyer looking down on her with that dear smile, which seemed both formal and intimate, signifying nothing more than platonic gallantry and, at the same time, such devotion that it caught Dilly up like a passionate embrace, the cry echoed within her, He does, he does.

He was carrying a flat package on the palm of his hand very cautiously.

"Blueberry pie," he confided, exulting. "Going to have a party when we get there. Mary's home. May go out later, but she said she'd stay with the boys till we arrive."

This seemed to be for him the crowning joy. All the way in the wheezing crosstown bus he kept repeating, "I did so want Mary to meet you."

Dilly wasn't sure she wanted to meet Mary. There'd been times when she'd felt decidedly unfriendly towards Durand's daughter.

Maybe she doesn't like me either, Dilly thought, trying to keep an open mind.

The house was dingy. One would never have guessed that a man with Durand's innate elegance lived in such a place.

Mounting the four flights of stairs, Dilly felt the dread of meeting Mary like weights in her shoes. Durand stopped two

or three times to let her rest. She could see that behind his reassuring smile he was finding the stairs a strain too.

When they arrived at the apartment and he fitted his key in the lock, they heard giggles and scuffles behind the door. It swung open and two little boys in sleeping suits pounced on Durand.

He looked around.

"Where's your mother?"

By now the boys had noticed Dilly. Without answering, they ran away on their bare feet.

"Mary!"

Something told Dilly she wasn't there.

Durand led the way through a long, narrow hall into the living room.

Everything was rather ugly, but neat, as though great care had been taken to preserve the old furnishings. Propped beside the telephone was a note:

Gone out.
MARY

It seemed redundant.

So she had skipped, left the children alone, cheated her father of his little happiness.

Dilly thought, picturing Mary as though she were present in the room, She neglects her children, but the house she scrubs and straightens like a demon.

Slowly, as if crushed, Durand put the pie down on the table and came to take Dilly's coat.

She had to clench her fists, for the impulse of her hands, very nearly uncontrollable, was to reach up and draw his head down into the comfort of her arms.

And then, for the first time, Dilly saw that Durand could be angry as well as gentle; for the first time in all the months she'd known him, she saw his eyes flash.

"That girl! She might at least have—"

But he caught himself. The little boys were within earshot, peeking shyly around the doorframe.

He coaxed them into the room.

"Shake hands with Mrs. Fuller."

As Dilly anticipated, they did nothing of the kind.

"This is Humph," Durand said, patting the bigger child's head. "The little scalawag pulling at my shoelace is Randy."

The little scalawag on the floor was hardly more than a baby, though early barbering made him look like a bald old man. The tuft of hair left over his forehead was pale yellow, strikingly like his grandfather's, and his eyes, turned up to the big man in laughter, were the same clear blue as Durand's.

Except that they haven't been bruised by life, the way his have, Dilly remarked to herself.

Humph was different—darker, skinnier, with a flicker of fear in his expression. He'd no doubt been old enough, Dilly guessed, to witness his parents chafing and straining until they tore apart. The dread of violence remained in the child's face. But there was something about the way he held his head—the curve running from the hairline to the soft, babyish neck encircled by the sleeping suit—that was already manful.

This Dilly took in while Durand stood looking down on his boys.

A little, she thought incongruously, the way he looks at me—tender, yet at the same time anxious.

"Pie!" he announced to the children, taking it from the table. His gaiety, if forced a little, sounded as if it were growing genuine. "We have a blueberry pie!"

He carried it proudly, ceremoniously, waiting at the living-room door for Dilly to precede him through the long hall into the kitchen. The giggling children tugged at his coat.

Humph climbed on the kitchen stool and got plates out of the cupboard. Durand turned on the flame under the kettle and measured coffee into the percolator (very generous spoonfuls, Dilly noted). Then he cut the pie and served it, leaving a piece for Mary.

Dilly observed the movements of his hands, which spoke, almost shouted, his pleasure in providing this "party."

Giving hands, she said to herself, watching them fondly.

And as she sat down at the kitchen table opposite him with the two little boys standing between them already gobbling their portions, she thought, This is the nicest thing we ever did together.

He looked across at her with what Dilly could only interpret as unspoken messages of affection, as though they had been sitting together at some kitchen table for years and years and looked forward to nothing so wonderful as sitting together this way the rest of their lives.

Then, dutifully, a little unwillingly, it would appear, Durand detached his gaze from Dilly to make sure that the children were eating nicely.

They were covered with blueberry juice.

"Randy's dropped his on the floor," Humph reported.

"Never mind," Durand told him quietly, getting up. "It'll wash off the linoleum."

But before Durand was out of his chair, Randy, satiated, rushed away, having first jumped squarely on to the piece of pie, making the juice squish between his toes. He ran through the house leaving little purple footprints as he went.

"Randy, Randy!"

Humph and Durand chased after him.

"Look at Mommy's rug," Dilly heard Humph cry in the living room. "She'll be ma-ad, Grandpa."

"Boiling water," Dilly shouted, running in and surveying the double line of purple footprints. "It's the only thing that takes out blueberry."

She tore back to the kitchen, got the kettle and dishcloth and, kneeling on the rug, poured a steaming jet over the stains.

Humph stood over her, whimpering a little, breathing hard against her neck.

"Never mind," Dilly told him softly. "We'll fix it." She sponged and scrubbed. "See? It's better already."

Durand had caught Randy up and carried him away to wash his feet.

"There," Dilly murmured at last, still on her knees, the kettle in one hand, the dishcloth in the other. She settled back on her ankles to assess the damage. "Think it'll be all right?" she asked Durand, looking up at him as he came in.

A wisp of hair had fallen over her eyes. She brushed it away with the back of the hand that held the dishcloth.

Durand stood over her holding Randy in his arms, smiling down. And though the stains were still bad enough to guarantee h--- from Mary, for some reason, looking at her that way, he was clearly not anxious at all but simply ecstatic.

CHAPTER 29

"How ABOUT some honeymoon bridge?" Durand asked, when he was finally alone with Dilly.

He had put the boys to bed three times. Twice they returned to the living room and he patiently tucked them in again.

"Some *what?*" Dilly asked, her voice rising. She *couldn't* have heard right.

Honeymoon—! But I'm not afraid of him, she assured herself. I just don't understand.

"Double solitaire," he explained. "I play single here in the evening. Two's lots more fun."

"Oh—a *game.*"

"Reason it's called honeymoon," Durand went on, looking straight at Dilly, "isn't just because a couple can play by themselves. A certain teamwork to it. Takes forbearance."

His tone was light. Yet in the joking reference to marriage, Dilly could hear a dominant earnestness.

"I don't know how to play cards," she confessed, seeing him

take two decks from a drawer in an old lowboy. But she didn't want to disappoint him, just because she'd grown up plain. "Years ago, though," she added, as he set a little table before her and drew up his chair opposite, "I did play Slap Jack with the children."

"You'll catch on."

He laughed indulgently, as if she were still very young herself. Gracefully cupping his hands, he shuffled the cards, making two packs slide into each other in a movement that fascinated Dilly. He was still laughing, lightheartedly by this time, looking at Dilly.

You and I alone together, was what he seemed to say. Spending the evening at home playing honeymoon bridge—could anything be nicer?

And Dilly, sitting in this strange room, suddenly felt unity with it. In some way she was linked with everything here, the ugly furniture, the children, even with the unknown woman who seemed so little sympathetic. She was linked through Durand with all that touched his life.

He finished shuffling. Handing Dilly one of the decks, he told her how to lay the cards on the table. She listened carefully.

"Now," he said, when the cards were down, "we're ready to start."

He took up an ace and moved it to the middle of the table. But suddenly his hand stopped in mid-air. Dilly looked up inquiringly.

Humph was back again.

"All I want," the child said quickly, his eyes wide with trouble, "is, how many days till Christmas?"

He glanced furtively at the rug, and Dilly saw he was afraid of losing his presents because of the disaster.

Without thinking, she reached out.

He came to her.

Dilly would have liked to take the child on her lap and cuddle him, but she knew she must approach him as if he were grown up.

"Today's the ninth," she said seriously, placing a hand on each little shoulder and looking into Humph's face. "That makes sixteen days more. Can thee count?"

She had slipped into the language she used with her children, but it would have been unnatural to speak to this one in any other way.

"And the thing about Christmas, the special thing is, nobody can take thy presents away."

"Santa Claus can, if you're bad."

"No," Dilly said, "Thee's mistaken. Even Santa Claus can't do that. Love comes into the world at Christmas, love and kindness. They're in everybody, even in people who get angry sometimes."

Humph listened to her gravely and asked, "Why do you speak funny?"

"It's the way I speak to my boy at home."

"Oh." He thought this over. "Big like me? Or like Randy?"

"Very big."

This seemed to please Humph. The anxiety went out of his face and he wriggled free of Dilly's grasp.

Durand put the cards down and got up. Gently, without saying a word, he led the child out. When he finally returned, he looked tired and troubled.

He worries about Humph the way Humph worries about his presents, Dilly thought sadly.

She couldn't draw Durand to her and place her hands on his shoulders, saying things that would give him new hope.

"Let's skip the game tonight," he said, gathering the cards without sitting down. "I think Humph is going to drop off this time. Randy's fast asleep. So I can show you the secret."

He led her down the hall to a door. "This is my room," he explained, opening it. "The boys have been most honorable about staying out. They know there's a surprise."

It was a surprise for Dilly too. It was unbelievable.

There, in the middle of Durand's small bedroom, stood the

monkey bars and the slide with no more than a narrow catwalk left around them. He had placed the slide in such a way that the child would land softly on his bed. Dilly could picture Randy whizzing down and rolling over full of laughter on the quilt, while Humph swung on the monkey bars between the dresser and the closet.

"Wonderful, the way it all fits in, don't you think?" Durand was asking, looking at Dilly for approval. "Only place in the house there seemed to be any room."

Nodding, she followed him around, holding her elbows in. Preposterous though the whole thing was, the pathos had gone out of it. All the money in the world couldn't have bought Humph and Randy a finer gift.

Or a sweeter one, Dilly thought, feeling the tears prick behind her eyes.

She felt self-conscious in this room, hesitating to look around further, but she couldn't help noticing the photograph that stood on the dresser. Against her will, Dilly was drawn to the face of the woman in the narrow frame, to the serene eyes and the winning smile.

Dilly glanced at it out of the corner of her eye, not sure that Durand would wish her to.

A lovely face. If the woman was aware that life wasn't perfect, that illness and death would overtake her, that her daughter would make a mess of things and her husband would suffer, her expression didn't show it.

To be Durand's wife is to be blessed, was all it said.

Dilly turned away. She couldn't look at the picture or the room any more. She was glad when Durand took her back to the living room.

"I must be going," she murmured.

"Sit down just a minute," he begged her. "We've hardly had a moment by ourselves, with those boys cutting up."

She returned to the chair she had occupied before and he took one beside her.

"It's nice they're not afraid of you."

That was all she could say to ease his anxiety.

He was fidgeting nervously in a way Dilly'd never seen him do before, twisting to look at her yet turning away. He cleared his throat as if to say something, but no word came out.

Dilly's heart lurched. Was he going to ask—? What was he going to ask?

"Diligence," he began finally, facing her with frank embarrassment, "I would like to ask you something."

Her throat tightened. She had feared this, foreseen it, ever since that day at the Zoo. Why had she been fool enough to think that they could go on enjoying each other's company without becoming serious? She herself— Yes, she had to admit that even if she could never— She cared.

Refusing Durand would be the hardest thing she'd ever had to do. She'd regret it as long as she lived. Then why were tears of joy rushing to her eyes?

"It's very—well—"

"Yes?" Blinking back the tears, Dilly tried to smile encouragement.

"Personal," he explained, looking away again, not noticing her emotion. "And I hope you won't mind my asking—"

"Of course I don't."

"You see," he rushed on, "there's no one else I feel so free with, though we haven't known each other very long. But you're so understanding and I know you'd want to help me."

So it *was* that!

Like a blow in the stomach, it hit Dilly. So after all he was going to ask for money. Elmira was right.

To jump up, snatch her coat, get out of here before he could complete the sentence, so she wouldn't see him reduced to making the request—Dilly would have given anything if she could have moved. But his look held her. She tried not to listen, but she heard.

"What do you think about—" He hesitated. "Toilet training?"

Dilly sank back in the chair, too relieved, too disappointed to answer.

"This new idea, not taking big boys like Randy to the bathroom. Do you think it's good?"

Dilly didn't know what she thought about that, only that it wasn't at all important. Not, at least, compared with what she'd imagined Durand was going to ask.

"Makes a lot more laundry," he explained earnestly. "But if it's really better for the child—"

Dilly barely heard what he was saying. Her disappointment was causing the blood to pound in her ears. It would have been the hardest thing she'd ever done, refusing him, and yet, to have been assured that he cared . . .

Durand didn't see Dilly home. He saw her to the crosstown bus. Dilly, he pointed out, could take care of herself, while if one of the boys should wake up—

"You must go right back," she told him.

But he stayed with her on the windy corner under the lamplight, waiting for the bus. At this time of night, Dilly would have preferred to take a taxi. Something made her feel it would be out of place.

"Now you know all about me," Durand said, looking straight into Dilly's eyes. "I wanted you to. Nothing about my life I want to keep from you."

"Is that what you had in mind the other night," Dilly asked, "when you said some day you would surprise me? Because it isn't a surprise—I mean, I knew all along that you were taking care of the boys."

"No," he answered, looking down at her with almost a new tenderness. "That wasn't what I meant. I thought maybe some day, now that I have the patent, I could— But—"

He turned away without finishing. In profile his face was very sad.

As the bus appeared, Durand turned to Dilly once more and he was his cheerful self again. But he didn't say anything. He

held her arm protectively till the bus came to a standstill at the corner.

Raising his hat, he suddenly bent and kissed her cheek softly. Then he handed her into the bus.

CHAPTER 30

ELMIRA had already gone to the Waldorf, bowed down by a hundred last-minute duties in opening the Pedigree Prom.

