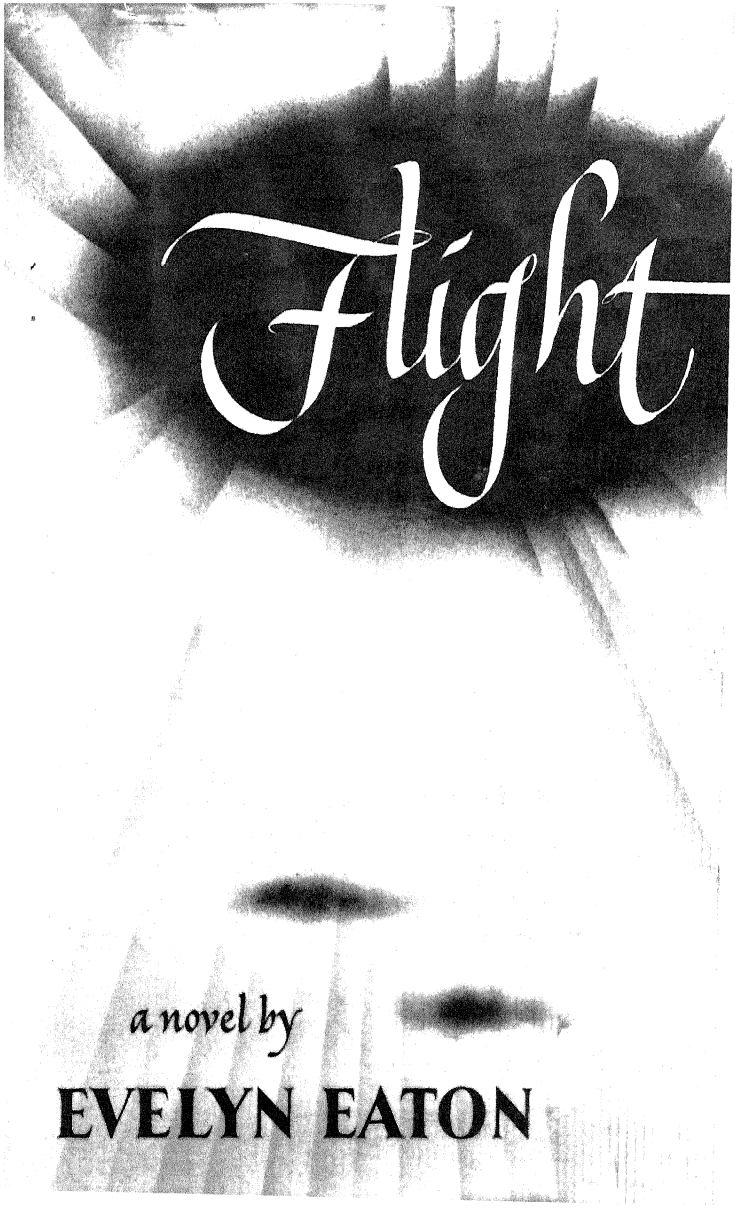
Flight
a novel by
EVELYN EATON

FLIGHT

Flight—soaring away from the world she knows—transports Martia Deane on what the reader soon realizes is not an ordinary airplane trip. Tension mounts with an increasing awareness that Martia does not know and cannot control her destination, until at last the reader's premonition grows to certainty that Martia and the other passengers are on the ultimate journey, that they are in fact dead.

What happens thereafter in this extraordinary story must be left to the author's artistry to portray. Skillfully interweaving the strange and vivid events of this final journey with retrospective flashes into her heroine's past, Miss Eaton creates an electrically exciting story and a character with whom the reader quickly identifies himself. Martia has made a success of her life by most people's standards: despite a disastrous ending to her early marriage, she had gone on to achieve some fame as a photographer. She had raised her daughter [illegible] probed the depths of feeling with a love which was denied her. Beauty, terror, pity and hope flash through these pages as we see her weighed in terms of what lies beyond. Martia, with clarity and final perspective, reviews her life.

Miss Eaton has not hesitated to use commonplace accessories in her highly original presentation of experience after life. Yet the whole striking concept is presented with reverence. The book is rich with excitement and mounting tension, but behind this moving, profound story is the wise and tender understanding of the cravings of the human heart. As *Flight* advances toward its powerful climax, it will be a stony reader indeed who is not

246+18=264

PREVIOUS BOOKS BY EVELYN EATON:

NOVELS:

Pray to the Earth
Quietly My Captain Waits
Restless Are the Sails
The Sea Is So Wide
In What Torn Ship
Give Me Your Golden Hand

COLLECTIONS OF SHORT STORIES:

Every Month Was May
The North Star Is Nearer

Flight

A NOVEL

by

EVELYN EATON

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

"*Fugue,* from the Latin *fuga,* a *Flight;* a composition in parts that do not all begin at once, but follow or pursue each other successively."—Webster's Dictionary

"A Fugue is composed of a Subject, the theme on which the whole composition is founded; the Exposition, that part of the Fugue during which the Voices make their first entries in succession, and which extends as far as the conclusion of the subject; Episodes, that part of the Fugue in which for a time neither subject nor answer is heard; Stretto, from the present participle of the verb 'stringendo,' in the sense of pressing on or hurrying up the time, that part of the Fugue in which the entries of the subject follow one another at a shorter time than in the first exposition; and the Answer. A real Answer is always possible."—From *Fugue,* by E. PROUT.

Flight follows, roughly, the construction of a fugue as given above. It is dedicated to good friends and understanding neighbors in New Hampshire, the Robinsons, Bob, Kay, Angela and Tammy, with my love.

EVELYN EATON

Boulderfalls, 1953.

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FLIGHT

SO FAR as she could see, without bending forward and rousing the pain in her head, there was no sign of shore. Disappointment nudged her, to have missed the last of it. She knew how it would look: first the river, then green woods, checkerboard squares with straight black roads and curving white ones crossing them, then the sea, this sea that she was flying over now and would be for—how many hours? She shook her head. Immediately PAIN rose up in a crested wave, towering to break on her. She lay rigid, waiting for the crash, the suffocation, the foam, the fragments. . . . It receded. It was hovering half an inch away. If she could concentrate on something, on anything, it might subside.

She grasped at what she remembered of the take-off, smooth, without even the small metallic *gluph* parodying human catch of the breath. The plane was simply higher, a little higher, higher, and at last high. She had closed her eyes then, intending to open them im-

mediately. She must have blacked out—which was not surprising. The PAIN moved a fraction toward her and she held it away by recalling the time before the take-off.

It was raining when she reached the airport, a bleak gray day with gusts of bitter wind. She watched the passengers ahead of her duck through the gate, one by one, blurred distorted figures in wind-shaken clothes. She could see the plane beyond them, expectant, blunt-nosed, gray, tail swung round, door open. Planes had these doors like darning-needles' eyes; darning needles were dragonflies. This, that she must take, looked like a dragonfly, with cruciform, glistening body, poised by rain-swept reeds. Ground mist helped the illusion. It might have been the dawn mist rising from Loon Lake. There was a heavy fog. This was a grim day, with poor visibility, not a day she would choose to fly. There could be nothing optional about the trip.

It was her turn to pass the barricade. She shivered, drawing her collar close about her throat, hanging back, dismayed. Where were Debby and Don? Late as usual, but this once it mattered, this once they might have arrived in time to say good-by.

Suddenly she saw them, peering at her through the glass walls of a closed-in promenade, making regretful gestures that they were prevented from coming nearer. "By red-tape regulations," she guessed impatiently, re-

membering the casual freedom of the first rickety canvas crates in which she used to fly the Channel between England and France, after what she still forgetfully sometimes called "the war." There had been two wars since. In the second, she was flying forty thousand miles over twenty countries, and across the Hump, without too much visible red tape. Now because Debby and Don were a few minutes late at a civilian airport, some bureaucratic jerk would not let them through.

Don had his arm around Debby, holding her hand in his. Their faces were tense and sad as they strained against the glass, looking remorsefully at her, anxious and concerned. She forgave them their lateness, mouthed "I love you both," waved and went forward awkwardly, burdened with her things. Then she turned at the gangway to blow them her last kiss.

A cloud burst. A violent gust of wind threw her off her balance. She was already blinded by the rain. She staggered, groped toward the plane, and struck her head against the framework of the door. It was a brutal crack, a sickening, tearing pain, an agony.

No wonder she was feeling dazed, groggy from the blow, and groggy from the shots she had taken before it—"immunization" from smallpox, paratyphoid, typhoid, yellow fever, cholera, plague, pestilence, battle, murder and from sudden death . . . no, that was the litany. How modern and appropriate it sounded, an

indictment of the age, as shots were an indictment of those places where such ills existed, with yaws, syphilis, leprosy and always malnutrition. Now she was sampling some of them in miniature.

"I wish my head would clear." She raised her heavy eyelids with an effort. She was in her preferred seat, by accident, the first she had lurched into, after she hit her head. She always chose to sit at the back, well behind the wings. She got the impression, from its fitttings and shape, that this was a C-54. It was lined with a tasteful, quilted effect, the curtains and the cushions rose, the padded upholstery gray. The seat beside her was empty. She counted fifteen passengers, six women, nine men, settled in attitudes she would come to know as characteristic later, if she came to know anything with clarity again. She sighed, closing her eyes.

The pretty stewardess with the *de rigueur* professional smile would be bending over soon to ask: "Your name and destination?"

"Martia Deane."

"Your destination?"

She would sound like the moron she felt, for she did not know.

"I can tell you my name and address, the name and address of my daughter, Mrs. Donald Spade, as in shovel. I can give you her telephone number and my

own, but I cannot tell you my destination, nor my reasons for going there. I am feeling ill. I hit my head when I boarded the plane. You must have seen it happen."

She opened her eyes and looked belligerently round her. There was no uniform in sight. Perhaps the stewardess was in the cockpit with the pilot, perhaps there was no stewardess on board. She hoped so. Then there might be no questions, at least until she recovered. It was disconcerting that a blow on the skull could so distort the functions of the brain, could take away memory, even a small part, covering only a few months . . .

It would come back soon. If not, she must have her head "seen by someone," her mother's euphemism for calling in a doctor.

"But who does the seeing on a plane?"

The door of the cockpit opened. The pilot walked through, loitering here and there, greeting his passengers, a grave young man in a captain's uniform, with a thoughtful, sensitive face, not the cartoon airman's superman-of-action mask. When he reached her row, he slid into the empty seat beside her.

"Have you recovered from the take-off? That was a nasty crack you got."

He was smiling but his eyes were serious.

She smiled back, surprised and relieved that he knew about the blow, whether he had seen it himself or it

was reported to him. His next words showed that he understood its effect.

"You will get your bearings sooner if you lie still."

She closed her eyes gratefully.

"That's right, rest. There's a time for action and a time to be borne through the air," his voice went on, blurring in her ears. She thought that she caught the words *Suez* and *Jordan*. He must be telling her the course.

"Do we go by way of the Holy Land?"

"Sometimes. Not always. This time we do."

Once she had jeeped into Jerusalem, bucketing past camels and shepherds watching their sheep beneath the cypress trees, to a town half as modern, half as old, as all humanity's dreams. It was a shocking experience for a Christian. Turkish guides asked her for chewing gum and American cigarettes before the Sepulcher, for money to turn on lights in the Sanctuary, and kept up a running stream of commercial conversation along the Stations of the Cross. It was a Saturday, the Jews were chanting from Lamentations at the Wailing Wall, glaring resentfully over their shoulders at the foreigners. It was forbidden to photograph them openly—she was warned that the sight of her camera might precipitate a riot—but she covered her assignment and got six shots. There was fanatical hatred and deep unrest on the faces half turned toward her. She could have wailed with

them, in her disillusionment over the sordid commercialism of the Temple.

Christ should come and drive us out again, she thought, recalling the guide in the Garden of Gethsemane who poked her in the ribs, begged for cigarettes or chocolates and tried to sell her pornographic post cards. Fortunately she was not assigned to photograph Bethlehem. She could keep the "little town" of Christmas Eve, presented to her imagination in a New England church.

"Sometimes," the pilot was saying, "not always. This time we do, and then if you look down at the right moment, you may see Bethlehem from the angle of the angels. . . . If there is anything you need me to do for you," he added, standing up, "I hope that you will tell me, and I hope you are comforted soon."

He must have said "comfortable." She was dizzier than she realized. The blow must have affected her hearing, as flying at too high an altitude would without an oxygen mask. She knew what that was like. She had taken notes at 19,000 feet which came out slightly altered, *widow* instead of *window*. She had seen Chinese soldiers, arriving in Chabua, dazed from crossing the Hump. They passed out in heaps on the floors of the planes which carried no oxygen for them. They stumbled down gangplanks, drugged and bewildered, with no notion of how many hours they had spent in

the air or of how far they had come. Some escaped to the jungle and were lost, looking for homes, thousands of miles away.

"Comfortable," she repeated to herself, correcting what she had heard into what she thought it must be, before, quiescent in the claws of PAIN, she drowsed into a stupor.

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SHE WAS CONSCIOUS, THROUGH THE JUNGLE of her half-sleep, of discomfort traveling her arm—the hot, angry jabbings of a hornet, stinging with intention to hurt. She brushed at it, flicked it off, and caught it in the hollow of her hand, the sensitive palm with its nerve-ends bared to sharp perception.

The size of the hornet alarmed her. It was so long, so large, her fingers could not contain it. It was firm and thick, with a texture of starched cloth, a hornet in a coat sleeve.

"Once more," somebody was whispering beside her, "one more shot."

"Does she know us? . . . Will she . . ."

That was Debby's voice. Debby and Don were looking at her through a window.

"Of course, we are all at the airport. Exception . . . exceptional," she murmured.

"What, dear?" Debby bent over, close to the glass.

"Not like those."

She was relieved and grateful to see them there, full-face, for other people, she was trying to tell them, crossed her eyeballs only in profile, marching right to left, miniature silhouettes with enormous faces, aware of her, but uncaring, making connections elsewhere. No one came toward her frankly, smiling, a light in the eyes meaning "You!" No one but Debby, and now Don, came to her full-face.

When she thought of Debby she was conscious of a weal, running from the palms of her hands, along her inner arms, across each breast, a known, familiar, sentient weal, raw, purple, skinless, seeking skin, eased momentarily only by some contact of sight or of touch. Along this imagined stripe, through its center above her solar plexus, she could feel Life probe toward Debby with Its dirty fingernails. She had warded them away, prepared Debby for their impact, spread ointment on the smart. Now Don must do these things for Debby. Don and Debby together must do them for their child. They would know the subterfuge, heartache and anxiety of adults standing between children and the world. It was a futile stand, for each soul is alone.

"No man may deliver his brother: nor make agree-

ment unto God for him; for it cost more to redeem their souls: so that he must let that alone forever!"

She heard the familiar words in Father Kenelm's voice.

SHE WOKE AGAIN TO THE PLANE, TO THE empty seat beside her, the filled seats ahead, the muffled hum of the engine, and, as she peered out, the gray clouds below. Her head ached, she was dizzy and glad to awake. When the shots wore off and the PAIN subsided, surely she would know her destination; she would remember the recent events of the past as she remembered the general sweep of it. Meanwhile she must sit still in her place, protected by conventions, rules of behavior, formulated, tacitly accepted and agreed upon, adhered to by groups of people unacquainted with one another. So long as she conformed, sitting quiet behind the mask of her face, nothing uncontrolled or unexpected would be said to her, nothing unpredictable happen.

"Sometimes I wish that it would, that this world were the world of Hellzapoppin, of those sudden spontane-

ous outbursts of individual expression, but if this pilot were to dance out of his cockpit now, out-dannying Danny Kaye, it would probably be a commercial. We are all inhibited. Even in France the nearest thing to spontaneity, the making of a scene, has become mechanical, following lines laid down since life in France began."

She saw herself once more making a good scene. One made them at any time, with anyone, about anything. It was expected, pleasurable, cathartic, relaxing. Some unremembered, trivial, ordinary time, she had made her last scene in France.

She had shouted, he had shouted. They had gone their ways, exhilarated, content and satisfied. That was in the days before shouting and violence became brutal and organized, before fascists and communists took to making scenes, when Debby was a little girl, *"la petite Debbie,"* going to a *lycée* in Cannes.

She remembered Debby, at the first *distribution des prix,* dressed for the great event in a white dress, white gloves, white socks and white sandals, marching demurely, in good time to the music, holding her skirts out stiffly in each hand. When she came to the benches she halted and lost her way.

A teacher stood up, pointing, an older girl stepped out of line to give her a shove, the procession wavered

on. When all the school was seated the music stopped, and there was a short, dramatic pause. The band burst into the "Marseillaise." Everybody rose. The mayor appeared on the dais, escorted by the principal. They stood together in silence until the anthem ended, the mayor fidgeting and teetering on his small feet. He bowed over her hand, kissed it, and they both sat down.

Another teacher rose and read out a list of names. Prizes were being passed down the waiting rows. Now and then a student received a *prix d'excellence,* which meant a very high average in every subject for all the year. The recipient of a *prix d'excellence* was honored by a burst of applause. She handed her prize to the mayor, who roused from his comfortable seat, took it, and gave it back again with his felicitations. He was a rotund man, and the tricolor cummerbund he wore made him more portly still. He was hot and plainly harassed by his official task, yet he managed to infuse enthusiasm into his voice and his gestures. Then he would sit again, and another list of another class would be read out by a teacher.

Debby's class came last. For a long time no *prix d'excellence* had been awarded. They belonged to the serious workers at the top of the school, those about to depart for the university. The smaller children stood in their places as their names were called, and the prizes

they had won were passed along the line. Debby's turn arrived.

"Et pour la recitation."

Debby rose, took her book, a brightly colored a.b.c., clasped it with a bow as she had seen the others do, then before anyone could stop her she walked forward, climbed the steps of the dais and arrived before the mayor, half asleep in his chair. She handed him her prize and stood before him, waiting.

"Comment!" he said, astounded. "A *prix d'excellence* so young?"

The Directrice beside him said something in his ear. "Ah!" He heaved himself to his feet, took Debby's confident hand in his and walked slowly forward to the edge of the dais.

Martia waited for the laughter to break out. Now it will come, she thought, wincing in anticipation of seeing the grave contentment wiped from Debby's face. The school was silent; so were the parents.

The mayor said distinctly, "Someday it may be, Mademoiselle, you will receive the *prix d'excellence* for your class. Meanwhile here is this alphabet for your powers of recitation." He bowed to Debby, she bowed to him. Gravely she tucked her prize beneath her arm, giving a perfect performance of the elated but modest scholar, returning to her place. Still no one laughed.

No one jeered or teased as she descended the steps. Not one giggle broke out as she sat down again. In perfect French politeness the incident was closed.

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MARTIA LET OUT HER BREATH IN A LONG, slow, sigh. Her body was in the seat of the plane, her head turned to the light. She opened her eyes upon clouds, torn jaggedly to show streaks of the sea below, metal-colored streaks of gray. The plane was passing among thunderheads sitting in conference, with gold upon their hair, from the sunlight above them. She watched them for a moment, thinking idly, inadequately, *Pretty,* not fully conscious of what they were or where she was; preoccupied, reliving the hour of Debby's encounter with the world, as though it were still happening, or just over, and she was still fresh with her hot, intense relief and amazement that Debby's trust in all-things-as-they-were won that reprieve.

She shifted in her seat, cautiously, not to disturb the Antagonist, crouching in the aisle behind her shoulder, she knew it was there, it had not gone, if she could drowse she might outwander it. The sensation was the same as when one drew the first guarded breath after choking—would it be this time, reprieve? The stinging in her arm, her dream of the hornet, the running of the

word *reprieve* through the trees, an oddly shaped fleet word in the mind's gray wood, reminded her now of another assault on Debby's faith. It was later, when they had crossed to England.

Debby was six, walking in the garden of the school in Sussex where Martia must leave her. She carried a brown teddy bear and was talking of serious things, in her fine formal French, knowing no other tongue. A bee blundered into the bear and scraped along Debby's arm, stinging her wrist. Debby screamed, struggling to draw breath to scream again, making an uproar out of all proportion to the hurt. She was outraged and terrified, not so much by the pain of the sting itself as by the bee's intention.

"Il l'a voulu!" she howled. *"Maman,* he wished to bite me!"

"No, you frightened him," Martia said quickly. "He came to investigate Teddy, thinking 'Now here's an unusual flower,' your arm moved, he feared you would be rough with him and he must defend himself, so without thinking . . ."

Debby's tears stopped momentarily. "How could this bee take Teddy for a flower when I was talking to him? No, *Maman,* this bee wished to hurt, else why did he not listen to what I was telling Teddy, or at least make inquiry whether I would be rough?"

The howls began again.

"Bees can't make inquiries in words," Martia explained. "And even if this bee were exceptional, he could not understand your answers. He was an English bee, and you speak only French."

Debby was satisfied. "Then you do not think he *intended . . .*"

"No, but you see how careful we must be with bees and other things, animals and people, to be sure they understand and are not frightened or hurt. You see how stupid a bee can become when he is frightened."

Debby nodded, holding out her arm. "It pains immoderately."

"We will put soda on it."

✧

"THAT WAS WRONG OF ME," MARTIA thought, leaning back in the plane, "sentimental, begging-the-question-for-a-little-longer, adult-dishonest. One cannot put soda on PAIN. But I could not bear her to know, at six, the ill will in the world."

There were enough adjustments for an uprooted child to be making without that major, unresolved one to PAIN. It was hard to bring up a posthumous child. Debby's home shifted as Martia's work shifted, through three countries: France, which meant Paris and the Midi; England, which meant London and Oxford;

America, which meant the Deane Photography Studios in New York and the summer home in Nova Scotia.

In later years the questions came, and the careful answers:

"*Maman,* have I a father?"

"Yes, of course."

"Where is he? Are we divorced?"

"Your father is dead. He died before you were born, but he knew you were coming. *Ce pauvre Papa,* he was obliged to miss all the fun of you."

"Oh." Debby pondered. "Then I'm an orphan and you're a widow."

"Yes."

"You never talk of him."

"Don't I?"

"No. I wondered."

After that Martia talked, she made a point of talking, of "your father."

"Your father was tall and thin and sunburned, even in winter."

"Your father *liked* fish."

"Your father had a gay, crooked smile."

"You have your father's eyebrows and his ears."

"Your father would have painted that. He was an artist. Didn't I tell you? No, we haven't any of his pictures."

She found that she could speak spontaneously and

casually of this man, "your father." He bore no relation to that other man who had worn the same skin, to Michael. She found that she could even think of "your father" now and then with acceptance.

"If your father were alive," she said one day, and caught herself thinking if Michael were alive, knowing what death revealed of him, she might gather him to her in tenderness, comfort, pity, but not love, and no longer passion. What a difference the prefix *com* could make to a word! There would be depth upon depth of compassion for "your father," but when Michael died, killing the spirit of Michael in his dying, he left her passionless and lonely. If there were a place of reunion after death, he would not be there. He had never been anywhere. This was the truth, "and the truth shall set you free." It had delivered her, instead, defeated and disarmed, to parry the long years alone, with every nerve-end reaching out to him, only reason and memory shouting "No!"

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SOMEONE WAS SHOUTING BESIDE HER, A man's voice talking unnaturally loud in her drugged ear. She opened her eyes to see the pilot's face, gravely intent upon her. She closed them again, abashed and

embarrassed to find herself the focus, the center of a shaft of concentrated light.

"Eat this," he was saying urgently, his strong hands coming toward her. He was proffering her medicine; his fingers placed a capsule on her tongue. *"Drink* this" —she felt the rim of the cup against her lips. *"Do* this" —she would comply with whatever it might be, obedient, content to be ministered to. The pilot was the doctor of his ship, the captain of his souls . . . no, now she was getting mixed, but the medicine he gave her held peace. She relaxed. There was a little polite flurry around her, a whisking of napkins and cloths, and now he had gone away. The intensity of the light was fading too; a curious peace remained, an armistice with PAIN. Soon she could open her eyes. She did so, cautiously.

The plane bored on, giving no impression of height or of speed, in the way of planes. She looked at the clouds beneath her, smoke puffs from an engine starting up a train after the first strong puff. They were torn open now, drifting apart to show a bluer sea, an irregular blue-and-white carpet, like the spatter-painted floors of a New England house. She stared; solidarity dissolved in a curling thinning wisp, as though some hand wiped mist from the lens of a telescope. She saw a boat below, as boats were not often seen, except by gulls and God. This was a four-masted sailing vessel, black, no bigger than a burned-out match, a schooner,

like the Nova Scotian schooners, sailing through Digby Gut beneath the windows of the house she had owned on the edge of the cliff.

Clouds closed over the tossing minikin; her eyes closed on the present in the plane. She was in the house above the Gut, with all the Bay of Fundy widening below. She was smiling in the darkness, listening to the last sounds of the summer night.

✧ ✧

SHE COULD HEAR THE RUSH OF THE CHANGing tide as the troubled waters of the rip swirled through the gap to the bay. She guessed what had woken her—the foghorn sounding on the opposite shore, the bell tolling from the tower halfway down the cliff. Fog was rolling up, moving inland in strange shapes of gray mist. She would have been aware of its coming without either of these warning sounds, from the chill air blowing in on her.

A bird sang in the half-light from the apple trees, then another and another. The whole garden above the sea was full of apple blossoms and singing; scallop boats were coming in; the first faint light began to be reflected in the western sky. It was another Nova Scotian dawn.

She turned her face from the window, stretching

herself in the big four-poster handed down to her from loyalist ancestors. It was comfortable, deep, bridal bed, child bed, death bed, and now widow's bed, for a while longer. Soon she would marry Crosby, practical, well-to-do Crosby, Canadian businessman, widower with two children, a suitable remarriage from every point of view—age, income, pursuits . . . though what did Crosby, what did she, nowadays pursue? Placidity, security, contentment, the feathers in the feather beds of life. She would lie there soon with Crosby, in a marriage, not exciting, but perhaps sound and enduring as the marriage bed. Its smooth maple frame had been polished and cared for by generations of women. She could picture their differing hands, shy, proud, loving, hating, or plain conscientious, moving over the wooden surface. Hands were more revealing than faces.