"Sorry I can't sit with you and Durand," she'd told Dilly as she was leaving. "The Committee's on the dais, you know, with the officers. But I'm putting you at Pauline Beetle's table. She'll see you meet everybody."

Was there anyone whom Dilly'd care to meet while she was at the side of Durand Smith?

Standing in the foyer now, impatient for his coming, she was fascinated by the reflection in the mirror. This couldn't really be her own reflection, could it, this undeniably charming woman?

The very act of putting on the chestnut velvet had transformed her. The color which smoldered in the deep silken pile of the fabric, the lines that fell so lovingly about Dilly divulged her inner glow—the secret knowledge of being cherished.

She had pinned the corsage at the V of the neckline, a little to the left, in what she took to be the region of her heart.

During the afternoon, Elmira's florist had delivered two little boxes. Dilly, opening hers with polite exclamations, hadn't actually been terribly thrilled by the orchids, even if the variety was, as Elmira herself pointed out, very *recherché.*

Then, just as Elmira was leaving, when the orchids had already been pinned against Dilly's chestnut velvet, another box arrived. This one was addressed to Mrs. Fuller.

"Oh," Dilly exclaimed in surprise, opening it. "Roses in December!"

For an instant she feared that she couldn't control her tears of happiness. But Elmira was watching.

In fact, Dilly'd succeeded in carrying the moment off very well. Though till then it hadn't even occurred to her that Durand might send her something, when his gift arrived she gloated over it, but graciously.

Of course, the lift of her chin had said, as Dilly let Elmira peep into the box, *of course* he sent me a corsage. You didn't *really* think, did you, my dear cousin, that Durand Smith wouldn't know the proper thing to do?

But aloud she'd said kindly: "I'm so sorry, Elmira. Yours is so very beautiful, far more expensive, I can see. Only, since he's taking me—"

"That meager little twig covered with artificial snow, just a couple of roses stuck on it!" Elmira snorted, full of sympathy. "Well, it's too bad, darling. Certainly you have to wear what your escort sends you. But it really doesn't look like much."

It looked like all the world to Dilly.

When, at last, Durand came to fetch her, resplendent in evening clothes, with a pride—almost humility—shining in his face as he beheld his lady, Dilly could hardly say the words in which she chose to express her thanks.

"It's the badge of our friendship," she told him shyly, looking down at the corsage. Then she added, sad in her joy, "Tomorrow it'll all be over."

"*Over?* Just because you're leaving?"

He seemed to find this inconceivable and Dilly didn't intend to dwell on it now, just when they were setting out for the evening at the Waldorf, the climax of all their wonderful times together.

But at midnight, she thought, at midnight I'll feel like Cinderella.

When they got there and they were being whisked up in an elevator full of fashionable people to the Starlight Roof, Dilly

became anxious. Would these people appreciate Durand? Or would they mistake his simple dignity for unimportance, overlook him?

She needn't have worried. No sooner had he taken Elmira's wrap from Dilly's shoulders than a little crowd of admirers formed about him.

"Dear Mr. Smith!" Pauline Beetle cried, sailing up in her Venetian lace, with a coronet sitting on her head that made her look the opposite of regal. "What a pleasure!" As an afterthought she recognized Dilly.

Durand greeted everyone with charming ease, remembering names and proudly introducing Dilly.

He's a great person, she thought, standing by his side and listening. Only a great person would be equally at home, equally gallant with the glittering patronesses of the Canine Club and the little manageress at the Salvation Army store.

Entering the ballroom on Durand's arm, with the chattering Pauline tagging along at his other side, Dilly felt her Kendal eyes popping. It was magnificent, a vast and splendid place. The dance floor in the middle, glaring under a spotlight, was flanked by scores of tables attended by waiters in white jackets.

At the end of the room, on a dais banked with flowers, stood the long table. And there sat Elmira, already happily surrounded by the dignitaries.

"Pity Henderson couldn't come," Dilly whispered to Durand.

They laughed together.

Pauline introduced them to their neighbors at the table, a Mr. and Mrs. Hunter from Syosset on Dilly's side and three of Pauline's friends on Durand's. Dilly didn't catch their names.

"What's your breed?" Mr. Hunter asked Dilly as they began to eat.

New England Quaker, Dilly impishly thought of answering, but she told him politely that she didn't keep a dog.

Mr. Hunter didn't seem to hold this against her. He said no more, however, because just then his empty fruit cup was re-

placed by the mock turtle soup and he concentrated upon that, leaving Dilly to enjoy hers.

But Durand was kept busy answering the four ladies, who were competing for his attention.

"Tell me, Mr. Smith," one of them asked, a large woman with a Florida suntan sitting beside Pauline, "what diet do you recommend for a beagle with asthma? A friend of mine in Fairfield has one and I promised to find out the next time I saw you."

Durand said civilly that he didn't know and then he turned to Dilly to inquire whether she was enjoying the roast capon and hot bing cherries.

But Pauline glanced enviously at Dilly and intervened. Her words were drowned out by the opening chords of the orchestra.

Durand appeared not to have heard Pauline address him, for he pushed back his chair and stood up beside Dilly, bowing to her with great formality.

How handsome he looks, Dilly thought. I don't blame Pauline for trying.

"May I have the pleasure?" he asked.

"But I can't—"

Had he forgotten? Dilly was fussed. Yet instead of sitting still, explaining, she stood up, acquiescing to his wish. She couldn't dance, but he had asked her.

He took her arm and drew her past the people sitting at the tables on to the crowded dance floor, into the orb of the spotlight.

"Had to get away from that woman," he explained.

Dilly's heart was beating loudly, already anticipating the ridicule which would descend upon her when she tried to dance.

But Durand didn't stop. He drew Dilly on, through the mass of swaying couples, toward a flight of stairs which she hadn't noticed till now. It led to a narrow balcony overlooking the ballroom.

I should have known, she said to herself reproachfully, I should have trusted him not to put me in an embarrassing position.

On the balcony, they were alone, in semi-darkness. The spotlight didn't reach it. Dilly and Durand could see everything, the head of each dancer below, but they were invisible.

He drew her down onto the top step and they sat there side by side, with the chestnut velvet hem spreading over their feet. Not even their hands touched, but they gazed at each other happily, held once again in close togetherness.

"Now I can really enjoy the evening," Durand said contentedly, "now that we've broken away from those Bedlington nursemaids."

They were sitting almost over the orchestra, deafened by it, so that when he spoke he had to lean over and practically shout into Dilly's ear.

"You mustn't think, though," he warned her, "that all the people here are snobs. Kennel owners are simple and honest and hardworking. Take that girl with the red hair dancing with that tall man down there. See her?"

Dilly looked down on the mass of dancers, hunting for the redheaded girl.

"Never been inside the Waldorf before, I'm willing to bet," Durand explained. "All she can talk about is black noses, hindquarters, stifle and hock, tapering tails. Raises a fine bull mastiff."

The orchestra had stopped playing and Dilly watched the girl as she went back to her table with her partner.

She was young and pretty, but Durand's noticing her stirred no jealousy in Dilly.

We're sure of each other now, she said to herself happily, still watching the girl. We don't even have to search each other's eyes, the way we used to do. We know.

Then why, if this was so, why, in the very next instant, did Dilly's eyes fly back to Durand's face?

What they saw satisfied her. He smiled at her gently with that calm candor she liked so much.

Dilly was satisfied.

But suddenly she was more than satisfied. She was frightened.

For what she saw in Durand's eyes now was far greater than assurance of friendship. It was love.

Hastily she glanced down into her lap.

Too much assurance. From seeking it, as she'd done a moment ago, she was fleeing from it. There was a point in each other's eyes beyond which they mustn't look. And he had gone beyond that, peering into her soul.

She fumbled with her purse, suddenly finding it imperative to scrutinize its contents, hunting for something in the dark, she didn't yet know what.

Her handkerchief—that was what she wanted. She drew it out and dabbed her nose. Then, making a long business of stuffing, she put it back.

By now, she was certain, Durand had turned away. Cautiously glancing sideways, just to see whether—

He was still looking at her.

Tell him, she cried to herself, thee tell him he mustn't do that. *Now*, before he does it again. It'll hurt him less now than if thee waits.

But she couldn't say it. Instead she exclaimed, with a forced giggle, as the orchestra struck up again, "Pauline must think we're dancing every dance."

"Never mind Pauline," Durand shouted into her ear. "It's what we think that matters."

"Yes," Dilly agreed, facing him fully. And though the evening wasn't over, she blurted out, like a child leaving a party, "Thank thee for the nice time."

He didn't comment on her slipping into plain speech.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he cried. "Everything we've done together has been beautiful. That night we walked along Fifth Avenue looking at the Christmas lights—remember? The chimes playing carols at St. Thomas's and the choristers opposite Radio City—"

"And that Star of Bethlehem," Dilly added, "steadfast above the City with smaller ones shooting down to earth—remember that?"

"Yes. And the day it was too cold to walk and we just rode on the El—"

"All the way downtown, then all the way uptown, as far as it would go."

They laughed together fondly. It was as if they'd been doing these things for years and years instead of only just a little while, as if they'd been going around like this together for ages.

"You didn't mind that night," Durand asked, suddenly grave, "when I put you on the bus—?"

Dilly didn't answer. How could she admit that she hadn't minded his kiss, that, on the contrary, she'd been bemused by happiness all the way home?

"Don't think," Durand added a little breathlessly, "I haven't wanted to before. Only, I wasn't sure you—"

"I didn't mind," Dilly said slowly. "I wouldn't mind anything thee ever did or said. But that's something—we just mustn't do."

CHAPTER 31

"WON'T YOU COME IN?" she asked, when he saw her home.

It was very late. But Elmira wouldn't be back for hours—a lot of business to be wound up at the Waldorf. And Dilly didn't feel the least bit tired.

So, on the threshold, one foot inside the apartment, she turned to Durand and asked, "Won't you come in?"

"That's what you said to me the first time," he recalled, putting his hat and coat down in the foyer.

Dilly started for the living room but backed out again quickly.

"Down!" she cried, "Henderson! *Please* don't jump on this dress." Keeping her eye sternly on the dog, she managed to slip unharmed into the room. "Those claws," she explained to Durand. "They'd simply ruin velvet."

He hadn't remarked on the dress. No doubt he hadn't even

noticed it. This pleased Dilly. She knew he noticed her, not what she wore, and this she took to be the greater tribute.

Durand was dreamy, paying no attention to Henderson, who looked on him favorably now and demanded some show of affection.

"That day I brought Elmira the sample," Durand explained. "The first time, I mean. I was discouraged. My feet ached dreadfully. And you stood at the door, smiling in that special way of yours, and asked, 'Won't you come in'?"

"I remember," Dilly said, throwing Elmira's wrap aside and taking the armchair. She didn't trust Henderson not to maul her on the davenport. "I'd been wanting to go home. It wasn't fun here then."

Durand didn't sit down. Instead, he walked to the window and pushed the curtains aside, staring out into the night, humming under his breath.

Dilly could just faintly hear.

It was their song he was humming and it took Dilly back to the time when he sang to her on the El platform. Then she thought of that other evening, when they again stood waiting for the train and Dilly had suddenly been overtaken by the impulse to flee.

She was very glad she hadn't given in to panic and run away. Durand would only have chased after her and it would have been embarrassing. She would have spoiled everything, acting like some silly teenage girl. Tonight they were finishing their beautiful times together. He would never have to know that he had stirred something in her. Their memories would only be of a serenely happy interlude.

But I must never come again, Dilly said to herself wisely.

No need to tell him this. Tomorrow, back in Kendal, Dilly would be forever safe.

Durand was still looking out of the window. He was so handsome in evening clothes. His back was like a young man's. Dilly wondered what he was thinking about, staring into the darkness and humming.

"Come," he said, after a minute, turning from the window and going over to her with outstretched arms.

"Where to?"

"Time you learned to dance."

"Dance!"

Yet she put her hands in his and let him draw her out of the chair.

"Just the waltz," he said, reaching his arm around her waist, only lightly touching her. "That's all you need to know—the other dances don't matter. But the waltz—"

He began whirling her around, singing,

"Lavender's blue, Dilly, Dilly,
Lavender's green—"

She felt frightened and delighted and lost, not knowing where to put herself, struggling lest she fall over her own feet. The support of his arm assured her and gradually she abandoned herself to his care.

But she didn't know which way he was going next and just when she thought they were definitely whirling around clockwise, he turned her in the opposite direction. She couldn't really have been letting him determine her course, as she'd imagined, for he had to push her.

He looked down into her face, laughing, and turned her again, singing all the while,

"If it should hap, Dilly, Dilly,
If it should chance,
We should have joy, Dilly, Dilly,
We two should dance."

She loved it. But she couldn't quite keep up with him.

"No, no," he said, stopping and letting go of her. "You must be free, not determined. You must let the rhythm possess you."

Her heart was beating so loud—how could she feel any other rhythm?

"Listen," Durand begged. He began humming again, tapping with his foot: *one*-two-three, *one*-two-three— Then he sang, "*Step*-step-slide, *step*-step-slide—" dancing away by himself, holding in his arms an imaginary partner. He returned to Dilly and stood still.

She tried to concentrate, to learn. Yet all she could think of was how nice he looked, dancing off that way and back to her, how boyish and charming and lighthearted.

"Now," he said, breathing fast, his eyes bright with excitement, "let's try again."

He put his arm around her once more and sang, overaccenting the beat:

"*Lav*ender's *blue,* Dilly, Dilly,
*Lav*ender's *green,*
When I am *king,* Dilly, Dilly,
You shall be *queen.*"

This time he carried her away. She didn't resist, surrendering herself to his song.

"*Who* told you *so,* Dilly, Dilly,
Who told you *so?*
'Twas mine own *heart,* Dilly, Dilly,
That told me *so.*"

Suddenly, the meaning of the words, the little cascade of melody each time he repeated her name, his hold around Dilly's waist, surged through her.

All she could think of, overwhelmed by the feeling, was that she mustn't stay in his arms another second. Startled, she detached herself, wriggling free of him, and dropped into the chair.

He came over and bent to peer in her face. "Dizzy?" he asked.

"No."