She began to play a game with herself, fitting fingers with rings, cuffs and sleeves, making them tuck in the old-fashioned wine-colored puff. There were no painted fingernails nor Woolworth jewelry in those days; there was a turquoise instead, or a ruby, in a gold setting, "to ward off blood disorder." Warding off disorder was as simple as that, once!

Now the sun was high. There was a muffled clatter in the living room, the sound of subdued voices and a man's clumping feet. A mighty thudding shook the house like a cataract of boulders hurtling down. Tom

Ditton was filling the woodbox. She could see him, cap on the back of his head, twisted so the visor shaded his neck, faded overalls hanging by a string, rubber boots and wide, lopsided smile. The Dittons were fishermen, all but Tom, and he still dressed as though he were hauling traps in heavy weather.

"I never had no use for the sea. Now you take a nice bit of land, well manured . . ."

He had taken it. The garden was covered with fish heads, bug-death, lime. Soon, blooming incomprehensibly from all the muck, there would be flowers—so Tom said.

A sizzling sound rose sharply above the other noises. This was bacon-and-egg day. She sat up, hungrily.

"Doreen!"

The door opened. A countrywoman's round, pleasant face peered in.

"I'm ready for breakfast."

What luxury it was, this summer of prosperity, which brought the neat tray, honey, rolls and solitude! Later she would have to be adequate in human relationships . . . later, not now; now she could lie still, working her toes up and down in contented peace, listening to the putter of motorboats in the bay, watching the sunlight move among the trees.

A new sound was coming from the sea, an urgent forward swishing, like the change of tide, but more

persistent. This would be the *Princess Helene* coming in from Saint John, bringing tourists, and artists, and sometimes week-end guests. Martia watched her pass through the gap, beautiful, powerful, friendly boat. Later, during the war, she was taken for a troopship and conscripted with her crew. The proud sweep of her superstructure with its suggestion of luxury and speed was camouflaged squat, her black and white paint, smart and sparkling, was covered by dingy gray. Guns were mounted aft. She had encounters with submarines, evaded them, shrugged and dropped her depth charges, never missing a tide for war's vulgarities.

Her passing stirred the countryside to life. Bells rang, flags rose, people waved from the fields, from the cliff, from the hotel grounds and the back yards of the fishing village. Occupations were set and timed by her; morning and evening divided into measurable periods —"before she passed the gut," "after she docked," "still at the dock" and "through the gut."

Martia pushed the tray aside. It was time to get up. Her feet found the rope matting she had chosen for a carpet because it was rough and enduring; contact with it braced her for the day. She watched three sea gulls, framed in the bathroom window, sailing inland out of sight as she took her shower and drew on her slacks. They were well-tailored slacks, over a slim firm figure. Her body had always been compensation for her face.

She glanced into the mirror thoughtfully. She saw an unusual face, not easy to forget or to find a hat for. It was disconcerting to have diffident gray eyes and a chin like Sitting Bull. Eyes and chin conflicted; only the mouth was right, wide and generous, red without lipstick, a mouth that looked as though it knew how to laugh, low and often, at itself. She ran a comb through her hair, sleek, shingled, black, with a streak of gray. Then she drew in her stomach and walked to the door, sanctuary ended.

The children were finishing breakfast at the table under the tree. There were three of them—Crosby's two, Ned and Penelope, and her one, Debby. They saw her and clamor broke out. Ned shouted, "Can we go fishing?"

"Why not?"

"Will you come with us?"

That was Penelope, going through a clinging stage, wanting to be with grownups.

"Why should I?"

She smiled lazily down on them both. They were good to look at, tanned and well. Ned was stocky, almost square, with his look of bewildered bullock—his eyes were too far apart—and his gay grin; Penelope, dark, slender, graceful, in everything except her feet —British feet, no doubt about it—uncompromising and always there. Well, they might carry her the better

through tough years ahead. British feet were solid and good to stand upon.

Debby, attending to the fishing poles, said nothing. She looked up, caught her mother's eye, and stared. It was a grave, attentive look. Often now Debby wanted to know more about her father. Snatches of description of fish and eyebrows and "your father's pictures" were no longer enough to give her the security she needed.

"What was he like?" she would ask, frowning with puzzled eyes, Michael's puzzled eyes.

It was hard to answer. Most of what Martia might have said would make little sense to Debby, little sense to anyone not remembering Michael.

He was best described, most vividly invoked, in a piece of music written long after he was dead, by a man who never knew him. Béla Bartók's last composition, the third concerto for piano and orchestra, brought Michael back to life, or forward to immortality. It was his requiem. He was in the intensity, the fire, the life of the first movement; in the unexpected tenderness of the second movement, coming after the strength and violence of the first; in the mounting agony and grandeur of the third, and the excitement of the stretto; he was in the scrawled Hungarian word *Vége,* "the end" Bartók strained to reach. He wrote the word on no other score. *Vége.*

She heard the first performance in New York, that

alien town on a vast continent, having nothing to do with Michael. She heard it when it was once more safe to listen to music, because she lived in a lasting truce, with scar tissue for wounds.

✧

That was later, later. The mind, set free from the journeying body in the plane, skimmed erratically like a skipping stone from splash to splash, meeting its own reflections.

There were compartments and divisions in time as in people. There was, for instance, Michael, your-father-when-he-was-young, and *Vége,* all in one.

✧

"DO YOU MIND TALKING ABOUT HIM?"

"Of course not."

Why should she mind talking about a far-off silhouette, immortally preserved like the figures on the Grecian Urn, your-father-when-he-was-young, "and lusty as an eagle"? No, for there was nothing majestic nor predatory about him, about Michael, when he was young, years before he fathered Debby.

Fathered was perhaps not the word, since he did not live to see her; *begot* was the word. "And he shall give

me passionate children, not some radiant god who will despise me quite." Debby was a passionate child, in many ways like Michael, in her looks, her gestures, some of her quick reactions, in "the arm, the neck, the hand, the attitude,

> "that make my heart stir swiftly like a fish
> swimming upstream against a waterfall,
> like a great salmon, black and silver, leap
> out of the dangerous waters of my breast.
> If he should come,
> round any sudden corner, then I know
> a fish would leap too far and fall too sharp
> on the hard rock and hurt itself and die,
> not to be caught by subtleties again,
> by what it loved, the little painted fly."

Execrable verse, but memorable, sticking in the mind with other tags.

What should she tell Debby of a love butchered long ago? Nothing. She must concentrate on earlier times of happiness, and share their seeming security with Your Father's child.

"Your father rushed, he never walked or sauntered."

"Why? Was he always in a hurry?"

"No, but even when he was lying still, flat on his back on the grass, or in the boat, or floating—he spent hours in the sea—there was nothing passive about him. He

was like a lovely strong dog, jumping over gates, or like a sea gull on a windy day."

Debby looked at her indulgently, but there was a small, proud, satisfied smile on her face. Seeing it, Martia added, "Your father was so *alive!*"

She said this of Michael, who was dead, completely, finally, deliberately dead. But this was the young Michael she was speaking of, the crazy young painter, who laughed so explosively, made so much sense and so much nonsense out of everything; who sang down neighbor's wells, wished on piebald horses, and danced all night in public squares to a wheezing accordion, because he thought he "had a well-turned leg," which was true, though one seldom looked away from his face to confirm it.

"A strange, exciting face. I never saw one like it, even in Europe, where people have more individual faces than they do here."

"Mother, really!" Debby protested.

"It's true. Take teeth. . . ."

"Did Father have odd teeth?"

"Not odd, exactly, but they weren't all even and smooth. One stuck out a little, and his nose was crooked. I always thought he looked like Robert Boyle."

"Who's he?"

"An English philosopher who lived in 1650. We had a portrait of him in the dining room. It was very like your father."

"Have we got it now?"

"No, but we have something else."

She got out the miniature and showed it to Debby, telling her to read the label on the back:

Portrait of a young man, by Nicholas Hilliard, c. 1588, portraying an unknown youth, leaning against a tree. He wears a large lacy ruff, a padded doublet, and short velvet cloak, while long silk hose clothe his elegant legs. The inscription reads: Dat poenas laudata fides—*(my) praised faith eases (my) pain.*

Debby turned it over grudgingly. "I don't want to think of him in a large lacy ruff," she objected. "Why do we have to look at such old pictures?"

"Your father had an Elizabethan face."

"Haven't we any real pictures of him?"

"No."

We made our living together as photographers, but there are no photographs of Michael, only those images, unexpected, uninvited, forming behind her eyelids. . . . Close-up of the young Michael as she had never seen him, except with the intuition, the generous eye of the imagination, quickened by shared reminiscence in the shared nights. She saw first the European schoolboy, all eyes and pallor, concave chest, too short shorts, properly *chétif,* yet unmistakably virile, able, if he so minded, like any French boy, to quote poetry and openly love music without it occurring to him or to anyone that a sensitive taste might be "sissy."

"Manhood at home is so precarious!" Michael once gibed to her. "One line of a poem, one phrasing of Bach, any knowledge whatever of art, and it's gone. The sex of Europeans is more solid. They can stand a large dose of the arts. In fact their virility prospers the deeper they know and love the riches—" his hand waved Gallicly—" 'the glories of our blood and state,' to borrow a quotation from the English, whose virility also takes poetry for food, and anything else a man pleases to do or to know. Which," he declaimed confidently, "makes the best lover, a European painter or an American football fan?"

"I can't tell you," she answered, "knowing only one."

"It was an academic question," he said, smiling. "Don't make it your business to find out all the answers!"

"No research?"

Then he opened his arms.

✧ ✧

RUN . . . RUN . . . RUN . . . BACK TO MICHAEL, the schoolboy, whistling his way to the *lycée,* over the cobbled stones. Run further back, to the thin child in the black *tablier,* bringing home the bread, using the long French loaf for a walking stick.

Run . . . and when she had run so far, so fast, so valiantly, have Michael rush up the stairs of the mind, not the imagined youth, not the unknown child, the

man, as she had seen him, on steps which still existed, if one went back to look, Michael the urgent lover, intent upon research, with all a French springtime in his eyes.

Bleakness clouded hers. Debby, pulling a grass stem thoughtfully, did not see the expression on her mother's face as she struggled with Michael, pushed him back out of sight, hurled him down those stairs.

After a moment of breathing, for flexing of hands, looking down on Debby, she was able to speak of Your Father with the acquired detachment, even to tell her the truth.

"He burst into rooms like—like fireworks. People loved him."

"You must have had fun together."

"Yes, we had fun."

There was the time when she was arrested in Grasse for wearing male attire, those first floppy, foolish-looking, feminine, voluptuous pajamas of the mid-twenties. She looked down at her slacks, smiling. It was curious how the French contrived to make a woman feel that at any moment she might become dangerously seductive.

"If Monsieur permits his wife to be immodest," the gendarme told Michael when he came to bail her out of jail, "and so to reverse the natural order of society, the traditional *bonnes moeurs,* as to appear in trousers, the French Government here in Grasse will not allow of it."

There followed an impassioned argument about the natural order of society and the *bonnes moeurs,* during which the gendarme surprised them by quoting Saint Augustine in the original. Finally Michael persuasively explained, *"C'est pour la bicyclette,"* and the gendarme gave way. Madame might, he said, proceed through Grasse, mounted upon her machine, but she must not loiter upon it, nor descend to her feet.

There was no machine, of course—they were much too broke to buy or to rent one, even if she could ride, much less loiter upon it—but Michael sounded so convincing that by this time they were all believing she had entered Grasse on a bicycle parked around some corner. Michael tinged like a bell, the gendarme, entranced, tinged back, and they all went to a café to have a small glass together. Half an hour later, after several glasses, they separated, good friends, with Madame still trousered, proceeding on foot, unrebuked.

"Tell me more."

But retold it was brittle, immature, childish.

"It must have been fun," Debby said wistfully, *and how,* her eyes added, *can you put this dull man in my father's place? How can you want to marry Crosby after marrying Michael?*

Want, Martia thought, *how young a word.* The fierce love she felt for Debby ached in protective pity. Yet why should one feel pity for the young? One should fight for the young, until they can fight for themselves,

and ache for the old, and to inaudible questions give inaudible answers.

She lingered, looking down at the fishing pole, remembering a scene three years before when a grave Debby confided in agitation that she had been kissed, for the first time, by the partner taking her to a Junior Prom.

"You handled that very well," Martia said when the narrative came to an end. "I'm proud of you. Thank you for telling me."

"I shall always tell you anything I think you can understand," Debby said reassuringly, and Martia choked. Fortunately she was smoking; she could blame the cigarette.

"Give my understanding a good trial," she said when she had finished coughing. Debby promised she would.

She looked up now and smiled, and then looked back at the fishing pole. Martia smiled too, dismissing, not rejecting, never rejecting Your Father's child, who looked and moved like Michael, but was always Debby, in her own right.

She waved now to Debby and started on her walk.