He looked anxious. "I shouldn't have whirled you about so swiftly."

"No," she murmured, "it wasn't the whirling. I'm just—tired."

But that wasn't true. She'd never felt more wide awake in her life, throbbing as she was with excitement.

"Rest a minute," Durand urged, going off to the kitchen.

Dilly could hear water running into the sink, the door of the glass closet opening.

She didn't rest, though she sat back in the chair. She was still tingling with the knowledge of how sweet she had found it to be held by Durand's arms, even in the impersonal clasp of the waltz. If she hadn't managed to stop at that instant, she might never have been able to break away. The thought made her feel faint.

Her parents hadn't, after all, been so very wrong when they condemned dancing; though, with another man, Dilly surely wouldn't have experienced this disturbance. But then, no other man had ever invited Dilly to dance.

When Durand came back and handed her the glass, she took a sip or two. All the pleasure was gone out of his face. He looked gray and worried.

"Rest a minute," he pleaded again, adding in a caressing tone, but as if to a child, "shut your eyes."

She obeyed, leaning against the upholstery and taking a deep breath. But now the room went round and round behind her lids. The song, which Durand had long ago stopped singing, echoed in her pulsing ears. She could hear the strong beat followed by the weaker ones and the little cascade of melody on which he repeated her name.

It was all because she'd listened to him, she'd let the rhythm possess her.

Opening her eyes without moving her head, she found that the room looked right. Durand was staring at her, grief-stricken and, she thought, puzzled. She quickly shut her eyes again.

Even behind her closed lids the room was steady now, but the song still echoed in her ears:

If it should hap, Dilly, Dilly,
If it should chance . . .

I must go home, Dilly said to herself in panic. *I must go home.* I can't stay here any longer.

It was a senseless thing to keep repeating to herself, since she was leaving at eleven in the morning and it was already well past midnight.

She'd never known such panic, not even when Willard died. Her feeling had been frozen then, numbed beyond function. Now she was tingling, alive in a way she'd never been before.

And she was frightened, as she'd been at the beach, when a wave pulled her under and she felt the current drawing her out.

I must go home.

Desperate, she put her hands over her face, pressing the palms against her eyelids. If she could just get back to Kendal! She'd be all right, once she had fought her way to the surface of this sea. She would catch her breath again.

Suddenly her fingers were drawn from her face. She opened her eyes. Durand stood gazing down at her, gently holding both her hands.

"Diligence," he whispered, "have I hurt you?"

"No. I—I loved it."

"But now—?" He still held her hands.

She turned her head away, not able to meet his eyes. She couldn't answer.

Resting her hands gently in her lap, he went back to the window and stared out again into the darkness.

"It was only an old nursery rhyme," he said after a while, turning to her. "I may never be king. I've never been fortunate like that."

Dilly sat up quickly and faced him. "I don't care about your being king," she cried. "I think you're very nice the way you are."

"That isn't all," he insisted. "I know you respect what I do, even if other people look down on peddling. And you understand about the boys." A little smile came into his face, but there was no self-trust in it. "What I mean is the part about

When I am king, Dilly, Dilly,
You shall be queen."

He looked across the room at her wistfully.

So that was it!

And he imagined, just because he wasn't successful, that she—

Dilly took a hard breath. "Durand," she managed to say, though her throat was tightening, "it's been beautiful. It's been—well—the most beautiful time of my life. As if what I'd missed when I was young—" She wanted to tell him much more, but couldn't.

He was very still for a few moments, standing there, staring at her. Then he asked, almost in a whisper, "When are you coming back?"

She shut her eyes. "I—"

"Soon, Diligence!"

"I'm not coming back," she said, feeling as if her mouth were made of iron. She didn't open her eyes. "I can't come any more. I thought I was big enough to hold our friendship apart from the —the rest of my life. I never meant it to become serious. I thought you understood that I could never—"

"I understood," he broke in. "It was just that I hoped—" He didn't go on. When he spoke again, it was in a strained voice, yet as one who accepts all that life brings. "What time are you leaving? That same eleven o'clock train?"

"No," she cried, her eyes flying open in her agitation, "no!"

"Doesn't run Sunday?"

Miserable as she was, she knew that she must face him honestly. "It runs," she answered, "but I—you mustn't come." She stared at him helplessly. "You must never come again."

He looked at her searchingly for so long that she was obliged to drop her eyes.

"I see," he said finally.

He came over and, taking her right hand out of her lap again, bent and kissed it. Then, very slowly, he put it back.

January

CHAPTER 32

IT WAS THE END of January before Dilly felt that she was living again.

She had been taken ill directly after Christmas. A virus infection, the doctor said. Kendal was riddled with it. Dilly had had hardly any fever, only an unaccustomed, quite shocking lassitude.

She had lain on the sofa, dutifully sipping fruit juice, reading a novel Martha Hadley had brought in which didn't interest her very much. A love story. Dilly couldn't see anything in it. So vapid, compared to real life.

In the book, the stages of love advanced with the progress the two characters made between their first meeting and their combined preparations for retiring. Shortly after the initial interview, the heroine removed her pearl choker, the hero loosened his tie. From then on, the intensity of the story mounted with successive divestments until it reached its ultimate climax.

But that's only the beginning, Dilly thought, impatient with the author. For a grown-up, the flowering of love is in the living-happily-ever-after, just where the stories stop.

Did these two live happily ever after? And if so, did the rapture they shared turn out to be the introductory chord of a two-part harmony, the chord on which all dissonance became resolved? Did the rapture flow into the bloodstream of their life together, conferring irrational glory on all their mundane acts?

That's what I want to know, Dilly insisted.

Bored with the book, she turned to *The New York Times.* She had taken to reading even the local news, as if the City were hers now by adoption, as if, entirely against her will, she lived in exile.

The bus strike hadn't crippled transportation after all. People on the East Side who usually traveled by bus took the Elevated instead. It was running on full schedule.

Reading this, Dilly felt a thrill of pleasure. There was something rather grand about the old El coming to the rescue when the smart new buses were standing driverless.

Durand must be gloating over this too.

Doesn't it make thee think of roses in December? Dilly asked him, though he was hundreds of miles away and she was never going to speak to him again.

She couldn't hear his reply, but she could see his kind, warm smile agreeing with her.

She often found herself telling him about the little things that happened to her day by day. And always, when she spoke to him, it was in plain speech, the intimate language of her people.

These imaginary conversations made Dilly feel guilty. It must be unhealthy to daydream about a person one could never talk to face to face again.

Besides, by indulging in such fantasies, mightn't she, in some inexplicable way, be troubling Durand—prevent him from forgetting? Perhaps it was because he still dreamed of her that she continued to remember. They must both be sensible.

Once for all, Dilly resolved to keep her thoughts at home.

She had plenty to think about here, very nice things. Anne seemed to be twisting Parky around her little finger. And Will was very much better. Gradually he seemed to be making peace with himself. Dilly didn't know what to attribute the change to. A girl? Could it be? Dilly did wish he'd tell her. Maybe, with time, that too—

And Lois's baby, Dilly reminded herself, going over all her blessings. I do hope it'll be a boy, since that's what she's set on. I wonder whether she's forgiven me.

"Oh!" Dilly had exclaimed when Lois announced on Christmas morning that she was pregnant. "If only I'd known sooner."

Lois, who'd purposely saved her news a few weeks in order to present it to her mother as a surprise, along with a pair of gardening gloves, was a little miffed. The irrelevance of Dilly's remark, the note of regret, when she ought to have been expressing only unmixed satisfaction, annoyed Lois.

Dilly, under cross-examination, still hadn't admitted that she wished she might have heard the news in time to tell Durand.

Now he would never know.

It was one of the very first things we spoke of, she recalled. He told me about Humph and Randy and I mentioned the fact that Lois and George had no children.

He would have been so interested! Whom else could Dilly run to with the tidings that she was going to become a grandmother? Who would rejoice with her like Durand?

She wished she could write him. But she mustn't write. She must never do anything that would prevent the wound from healing over for them both.

Lois had immediately begun educating her mother.

"Things aren't what they were when you had us, you know," she said firmly. "This baby isn't going to be housebroken till he's old enough." She looked at Dilly belligerently.

"Quite right," Dilly agreed. "It makes more laundry, but if it's better for thy child, thee must accept the added work."

This wasn't at all what Lois had expected.

There were no doubt a great many other matters pertaining to child care in which Durand could have advised Dilly. He was an experienced, up-to-date grandparent.

Thee knows, she confided to him, laying aside *The Times,* it isn't going to be all fun, when that baby comes. I can't keep Lois's house looking the way she does, as if no one lived there.

But it would be beautiful having the baby to love and care for, even if only in those first few weeks.

Lois will say I'm spoiling him, Dilly whispered to Durand. She always says I spoiled Anne.

Oh, dear! Hadn't she resolved not to do this? The baby—she must concentrate on the baby. There were so many things that she must make for him during the next few months. What had she done with her knitting?

In a way, the coming of the baby to the saltbox in Stonington seemed to point up the emptiness of Dilly's own house.

What did a widow whose children were grown do with the remnant of her life that would give it value? What was the use of it, anyway?

Inconceivable that a woman should arrive at the age of fifty-two without knowing why she was living! Might as well be a cow. But it was true—Dilly'd never thought like this. She had lived first as her parents required and then according to Willard's pattern, doing day by day what had to be done, not hampered by too much introspection, except in Meeting.

It's lying around like this that makes me brood, she explained to Durand. Thee does understand that, doesn't thee?

After weeks of resting, Dilly still wasn't quite well. The doctor kept coming.

Dilly began to fear that the emotional crisis through which she had lately passed secretly and alone might in some way have injured her organically. Such things, she knew, were possible.

"You don't think it could be my heart, do you, Dr. Sluyper?"

Being a literal man, he applied his stethoscope conscientiously and then shook his head.

"Your heart, Mrs. Fuller, is like a young girl's."

That's the whole trouble, Dilly thought.

In New York, it had seemed to her each day that her heart would have to expand if it were to grow great enough to hold her joy.

Now, if it was to go on serving her, it would have to shrivel.

February

CHAPTER 33

FORSYTHIA, Dilly said to herself, waking in sunshine. First thing this morning, I'll go out and cut some; dig up lily pips and plant them in a pot.

They'd bloom indoors by the end of the month. The house would begin to have the look of spring. Every year about now, Dilly used to bring things in and set them by the south window so they'd be out by Willard's birthday.

The air was almost soft. Standing on the piazza after breakfast, looking up the river, Dilly gave thanks for the feel of the sun on her face. She'd been in the house so long.

What a mild winter, she thought. Here it is, only the middle of February and the ground isn't even hard.

There used to be those terribly severe winters; the river would be frozen. Dilly remembered how, when she was a little girl, looking out of her window late at night, down at the Cove where she grew up, she'd see men muffled in heavy scarves walking out on the river with lanterns. They cut holes through the ice to spear eels.

Today the river was running with the tide.

Dilly's knees felt wobbly going down the steps. Stooping to push away the leaves under the dining-room window, she saw with excitement that beneath the mulch life was beginning to stir. The crocuses were already sticking their silly heads above ground, though there was sure to be frost yet.

I mustn't stay out too long, Dilly told herself, covering the flower beds again.

But it was hard going back into the empty house.

Standing on the piazza with the basket full of forsythia sprays and lilies of the valley still tightly enfolded in their purple casing, Dilly looked longingly back at the garden.

The mailman was coming up the street.

There were no letters from the children, only some impersonal long window envelopes and a small package. Dilly couldn't recall having ordered anything. She studied the package. It was postmarked New York but had no sender's name or return address.

Back in the house, sitting in the wingchair, Dilly tore open the wrapping. A box done up in white tissue, tied with a cherry ribbon!

She caught her breath.

Heavenly scent escaped from the box. Inside was a sprig of lavender.

Lavender's blue—a Valentine!

And now Dilly was glad to be alone in the house, grateful that she didn't have to hide from anyone the tears which covered her face. She lifted the silvery sprig with its tiny flowers out of the box and held it to her cheek, breathing in the clean outdoor smell, ardently drawing it into herself, filling her lungs and spirit with its redolence.

There was no message.

But had she looked everywhere, searched for a card amongst the folds of tissue? In her surprise and emotion, she'd only noticed the lavender.

She smoothed the layers of tissue, smoothed them over again. There was no message.

Naturally, she thought, a Valentine—they're always anonymous. One's supposed to know. And what could he have written that would be more eloquent than this?

Smoothing out the wrapping paper, she studied the address:

Mrs. Willard Fuller,
Kendal, R.I.

and at the top, in imperious letters, *Handle with Care!* That was all it said.

With a pang, Dilly realized that she'd never seen Durand's writing. It fitted him. There was gentle robustness in the pen strokes, a headlong angle, like his walk, something so very Durandish about the roundness of the capitals, the briskness of the exclamation point, the open, honest characters.

She ached in remembrance, seeing him so clearly. The marks on the brown paper brought him into the room.

Laying the lavender tenderly on her desk, wiping her eyes, Dilly opened her pen. This very minute, she'd thank him.

Dear Durand, she wrote.

How would she phrase it? What words were infectious enough to communicate Dilly's happiness in receiving the Valentine or her sadness in acknowledging the end of their friendship, the arrival at a point beyond which she couldn't go?

Would he study the handwriting too? Now that she came to think of it, he'd never seen Dilly's either. Would her longing for him expose itself in the penmanship, shout to him in the very way she formed his name? Would "dear" denote more to Durand than to the Collector of Internal Revenue when Dilly, discussing the overpayment on her tax return, began, *Dear Sir?*

Should she inquire about his business, send her love to Humph and Randy, omit the fact that she'd been ill but tell him —she must tell him!—that she was going to become a grandmother?

And if she closed the letter with "Your friend," in the old-fashioned Quaker style, would the two little words, which seemed to have hardly any meaning for most of Dilly's correspondents, have extraordinary significance for this one, as though she'd written "Love?"

Dilly put down her pen and gazed out at the river.

Was it possible to write at all without reviving the feeling she'd intended to extinguish, that evening after the Benefit, when she told Durand that he must never come again?

He had kissed her hand then and, without a word, had gone to the foyer and picked up his coat.

Wriggling into the sleeves, he had stood with arms held wide a fraction of a second longer than necessary, pleading.

Or so it seemed to Dilly, sitting there motionless in Elmira's living room.

Lowering his eyes almost immediately, he had concentrated gravely on the buttoning of his coat. Without another glance at her, he had taken his hat and left.

Yet in that instant, when he stood there, arms outstretched, looking at Dilly that way— She couldn't, of course, be sure she hadn't just imagined. But it had seemed to her that he . . .

And now, he'd sent the Valentine.

No, she thought, I mustn't write. It will only make him more unhappy.

But how ungrateful, how rude!

Maybe he'd infer that the package hadn't reached Dilly, that the meager address hadn't sufficed.

In a metropolis the size of Kendal! she exclaimed to herself, almost laughing at this idea.

Then again, he might think she couldn't guess who'd sent the Valentine. Besides, a woman wasn't supposed to answer, at least, not this way, formally.

She mustn't write.

Sensibly throwing away the paper, closing her pen, Dilly got up to cook some lunch.

And this time, she said to herself severely, this time I mustn't let my feelings run away with my judgment. I simply mustn't.

Firm in her resolve, she didn't try writing again. Yet all afternoon, she lay on the sofa, holding the lavender, dreaming. . . .

She must have fallen asleep. She was still lying there at twilight when she heard a step on the piazza.

Philip.

Dilly jumped up and threw the lavender into a drawer of her desk.

Ever since she'd been taken ill, Philip came in every afternoon before going home. While Dilly felt so weak, he had gone first to the kitchen and made some tea, bringing it to her on a little tray. Then he would light the fire and they would sit before it together. He would tell her what had happened since yesterday, giving her an account of his work, news of his children, and reporting on the progress Bart's Boys were making in establishing their business. He was so pleased about this!

Now that Dilly was better, she was the one who made the tea and, as a rule (when she hadn't fallen asleep!), had a fire going. For, though she no longer needed care, Philip kept coming.

"Thy house smells deliciously of spring," he remarked, entering the living room. "I see thee's been outdoors today."

He went to the window and stood looking at the brown stalks of forsythia that held promise but no visible life as yet, and the lilies, which were far from open.

"They'll be out in a couple of weeks," Dilly said nervously, wondering whether Philip recognized the scent which penetrated surprisingly, even through the closed drawer.

Turning to him, she saw that there was sawdust in his hair. She had to restrain the impulse to reach up and flick it off.

It had become very hard for Dilly, seeing Philip this way every day, not to show a wifely interest in his appearance, not to offer to attach dangling buttons, which his housekeeper never seemed to notice, or to turn the fraying collar on a shirt.

But Dilly didn't reach up to the sawdust. Instead she said to Philip laughingly, "I see thee's been in the Meetinghouse shed. How's it coming?"

"Fine. The old beams are sounder than we thought. Remember how the roofline sagged?"

He sat down opposite her.

"I was afraid it would all have to come down and be built up again," he said gravely, "but those old timbers are indestructible. Bart's Boys have the roof straightened out. They're putting barn sash clear across the south side, where the shed used to be open,

and that little Tony Marcantino's already talking about planting flowers in the spring."

"Will they have it finished by the end of March, the way they figured?"

Philip considered carefully before answering. "The machinery may not be installed," he answered finally, "but the boys want to hold open house on the last Saturday." He paused, looking thoughtfully at the river.

Had he smelled the lavender? Dilly asked herself. *Had he?*

"What the boys have in mind is the kind of ceremony Bart would have wanted," Philip was saying. "They're asking Friends to help arrange it. What does thee think about that, Dilly?"

Teapot in hand, Dilly gave a start. She hadn't been listening to Philip. She'd been exulting in the scent that filled the room. Long after the forsythia and lilies had bloomed and faded, the lavender would remain fragrant.

It'll be fragrant forever, Dilly said to herself foolishly, pouring tea into Philip's cup.

March

CHAPTER 34

SLICING ROAST TURKEY in the Meetinghouse kitchen, Dilly glanced out at the shed which glistened with new paint. Over the door hung a little sign, *The Shipmates.* The sign wouldn't attract customers—it wasn't visible from the street—but it evidently gave the members of the firm, who were standing in the Yard looking up at it, a feeling of great pride.

This was their day, the formal opening of the shed, and there was a last-minute bustle. The lawn and hedges were being trimmed, the steps doused. But Dilly noticed that though the boys were still working, they were already dressed up: each had put on a tie.

Any moment now, their relatives and friends would arrive. After a short devotion, they'd inspect the shed. At supper they were all to be guests of the Meeting.

Will, Dilly thought, still watching The Shipmates. I do wish he had come.

He'd conferred with them when they'd first gone in for building boats. Together they'd investigated new processes, finally deciding to order plastic hulls and make them into finished dinghies.

Helping the boys, Will had himself been helped.

It's almost miraculous, Dilly thought happily. He was so mixed up when he came out of service, uncertain what he believed, not interested in anything but his boat and his record player, not even a girl. Doing things for the boys did a lot for Will.

Now there was this Julie, whom he'd gone to visit over the week end.

Carrying platters of cookies to the First Day Schoolroom and placing them on the long tables, Dilly wondered what Julie was like.

Nice, I know, she declared to herself with real conviction. But I do wish Will would tell me.

The young Friends had set the tables with crisp paper cloths and the lovely old blue willow dishes, just as they did at Quarterly Meeting time. Everything was ready.

Lingering a second, staring dreamily at the design on the china, Dilly had an overwhelming sense of continuity, as though her life, which had seemed to be perilously adrift for a spell, was once more tied to its mooring. Years ago, she'd been one of those who set the tables when Friends gathered at Kendal. Upstairs in Meeting there was silence and solemnity, but here girls ran gaily back and forth to the kitchen until Meeting broke and Friends came trooping down for lunch.

As a young married woman she'd helped with the cooking. Later, bringing the children's bibs from home, she kept a watchful eye on manners during the meal. (From the first, Anne talked with her mouth full!)

This was the pattern of Dilly's life, as much a part of it as the blue design on the china. Nothing had ever detached her from it, nothing until last fall, when she'd gone on what had seemed like such a harmless little visit to Elmira's and Durand. . . .

Durand, she repeated to herself, as if it were the name of someone she recalled having known a long, long time ago. I never even think of him any more.

She was over it.

This moment, she said to herself triumphantly, straightening a chair that had been knocked aside—all at once I can look back on the experience without pain.

No, I don't think of him any more.

After the Valentine she'd never heard again.

She'd known when she stopped waltzing with him, she'd known that evening that if she could just get back to Kendal,

she'd be all right. But it had taken longer to get over the ache than she'd expected. Only today, this minute, as she felt safely tied to her mooring, she knew she had at last recovered.

Philip came down to tell her it was time. His eyes shone.

This occasion means more to him than anyone, Dilly thought. He worked so hard to get those boys on their feet.

There was no sawdust in his hair today, she noticed as he walked toward her, none anywhere.

No sawdust in Philip's hair, only this joyful light in his eyes! I'm lucky having a friend like him, Dilly told herself.

"How nice the tables look!" he exclaimed.

He stood a minute surveying them thoughtfully.

Dilly guessed he was picturing the people who'd be coming here later, Friends and friends of Friends, those whose beginnings had been made easy and those who'd had to struggle for goodness along with survival. In the midst of their conversation, they'd pause to give silent thanks and to remember all men in want. Some of the visitors might find the pause embarrassing. Yet, as they began eating together, everyone would feel joined in what must surely be, for all its geniality, a sacramental meal.

A car drove into the Yard, immediately followed by others.

"We'd better go up," Philip said.

On the stairs he whispered to Dilly, "I hope no one mentions early history. No use reminding the boys that they were once hard characters."

That's the weakness as well as the strength of Friends' Meeting, Dilly reflected. Anyone may say anything and it isn't always in the spirit.

There was a larger crowd than she'd dreamed would come, so that involuntarily her mind flew back to the kitchen, to the food a group of women had spent all morning cooking. Dilly knew there was more than enough. But people kept coming.

It was easy to pick out the boys' parents. Many of them had foreign faces, expressions that spoke of early deprivation. They looked ill at ease and, as they beheld the plain interior of the

Meetinghouse, they were obviously shocked, as though they couldn't believe it was a place of worship.

Friends were here and also, to Dilly's astonishment, many Kendal people who had no connection with the boys or their project.

"We just felt," one of them told her as she stood in the vestibule greeting the visitors, "we wanted to show our regard for folks who could do so much by their friendship."

Philip had asked The Shipmates to take the facing bench, where the Elders used to sit long ago. He said he thought it would be nice if everyone had a chance to see the members of the firm all together.

And it really was a great sight, Dilly thought, as she sat down beside Vaughn Hill and looked up at them.

The boys were solemn but happy. Their hair was slicked; their faces were radiant. Average age probably nineteen or twenty and already they were owners of a going concern.

They'd told Philip they wanted everything done after the manner of Friends, though they didn't exactly know what that implied, only that it had been Bart's way. Philip explained that there would be a silence first and that then if anyone in the Meetinghouse—any of the boys or their parents or friends—felt moved to say something, he was welcome to do so. But there were to be no prepared speeches. Whatever was said should emanate from the silence.

The boys must have gone home and told their families, for the unusual assortment of people settled down quickly. The Meetinghouse became as still as on First Day.

Always, when strangers came, Dilly hoped they'd *feel* the meaning of the silence—that it wouldn't simply seem an absence of sound but a fullness of spirit beyond anything man can put into words.

After a time, Denny Hill rose to his feet.

This surprised Dilly. Denny didn't speak in Meeting as a rule.

"Three years ago," he said shyly, almost too softly to be heard,

"when we came here—Vaughn and the children and I—Bart Brown had just lost his life. So I never met him. But sometimes I feel I know Bart better than a lot of people I see around. Because he's gone right on living in the lives of others. He was a simple person, a woodworker, very particular about doing his job well. He demanded perfection of himself, but he could put up with imperfection in anybody else. No matter how unkind or thoughtless a man was, Bart could still see the good in him."

Denny had gained confidence. He was speaking up now.

"Bart had an idea," he continued, "that if men worked on their own, they'd demand first-rate workmanship of themselves and wouldn't manufacture anything unless it was going to be put to use which they considered right. In a small business, they could take responsibility for everything. So when these boys came to him, he urged them to start out on their own.

"I guess I'll always think of them as Bart's Boys, though they're men now and the firm has this nice new name. I think they've sort of—" he hesitated, "immortalized Bart. And that seems to me something they can feel very proud of."

As Denny took his place, Vaughn reached out in an impulsive gesture and squeezed Dilly's hand.

She means, Dilly thought, she's proud of her husband and what he's done to help the boys.

One of the boys themselves—Dan—stood up now. He was the one who used to come to the house and talk things over with Will when they were considering the question of plastics. It must be hard for a boy like that to speak in this gathering. He pulled at his tie nervously. But he held up his head and swallowed hard and murmured, "I want to explain why we decided to call ourselves The Shipmates.

"Most everybody knows, we build boats. Dinghies—they're our product. But there's more than that to the name. We didn't want no name that would sound like a closed company. Any serious guy who really wants to work can join us, share the running of the business and the profits *and*"—he laughed sententiously—"the *work.*"

An outburst of laughter rang through the Meetinghouse. Dilly was glad to hear it. People no longer felt constrained.

"Another reason we liked the name," Dan went on: "some of us used to belong to a gang did a lot of fighting. Bart made us think different about that. He said everybody was in the same boat together—shipmates—everybody in the whole world. So there shouldn't be no more fighting nowhere, except against sickness and unfair things. He used to tell about Jesus and his pals going out in a ship and a storm coming up. The way he told about it, seemed like it happened right around here, out in Little Narragansett Bay.

"Well," Dan trailed off, looking around, as if he couldn't think of anything more to say, "we just kind of liked this idea of the name Shipmates. See?"

There was a short silence after Dan had spoken.

Then, in an apologetic way, a man at the side of the room got to his feet, an elderly man, probably a laborer, with a large dark face. He held his hat tightly in both hands and, as he began speaking, he looked down at the floor.

"Please," he said, hugging the hat to his chest, "I tell about our Tony. Four years ago, he no good. Don't want to do no work. Judge say, 'Tony, you steal again, you go to jail.' Tony lonesome. He say, 'Girls no like fellows don't have no car.'"

This brought a laugh, which was quickly suppressed. Everybody seemed to sense the man's earnestness.

"Tony go down to the beach where Bart work," he continued. "Bart give him hammer. Bart say, 'Tony, help me build this boat. Tony, help this guy, he not hammer so good. Tony, you and me, we go to the ballgame.' Everybody at the ballgame see Tony with Bart, honest man, good family. Everybody say, maybe Tony not so bad. Tony full of pep when he work for Bart. Then Bart drownded."

The man's voice wavered, as though he wasn't sure he could go on.

"Tony cry all night," he said finally. "Later he say, want to

do like Bart think, start business with these boys, no boss, only God, do like He say. And he work so hard, our Tony."

Suddenly the man raised his head, as if he were looking every person in the Meetinghouse right in the eye.

"Me and my wife," he said steadily, "we like to say, 'Thank you, you make our bad Tony good.'"

As the old man took his seat again, Dilly looked down into her lap.

This was what Philip had feared. And yet, it was nice that Tony's father was sticking up for him in public. Tony, sitting in full view on the facing bench did look embarrassed, but he must be secretly pleased, too. There were no doubt times when it seemed even his father was forsaking him. Only Bart—

During the past few months, Dilly had grown to be one of Tony's trusted friends. He kept coming around to see her, asking what flowers he should plant around the shed.

Now the silence became deeper. It caught up the whole gathering "as in a net" and all these people, who were ordinarily worlds apart, were joined by it.

Suddenly, because her heart was so full, Dilly herself felt she would like to say something. She got to her feet timidly, not sure what it would be.

"There were still farmers who came to Meeting in their surreys when I was a child," she recalled slowly. "I used to love to go out to the shed and run my hand along the beams that divided the stalls. The horses had gnawed them smooth while they waited for their masters.