✧

SHE WAS WANDERING INLAND FROM THE sea. The vegetable garden looked green and appetizing, with the neatness and precision of the beans, beets and

carrots and the young green corn. That sort of regimentation was acceptable even to one who hated most conformities. She picked a radish, dusted it and chewed on it absent-mindedly. The stone wall by the garage bulged in several places.

Tom, scratching his head, said, "There ain't nothing for her but cement."

Crosby—once at the beginning of their friendship she had shortened his name to Cross; he had not taken it very well—Crosby saw her coming and straightened, smiling his pleasant, well-fed smile, which said, in effect, "What will you have to complain of? I am courteous, well mannered, a good sport."

"But a bore," her stubborn mind replied.

"Tom says we'll have to put a cement wall up," Crosby told her. "He says the frost has heaved again."

"I see it has."

She joined them. At once the subtle coalition between man and man emerged. They shifted their feet and began to show off in their different ways.

"Cement wall? Won't that be expensive?" Martia asked, staring between them.

"Less than it would if the wall came down and took the road with it."

Crosby sounded irritated. Tom gave him a quick glance and a slow grin as if to say, Women! What do they know about money, making or spending it?

Martia reflected that she paid his salary. She had supported herself and Debby for fourteen years. The business she built up was doing well, better than Crosby's. She smiled, but he was frowning.

"Don't you think you'll like a cement wall there?"

"If it's going to fall down we must have one, I suppose, but I shall miss those rough rocks. They go with the place."

Deep Seas was hers, Crosby would marry into it. She could remember when it was the only house on the cliff, except for a farmhouse that burned. Crosby came after the hotel and the cabins were opened. He was always planning "to improve the place." It was good that he loved it. What would he find to do with his week ends and vacations if a wall didn't fall down or the well run dry? He was giving up his own neat suburban place to be there. Most men would have wanted to be nearer to their work. Thank goodness he didn't plan to make her live in Halifax—"go to Hell or Halifax!" She gave him a nicer smile.

"Cement will look all right when it dries," she said. "I suppose it will be streaky with white. The kind they use here is full of salt."

There she was again, telling him, always telling him. Couldn't she remember not to be the oldest inhabitant? It must be irritating. She waved contritely as she turned out of the gate and started on her walk. She took the

same walk each day, up the hill, through the village, past the wharves, across the stream by the wooden bridge, into the woods and along the cliff. From the top of the hill the village spread out below, seventeen shingled houses, a church with a broken tower, a gray shed, the school. Most of the houses had patches in front where flowers and grass struggled for supremacy and the grass won.

Nets, lobster pots and rubber boots, old trawl tubs and bits of rope lay scattered on the dilapidated porches needing paint. It was a fishing village; no one "bothered his time" with the land, good rich earth. French peasants would have cultivated every inch, and terraced the hillsides to make them productive. Here they chucked in a few potatoes, some turnips, and that was all; yet they were poor, poorer than a French peasant. Few made more than eight hundred dollars a year from the fishing. On that they sat and spat and raised large families, providing local color for passing artists. There was one painting from the hillside now. If she went on she must pass near him. She hesitated, half deciding to cut short her walk. Then a memory of Crosby's solid figure and unimaginative face, of Crosby expanding under Tom Dillon's flattery, made her want to walk on, go farther, stay away from Deep Seas, Crosby's Deep Seas, longer, even though artists, their easels, their canvases, their paraphernalia of familiar sorts, sometimes

their silly berets, were capable of hurting her sharply.

She halted again when she saw the crutches. This time she would have turned back, but he had seen her, and it seemed more pointed to go than to stay. She walked forward slowly. When she reached his shoulder she saw that he was young and that he had lost his left leg above the knee. He was not wearing an artificial one. He had the folded trouser neatly shortened over the stump, and the stump itself rested on a canvas camping stool. She guessed that even if he could afford an "appliance," as the glossing word went, he would find it heavy and cumbersome, hot and a nuisance. Crutches were difficult too. His were lying on a boulder beside him.

He looked up at her, frowning. Then he put down his palette.

"I wonder if you'd do something for me," he said. "I hate to trouble you, but I need help."

Her heart quickened with astonishment as she heard his voice. He speaks like Michael! half her mind warned her with a sick dismay. The other half said angrily, You would imagine that! Because he's dark and painting in a beret, and you are in a mood, you would imagine that!

But she knew it was true, the chance resemblance did exist, and she would pay presently in heightened loneliness for this casual exchange of conversation and for ab-

surdly craving more of the clipped speech with the faint divergence in it that came, in Michael's voice, from a lifetime in France.

"Yes," she said quickly, "of course. I shall be glad. Please tell me what I can do for you."

"I've dropped a tube of paint over the cliff," he said. "It rolled onto the beach and I can see it there, but I can't get down to it. I hate to trouble you, but I'm afraid the tide will get it, and I need it."

She leaned to look where he pointed, and saw the glint of the metallic tube among the rocks and logwood drift of the beach.

"I'll get it," she said with an urgency out of all proportion to the project. She began to scramble down the steep path to the rocks. She heard the clipped voice behind her saying wearily to itself, "And now what shall I do?"

✧

A SLOW BREEZE STIRRED, LIFTING THE HEAVY sea-scented air. The metallic glint receded, twirled, became a lighthouse, far below a mountain. She was in a garden with small precise flagged paths and peach trees trained against stone walls. She was twenty-two, in Cagnes, and Michael stood beside her.

It was the day he decided not to be a painter.

"I haven't got it in me."

"I think——"

"Or if I have, it won't come out. I shall never be first-rate. Or good. Modigliano thinks so too."

"Michael . . ."

What was there to say? It was probably true. He would never be great, and if not great, why paint?

"There are enough second-rate daubers in the world, and all the would-be arty—no," he told her.

He stood very straight in his rusty sail-cloth slacks, looking over the garden, across the sleeping village to the starlit Mediterranean, saying in his weary desperate way, "and now what shall I do?" She knew how to answer Michael. "I love you," and a moment later: "Drive . . ."

They had driven all night, furiously, in the old open Renault, along the Corniche, back into the hills, everywhere, nowhere, finally reaching home, swinging into the garage with its perilous twist above the cobbled road, stumbling out, through the same garden, thick with the dews of dawn, into the house and into bed. He had taken her brutally, mechanically, and fallen asleep at once, heavily in her arms. When he awoke some of the angry pain was dead—some of Michael, too. They burned the canvases together and put away the paint.

There was one tube left, glinting on the beach, and

a man with Michael's voice asking, "What shall I do?" She could not say "I love you" nor yet "Drive!" but she wanted to help him if she could. She was superstitious and crazily muddled when she felt that here was a chance to do something for Michael.

✧ ✧ ✧

SHE BRUSHED AT HER ARM. THE HORNET was there again, about to sting, or else the PAIN drew near. There was Something hovering close to her seat, for she was in her seat, in a plane, she knew that much, and she was smiling wryly, in the darkness, remembering herself and Michael in the garden at Cagnes. Set against the horrors and sorrows of the atomic age, their sorrow seemed absurdly young and small, but in the twenties it was Tragedy. It took from Michael his pattern of living; later, she thought, it had taken more. There was a sibilant, swishing sound, of the sea, or of traffic round an island, a safety island. She put her hand to her head, to push away the descending weight, the constricting band, coming in the place of PAIN.

✧ ✧ ✧

SHE WAS WEARING A NEW HAT. AS SHE crossed the Avenue Henri Martin, toward the Trocadero, a man called after her: *"T'es jolie, quoi!"*—casual, impertinent, gay.

She walked on, smiling. It was like looking in a mirror, checking on her make-up, being reassured. When no man murmured after her in the streets of Paris she would know that she had reached the Shelf. She had an absurd vision of a long linen closet. Whose shelf? God's? Pious women giving themselves a trifle complacently to the Lord when no one else would have them—was it their shelf? Well, she was not on it yet; perhaps she never would be.

She was boarding the Tramvay Dix-Neuf, which would take her across Paris, ambling, creaking, jerking, to the Rive Gauche. She could have traveled by the métro, it was quicker, but that would have meant two changes and a long walk at the end. The bag carrying her equipment was heavier than it looked; besides, she could afford the time, she liked the trip.

The conductor blew his shrill tin horn like a child's toy from a Christmas stocking.

"Tout le monde est servi?"

It was an absurd, delightful way of talking about tickets—everybody served. The French knew commercial transactions were redeemed by ceremonial, of the right, not the phony, hearty sort. Carefully she cradled her camera on her lap as he counted out the change. She was going to a serious assignment, a challenge. She was to photograph the Cluny for the series *Museums of Paris*. Michael was doing the Carnivalet, which was more difficult. Cluny would be photogenic no matter

what she did. Still, she hoped to do something original.

They skirted the quais, sliding discreetly past the Place de la Concorde at its lower end. Here was the river. Soon they would be crossing to the other side, "the real side," Michael called it. He had studied oil and line and life, in the Quarter, lunching Chez Rosalie on onion soup and hope. He had walked the Boulevard Saint Germain, sat at round-top tables, talking—how they all talked, the artists, their models, and their friends! That was the reason why she would be the one to photograph Cluny, and Michael stay as he always did, on the other side, the Rive Droite. It was the reason why they lived in the Rue des Marronniers, in Passy, in a modern apartment house, as far removed from the Luxembourg and the little cramped gray houses of the past (hers and his, for she had been a student too) as right bank was from left bank.

The Rue des Marronniers was smart, modern, a new development "on the American plan," its promoters said, though she had seen nothing like it in America. It was clean, large and nondescript. It overlooked the Seine. It was terraced out of a hillside of stone, with its main entrance on the fifth floor. An elevator descended to the floors beneath, where there was another entrance giving on the quais. Their apartment was on the sixth floor, which made it ten stories over the river—eleven if one counted the *entresol*—yet only two from the main

entrance. That, Michael always said, was chic. It was a pleasant apartment, sunny, gay, it "presented" well. People, friends and clients, liked to come there. Michael called them all "contacts." He kept his office and his darkroom in the Rue Cambon, conveniently near the Ritz.

Michael himself was chic, or, as one put it then, "the rage," *the* fashionable photographer of the thirties. He had arrived. She smiled sometimes, remembering the beginnings, one secondhand camera, one corner of the bathroom washbasin, one inflated water bill, one deflated artist. It was good for Michael, they had decided together, to salvage so much of his equipment, mental and emotional, his flair for group and line, his original treatment, his artist's grasp of the essence of a subject. This was eyewash, of course. Michael had failed as a painter, he was making good as a photographer—that was how his clear-eyed friends would sum it up.

"Now, *chère* Madame, he has found himself."

"How lucky for him to have you to assist him!"

Yes, Michael had made an assistant of her.

"What fun it must be to work together!"

Yes, it had been fun. His friends were right. Friends? She would have said Michael had no friends, only acquaintances. This was natural, since he would permit no one from his old life as a painter even to come to tea. He was French enough to expect tea, as a fourth meal,

as a matter of course. He enjoyed gatherings and apéritifs. He was wholly European, child of expatriates. He had never been to America. He spoke of "home" sometimes, meaning vaguely "somewhere over there," but he had no roots in the United States.

His acquaintances were expatriates too, members of the international intelligentsia of the thirties, writers of the Cocteau school, would-be followers of Gertrude Stein, inordinate admirers of Proust, devotees of the ballet, drawing-room politicians, rich Americans who had married titles, English eccentrics, Argentine buyers, men and women who for some reason or another temporarily "had arrived," hangers-on who did hang on when anyone arrived, and of course all of them clients, clients of Michael and Martia, of dearest Michael, of darling Martia.

She was too American to suit this light-minded, bubble-tongued, brilliant, bitter group gathered around Michael. She was shocked sometimes, and of course they knew it, by the things they took for granted.

"Elementary, my dear Watson," they would say about depravity, perversion, selfishness. That decency could be "elementary" or even exist—ah, that was side-splitting to them. *"Sans blague,"* did she believe in such schoolgirl virtues as courage, compassion, unselfishness? "Ah, *ce pauvre* Michel!" Doubtless hers was a line such as American women, one heard, were fond of

taking, but an outmoded line. When would she mature? they asked themselves, and they asked her. Why not grow up, be *"à la page"* with the rest? Then she had found herself thinking of farm land in New Hampshire or Vermont, of small New England towns, of Burlington, where her father taught history for thirty years, coming home one day to die of a heart attack, unobtrusively, as he had lived, without a fuss.

Those *numéros* around Michael would have found him dull. She admitted that their talk was stimulating, brilliant, amusing, that it made one think, in a superficial way. It was only when they ganged up on her, taking Michael with them, to laugh at her naïveté, her uncouthness as a member of the crude American mass, that she minded them. Toward the end Michael had a way of looking at her, quizzical, superior, astonished, from a height—none of that described it well. It was more a puzzled weariness, a lonely look. Yet toward the end she was making better headway with his friends because of her work. They respected work. Everything else was *blagues,* but work. By that they meant of course the artist's work, especially if it did not make a vulgar amount of money. Nowadays, lip service of respect was paid to all the things that Michael's friends debunked, but no one respected work unless it did make money, and then it was not the work which counted, but the money. Shoddy work for large

amounts of "cash rewards" appeared to be the goal. Then it was different. Morality and pride lay in one's work. The best-selling sensation of the moment was not important; it might even be held against one. What mattered was the artist's growth, the worker's development, the undeviating fidelity to a high standard of quality, whether in a painting, a photograph or a pair of shoes.