"But I don't think the shed was ever so fine a place as it's been since Friends gave it to The Shipmates for their workshop.

"And I want to thank the boys. They've done so much thanking. But I want to thank them for what they've done for me. Somehow, they've made me feel more—" she hunted for a word, "well, *at home* in Kendal, though it's where I was born and lived my whole life, more at home because something good is happening, friendship is working in it like yeast in bread, making it

rise. If it weren't for you boys, our old shed would simply have fallen apart.

"You've put accomplishment into the place. You showed us that something of what we sit and wait for here in Meeting—a sensitivity to the needs of those around us—is really here.

"I'm—" Dilly felt suddenly choked. "Very grateful," she murmured, quickly sitting down.

April

CHAPTER 35

THE SECOND Saturday after Easter, at eight o'clock in the morning, long-distance called Mrs. Willard Fuller.

"Yes," Dilly answered, waiting to hear Anne's voice or Elmira's.

"Diligence?"

"*Durand!*"

"How are you?"

"I'm—" She didn't know how she was, aside from the fact that her heart was failing. "Fine."

She could hear him breathing, as if he'd been running or he felt nervous.

"Diligence, I'm catching the eleven o'clock for Kendal. May I?"

"Oh."

What else could she say?

"Something I want to tell you myself, before anyone else knows," Durand rushed on, "Mary or anyone."

"Is everything all right?"

"Well, I haven't exactly become a king," he said more slowly, still breathing hard. "And I wish I could place a kingdom at your feet."

"I can't hear what you're saying, Durand. There's this buzzing."

"I said, if I had a kingdom to place at your feet, it wouldn't add to your queenliness, only do it homage."

The buzzing had grown louder.

Dilly didn't grasp a word Durand was saying. Even so, the tone, the language were just like him. Suddenly she couldn't hear anything. The line was dead.

"Durand," she cried, "are you there?"

"Yes."

"I thought we were cut off."

Now the line was dead again.

"Durand?"

"Yes?"

And Dilly realized at last that he was waiting for an invitation. Could she ask him? What about—chaperonage?

Tonight, she thought quickly, it'll be all right tonight, with the children home. But tomorrow—

"Can you stay awhile?" she asked aloud.

"Till tomorrow evening. Have to be in the office early Monday."

"So soon?"

This wasn't at all what Dilly had meant to say. Not at all. But it seemed to please Durand. He said goodbye assuring her that if it weren't for all the things that required attention before train time, the wait would be intolerable.

When Dilly hung up, the buzzing continued. It wasn't in the telephone; it was in her ear.

I shouldn't have let him come, she reproached herself. I shouldn't have let him.

Why had he asked this, suddenly? Maybe his need for money —he was obliged to turn to her.

And I'll give it to him, she told herself. I don't care what Elmira thinks. It's none of her business how I spend my money.

But Will and George—if it was a great deal that Durand needed, oughtn't she to talk it over first with them?

What will the children think anyway? she asked herself in terror, getting up and striding toward the window. Lois will be horrified. Maybe even Will and Anne.

How explain that Durand had been Dilly's friend but was no longer one exactly, yet he was coming all this way to see her?

Maybe it wasn't for money, only that he was lonely. Dilly was lonely too, but she would have to make it clear to him that she couldn't— He would perhaps ask why. Dilly wouldn't know how to tell him.

In her trouble, she stared outside, as if hoping to find help in the sopping garden.

It had rained practically every week end all spring. Why couldn't this one—just this *one*—be fine? Anne was bringing Parky home. Will was already here, asleep now, but in a little while he'd be going down to Lotteryville to work on his boat.

And Durand—Dilly did so want his first sight of Kendal to be beautiful.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet, remembering how much there was to do before he came. The guest room—she'd intended to give it to Parky, but now— Parky wouldn't mind going up to the third floor, surely. The old maid's room had a certain charm, with the nooks and cupboards under the eaves. The river was beautiful from up there. One could see way downstream. Besides, no use making company of Parky. If he was going to be around all the time, from now on—

So the guest room was made ready for Durand, turned out and aired and polished as if it had been dusty, which it wasn't. A bowl of the daffodils which grew by the kitchen steps was placed on the bureau. Dilly searched the bookshelves in the library for her special favorites to lay on the bedside table in the guest room: the "Silent Traveller's" drawings of New York seen through fanciful Chinese eyes, *The Quaker Bedside Book* and, because it made her think of Durand, *The Wind in the Willows.*

But I do hope, she said to herself, arranging them invitingly, he isn't going to lie awake half the night reading.

And though it was still morning and his train hadn't even left New York, she patted down his pillow softly, blessing his sleep.

She ran through the house straightening things, trying, as she flicked the dustmop, to picture Durand in every room. But she wasn't able to. She could only see Willard. That made her

thoughtful, slowed her steps a little. How could she be so eagerly anticipating this visit?

But I must hurry, she told herself then. Get breakfast for Will, pack his sandwiches, start lunch. Anne and Parky'll be starved when they get here. And dinner.

She must prepare it in advance. No sense wasting time in the kitchen when she could be sitting in the parlor with Durand.

I know what we'll have for dessert, she sang to herself gaily. Roman punch!

Durand would be so surprised when it was served. Dilly would be watching his face. A little look would pass between them.

She hurried down cellar for the jelly and then she flew about the kitchen assembling the tins, the flour and sugar and the butter.

When Will came down at eleven, Dilly had to clear a corner of the table so he could eat his breakfast.

Standing at the stove, keeping her eye on the coffee as though it couldn't possibly drip unless she watched it, Dilly said as matter-of-factly as she could, "We have another guest coming overnight. Man by the name of Smith, Durand Smith. I met him in New York. We didn't keep in touch," she added quickly.

There was the Valentine, Dilly's conscience whispered. Doesn't that count?

She glanced over her shoulder at Will but he didn't show any reaction. Maybe he was chewing a little more slowly. Otherwise he looked as if nothing unusual had happened.

Dilly wasn't deceived. She hadn't expected Will to show his feelings. But she was relieved that he didn't cover them with some quip about a boy friend.

"Thee'll like him," she murmured, concentrating on the coffee again, and, though there didn't seem to be any logical connection, "I wonder what made him come."

"What's he do?"

"Business. Does thee think," Dilly asked hastily, before Will could pursue this in detail, "Parky'll mind the third floor?"

Thoughtfully chewing, Will didn't answer.

"Will, tomorrow, if it's nice, I'd like to take Durand sailing. Doesn't the yard have boats for rent?"

"This early? Hardly any boats in the water yet, Mother. If I'd known, I'd have got mine ready sooner."

"I only heard this morning," Dilly explained, pouring the coffee into Will's cup. Then she looked at him squarely. "It isn't anything to—" She hesitated. "To worry about, Durand's coming."

Will gazed out the window. "Can't paint in this weather," he grumbled, as if his mother hadn't said anything.

This isn't going to be simple, Dilly realized. Why had she let Durand come, just when the children were home?

"Ask Mr. Crawford, will thee?" she murmured, putting the coffeepot back on the stove. Her voice sounded far from steady.

After Will left, Dilly didn't have time to brood. Almost at once, Anne and Parky arrived in that old open roadster of his.

Dilly stood at the door, watching them come up the walk. Anne was wearing yellow oilskins and a southwester and looked, Dilly thought, like a little Uneeda Biscuit boy. Parky, tall and bareheaded, tagged after her.

They stood in the entrance hall, dripping on to the floorboards.

"Hi," Anne said.

Parky just grinned. What an engaging boy!

Dilly knew from other times that it would be awhile before he talked.

"So glad you could come," she told him, but what she thought was, Won't Durand be pleased to find Anne's affairs working out so well!

"Anne," she asked, "why doesn't thee put Parky's car in the garage, out of the rain? Drive mine around. I'll want it later anyway to go to the station."

"Will coming by train? I thought he was here."

"Will's here. We're having another guest, Durand Smith," Dilly murmured, quickly turning to Parky and inquiring, quite unnecessarily, after his health.

"Who?"

"Durand Smith."

Almost in the same breath, Dilly exclaimed, addressing Parky, "Such weather!"

"He the man you dated in New York?"

Dilly would have preferred not to have Anne phrase it quite that way in front of Parky.

"Put the car up and get dry," she admonished her. "Lunch is almost ready."

By the time they returned, Dilly had lit the fire. She wasn't surprised when Anne, coming back, squatted before it, took off her shoes and socks, and stuck her bare feet on the hearth. She wasn't surprised, but she was a little pained.

Parky stood politely, holding his hands toward the blaze.

He's nice, Dilly thought. I'd rather have a shy boy than one who's cocksure. And he has a fine, open face.

Aloud she said, offhandedly as possible: "I've put Parky up on the third floor. View of the river is so much better there."

"That's okay," he said, his tone implying that he wasn't interested in looking at the river, just at Anne.

Anne gave her mother a swift glance. But all she said was, "Unhun."

She and Parky trailed Dilly to the kitchen.

"Anything we can do?"

"Just a minute and you can take the platters in."

"After lunch," Anne announced, wiggling her bare toes on the linoleum, "we're going to the beach."

"In this rain?"

"But I want Parky to see it. Sometimes, in weather like this, with a northeast wind blowing, it's rather beautiful. Don't you think so, Mother? In a somber way, I mean."

"Yes," Dilly agreed dreamily, picturing the beach. She stood still a moment, holding the serving spoon. "Yes, it might be very beautiful."

She could take Durand down before supper. But no, there'd

hardly be time. She wouldn't rush him off the moment he got here.

Anne went into the hall to answer the telephone.

"It's for you," she announced, coming back.

Mr. Crawford was calling from the yard.

"Will told me what you want, Mrs. Fuller," he said, "but gosh, there isn't a thing in the water yet."

"Not *any*thing?"

"Unless you'd consider that little knockabout of Ned Rasmussen's. But I don't think you'd like her."

"Yes I would," Dilly assured him flatly, without ever even having heard of the boat. "What's wrong? Does she leak?"

"Nothing wrong exactly. Only Mr. Fuller was always so particular about his boats, the lines and all."

"Never mind her lines," Dilly broke in, jubilant. "Long as she sails—"

"She sails all right. Quite good to windward. Would you like me to speak to Ned about her, Mrs. Fuller?"

"Yes, do, please. And thank you, Mr. Crawford. Thank you very much."

A little cockleshell, Durand had said.

She wouldn't tell him about it. She'd keep it as a surprise. Tomorrow afternoon they'd drive to Lotteryville and there would be the boat!

But, after all, aside from the lines, something seemed to be the matter, for Crawford was clearing his throat. "Mrs. Fuller," he said finally, "that knockabout of Ned's—the *Away*—she has a candy-striped sail. Wouldn't you mind that?"

"Candy-striped?"

"Yes, green and white, like a peppermint stick. Maybe you saw her on the Pond last summer. People consider it a little sporty and I thought, for a lady like you—"

"That settles it!" Dilly cried. "Ask Ned if he'd let me have her for the season. A candy-striped sail—oh, Mr. Crawford, how perfectly magnificent!"

CHAPTER 36

REPLACING THE TELEPHONE, Dilly rushed back to the kitchen and threw her arms around Anne, whirling her across the linoleum.

"Waltz," she cried gaily, "surely thee knows how to waltz, Anne? *Step*-step-slide—"

"*Mother!*"

Seeing the child's astonishment, Dilly laughed and let her go. Oh, she was very, very happy and she didn't mind Anne's knowing.

Parky stood leaning against the drainboard, staring at Dilly wide-eyed.

I've startled them, she thought, amused. Why are they so sedate?

After lunch she tried to rest a bit. Everything was ready. But she'd hardly stretched out before she began wondering whether she'd put towels in the guest bathroom for Durand. Jumping up, she went to make sure, knowing all the while that a graduated row of towels, fresh and inviting, hung on the bar beside the tub.

In her room again, she stood at the bureau, running the comb through her hair.

"We're leaving," Anne announced, coming upstairs in her oilskins. She lingered in Dilly's doorway, as though she wanted to say something and couldn't quite express it. "You know," she remarked finally, "I'm glad you let your hair grow out. I never cared for that stylish cut they gave you in New York. Your old upsweep has more oomph."

Dilly was touched. This was Anne's way of bolstering her, of indicating that she approved Durand's coming.

As Anne turned to go, Dilly followed her out into the hall and leaned over the banisters.

"Parky," she called, as Anne ran downstairs.

"Yes, Mrs. Fuller?"

"Have a lovely time at the beach."

"Thanks."

His upturned smile was for her, but the radiance in his face was for Anne, who was jumping toward him two steps at a time.

They hadn't been gone long before Dilly left too.

When she got to the station, she wasn't surprised to find that she was much too early. The train wouldn't be in for at least twenty minutes. Her impatience and excitement had refused to wait at home. They'd flown through town and now they were flying down the track to meet the train head on, though it was still way off in Connecticut.

Sitting in the car to keep dry, watching the jagged dribbles on the windshield, Dilly wondered how Kendal would look to city eyes.

From the parking lot beside the track she could see the low store buildings facing the depot square and the spire of the First Church, the highest point in town, which was no taller than the elms that lined the Green.

Wouldn't it all seem pigmy to Durand? And Dilly's old house . . .

And the garden, she said to herself, breathless with eagerness. If only the weather will clear enough so he can see the garden!

It was all Easter-colored still, yellows and purples—daffodils, primroses and crocuses in the flower beds, dandelions and Quaker ladies in the lawn. And the rock garden was bright with violets and periwinkles, scylla and soft patches of mauve moss.

Dilly'd never tried picturing Durand in Kendal. Whenever she'd thought of him, it was always against the background of New York. Impossible for her to see him here.

For the first time, she wondered how he'd take to the children. Would he understand Will's reticence, Anne's piquant candor? How could anyone not like Anne and Will?

Then, tomorrow, when Lois and George came over from Stonington for dinner—

Would Durand become devoted to the whole family, as Dilly was to Humph and Randy?

But not Mary, she had to admit honestly. No, not Mary.

And *me*, Dilly thought finally, rubbing moisture off the windshield with the palm of her hand. Will he like *me*?

She laughed happily, imagining Durand's face when he first caught sight of her. She already saw the joy shining in it. Stepping off the train, he'd find her there, waiting on the platform in the downpour.

Driving home from the station, she'd have to remember to keep her eyes on the road. Later she could look at him all she liked. In the entrance hall she'd take his coat and hat and then she'd show him to his room. She would go to the window and call his attention to the river. No. She'd let him discover this himself.

When it began to get dark, Will and Anne and Parky would return. Dilly would present them to Durand one by one, making sure he wasn't left wondering which of the boys was hers. They'd all sit down to dinner and at the end, Anne would bring in the Roman punch!

Later, the children would go out, probably. Durand and Dilly would sit by the fire.

Then he'd lean back comfortably in the wing chair and perhaps he'd first say, "Now tell me everything," the way he'd done in December after Elmira had gone out. "Everything."

And this time Dilly'd tell him.

Though not everything, she decided. Not about how sick I was and how sad, thinking I was never going to see him again. But I'll thank him for the Valentine and I'll explain why I didn't write.

She could do this now, she was sure—simply tell him frankly that he had come to mean too much to her; that from a lighthearted enchantment their relationship had turned into a reality which interfered with her life.

We couldn't ride on the Enchanted El for ever, she would tell

him outspokenly. Things never seem to stay the same. And when we began to grow serious—

He'd understand.

Maybe then he'd begin to tell her, at last, what he'd come to say, what he wanted Dilly to know before anyone else, even Mary.

"I haven't exactly become a king—"

What did that mean? She couldn't remember his words. Something about queenliness.

And now she was sure she wouldn't be able to wait that long. He'd have to tell her right away, the minute he got here. No, not in the station. But when they were home, when she'd hung up his coat and hat—wouldn't it be all right then to ask what he'd meant?

Ever since he telephoned, Dilly'd been dashing around the house, too busy getting things ready to wonder. Now she knew that her excitement was in danger of upsetting her poise.

I must try and control myself, she decided. Think of something else. Tomorrow—that's it—surely tomorrow the sky will be scrubbed blue. Durand and I'll go to Meeting, if he doesn't mind, and I don't think he will.

Still, he mightn't like the plainness, he who loved color and music and things happening. He mightn't hear the living voice in the silence.

Oh, but he'll feel it through me; he'll understand, she assured herself.

And in the afternoon—that would be so wonderful, watching his delight when they cast off in the little *Away!* When he saw the candy-striped sail gaily billowing out into the breeze!

The train was coming. It shrieked, rounding the curve before crossing the river. In a few minutes it would be slowing down beside the platform. But Dilly jumped out of the car now.

She didn't care how wet she got. She had to be near enough to scan the faces of the people waiting in the vestibule of every coach. Not many would be getting out in Kendal.

But Durand—Durand would!

At last the train came to a standstill. People began getting out, pulling up their coat collars, holding their hats. Up ahead, a square-shaped man carrying a suitcase jumped down and looked about uncertainly. But that couldn't be Durand. The other men who had alighted were already getting into their cars and driving off, except a very young one who sprinted down the footpath to the street.

The train started to move again.

And like a stone, the premonition fell on Dilly's heart.

But she ran up the platform, toward the square man who couldn't be Durand, almost closing her eyes in order not to see him more clearly, kept rushing toward him, since there was nobody else. When she came within a few yards of him she had to stop, for it was no longer possible to pretend this was Durand.

He hadn't come.

CHAPTER 37

THE CHILDREN were crowding the entrance hall.

Will was home early—impossible to do a thing to the boat in this weather, he explained. And Anne and Parky just happened to be standing there—that was the impression they tried to give. But Dilly knew they were simply curious, waiting to see Durand.

"Missed the train," Will concluded philosophically, as soon as Dilly came in. "Probably arriving on the five-thirty."

"That's a local," Anne cried. She looked worried.

"Might have changed in New London."

Will was trying to be casual, to act as if it were to be expected that a man should come late, Will who was always on time.

That's so I won't think he didn't want Durand, Dilly thought gratefully.

She'd already figured out about the five-thirty. But if Durand had missed his train, why didn't he telephone? It wouldn't be like him to disappoint Dilly.

She changed into dry clothes and puttered around. There was nothing left to do. How could she pass the hours till she went back to the station?

"Like us to go with you?" Anne asked, signaling to Parky when Dilly was putting on her coat again.

"We'll go along," Parky said promptly.

But Dilly wanted Durand all to herself when he arrived. And if he wasn't on that train either— It would be better if she went alone.

She didn't arrive too early this time. The train was already rounding the curve as Dilly drove up. Her impatience, though much tighter than before, was, for some strange reason, more readily checked.

As the train slowed down beside the platform, she looked at the passengers waiting to alight, scanning every face. Even before the last man stepped onto the platform, Dilly felt more than a premonition—she was certain that Durand hadn't come.

This was the last train.

Perhaps the children felt more than a premonition too. At any rate, they weren't waiting in the entrance hall. They were, however, tactfully within reach, in the event that Dilly should wish to be supported. They were sitting on the dining-room floor playing *Scrabble.*

But Dilly didn't wish to be supported. She went up to her room and threw herself on the bed, exhausted and puzzled.

What had happened?

Hadn't her invitation been cordial enough? Should she have said something more?

I *was* uncertain, she admitted. But he called up so suddenly. There wasn't time to think. And how could I know whether I ought to let him come?

He'd sounded so eager, though, so like the old Durand. He'd even said the wait would be unbearable. Why, then—?

Dilly lay staring at the ceiling, wondering. If one of the little boys had been taken sick or some other emergency had arisen, Durand would certainly have notified her.

As though there were illness in the house, Anne appeared in the doorway moving noiselessly. Whether Parky was there too, standing behind her in the hall, Dilly wasn't sure.

"Like me to bring up your supper?"

The smile Dilly tried to manage for Anne didn't quite come off.

"Don't think I—mind," she murmured, not sure that she wasn't going to burst into tears.

Anne dropped onto the bed and drew her denim knees up to her chin. "You know, Mother," she said, "if it were me, I'd call him up."

"Thee would?"

For Dilly this wasn't a brand-new idea. But she didn't like the possibility of having to speak to Mary.

"I thought I'd wait till I hear from him," she explained. "If it's simply that's he's been delayed—"

"Why wait, when you're so worried?"

"Does thee really think I should?"

Without giving Anne a chance to answer, without considering further, Dilly sat up and took hold of the telephone.

She hadn't forgotten Mrs. Humphrey Day's number. Though she'd only heard it that one time, months ago, the night Henderson was such a trial, she still remembered it as if it were her own.

Her impatience wasn't subjected to the torture of waiting. She didn't even have time to think over what she was going to say. Almost at once she could hear the ringing on the other end. But there was no answer. The ringing went on and on. There was still no answer.

"I'll try it again in twenty minutes," the operator promised.

Dilly hung up.

There's nothing I can do now, she said to herself miserably, but wait.

It wasn't fair to the children, though, to be brooding like this when they were home for such a short while.

"I'll come down and get supper," Dilly told Anne, pulling herself together.

Yes, she'd been right. Parky was lurking in the hall.

Will had set the table.

They were about to sit down and eat when the telephone rang.

Dilly raced out to the hall, colliding with Anne, who was racing out too.

"On your call to New York," the operator said in a noncommittal voice, "that number doesn't answer."

"Maybe Aunt Elmira could tell you something," Anne suggested, when Dilly hung up. "Why don't you call her?"

"No!" Dilly cried so vehemently that Anne looked frightened. "She wouldn't be in touch with Durand."

The whole Canine Club would know within an hour that he had stood Dilly up. And that Pauline Beetle—

It was, after all, very nice sitting at the table with the children. Dilly felt comforted.

"We're going square dancing," Anne announced with her mouth full. She turned to Will. "Want to come?"

"Thanks," he answered. "Some of the fellows are home. I'm going down to Rod's."

While they were doing the dishes, the telephone rang again. Anne didn't try to get there this time.

That number didn't answer.

"I can't understand it," Dilly murmured, returning to the kitchen. "Mary ought to be there. She wouldn't leave the children alone all evening. I shouldn't have liked speaking to her, but she ought to be there."

"You mean," Anne cried, not hiding her shock, "he's got a wife and children?"

Dilly stared at her. Could Anne really have thought this?

What does she take me for? Dilly wondered, as she explained.

Twenty minutes later, when Anne and Parky were about to

leave the house, the telephone rang again. They stood half in, half on the piazza, holding the door open so they could hear Dilly's voice.

"On your call to New York . . ." the operator was saying.

As Dilly hung up the receiver, she heard the front door close.

CHAPTER 38

BUT she wasn't alone. Will was staying home with her.

"Can see those fellows any time," he remarked, shrugging.

Giving him a grateful look, Dilly sat down in the wing chair. She was worn out.

"Somebody ought to be there," she observed, mostly to herself. "I wonder if they could have moved."

Will was roaming about, fiddling with things.

"Say, listen, Mother," he blurted out suddenly, "who is this man, anyway? Never heard of him till this morning. I don't want to barge in if you'd rather not tell me, but—"

"I'd like to tell thee, Will. There isn't any secret, only I don't know very much myself—what possessed him to call up this morning, after all these months."

Dilly ran her hand back and forth over the arm of the wing chair. The taupe velours, which Willard had picked out so long ago, was all rubbed thin in a wide patch.

"We met under—well, rather unusual circumstances," she explained, coming back to Will. "But a friend of Elmira's knew about him. And for that little while that I was in New York we had a sort of enchanted time together. I don't know how to describe it, as though we were very, very young—like Anne and Parky, but not so serious. We just had a beautiful time."

Will had stopped wandering. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking down on Dilly.

"We went to very simple places," she told him squarely, "because he had no money. But he could make the simplest thing seem full of excitement and charm. Riding on the El, for instance."

She studied Will's face to determine whether he would understand this. Now if it had been Anne, Dilly'd have taken it for granted. But Will was so matter-of-fact.

To her surprise, he nodded. "I see what you mean," he murmured. "Just walking up Brattle Street at night—Julie and I like that."

Dilly pricked up her ears. *Julie and I!*

But Will was waiting for her to go on.

"I hadn't had a very good time at Elmira's before I met him. Thee knows how she is—her kind of entertainment. And then Durand came. Suddenly everything was beautiful. But it wasn't a serious relationship, Will, really it wasn't."

Dilly peered up at him to make quite sure that he wasn't left in any doubt about this. But he had started walking around again.

"That is," Dilly was obliged to add, "until just at the end. Then I began to fear that he might be—well, I just thought it would be better if we didn't see each other any more, or keep in touch. And I told him."

Will stood stock-still in front of Dilly and stared at her. "Why did you," he asked, "if he was all that nice?"

Dilly began rubbing the taupe velours again, wondering how Willard had come to choose this particular color.

"I thought," she answered Will slowly, "the longer we waited, the harder it'd be for both of us, to break it off."

"Did you have to?"

"Tell him?"

"No. Break it off."

"*What?* Thee doesn't mean— Why, Will," Dilly exclaimed, horrified. "I'd never dream of anything like that. I have all of you and that's enough for me, the rest of my life. And Father—" She was afraid she was going to cry.

Will said nothing. He just stood there, looking grim, jingling some coins in his pocket.

Dilly reached up and touched his arm lovingly. "Thee's sweet to try and help me," she whispered. "But there doesn't seem to be anything to do." And then she said, though it seemed irrelevant, "I don't even know where he is."

Feeling Will's arm, Dilly suddenly had the impulse to tell him, really tell him about Durand, not just the surface truth, but everything.

"Thee sees," she rushed on quickly, to get it over with as soon as possible, "he seems to be in business difficulties. Elmira had the idea that he was just—well, being nice to me because of that, because he needed capital. She rather had the impression that he was playing on my feelings. But she was wrong," Dilly assured Will earnestly. "It wasn't that. Durand really likes me."

Will stood there, listening attentively, still jingling those coins.

And, in a sudden spasm of fear, Dilly's throat tightened as a thought struck her which had never struck her before.

"Thee doesn't think, does thee, Will, that it was just vanity in me, believing that? Thee doesn't think Elmira could have been right and I was just carried away, so anxious to be liked?"

She hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, Will, how horrible! I did believe in him."

After a while, Dilly put her hands back on the arms of the chair, but she didn't look at Will.

"I still do," she said softly, staring into space. "But maybe he was just desperate and that was why he asked to come. And then, maybe he couldn't face hurting me. Because no matter what Elmira thinks, and even if he is in need of money, Durand's a very kind, honorable man. I'm convinced of that."

Will kicked a coal off the hearth into the fire.

"It isn't kind or honorable to say one's coming and not show up," he said gruffly, though Dilly knew he meant to sound gentle. "Or to lead you on so as to get money."

"But he didn't!"

Now Dilly broke down and really cried. "Oh, Will," she

sobbed, "I don't know what he did, what to think. I'm hopelessly confused."

When, at last, Dilly was able to face Will, she saw that he was scratching his head.

"How about going to the movies?" he asked. "I think there's something very good, forget the name of it. Where's the paper?"

"No, Will, no. Thank thee. But I want to stay here in case Durand—"

Will looked at Dilly and his eyes said, He won't. I can tell you that.

Aloud he murmured, "Think I'll build up the fire. Make things more cheerful."

Dilly took out her knitting. She still couldn't see very well, but she was determined to rise to Will's kindness.

"I'm way behind on these booties," she announced, hoping she sounded more herself. "Ever since I was sick— If I don't hurry, little George'll be here before things are ready."

"What makes Lois so sure it's going to be a boy?" Will asked, sweeping the hearth.

"I don't know. But it probably will be."

"How can you tell?"

"Lois always did get what she set her mind on."

Will laughed. "You said it!"

"Thee mustn't think I don't want her to have a boy," Dilly added quickly, regretting she'd been so hard on Lois. "It would be very nice. But one ought to sit loose."

She watched Will squatting before the fire, his back turned toward her. He was still in the white T shirt and khakis he always wore on the boat. Under the closely fitting shirt the muscles of his back and shoulders showed, surprisingly strong.