There were good things she had done with Michael, and good or acceptable things she had done alone—for example, her study of the three men fishing and the tramp asleep, on a gray February day. She had been lucky to find the material already half composed, but the angle and the lighting were new, and something intangible in the mood was hers. The picture took two prizes and was widely reproduced. It made Michael's friends accord her a toehold on their climbing vine. She was not brushed aside so often as someone negligible, there to hand them food, drink and cigarettes, to be greeted on arrival and departure with the straying eye, looking over her shoulder to equals beyond.

She had liked the people of the Midi better, the painters, their wives and mistresses, models, cooks, contrivers, always forward-looking, often gay. They were her real friends. Michael in dropping them from his life removed them from hers. It was not her fault that he failed as a painter; it was not her doing that he suc-

ceeded as a fashionable fad-of-the-moment photographer, although she did feel, she knew, to be honest, she had softened the failure and helped on the success. That was marriage, to help, to console, to love, to collaborate, though Michael chose to spell it differently.

✧ ✧

MARRIAGE. MARRIAGE WITH CROSBY WOULD spell security, strange fetish of the inhabitants of a planet circling round a star, one of the smallest stars. Did other planets, circling round their stars, invisible to earth as earth was invisible to them, spawn creatures babbling of security? Marriage with Crosby would mean giving up the studios in New York. She would like that. It would mean being able to live six months of the year at Deep Seas. She would like that. It would mean being able to give the children—Ned, Penelope and Debby—the sane, quaint values of a vanished world. She would like that. Marriage with Crosby—she would like *that!*

It was absurd to imagine that such reasonable plans of solidarity, affection, marriage could be threatened by inflections in a passing stranger's voice. Now she reached the bottom of the path, crossed the beach and started back with the paint tube in her hand. She had no recollection of the moment when she stooped to pick

it up. So much of life ran on with half the mind away. She had an impulse to uncap the tube, squeeze it till all the red ran out, twist it and toss it to the sea, but she held it gingerly as a retriever mouths a bird, and brought it with her carefully to the top of the cliff. Her head came level with the easel on its dwarfed legs, specially arranged for a crippled man to use. She rose above it, and above the crippled man, feeling self-conscious and clumsy on her two sound legs.

"Don't tower so!" she imagined him shouting with Michael's voice, but "Did you find it?" was all that he said.

"Yes, here."

He took it, turned it over and put it to one side; then he looked through her, frowning absently, and went on painting. She wondered how he could work with conviction when he could not step back to get the right perspective.

She wanted to tell him, "I know how it is to be too close to the subject, pushed up to the canvas, held in front of life." She thought of Crosby. Perhaps if she could step back, hold up pencil or paintbrush to Crosby, get him in perspective, erase a little here and there, now and then . . . She laughed. The boy looked up at her, surprised.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to disturb you." She hesitated. "May I look?"

"There's nothing to see. I've only started it." He leaned back. "I think I'll break off for lunch."

"Abstractionist?" she murmured, her eye on his work. She liked the broad sweep of the outline, the out-of-focus sea, the strange collection of boulders in the foreground, where no boulders could or should be.

"Not necessarily," he said, lighting a cigarette.

"Where are you staying?" she asked presently.

"At the Digby Pines."

"That's an hour away. Would you care to lunch with me? I—we would be delighted. We live down the road."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I would like to very much, but it takes so long to move me." He glanced down at his leg. "And I have my lunch here."

"Can I help you unpack it?" she asked, adding absurdly, as though it explained everything: "My name is Martia Deane."

He smiled. "No thank you. I'm waiting for my brother. My name is Spade. Here's Don now."

So casually one rounds a turning point! A boy swinging out of the woods, a cripple watching him, set tangled values right, made compromise with some things impossible. The pendulum of the world ticked true again. She went home free of Crosby. The awkward confirming words were spoken later, the transition dragged through the summer, but the decision, the

conviction, the conversion came in that long moment in the field above the sea, in Nova Scotia, when she first met Dick and Donald Spade.

Eight years later Debby married Don.

✧

EIGHT SIGNIFICANT YEARS, 1938–1947, YEARS of World War II and of the bomb, years of stress, anxiety, achievement and change; years of travel as a photographer-war-correspondent, covering many countries; years of professional achievement, of grinding work, of expanding the Deane studios, shorthanded; years of money pressures to meet the bills for Debby's college, and her own life in New York—febrile, brittle, nerve-racked, crowded, dangerous, sordid, brilliant, beautiful New York!

The world's greatest artists were there, exiled permanently or temporarily from Europe, and so were the drunks and the dopes and the men on leave and their women. What a gallery of faces she caught in those years of her greatest work! That was how she would have described them on the surface, eight significant years, but beneath the surface?

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita . . ."

"To Carthage I came . . ."

To Carthage and to Clive.

✧ ✧ ✧

A STIR, A COMMOTION ROUND HER, BROUGHT her back to the plane, to her seat, to the head of the man in front of her, lifting, startled, to all the inquiring heads. She bent to the window. There was nothing to be seen but gray clouds, in an empty sky, only it could not be empty. It was full of menacing, imminent sound. Once before she had heard a noise like this, over Cazes Field in Casablanca, at the height of the Green Project, carrying 40,000 veterans a month home by the Skyrocket run. Planes were landing every six minutes, all around the clock, B-17s, C-46s, C-54s and Flying Fortresses, in formations of scores, zooming down through blinding dust, one on the tail of another, in what was then the largest air movement of troops in history. That was a long time ago. Planes made a different noise now; planes looked different now—eerie, half alive, growing more intelligent, more independent every passing hour, only it was they who passed the hours, passed the minutes, passed the seconds, in their superspeed. Soon they would overtake and pass the speed of light.

They nosed out of their hangars with the first gray light, filling the skies with roar and hum and sharp staccato, the sound that she heard now. It was not the

rush of wings, the steady stroke of pinions, these were not wild swans, creaking by in flight, this was the hoarse crescendo of engines made by man.

Monks and nuns sang of them at vespers on Thursday afternoons. "They have mouths and speak not; eyes have they but they see not. They have ears and yet they hear not, neither is there any breath in their mouths."

They have wings, stiff and silent, wings that cannot beat the air. They have faces, secretive, knowing, brooding and inhuman. They are man's new idols, travesties of the Birds of God. They are the Djinns.

"They that make them," chant the monks and nuns, "are like unto them, so are all they that put their trust in them."

Stronger wings than theirs are traveling the skies, these empty-seeming skies, full of the raw stuff of continuous creation—dust, noise, hydrogen, dark, invisible stars, hissing at the earth as the sun is hissing.

She had read in the morning paper—was it that morning—an editorial casually mentioning "a hundred thousand million of these radio stars." At first her eyes registered, and her mind recoiled before, a vision of endless made-up faces with enormous smiling lips. She read on: "If we could see them they would appear as overlapping blurs—" and that would still apply to Hollywood, to Television, to the Stars of Stage and Screen, but then the article continued—"so that star-

light would perfuse the whole sky." *Perfuse* was a rare, right word. She had looked it up in Webster's, where it was not given, and in the little Oxford dictionary she carried with her from her English days, where, of course, she found it: "Perfuse, besprinkle (with water, etc.); cover, suffuse (with radiance, etc.); pour (water, etc.) through or over." It was the *et ceteras* which counted, as in the Cummings poem Clive had sent her once.

Clive would like this discussion of the hissing stars. It was so much how he thought, how they talked together. Clive might have written the article. "Hisses are heard that mean as much as the bands and lines of the solar spectrum," or as little. She saw him shrug. "Black regions in the Milky Way are full of dust, but the radio waves pass through it, as they do through mountains and houses when we listen to broadcast speech. Buried in these black regions are stars that we shall never see. Hisses have already revealed that the sun is twice as big, in a radio sense, as it looks. The hissing of the stars bears no relation to the music of the spheres in which ancient Greece believed, yet it is music of a kind to ears that can be attuned to it. The universe turns out to be much dustier and noisier than we ever dreamed it was."

"Not than my dream," Clive would have said, obsessed as he was against noise, making a hero of Harold

Ross, not for anything he had done with *The New Yorker* but because he got the singing commercials out of Grand Central Station. Could even Ross get hissing stars out of the sky? The sound changed now to something more like the subway, and from that to a large pneumatic drill. She was in a car on her way to Debby's wedding, and of course they were digging up the streets.

✧

DEBBY WAS MARRIED IN THE CHURCH OF the Ascension, on Tenth Street and Fifth Avenue, on one of the hottest days of the year. It was odd for Martia to be at any wedding without a camera. "Let Deane's Bridal Book record your Bridal Day." "Let Deane's Pictorial Record Immortalize *Your* Wedding!" Let your toothy smiles pay for Debby Deane's tuition.

Now Martia faced "immortalization"—not immortality—in all the incongruous panoply of Mother-of-the-Bride. There was nobody to share the joke, no wry, intimate smile among the festive grins and grimaces. She drove to the church in a large black limousine, solid antithesis to any car she would want to own. A ghost-procession of battered convertibles, from the first baby Austin to the last Ford, ranged alongside, flicking their windshield wipers at her derisively. She was alone on the stuffed, upholstered seat, yet there was a compan-

ion there, not "your father," certainly not Michael. The man who came to sit beside her on that empty seat was the man who came most often to take his place on the empty seats and empty occasions of her life. It was Clive.

It varied, of course, according to the occasions, which Clive came. The Clive of public encounters in wartime trains and restaurants, the Clive of private encounters in apartments and hotel bedrooms, the different Clive of the letters, read around the world, in the most incongruous places, and some appropriate ones, the reproachful, silent Clive who felt himself betrayed, or the mad disarming Clive, laughter brought hurrying to share and enhance a joke. These jumbled, overlapping Clives took life beside as many jumbled overlapping Martias. Sometimes they all arrived at once and were hard to exorcise.

✧

SHE MET HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE Rentons, outside Washington. People were playing bridge and she was annoyed with herself for being there. She could have gone straight home after the committee meeting, on the Congressional, instead of coming to the Rentons for the week end to find the place stuffed full of characters, a hodgepodge of uncon-

nected wartime transients. She sighed impatiently. An echo of her sigh sounded beside her. She looked up defiantly, prepared to be resentful of mockery, but Clive, sighing again, was unaware that she existed, was unaware of anything except the gloomy and engrossing thoughts that made him sigh.

She looked at him curiously. He was in his forties then, dressed in a blue suit, too hot for the time of year, too formal for the country, expensive, well cut, yet suggesting someone who had forgotten the role clothes played, who had forgotten more significant things. She studied him covertly. Those wrinkled lines around the eyes, the general set of the head, even the way he was sitting—uncomfortably perched on the arm of a chair, rigid and still—suggested lookouts, space, responsibility, the sea; or was that the strange effect of Ruth's paneled room?

His face was stern, bleak in profile, with a chin on the line of hers, a prominent high-bridged nose out of proportion to the rest, thin, sensitive lips drawn tight at the corners, signs of a beard, black like his hair. His hands were clasped together, the knuckles showing white, everything about him taut with fatigue. He sighed again, unconsciously, from far away. It was embarrassing to overhear that small despairing sound.

A burst of noise from the bridge players brought him back from wherever he was to the room, to the rubber at the nearest table coming to an end. He turned toward

Martia. He had the gray eyes she expected, but the expression in them startled her.

"Is there a garden?" he asked. He hesitated, looking about him.

"Outside, where gardens usually are."

"Could we take a turn in it?"

They passed between box hedges along a flagged path to the lawn. Most of the flowers were over, honeysuckle, iris, lilies; the peonies, never very good, were passing with the roses, but enough blooms hung on the great white-rose hedge to fill the air with heavy sweetness. The white flowers could be seen in the half-light. She stopped to pick one, and held it out. He took it from her, sniffed it, let it fall. They wandered on. The lawn sloped to another rose-covered wall, beyond it rolling hills blotted out the stars. He opened the gate. The road, a highway going south, was black in the starlight.

It was like gliding above a dark canal. They were invisible from the knees downward; their footsteps made no sound; only a slight jar as each shoe came in contact with the asphalt told her that she was walking, that she was tired. She knew the power of fatigue, how it heightened perception, how it pulled down barriers built of self-control. It was only under the influence of extreme fatigue that she was tempted to talk of herself. This was such a time, but Clive had talked instead, in a flood of words, poured out to himself, to her,

a transference of mood, her own compulsion speaking. His need to confide, his fatigue, were greater than hers.

He talked of the bridge that first strange night.

"Do you agree," he asked in the darkness beside her, "that love is a thing to work at? There's a forest, you want to reach it, there's a river running between you and the trees. You must build a bridge if you want to explore, if you want to know the fields and the hills beyond. Some people won't work at throwing up a bridge, they attack their forests with jeeps and amphibious tanks. They conquer, but there are scars on the bank and all the inhabitants have disappeared. They're more alone than they were before. Others don't even want a bridge. They like to keep their fields to themselves. They come to the bank from time to time and wave across it."