"Durand has these two little grandsons, Humph and Randy. Very appealing. Their father seems to have passed out of the picture and their mother's rather—well, selfish. So Durand pitches in."

Will glanced at Dilly for an instant. Then he gave his attention to the fire again.

Because he wasn't looking at her, Dilly ventured to say, made daring by the intimacy of the moment, "Tell me about Julie."

Will didn't answer at once. "Nothing to tell," he said finally, without turning. "We just seem to hit it off."

Translated into her language, Dilly knew this meant, We're very much in love.

She was wondering whether she could safely ask more when the intimacy was shattered by the telephone.

Dilly jumped.

Thee was right, her eyes said to Will when she returned. Durand won't call any more.

Durand had put himself beyond her reach, made it impossible for her to find him. He had quite simply disappeared out of her life.

CHAPTER 39

MEETING had already begun when Dilly arrived. She'd stayed home till the last minute, just in case— And then, as she was starting out the door, she'd decided to go back and wake Anne.

So that as she entered the quiet gathering of Friends, she was puffing from hurry.

Settling down on the bench beside Philip, Dilly caught her breath. She was eager to draw in her scattered self and submit her anguish to the regenerative silence.

All night she'd barely slept, early this morning she'd put in the call again. But there was still no answer.

The sun had come out in the rain-washed sky, causing the Meetinghouse maple, which wasn't quite in leaf yet but green with promise, to shimmer through the little panes of the south window. Budding and glistening, the old, old tree looked like the youngest thing on earth.

Dilly shut her eyes and bowed her head, saying over in thought the first quotation that came to her, not scripture this time or a Quaker passage but the sonnet her father used to recite when she was a baby, her earliest recollection. Holding her in his arms, rocking gently, he would say, almost sing it, giving little Dilly a hug each time he came to her name:

"Each hath its place in the eternal plan,
Heaven whispers wisdom to the wayside flower,
Bidding it use its own peculiar dower
And bloom its best within its little span.
We must each do, not what we will, but can,
Nor have we duty to exceed our power.
To all things are marked out their place and hour.

"The child must be a child, the man a man.
And surely He who metes, as we should mete,
Could we His insight use, shall most approve
Not that which fills most space in earthly eyes,
But what—though Time scarce note it as he flies—
Fills, like this little daisy at my feet,
Its function best of diligence in love."

It calmed Dilly this morning to repeat these mid-Victorian cadences to herself, as if she were in her father's arms again. Even before she'd been old enough to grasp the sense, the poem was synonymous with his love, a love much vaster, she realized later, than his affection for those close to him, rather the affirmation of "that of God" which he believed to be in every man.

Now that I'm middle-aged, Dilly thought, and in trouble, those words still speak to my condition.

She wondered why Thomas Burbidge, a poet who could write like that, had been forgotten. There was something in the poem, too, that characterized Durand, a certain quality.

Suppose he was trying to get in touch with her? This very minute he might be putting through a call, he might even be on his way.

Dilly stirred restlessly, bumping Philip with her elbow.

The minute Meeting breaks, she resolved, I'll rush home.

She wouldn't linger, as she generally did, to speak a friendly word to everyone. She wouldn't wait for Philip to come with her.

But, after all, there was no need to rush so. If Durand did come, Anne was there.

It had been cruel waking her on Sunday morning. Dilly stood over the bed a minute, studying the sweet face, so grave in sleep, not at all like the Anne she was used to. Mature, too, no longer the face of a little girl.

Being loved had transformed Anne.

Would this Parky, presumably fast asleep up on the third floor, make her happy forever?

He will, Dilly assured herself, convinced yet prayerful too.

And gently, driven by necessity, she had woken Anne up.

"Have you heard?"

Dilly shook her head.

"You go to Meeting," Anne urged, one eye open. "I'll listen for the phone. And don't worry, Mother. He'll turn up. Men are queer, but they always turn up again."

Dilly smiled at the experienced little woman who was squinting at her with one eye. Yet she didn't believe Durand would come any more. He wouldn't telephone either. It was merely a precaution, waking Anne.

Sighing now, Dilly drew back her straying thoughts, reminding herself that she was in Meeting. She hadn't even begun to center down.

And she tried to penetrate the silence, to open her heart to whatever it might reveal.

What was the purpose of life anyway, of this remnant of it that had been left her? Was it to be a dike against Time, holding everything back where it had once stood, the furniture, the estate, her heart?

The answer didn't present itself.

Instead, something irrelevant and quite strange came over Dilly.

Sitting here in the Kendal Meetinghouse, she had the same feeling she'd had the first time she climbed the El with Durand, a loosening of all her former qualms. She remembered how they'd clung to the surface of the city like its covering of grime that evening and how, standing on the platform in the clear upper air, she'd been freed of all reluctance.

Then, coming back on the El the same evening, she'd had the feeling which almost never came to her anywhere but here, of understanding life serenely through some faculty other than the mind. This had made her think of the Meetinghouse at home and she'd told Durand about it.

Could he, perhaps, be in trouble, such great trouble that he hadn't even been able to send her a message? In the muddle of wounded pride and doubt, planted by Elmira, Dilly'd overlooked the main fact—he had wanted to come. That much she knew.

If something dreadful had happened, she must find out. She must know immediately, not wait to hear. The minute Meeting broke, she'd rush home and telephone again. And if there still wasn't any answer—

I'll *go,* Dilly said to herself suddenly. I'll go and search for him, everywhere. If he's in trouble— Oh, why didn't I think of that sooner? Maybe I can help him.

How could she have thought for a minute that he'd fail her? She should have had faith enough to believe that if it had been at all possible he would have come.

I do, she said to herself, squeezing her handkerchief in her fist, I do have faith in him. I'd trust him with—my self.

It was clear what she must do.

Willard didn't need her any more. If Durand did—

An ocean of light spreading and shining above the ocean of darkness and death, Dilly quoted to herself.

Now she could hardly sit still.

What would the children think?

Never mind that. She'd give them dinner, then rush away. The trains—she wasn't quite sure how they ran on Sundays.

No! She wouldn't wait for dinner. The children could get it themselves. She'd leave the moment she'd told them, jump in the car, drive to New York, look for Durand. Surely someone would be able to tell Dilly where to find him.

How was she going to bear it till Philip reached for her hand and broke the Meeting? Her impatience was stifling.

But the silence tugged at her, drawing her off from all this reasoning and planning, and Dilly surrendered to it. The quiet was like a calm sea on which she floated, buoyed up by a force much stronger than her own, enjoying a serenity that surpassed all creaturely attainment.

Though she was now beyond the scope of intellect or memory, Dilly heard, like an echo in her mind, . . . *open to you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

No one seemed moved to speak this morning and Dilly felt thankful that the silence wasn't broken. Her spirit was woven into it, with the spirits of the Friends around her.

In the distance a train shrieked before rounding the curve by the river, the train that passed through Kendal just at noon. It came from New York, but it wouldn't bring Durand; it didn't stop.

Last year—what was it Elmira'd said he'd had last year, when he was in the hospital so long? Heart? Maybe—

No, no. She mustn't let herself get into a panic, Dilly decided. Elmira hadn't really known. A man who could run around like that, sprinting up and down the El, was strong.

I'm worried, Dilly conceded. But I'm happy too, happier than I've ever been in my life. Now I'm sitting loose.

Looking out at the maple, Dilly pictured her garden. This sunshine would lift the faces of the daffodils. She did hope she wouldn't have to be away too long, just when the irises were about to open.

And though Dilly was impatient to start off, she couldn't help wishing that Philip wouldn't break the Meeting quite yet, not for another minute, not till she'd discovered one more thing: why

had it taken her all these months to understand the purpose of her life?

How could it have taken me all these months? she asked herself again. Why didn't I know from the first?

But she couldn't answer that.

Can the blooming iris remember its beginnings in the earth? she wondered, patient and peaceful now, even in her fear. Can it remember the winter sleep, the first timid reach toward light, the long journey in its green casing?

Philip stretched out his hand.

As she took it, Dilly smiled at him in farewell.

Turning its face to the sun in the days of its blooming, she thought, rushing out of the Meetinghouse, can the flower possibly remember the night in the knobby root?

CHAPTER 40

"ABOUT TIME, if you ask me," Anne observed, when Dilly came home and announced that she was going to New York. "We'll drive you down." She turned to Parky. "We will, won't we?"

They were side by side on the floor, lying on their stomachs, enjoying the funny paper.

"Sure, Mrs. Fuller. Be glad to."

"No," Dilly told them, trying to sound strong. "You have to go back to school. Don't forget, Anne, Parky must drive all the way to Hanover."

"I'll take you," Will put in quickly.

Dilly gave him a grateful glance.

How I'd love to have thee with me! she thought.

But she said dutifully, "Thee must get back too. There's no need for anyone. I'll take the train. Isn't there a one twelve? If I hurry—"

"I'll pack your bag," Anne offered, jumping up. "What do you want me to put in?"

"Bag?" Dilly repeated stupidly.

Staring at her in amazement, Anne insisted, "You have to sleep somewhere. Aren't you going to Aunt Elmira's?"

"No!" Dilly cried. "She'd tell that Beetle."

Anne laughed at her and said, "All right. Skip Aunt Elmira. Where are you going to stay?"

"I don't know," Dilly murmured. "I don't know."

If she just found Durand—

Anne seemed to be troubled. She started for the hall, lingering irresolutely at the foot of the stairs. Finally she went up to pack for Dilly.

Parky, who apparently believed Anne couldn't manage even this without him, followed her.

"Sit down, Mother," Will urged. "You have plenty of time."

Dilly dropped into the wing chair and discovered with surprise that she was exhausted.

"Thee must explain to Lois and George when they get here," she said. "I'll just miss them. But dinner's all ready. I do hope Lois will understand," she added doubtfully.

"Okay," Will muttered, as if he didn't fancy the assignment. "I'll tell her. And there's Ned's knockabout—I'll call that off."

"No! No, don't! Tell him I want it for the season. I'm sure I do now. Please tell him that."

Will looked completely puzzled. But he made no comment.

"Guess I'll go around for the car," was all he said, getting up. He stood looking down at Dilly, slow to leave her. "Anything else you'd like me to do?"

Suddenly, seeing the tender solicitude in the boy's face, Dilly's eyes filled.

"Is it all right, Will?" she asked, peering up at him anxiously through her tears. Would he guess that what she meant was not about the boat but about—? "Whatever I do—you won't mind?"

She longed to have him give her some sign. But this, she knew, was beyond him.

He only stood looking down on her. Then he smiled.

That was sign enough for Dilly, more than enough!

She held out her hand and he took it.

"Listen, Mother," he said rapidly, "when you get back, would it be all right if I brought Julie down for a week end? I'd like you to meet her."

"Oh, Will—!"

Dilly jumped up and, though she wasn't quite sure how Will would take it, she reached up and put her hands around his head, drawing it down to her. Since he didn't seem to mind, she kissed it softly.

"Now I have to fly," she said, letting go quickly, running into the hall so he wouldn't see her face.

"Lots of time."

Anne was coming downstairs. Parky followed with the bag.

"Shall I make you some sandwiches—chicken and some of that currant jelly?" Anne asked. "There may not be a grill car."

"I'll make them," Parky offered.

But Dilly shook her head. She wouldn't be able to eat.

"How about money?" Anne persisted. "Have you got plenty? I can lend you some."

"Money," Dilly murmured vaguely.

What was the good of money until she'd found Durand?

Her vagueness seemed to worry Anne, bringing out the maternal instinct in her more and more.

"Mother, look, you've got to put your mind on what you're doing. If you don't take care of yourself in New York you'll get hit by a car or something."

Dilly tried hard to gather her wits.

"Yes, dear," she said meekly.

"Which coat are you taking?" Anne inquired from the depth of the hall closet. "The light one? You ought to take your raincoat too."

Dilly shook her head again.

What she was thinking was, *Take nothing for your journey*

. . . neither bread, neither money, neither have two coats apiece. . . .

"I'll get the car," Will announced, really going this time.

Cramming on her hat, Dilly glanced at the clock. She did have about ten minutes to spare. And so, for the last time, she put in the call to Mary Day's apartment. Maybe—

There was no answer.

Hanging up the receiver, Dilly lingered near the telephone, as if by willing she could make it ring.

And suddenly it did.

Dilly's fingers shook. When the Kendal operator asked her to wait for a call from New York, she feared she'd be too weak to talk.

"Dilly?"

"Elmira!"

Dilly knew instantly that something was wrong. Elmira must have heard.

"Dilly? Dilly, listen. The most awful thing happened yesterday. I had to call and tell—"

"What? What is it? Tell me, Elmira. Is he hurt?"

"No."

"Thank goodness!"

"No. He's all right. I'm the one who's hurt."

"Elmira, *tell* me."

"The Executive Committee. You know, of the Canine Club. They had a meeting. And they passed this ruling—that they wouldn't register Mule Terriers any more."

"Oh. Is that all?"

Dilly collapsed on the hall chair.

"*All?* How can you say such a heartless thing? It's the most outrageous— They say it's on account of all those strains. Economy, I guess. They'll only register dogs with one strain. Isn't that the limit?"

"Thank goodness," Dilly repeated, but not so loud this time. "Elmira, do you know anything about Durand—where he is?"

"On easy street. And I'm—"

"So he did move!"

"Stop fooling, Dilly," Elmira snapped. "I'm worried about my Associated."

"What's that?"

Dilly pushed one arm into the coat that Anne was holding for her, then transferred the receiver and put in the other.

"My stock," Elmira was saying. "Associated Bakers. Don't you read the papers?"

"No time before Meeting. Anyway, I don't follow the stock market."

Anne was buttoning Dilly's coat and pushing wisps of hair up under her hat.

"I should think you'd follow your friend Durand Smith, at least, *Diligence*," Elmira said crossly. "Associated—"

"Never mind your stock. Just tell me about Durand. And, Elmira, please hurry. I have to go in a second."