Which kind was she?

Bridges were things best left to engineers, she decided, especially bridges built in a hurry. But she would never cross one without a pang or, if *pang* were too large a word, without awareness of what a bridge should be. A bridge, according to the dictionary he gave her later, was "a structure of iron, stone or wood, spanning a river, road, valley, etc." It was also "the block on which the strings of a musical instrument rest." To build a bridge was "to make a passage, to find a way of overcoming." In the mastery of that one art of construction man had all he needed to live well.

Bridges nowadays were used for the transport of guns, troops, equipment, prisoners. Daily blown up, they were daily rebuilt. That was what one wanted—a bridge that would be daily rebuilt, that could be used for reinforcements in the desperate conflict of man against life and that in the end would stand. Yes, eventually, white in the sunlight, spanning a river cleared of war's debris, the bridge would serve as passage for such innocent things as donkey's feet, bringing loaded panniers of fruit and food from farm to market; children would cross the bridge, and dogs, and later, in the evening, lovers. The moon would rise, the stars shine, the bridge stand, and it would be their bridge.

She turned, sighing; she was half asleep. A man's long, crooked fingers pushed hers aside. There was a brown stain on the first two of the right hand. She smiled indulgently. "That new developer," she murmured. "Michael, here's a pumice stone." She held it out, but the hands ignored her. They were busy swiftly unraveling the pattern in the counterpane, tearing it softly, scientifically, to pieces. They had no right to be there. She nerved herself to push them away.

✧ ✧

SHE STRUGGLED UP THROUGH SEAS OF SLEEP. It seemed to her that she was on a cross-channel steamer. A steward was bringing her soup. He made an in-

ordinate noise with the spoon against the dish and she was rebuking him for being voluntarily a member of the master race when she opened her eyes.

The room was unfamiliar, the window and the fireplace confusing, not in their right relationship; for a dazed half-minute she circled through houses and places she had known, then it came to her that she was in Ruth Renton's guest room. The clinking of the dishes she had noticed in her dream persisted; it grew louder. The door opened. Ruth came in, balancing a tray. Martia drew up her feet to make room for her on the bed. They smiled at each other, the easy, confident smile of old, familiar friends.

If it were true that "good and evil keep strict accounts and each man's face is a ledger," Ruth's had balanced, after some difficult crossing out and writing in of figures, to show a credit in serenity. When she spoke, Martia felt as though the jaws of a plier came together, holding a subject firmly, turning it this way and that, until it was exhausted and could be laid aside. The subject was Clive.

"When you went walking together, what did he talk about?"

"Nothing much." Things defined became things distorted.

"Did he tell you his convoy was torpedoed?"

"No."

"Did he talk of his wife?"

A shadow moved across the quilted sunburst on Martia's knees.

"No."

"Surface charm, easygoing, incessant talker," Ruth said viciously, "with prominent blue eyes, and by that I mean plausible, insincere, bulgy-eyed, a shark with wispy claws, and I don't care what you say of my metaphors. She's kept him in hell. But the boy's a lamb. Did he tell you about David?"

"No."

"I suppose he still can't talk about it."

"Why, what's the matter with David?"

"In the Marine Hospital on Staten Island, with both feet burned off. He was in the convoy with Clive. Didn't you see the pictures?"

"Oh," Martia said slowly, "*that* convoy. Yes, I saw those pictures. As a matter of fact I took some of them." Not Clive—she would have remembered, she remembered for years, forever, the faces that she took—but other human-interest studies, her specialty. She was becoming "known," as known as Michael, for "shots that tell a story." It was the reason why she had come to Washington and why she would soon be on her way "to cover twenty countries," as a press photographer, a civilian war correspondent with the rank of captain, "if captured by the enemy." So that only colonels or generals might rape her? It was absurd to talk about "covering countries" like being asked to dinner "to bal-

ance a bishop." That had happened to her once and Clive loved the story.

Clive cared for words, for the right turn of phrase, for exactitude of meaning with a passion, surprising in a man of his profession, until one remembered Conrad or thought of Pierre Loti. Clive was a writer who sailed, not a sailor who wrote. Clive hated clichés, verbosity and junk.

✧

SHE HAD SAILED IN A JUNK TOO ONCE, ON the Arabian Sea, a dhow with a long-pointed sail, manned by a crew of three and a captain-pilot. The three crewmen squatted on the end of a board jutting overside, to counteract the listing of the boat. When it was necessary to tack, every few minutes, they would run to the other side, carrying the board, insert the end of it under two ropes and squat as before. Winds were known there as "one-man wind," "two-man wind," "three-man wind," depending on the number of squatters. The captain-pilot knew English; he explained these things. His voice was agreeable and soft, but it was ridiculous for him—or for the young pilot of this plane she was in, for that matter—to address her as "my child."

"My child, if you can hear me, make a sign of ac-

knowledgment." She would do nothing of the sort, but when her head cleared and the PAIN backed away, she would give him to understand what she thought of this mode of address. There were only two people who might call her their child. One was dead; the other, Father Kenelm of the Anglo-Catholic Church of Saint Mary, had his own idea of a Three-Man Wind, blowing where It listed. She would make signs of acknowledgment to him if he asked her to. Meanwhile here was Ruth, making signs of another kind, understood by all women, Ruth ranging up alongside in the absurd old-fashioned station wagon the Rentons clung to.

She had disliked it when Ruth bought it. It was ostentatious and superstreamlined then. Now it was tall, top-heavy, ridiculous, appealing. It was only when the modern got out of date that it could take a personal place in her life. For her to become fond of a machine—or of a person?—it must have lovable defects and be valiant in spite of them, even a little pleased with itself, like the old battered brief case Clive took from her hands as they ran together for the train.

✧

CROWDS FLOWED FORWARD—MEN IN UNIform, women in uniform, women with babies, women with crazy hats over anxious faces, white faces, black

faces, redcaps—all converging on the train, complacently waiting for them, gleaming, streamlined, sure of itself and insolent.

They got into the third car, walked through two more, carrying their suitcases, and finally came upon an empty seat. She slid into it gratefully, watching Clive's strong hands flip the bags easily into place. Normally she would have had to tug at them with an effort, cannoned into as she bent over, pulling her suit out of crease. Probably she would have cracked a fingernail. Then some enormous woman smelling of sweat would have crowded in beside her, or a man reeking of garlic, or a sticky-fingered child. That was wartime civilian travel. A feeling of guilt accompanied it that one was traveling at all, and of course one must not complain of the run-down rolling stock the company put over for the highest fares. They were lucky, there seemed to be air-conditioning this time, and the seats were almost clean.

The train started; she had the sudden small tight certainty of smooth-moving hours that would never come again, set apart in the miniature world of this upholstered seat, beside a man who, though he did not know it—of course he could not know it—had the power to hammer her awake, to bring her alive. It hurt to be "brought to," to the Martia Deane who *was* Mar-

tia Deane, but even PAIN was better than the deadness of the colorless automaton for so long taking Martia's place.

The train gathered speed; a small uneasy panic gathered too, keeping time beside it. She moved. His shoulder moved toward her; illogically panic subsided; she touched him, she felt safe. She talked then, ducking under words, about books, people and things.

He had always liked things, he told her—houses, chimneys, roofs, earth, tools. One of the satisfactions of his job was taking cargoes of useful, needed things and delivering them safely where they were most wanted. One of the horrors of his war was seeing cargoes lost. "I never could bear waste. There seem to be two kinds of people: those—" he pointed to a house in dilapidation—"who can own a place like that and let it rot, and those who are always trying to improve or to conserve or to construct."

She looked over his arm as he pointed. The road flashed by in compositions, glimpses, angles like the angle shots of the nineteen-thirties, when she and Michael could see nothing in any view that wasn't at least slightly distorted. They did all those falling bits of Paris, London, Florence, Chartres, carefully mounted, horribly prophetic, some of them. It was a craze and carried too far, but it did make people stop and look

again at too familiar places—the Bodleian Library, for instance, shot on its back with its legs in the air. How irreverent!

"How American!" the Vice-Chancellor commented, but she and Michael got the job of illustrating one of the booklets for the Oxford Preservation Trust, on condition that the photographs were perpendicular and dull. She remembered the darkroom they were offered, in the basement of the Institute of Pathology, full of half-dissected cats. A brighter memory was the Baby Austin parked outside the pub—many pubs.

"Like a glass of water?"

She nodded absently, staring at Havre de Grace, an incongruous name for an American station. She did not see him leave, nor follow his swaying figure down the coach. She was swept to France.

✧ ✧

MICHAEL WAS NOT IN THE OFFICE NOR IN the darkroom when she arrived. There were only the smell of musty acids and a string of negatives hanging from the line. She was disappointed. She enjoyed working with Michael. She remembered the first time they shut themselves together in the darkroom, bending over trays with liquids, mysterious to her, swishing in them; watching images appear on paper, snatching

pictures out in time . . . there was a magic of enlargement, a sort of drunk-with-power feeling she got from nothing else.

You could create, you could improve upon creation. You could distort, you could leave out the central figure proudly posing, to make a masterpiece of the paving stone beneath his feet. You could change all values, sharpening this, reducing that. You could superimpose.

She liked all the things Michael didn't—mixing the acids, getting the hypo to dissolve, washing the trays, dusting the lenses, and, best of all, at the end of the long process, using the cutter, making the margins white and straight, pasting the finished print on the cardboard mount. Michael liked taking the pictures, conceiving and composing them. He liked playing tricks with development, retarding or intensifying. He liked montage, retouching, faking. They collaborated well together, overlapping their activities.

But now he wasn't here. She put out a finger to touch the drying film. It was quite dry; it was yesterday's work. Michael hadn't come in, then, from the Carnivalet. He must be waiting for an afternoon shot; late light was his specialty. He would be here any moment; meanwhile she would get her own film started and out of the way. She took off her coat, put on her overall, reached for the heavy bottle of developer, and forgot to take off her hat.

The doorbell rang. She ignored it while she put the slippery bottle down. Michael could wait for a moment, since he'd forgotten his key. The ringing grew more insistent. Now there was knocking too.

"Michael," she called, "I'm coming as fast as I can. Don't be a fool!"

The bell rang again, urgently.

"Wait a moment, can't you? I've got the acids half poured out."

No voice answered, only a thunderous knocking and a creaking sound as though he were trying to break down the door in his impatience.

"Curse you!" she said, laughing. "Oh, very well!" and ran to open it.

Two policemen stepped inside, mangling her name in unison. When they had made her understand what had happened, what they wanted, she went with them, into the street, into the car, just as she was. She sat between them in an acid-stained white overall and a smart red hat, asking two questions over and over: "But how? But why?"

They told her how. Michael had jumped from the window. Why—he had left a note. An inspector from the Sureté had it; he was waiting to speak to her. They drew up by the lower entrance from the quais instead of the main door that she used. They were making automatically for the scene of the "occurrence" they had

left. Getting out of the taxi, Martia saw the crowd, the man with the sand and sawdust, the blood in the gutter. Everything else that was Michael had been taken away . . .

. . . to the morgue, the policeman said.

The crowd murmured at the sight of her: *"C'est la femme!"* Everywhere she heard it—*"C'est la femme!"*

They were still looking up. She looked up too, seeing the open window; eleven stories up. Michael must have knocked over the window box. There were scattered nasturtiums and earth on the pavement among the stained sawdust and sand. A man was hosing them off into the gutter. In a little while it would be clean.

They took her arm. The police were clearing a path for her.

"C'est la femme!"

Because they came in the wrong way they had a long trip up in the elevator, silently, the three of them, until it came to rest. The apartment door was open. She hesitated in front of it.

"Courage, Madame!" the policemen said, propelling her in. The inspector from the Sureté was waiting in the hall. He was fat and bald and complacently sure of himself. Sureté was a good name for the force he represented. He was sure about everything. Sure, for instance, that foreigners were a nuisance, always *"des histoires."* Before he would answer her questions he

required to be told everything—that she was pregnant, that Michael had known she was pregnant, that he desired a baby, that he desired her. . . . The inspector nodded. The concierge, already grilled, had been specific about the "relations" between her and her husband. The police surmised, for instance, he informed her, that Michael had taken her that morning, *"comme d'habitude."*

Eventually he gave her the note Michael had written. "Not my wife's fault. *Pas la faute de ma femme.* Michael Deane."

They continued questioning her then, gently, tactfully, relentlessly, until they were satisfied. They said they were satisfied, returning her identity papers one by one.

"Satisfied?"

"That this note is true, that you did not, in fact, murder your husband or otherwise cause his death."

They left with many assurances of regret and mention of the proper authorities to consult about the funeral. They left, and she was alone, with the unborn Debby.

He thought of her at the last, enough to scrawl a message, even to translate it for the French police—but not enough to stay, or to explain.

Images filled her mind as she sat on the edge of the chair, holding the note: Michael in the boat, his hair raked by the wind; Michael driving the car, leaning,

laughing beside her; Michael chasing fat old Amélie round the garden in Cagnes; Michael singing into her hair as they danced together "Stars Fell on Alabama"; Michael when they were married, borrowing her handkerchief "because weddings make me cry"; Michael, who was dead.