"I'm telling you. Associated bought out Worcestershire Biscuits —not that dog poison he was peddling, but the name, the idea of it. Going to use it for a cocktail cracker—save us all the trouble of making canapés. A cracker with meat flavor. You know how people go for meat, even if there isn't any in it."

Suddenly Dilly's mind began functioning. She jumped to her feet.

"Did you say *bought* it?"

"And how! Paid a hundred thousand dollars just for the name and the formula. Imagine, Dilly, for that poison! So you see why I'm worried about my stock. It was doing so well. And poor Henderson," Elmira wailed, returning to her grief. "To think they'd do a thing like that this week!"

"This—?"

Dilly searched her memory. Was this the anniversary of something?

"This week of all times," Elmira repeated, sobbing now. "I suppose out there in Kendal you don't even know that it's *Be Kind to Canines Week.*"

Dilly felt suddenly sorry for Elmira. Her chagrin was, after all, real to her. But at this moment, when Dilly had such a lot on her mind—

"What did you say the name of that street is where Durand lives now?" she asked her.

"Darling," Elmira cried. "I don't know where the man lives. Same place, I guess. Haven't seen hide nor hair of him since you were here."

"Oh," Dilly mumbled, disappointed.

Anne was making faces at her which said, High time you shut Elmira up.

"Well, I'm sorry, Elmira, but I have to say goodbye."

"Dilly, wait. When are you coming to see me? It would be such a comfort. You've known Henderson since he was a baby. Remember how you held him on your lap when we drove home from Long Island? Oh, Dilly—"

"Don't cry. I'll come. I'll come tonight. And now I simply have to go."

"You'll *come?*"

"Yes. But I don't know what time I'll get there. Quite late, probably."

"That's all right, darling. Any time. I'm so upset, I couldn't sleep a wink, anyhow."

Will was tapping the horn. Dilly rushed out on to the piazza.

"We have your bag," Anne called. She was already sitting in the back seat.

Parky saw Dilly into the front. Then he got in beside Anne.

"Sorry to rush you," Will apologized, starting the car. "It's getting pretty late."

"Not a matter of money, after all," Dilly confided to him quickly. "Durand's had a windfall. And if anybody ever deserved it— That must have been what he wanted to tell me, before anyone else knew. So something dreadful must have happened—some accident. Oh, Will, do you think I'll find him?"

Instead of reassuring her, Will muttered, letting the engine idle, "Wouldn't you know!"

Lois and George had come early. They were driving up before the house.

"How can I tell her now?" Dilly cried, turning to Will in a frenzy. "There isn't time to explain."

Anne craned her neck out. "Aunt Elmira just telephoned," she told Lois hurriedly. "Asked Mother to come. It's her dog."

"You'd think she might have let Mother have dinner, at least," Lois remarked peevishly, as George helped her out.

"Lois, dear," Dilly broke in, stretching her hand through the window. "Elmira could have waited. I'm going to New York to look for—to try and find a grandfather for little George."

"Are you *crazy*?" Lois cried, backing away.

Dilly looked at her daughter, trying in this fraction of a second to convey with her eyes all that she felt and could never tell her, trying to make her understand. She was still reaching out toward her.

"No little boy should have to come into the world without a grandfather," she insisted earnestly.

"I think that's a nice idea," George said in that good-natured, half joking manner he always used with Dilly.

"Never heard of such a thing," Lois expostulated, shaking her head.

But she stepped forward and took Dilly's hand, even giving it a faint squeeze. For Lois, this was quite a gesture of affection.

"Bless thee," Dilly whispered.

As Will let out the clutch, Lois stood there looking completely flabbergasted.

But George shouted, "That's the most thoughtful preparation anyone has made yet."

CHAPTER 41

ARRIVING in New York, Dilly was tempted to walk over to Third Avenue and take the El. But she didn't know the way to Columbus; she might get lost. This was no moment to be sentimental.

It doesn't matter now, she thought, jumping into a taxi and giving the driver Mary's address. Durand and I can ride on the El the rest of our lives. That is, if—

Suppose I can't find him? she asked herself suddenly. Suppose . . .

She was shivering. When she opened her purse to get out the fare her hands shook.

In the vestibule of Mary's house Dilly pushed the button under Mrs. Humphrey Day's name. As soon as she was sure that there was no response, she pushed the next one. *Joseph Martin,* the card read. Dilly threw her weight against the door and after awhile, to her intense relief, it clicked and opened.

This time she hardly noticed the four flights.

"Mrs. Martin?"

The woman in the doorway was middle-aged. She looked as if, apart from food, she hadn't found much in life gratifying.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Day's bell doesn't answer and I—"

"She's at the hospital."

"*Something's happened?*"

Mrs. Martin's face and hands indicated that something had indeed. "Her father—such a nice gentleman," she wailed. "He was crossing Forty-second by Grand Central and this car came along. The light was red."

"Oh! When was it?"

"Yesterday morning about eleven—little before, I guess. Mary was off somewhere. By the time the hospital got hold of her, they'd already operated."

Humph's head appeared, squeezing between the woman's side and the doorframe. Then Randy's head squeezed its way between Humph's and Mrs. Martin.

"Don't know where he was going in such a rush," she went on. "Seems he was hurt bad inside. Such a nice gentleman."

"Yes—yes, he is."

Dilly couldn't stay there another second, though she did want to be loving with the boys. They seemed so small and helpless beside the bulk of Mrs. Martin. Humph appealed to her out of eyes dark with fear. But Randy—

It shook Dilly to see Randy surveying her calmly with Durand's eyes, the same clear blue, only that they hadn't been bruised by life.

She gave each head a hasty pat. Randy's calm gaze made her turn quickly. Even as she stood looking at him, it sent her scurrying down the endless stairs.

Columbus Avenue was almost dark. No taxi.

Why didn't I let Will come? Dilly asked herself in terror.

Everything took so long: finding the taxi, reaching the hospital. To Dilly, riding through the indifferent streets, between blocks of houses that took no interest in Durand, past crowds of people who didn't even know that he existed, that his life was in danger—

She couldn't bear to look at the cold world, at the double row of hard white lights that stretched ahead to infinity.

Over and over, to every sentinel in the hospital, she repeated his name, "Durand Smith." Then she followed directions, on to the next one. "Durand Smith, please."

Each time she said his name, she was coming nearer to him, yet each time she had to pass another ward. And again she would say, like someone in an interminable dream, "Durand Smith, please."

"He's in a cubicle at the end," a nurse finally told Dilly, pointing a long way. "See, down there, where his daughter's sitting? She'll show you."

"I don't know her."

"On that bench in the corridor. Looks like she's asleep. Stayed with him all night while he was coming out."

Dilly hardly glanced toward Mary. Her eyes were on the face of the nurse.

"Is he—is he going to get well?"

"Don't see why not. He's comfortable now. Morphine's taking hold."

The nurse appeared to have no further time for talk. And so Dilly went on down the corridor to the bench where Mary sat, fast asleep.

I wouldn't have known her, Dilly thought.

She didn't look like Durand. She didn't look as hard and irresponsible as Dilly had pictured her either, only very young and pathetic in her rumpled suit.

Dilly stood over her and stared.

So tired. So sort of baffled by life, she thought, realizing she'd never again want to be cross with Mary.

No doubt there'd been a lot Durand had never mentioned; maybe he didn't even know. These kids who did their courting and marrying in the war . . .

Then Dilly touched her shoulder.

This is the second time today I've done this, she reflected irrelevantly. Early this morning Anne—

Jumping, the girl opened her eyes.

"I'm Diligence Fuller."

Once Mary got over seeming frightened, she showed no surprise, only a mild curiosity, as if she'd been wondering what Dilly would look like.

"They said you were on the way."

"They—?"

"Some man at that Rhode Island number. I called about one-thirty."

"Oh." And Dilly couldn't help adding, though she was instantly sorry, "I'd been waiting all night—"

"Yes," Mary said, dropping her eyes briefly, "Dad asked me to call soon as he came to. But I didn't know what he was talk-

ing about. Everything he said was queer. He kept after me so that when I went out to get a bite of lunch—"

"Never mind about that now," Dilly broke in. "All I want is to see him. But first tell me what the doctors say."

"He got this smashed rib and it cut an artery. That's what made him bleed so. But the operation came out all right and they say he'll be as good as before. Only, of course, he's going to need a lot of care. And how can I, when I have to go to work? And the children— Besides," she added miserably, "I think he has a concussion too. The doctor won't listen to me. But he must have, because he keeps saying, 'Don't worry about the money, Mary. We've got all we need. Don't worry about money.' "

She stopped and bit her fingernail.

"It's the last thing we have," she told Dilly, looking at her with a directness that was suddenly reminiscent of Durand, "so you see why it worries me to hear him talk like that. Even when he's up and around, I won't be able to leave the children with him if he's—"

"No," Dilly exclaimed, wondering if she could control her temper. "You certainly won't be able to do that."

And then she remembered that Mary herself needed help just now as much as anyone.

"You won't have to," Dilly assured her. "Your father always hoped you could engage a competent woman for them. And don't worry about that concussion any more. I think he was meaning to tell you tonight, when he got back from Rhode Island."

But Mary wasn't listening to Dilly. She had broken down.

"I tried," she moaned, "I tried all I could to take care of him after he had pneumonia last year. Wouldn't let him have coffee or cigarettes or any of those things that aren't good for people."

"Mary," Dilly said, raising her voice to get through, "it's in the paper. I don't know which one. *The Times,* I imagine."

"I tried keeping him home," the girl went on, not paying the least attention. "But he was always slipping out. I never knew what he was up to."

Dilly put her hand on the girl's arm. "You need some rest," she said. "Go home and collect Humph and Randy. Pick up a *Times* on the way and look through the Business Section. And get a good night's sleep. I'll stay with your father."

The girl's face brightened, as if she were hearing Dilly for the first time.

"You'll stay? You mean it?"

Why does she think I've come? Dilly wondered.

CHAPTER 42

"DURAND," Dilly whispered softly, but he seemed not to hear. "Durand!"

She stood by the high hospital bed, drawing his spirit to her with all her will.

Pain clouded the blue eyes. But as Dilly whispered, they began to clear. Attention seemed to be gathering in them, as if it were making its way from some distant place.

With a stab of joy Dilly saw Durand becoming aware of her presence, saw what it meant to him that she was here.

"I knew you'd come," he murmured.

She stood looking down, telling him everything in silence.

"Did you get the Valentine?"

"Yes. Every time I open the linen closet— Thee knows, Durand, that Valentine will stay fragrant forever."

His face showed what he'd been through. It was gray, with little fever spots above the cheekbones. But the hand that lay on the white blanket cover wasn't a bit changed. It was just the way Dilly remembered.

Reverently, because it signified to her as solemn an act as marriage, Dilly took the hand in her own two and pressed it gently between them.

He looked up at her comprehendingly and his eyes were suddenly calm. Even in the days when Durand and Dilly were rushing about town together happily, his eyes had never looked like this. There'd always been anxiety in them and past grief.

Now it was as if he felt his whole self to be held between her hands, safe in her care at this moment, when he was in need.

"Everything's ready for thee in Kendal," Dilly whispered. "Soon as they let thee come, I'll bring the car. Everything's waiting, even daffodils on the bureau. And when they fade, there'll be the irises. And the roses. All summer long— In December, too."

The response in his eyes moved her so that Dilly could hardly go on. But she had such a lot to tell him!

"There's this boat on the river, a little cockleshell. Soon as thee's well enough, we'll cast off and sail away—"

He didn't inquire, as an experienced sailor would have done, about her rig and length and draft.

"What's she called?" was all he asked.

"The *Away.*"

"*Away.* Nice name."

"And, Durand, I couldn't wait to tell thee—she has a candy-striped sail."

He looked up at her anxiously, evidently struggling to comprehend.

"Thee wanted the sail to be pretty—remember?"

"Yes."

"This one is the prettiest sail in the world—green and white, like a peppermint stick!"

"*Away,*" he repeated happily, looking at Dilly with eyes that were as calm as Randy's. The pain must have gone.

Maybe it's the morphine that's working now, Dilly thought. Maybe it's because he knows someone will take care of him at last. Maybe it's just—just me.

And then she thought, I mustn't tire him or he'll never get well.

She let his hand go only long enough to pull the one chair that

was in the cubicle close to the bed. Sitting down, she took the hand again and held it firmly in both of hers.

They looked into each other's eyes silently, looked and looked, without any need to look away.

I don't care how deeply he looks now, Dilly thought, overjoyed. I need never hide anything from him again.

"Diligence," he said after a while, "any thermos in Kendal?"

The question took Dilly by surprise. Her thoughts had been so far from things like thermos bottles that she couldn't immediately put the hand of her memory on the one she knew she owned. Then she found it, in the pantry, behind the preserving kettle, where it had stood ever since the time she and Willard and the children used to sail to Napatree Point in the "Gooly" before the hurricane, so long ago.

"Yes," Dilly cried eagerly. "We have a thermos. Oldish, but still good."

"Bring it along," Durand commanded with something of his old vitality. "Breezy out there on the river. I wouldn't want you catching cold."

Already looking out for her again!

"And, Dilly, make the coffee strong. You know—"

"Yes," she promised, caressing his hand. "I know how thee likes it—gustable."

He smiled in touching contentment.

"How could I stop for a little red light, running to ask you to be my queen?"

"Was *that* what thee was coming for?"

With a flicker of scorn, he brushed the question aside, as if it didn't merit an answer.

"*Doggoned car!* I told you, though, the day we met—"

He stopped, weak perhaps. Yet the mischief which lighted his eyes turned Dilly's remaining fear to triumph.

"I told you then New York is precarious," he whispered, grinning up at her. "Remember?"

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DAISY NEWMAN was born in England of American parents. Her education was interrupted by frequent travel, for she has attended ten schools and three colleges in Europe and the United States. At present she and her husband, who teaches at Yale, are living near New Haven. During the family vacations Mrs. Newman might be discovered operating as sea-cook on the sailboat, *Polly*, which is skippered by her husband and manned by their two children. She is also a devoted gardener, "not the clubby kind but like Dilly with earth under my fingernails."

This biographical sketch was written in 1954.

Other books by Daisy Newman:

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