He would come home to explain. Presently he would come in, through the blue twilight deepening outside, *l'heure bleue* that he loved. They would eat together. She half rose to see what there was in the larder for him. Then the note in her hand shouted, "No. He's dead. You'll never see him. He's dead. It was no accident. It was his decision. He planned it. He wanted to die."

She sank to her knees by the chair. He *planned* to leave her and the baby.

Why, Michael, *why?*

✧

SLAM ALL THE DOORS. RUN FROM THE WINdows, from sunlight. Live on the edges of the wasteland, among the alien scorn. That was a good pun, Michael would have liked it.

Purse up the lips, say "the irresolute, the spoiled, the petulant, the shallow-hearted decided that he would die. He rejected the universe."

(Gad, he'd better!)

Reject his rejection of life, of you, of the child. Shore up the heart, blind the eyes to any pitiful image of Michael, finding his desperate courage to die in the grim silence, except for a short scrawled note.

Read it, look at it carefully, as you must look at everything now, through the wrong end of a long glass held to a bright, dry eye. Diminish, diminish, add distance, "let nothing disturb thee, nothing afright," nothing must get within touching range. Be tough, be brittle, be fruitful, be pregnant, be anything, except what you knew you were, alive, and Michael's wife, an alive Michael's wife . . . alive . . . Michael . . .

God be good to me, good to Michael's child!

How shall we survive? How, Michael, *how?*

✧

PRACTICAL THINGS GO ON AFTER A DEATH, she learned. Rent, rates, taxes, telephone calls, commissions, letters come. She was tempted to answer some of them with the brevity of the note:

"It would be delightful to dine with you Tuesday the nineteenth at eight o'clock, but Michael jumped from our window. The funeral was last week."

"Please excuse delay in delivering your proofs. I am shorthanded. My husband jumped from our window. Would you prefer a matte or a glossy finish?"

Finish . . . it is finished . . . *vége* . . .

"The Carnivalet series is missing from the prints that I enclose. The photographer is missing too."

People who "had just heard, my dear" were worst of all. They came in curious droves until, like the police, they were satisfied.

She sold furniture, equipment, cameras, good will, and went "home" to the United States, to have Debby, to work at something alien and exacting, far from any world she and Michael shared. Debby and work to support Debby filled her life. Except for hours when she said "he was never here" and "so stood stricken, so remembering him," except for nights when she joined him, held him close, except for the question always with her, his last bitter gift—Why, Michael, *why?*—he was kept at bay. There was no other woman, nothing so banal, so easily explained; there were no debts, no money troubles, he was doing better than well; he had taken her that morning and left her that noon, that was all. It was nice of him, he would probably have said it was "chic" to exonerate her from blame; she had not been tried for his murder, nor accused of his suicide, in public at least. What more could she want? Irony was a poor substitute for what she had thought she had. There was pride, there was courage, there were things—cars, acquaintances, friends—there were work and money and travel, there were buying and building and

owning and being left Deep Seas, there were distant relatives and a few inquisitive friends, there was the child Debby—there was everything, except what makes a woman's life, or a woman to live that life, for if Michael had never existed, then neither had Martia.

✧ ✧ ✧

"YOUR WATER."

She looked down, bewildered.

Water? Yes, she was thirsty. She took the cardboard cup from the proffering hand, her throat dry with the bitterness of years. She caught the pilot's compassionate glance and realized that she must have been obvious.

Self-pity, she thought wryly, is a very thirsty thing.

"A little surface trouble," he was saying cheerily, "an air pocket or two. Tighten your belt for the bumps. This part of the journey is always a bit rough. That's the reason why some people prefer to take the train. Look deeper. It is better to sleep through what you don't understand."

✧ ✧ ✧

"THERE'S A STORY ATTACHED TO THAT,"

Clive was saying when she got back to him again.

She would never hear it. The train running smoothly in the tunnel was beginning to slow up.

"Where do you live in New York?" He fumbled in his pocket. "Give me your address."

She took notebook and pen from him and wrote her name, her address, her telephone number in a shaky scrawl against the movement of the train.

He read them aloud. "Martia M. Deane. What does the 'M' stand for?"

"Mary."

"I like that. Martia sounds aggressive."

Her pocketbook slid down; he bent to pick it up. She watched the back of his head, absurdly sturdy, like a small boy's.

The conductor passed through the car shouting "Pennsylvania Station." People already arrived in their minds pushed aimlessly forward with their bags. She sat still, reluctant to move, conscious of intimacy brought to an end before it could begin. When they left their small plush world of timelessness and talk they would go separated ways. The tough plant of companionship, the mountain friendship tree, which might have flowered between them, given time, had not been given time.

The train jerked to a stop. It stood shaking its shoulders, rocking with metallic laughter as they both got out. She felt remote and self-conscious as she looked at

him. They were smiling the uncertain smiles of people saying conventional phrases they would like to make less banal. She had photographed that smile on faces moved by a sermon, meeting the man who preached, or people congratulating an actress on a scene that has shaken them.

"I have enjoyed so much . . . " meaning, "You have laid bare in your sermon or your acting or your book things that I know as mine. We must be close to each other, therefore, since we share this truth." But that was not what they said. They were never given time.

People were streaming toward the ramp, picked out, labeled, sorted by her professional eye: soldiers hoping to be met or not expecting it, the difference obvious in their walk; sailors on leave or reporting for duty, with a difference in walking too; civilians hurrying guiltily among the uniforms; and behind the roped-off circle, all the waiting faces with their varying expressions, naked to anyone who looked. No one did look for more than a searching second, before going on to his own concerns.

A sergeant and his girl in a clinch that shouted *"You! You!"* (Comest thou smiling from the world's great snare, uncaught?) divided the stream in the middle. Martia and Clive circled round them. Then she was in a taxi, with her bag, alone.

The cab started with an impatient jerk. He replaced

his hat. He was pushed aside by a group surging into the street and that was the last she saw of him as she was hauled away. The taxi turned into 42nd Street, swinging east. She watched the faces, a summary of concentrated life. Sooner or later everything went by.

Near Broadway there were pitiful painted bobby-sox girls and a crush of out-of-towners; outside Sterns, shoppers, middle-aged, resolute; at Fifth Avenue, more shoppers, mixed with lanky nondescripts, using the library; after Fifth Avenue, thicker-flowing streams; outside Grand Central, greetings and good-bys in every tongue; the Commodore, full of the Navy; restaurants where people waited, milling in and out; presently the strident shabbiness of Third and the El; then Second with its furniture shops, its delicatessens, its width, its clumsy cobbles. Beyond it one came suddenly to the residential security of Tudor City. A trolley thundered underground to its last stop this side the river, glinting in the distance with a barge or two upon it. The taxi rounded the hairpin turn at the end of the road, going toward the hospital. Martia lived in the end white house on the top floor. She paid the taxi and began to climb the stairs, three flights; it might have been worse, but it was always more than enough.

The apartment was hot and airless and small. She pushed the door shut, threw her hat on the couch, turned on the radio and went into the kitchen. She

poured herself a rum-and-soda, filling the glass with stale ice cubes. She felt as though she had come back from a farther place than Washington to a nearer place than 42nd Street. The apartment welcomed her into its small impersonal peace. She shut the door on disturbance, on conjecture, hunger, want, on emotional intensities of any kind.

The telephone rang.

"Yes? . . . You have the wrong number."

She put the receiver down. After a minute it rang again.

"Hello," she said crossly.

"This is Clive Hunt."

"Oh . . . yes."

"Don't ring off again."

"I didn't recognize your voice."

"Will you meet me in the Rainbow Room in half an hour?"

There was a silence. She thought desperately, I wish his voice—when I do recognize it—didn't turn me into a fool!

"Will you come?"

"Yes."

"You'll be sorry," the radio warned with the unctuous conviction of a crooner as she put the receiver down.

"I know," she answered it, "I know."

✣ ✣

HEAT HAZE OVER THE CITY SOFTENED THE edges of buildings, burnished the river copper-pink with lines of shell and a deeper streak of purple near the New Jersey side. They stood looking out, before they ordered their drinks and sat down, with their backs to the view, their shoulders touching. Young lovers at the next table were making good use of their time, so obviously that the violinist with his white make-up recalling Pierrot-qui-rit paused by them playing "People will say we're in love." There was a round of applause. He shifted his fiddle, bowing and smiling. The room was filled with the young—soldiers, sailors, airmen and their girls. There were only four civilian couples; two of these looked as though they might be servicemen on leave.

She envied all of them—the girl in brown with the noisy laugh and the flashing rings; the quiet one in blue, dreaming over her glass; the two WAVES and the insolent blonde with the Marine. They were young. The war was hard, but they had some chance of living through it to a peace which would find them still climbing the crest. They would be able to take a postwar world when it came and to live in it. People would say

of the Joneses, "He was decorated in the war. Now he's in real estate"; and of Clive and of Martia? "They were in both the wars. Now they're on the shelf."

The violinist, smiling his oblique, white, knowing smile, paused near their chairs. He played "Speak low, when you speak love," and then, tactfully ironic, "Darling, we're late." Clive sat stiffly, staring at his drink. After the man had drifted by them he said resentfully, "I don't suppose any generation but ours was so at the mercy of arbitrary transportation through its memories by cheap, catchy sound."

It was true. Turn a button to hear the news, and catch the tail end of that tune of 1930, taking you to that place, that time, that person, what you thought, felt, were then—*whoosh* . . . twirl the thing again "and now we hear the popular hit tune number one"—and are in what year, where? It was all part of the tempo of quick displacements, by plane, by rocket, by bomb, and quickest by tune. Most listeners were hardened. Her glance swept the tables. For these young lovers the songs were rooted in the present. Some of the young—Debby even—thought the songs were new.

Clive was glaring at the oblivious couple at the next table. "I hate sound," he said, "I hate radio."

He resisted artificial compulsions by going back to the stillest place he knew. He crossed the strip of grass in front of his grandmother's house.

"I go into the kitchen and sit by her table; I rock on the porch of a house which hasn't been there for years. Have you a place to go to?"

"Yes."

But she spent most of her time trying not to walk there. She was at the mercy of a tune, a sound, a smell, wafted where carelessly she left a part of herself to be called for later, collect.

"Planned excursions are all right," she added. "It is the unplanned that hurt."

✧

SHE HESITATED AS THEY REACHED THE street; he took her by the arm, steering her confidently round the corner. They were making, she understood presently with a slight dismay, for a French restaurant on 56th Street. She knew it well. She had eaten there regularly when she first came to New York, because, though she had turned resolutely from the old, she had not yet turned as resolutely to the new. Twice a day she escaped from the strangeness of New York to familiar atmosphere.

When François, the pock-marked waiter, had served her for a month, he said, in the French that still meant home, "One sees that Madame has the habit of good food."

"Not the habit, François, just the memory and appreciation."

Later, when he came to know her well, he ventured, "How sad it is that Madame dines alone!" He moved the bread basket deftly near. "Where then is her friend?"

The security the place for a moment seemed to offer slipped into a menace. She gave up going there. It was better to eat strange tasteless food in places where one could not, by any possibility, imagine Michael drawing up the empty opposite chair; places where waiters would be incurious and unobservant of anything except the size of tip.

Now here was Clive turning serenely through that door.

"The food's quite good in here, and it's always quiet, no radio, no commercials."

"I know," she told him. "I like it."

There was François, flicking them to a table. If she recognized him, would he recognize her? It was improbable. She would not have been certain if it weren't for the pockmarks, but scars were recognizable whether they came from small pox or from sorrow. François said gently as he draped her coat on the back of her chair, "It has been a long time since Madame came here, no?"

"Very long," she answered, "yes."

"Madame has been away, perhaps? Madame has been home? It is good to see Madame again. And *here* then is the friend!"

She looked at Clive. The friend. Yes, that much, surely, no matter what to come. He was staring at them both, not understanding French, not pretending to understand or to want to, perfectly at ease. His eyebrows rose questioningly, his gray eyes smiled, so did his mouth; she realized for the first time that his habitual expression was good humored, even gay.

"Since you seem to get on so well together, suppose you order."

"So, Madame has chosen well." François creaked away.

They were sitting side by side, back to the wall. She began to feel the peculiar, magnetic attraction of his nearness, through the arm and elbow, the foot, the knee, the thigh, the entire side, the solar plexus, the et cetera. It was as real as the heat from an electric blanket and as comfortable; no, on second thought, it was not like an electric blanket, nor at all comfortable.

They both began to talk at once. He said something about David. His voice sounded uneven, as though he too were conscious of northern lights crackling about them in a mysterious curtain.

"How old is he?"

"Nineteen."

She tried to picture Clive's son.

"Fair or dark?"

"Fair, like his mother. Looks, though he's good-looking, are the least part of his charm. There's something about David . . . " He laughed. "I remember there was a children's Halloween party once. One of his mother's friends dressed up as a gypsy, telling fortunes. David hung around the booth for a long time before he went in. I happened to be outside where I could hear everything. The fortune-telling lady told him he would wear a uniform with a great many beautiful buttons; he would go to sea and command his own ship; he would marry and have two children, a boy and a girl. David listened gravely, then he asked her, 'Do you see anything there about a dog?' That's David."

"Did he get his dog?"

"No, never."

"He's only nineteen. . . ."

Clive sighed. "The things he wanted most you can't do without feet."

"Ruth told me," she said quickly, as François brought the food. There was a moment's silence. "How much was amputated?" she asked presently.

"Below the knee on the left leg, above the ankle on the right."

"The knees are the important things, I understand.

I've always heard . . . if he has kept his knees, he will be able to walk again quite well."

He made a small, impatient sound.

"What did he do on the ship?"

"Sparks. Radio."

"There will be a job for him, then, in civilian life."

"It's the last thing he would like. He played hockey before the war. He wanted to go back to it, professionally."

"Well, of course . . ."

"Oh, he's reasonable enough. It's just that he's defenseless. Every way."

"No girl?"

"No girl. I don't know what else Ruth told you, but David hasn't had much chance to think very highly of married life. He has got into a habit of thinking that no girl he married would have comfortable feet of lovely clay and know where to plant them."

(Or any feet at all . . . a fishy tail . . . a wisp of something . . . claws.)

"I can't help him. I would have divorced long ago, but his mother's a Roman Catholic—David too, of course. He lies there, shut up like a clam and I can't get through to him. He won't talk to me, or to anyone, they tell me. He works himself up to scenes. There is something very wrong."

She resented the trouble in his voice. It was diffident

with a combatant's experience. What happened to civilians in the way of suffering, illness, discomfort was annoying because one must in decency accord it some recognition, but it was taking the time of doctors, nurses and the consideration of the community away from "where it belonged," to the combatant. So the maimed civilian must add to his maiming the brushing aside of his suffering as irrelevant or unimportant, and bear that as well.

She would not take issue with Clive over his "besides." If Debby, then happily at college, had lost her legs Martia would feel that no other amputation had validity or should be mentioned to her, and yes, she would be feeling a guilty responsibility. . . . She looked at Clive with understanding and compassion as she made the mistake of saying, with her hand on his, "Now, thank God, it's over!"

But it was never over, he told her. It was never over for him and therefore never for her, part of the baggage of her knowledge forever.

✧

IT WAS NEVER OVER, THE CREAKING, THE stuffiness, the shut-in of the night, the sealed portholes and the game of chess, the evening like all others till the alert, in the metallic voice, not like the voice of a man

through a telephone, but the voice of the ship itself, the destroyer in charge, hoarsely shouting its orders.

"Scatter!"

Two hundred and thirty ships, ammunition, oil, a pack of submarines . . .

It was never over, the darkness, the scurrying feet, the banging doors, the bridge, the first explosion, then the murky light silhouetting shapes, tankers, Clive's on the right, David's on the left. It was not over with the bursting ship, the flames, the suffocation. There was the long night, the gray revealing morning, the faces of the other men in the rubber boats.

It was never over, the constant return, with incredulity to the *before,* to eight ships proceeding abreast, screened by destroyers and corvettes, to the balloon towing from the mainmast, the special drum to haul her in, to nights when you slept in the charthouse and the mate slept under the bridge, when a flat board towed astern with a piece of pipe sticking up from it made a fountain, slightly phosphorescent, all that could be seen of any ship, dim enough to steer by or steer away from, yet seeming to shout to an enemy, "We're here!"

Casualties die from hemorrhage, from the nose, from the ears, concussion gets them, depth-charge concussion. They die when your own destroyers drop more charges right among your men, they die in the water all around your boat.

Meanwhile the radio men, the sparks, the Davids, listen with trained fingers twitching to send the urgent messages which must not be transmitted. "Radio rooms will be sealed in port. It is forbidden to transmit at sea." The war cuts their job in half. They may not send an SOS, but while their ships go down they can hear the dance tunes and the commercials coming in from home, swing and Hedy Lemarr, and now for an announcement of importance, the cheap, corny commercials. No wonder Clive hated sound.

✧

THE CORRIDOR TO THE ELEVATOR CAME ALIVE. She had never thought of it as anything but a tunnel, a place of transit from-the-office-out-of-there. It was impersonal, especially after hours when everyone had left, but with Clive waiting for her it took on the atmosphere, the sheen of expectancy, of a place in its own right.

"There's a brooding craziness about this place," he said.

She nodded, knowing what he meant; walls giving off the secrets of the business done behind them, this chuckle over a successful deal drowning out that whimper down the hall.

"All empty office buildings brood," she said.

"This one breathes. I expect it to walk like those old stones, somewhere—Languedoc."

Clive had never been to Europe; he knew it from books, knew the literature, the turns of thought. When he went to sea ("in the most civilian way with the least red tape, and how *that* annoyed poor Isobel! She told me I'd missed out on the war!") he was the editor of a country newspaper, and before that of a literary quarterly which died, and before that an unsuccessful free-lance journalist.

Was it this aura of distinguished failure (Michael's story over again), of contempt for the standards of the herd, of a quiet refusal to climb with the vulgar, which attracted her to Clive from the first? She did not know, aware only of her relief that here at last was a man, unself-conscious with words, who need not use the current cliché-jargon for the most obvious thought exchange, nor expect her to.

She could, of course. She got on well with the men whom she knew in business or met through her women friends. She could play table-talk-tennis with anyone, lobbing superficialities across a net, smashing home a wisecrack just this side of the line, keeping to the artificial rules of the game, never wandering from the laid-out courts. It took only practice and the concentrated attention of one tenth of herself on the outer rim to

acquire some dexterity and the reputation of being a good-one-to-talk-to; but this man used words as they were intended to be used, to clothe his thoughts—he was not afraid to think, apparently—and then to reveal his thoughts, and for that sort of vital, unexpected exchange she was rusty.

They stepped into the heavy warmth of the night. The moon was silvering windows on the top floors until they looked like mirrors used for ponds in miniature gardens. He took her arm. She could feel her fingers tremble. They did not look at each other. She spoke quickly. "Where are we going?"

"Since you had to work so late, to a tavern near here, open all the night."

She was working late now, every evening to finish current assignments before she went overseas. She did not tell him that, immediately. He seemed incurious and preoccupied. He did not speak again until they reached the restaurant.

It was a friendly place, round a corner, down some steps. There were half a dozen tables with plenty of space between them, giving the impression, at least, of a cool privacy. The table they chose gleamed with linen and silver.

"Good," she said. "I have become so tired of naked little tables and colored fancy mats."

"Sit where I can see you. Steak, chicken, lobster? Or do you eat nuts and fruit? Do you live, like some people, 'on other planes'?"

"No priority on any plane."

He smiled. "No bo-tree?"

The waiter tried for the third time to get the order.

"Two steaks, smothered in onion, peas and salad." He turned again to her. "Is that all right for you? Onions create a plane for us of their own. Matter is important," he added as the waiter left. "It takes time to evolve. I never could see why it should be transcended, transmuted or ignored."

"I know," she said reflectively. "I've often thought how awkward it will be for some of the people I know, enthusiasts of different sects, when they die to be confronted with the first obvious questions—'And what did you do upon earth?' 'I was extremely spiritual. I lived entirely upon higher planes'—and have Saint Peter——"

"—roar 'the hell you did! What on earth do you suppose you were put on earth for? Master matter first.'" He laughed, then he added, "Religion being settled between us . . ."

"Not quite."

Not then. Then he was only saying, "Would you build the bridge?"

She looked at his strange eager face. "I might," she said unsteadily, "given time."

"But that's what we can't be given."

She wondered how he knew. She had been scrupulously careful of "security."

He went on, slowly, drawing diagrams on the immaculate cloth. "There is a ship, plowing through the ocean at this moment, ten thousand miles away, a small tanker carrying octane. A Jap cruiser put a shell into her engine room . . ."

The waiter brought the steak and set it down. Clive stopped speaking, automatically, for "security," or for privacy?

". . . disabled her completely, killed the captain, half the crew. A British squadron scared him off before he could sink her. They transferred the load . . ."

She listened to the tension in his voice. She was trying to concentrate. This ship was a person to him, a person to whom barbarians had done an indignity. Octane . . . Sandy Heads—that was the Indian Ocean.

". . . bring her up the Hoogli with tugs. She can use her rudder still."

His steak was growing cold. He stared at it, he looked at her. "Know anything about engines?"

She shook her head.

"Well, the piston pin holding the connecting rod forcing the crank shaft round has to take a terrific thrust. It has to be made of a specially hardened steel which can't be got out there." He hesitated. "She's my

ship." His voice was small. "I'll be taking the pins out to her . . . pretty soon."

"I see," she said.

"And though it may sound cheap and theatrical to say 'I might not come back,' it happens to be true, obviously physically, but in more important ways. I have a strong hunch this is the crest of life for me, the turning point. If I have nothing to come back to this time—" he paused expectantly; she was silent, looking away from him—"most of me will be disabled, like the boat, and no hardened steel will help me out. I shall sink, because I'm made of human, tired, makeshift stuff." He smiled. "I sound grotesquely selfish. That's because I'm afraid. You know the tantrums of the small boy in front of the Christmas tree."

"Yes," she said, "and I also know the perplexities of Santa Claus."

He laughed and took up his fork. "You mean the Indian Ocean is a wide sea to bridge? But if we could love enough . . ."

She shivered. "What makes you want to build your bridge with *me?*"

He brushed that aside. "Which shall it be? To us, or not to us?"

He raised his glass. She lifted hers, she looked at him, she drank without a word. He finished his in an equal silence, while she stared at the tablecloth.

"I'm sorry," she said, desperately, at last, "but a bridge, any bridge, can't be built in a rush."

"With modern engineering and brain and guts? It's built in a day sometimes. 'Darling,' the song said, 'we're late.' "

"If we had time to build together, normally . . ."

"But we haven't."

"I know."

(. . . any given time—time, our one rationed commodity.)

"We have only this short time."

Shorter than he knew. *At my back I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near.* A C-54 with four motors, tuning up to carry her away. She would be in Calcutta before him.

✧

THE BED PULLED OUT WITH RELUCTANT squeaks. No matter what padding she could devise, it would be uncomfortable. He surveyed the ridge down the middle.

"A striking tribute to your virtuous life." He turned the mattress over. "Let us be cramped tonight, let us share the single couch."

"We'll fall off."

"Not if we're firmly anchored."

She put out the light, annoyed with herself for being discountenanced.

Reflections from the street lamp through white shades showed his shadowy face, bending over her. Her arms opened to the desired weight of his body, the sureness of his hands.

(License my roving hands . . .)

She shut her eyes. A shadowy suspension bridge gleamed in her moonlight, thrusting its arches to the sky, white bridge of marble-melting fire, triumphantly spanning the torrents. The caresses increased. She cried "Michael!" and the arms holding her grew rigid, straining to set her free.

He propped himself on his elbow, reached for the lamp and pushed the switch. They stared at each other, dazed, blinking in the harshness of the light; falling masonry, dynamited supports, mud and ruin, desolate about them.

"Michael," he was saying softly, "Michael. Damn!"

It was her body that had cried out, not her heart or mind. She tried to tell him.

"Hush," he said, "hush."

Presently he said, "Ruth told me there was Michael. This tells me something else. There hasn't been anyone since—who mattered."

She lay very still. "No one since," she whispered.

He put his lips on hers. His head rolled to her breast

and was pillowed there. Suddenly, grotesquely, he was asleep, exhausted, twitching, breathing heavily. She watched him sleep, tracing shadows from the street across his face for long hours, until in the gray light of growing day she too slept.

✧ ✧

SHE WAS LYING FACE DOWNWARD IN A rubber boat, like the boats they provided for ditching from a plane, when she went overseas, very complete boats, these. They had floating radios with yellow kites to take the aerials aloft.

"And a New Testament," the P.R.O. explained. "Don't lose your heads, take it easy, when you find yourself in the water. You'll be all right."

Most people assured her many times, these days, that she would be all right. "You will get your bearings soon, if you lie still." That was the pilot, who, of course, should know. Meanwhile it would have been better to lie another way, say, upon her side, because of this strain on the back and the knees, and this strange PAIN in the head.

There was no one else in the boat. Clive had gone away. The things that were moving against her thighs were sharks. David brought them there. It was careless, but not his fault, one must always remember that. His

mother was a fish, a shark. Neither of them understood Clive. Martia did. He had pushed her into this boat. It was easy to guess how Clive would feel about things lost at sea—food, oil, orderly boxes of sweet-smelling wood, not finicky things like furniture and china and glass and embroidered towels, not things with a symbolical meaning like Isobel's ornaments, the pseudo-Buddhas and the Italian candlesticks—good things, boxes of, well, soap, for instance, cakes and cakes of soap, enough to wash all the children and the prisoners and clean up a lot of the mess, soap in good-looking cases.

Now it was all in the sea, where it wouldn't make a good lather because it wasn't that special kind of salt sea-water soap. Sharks didn't wash with soap, or did they? Isobel must, of course, and drown herself in perfume, to wash off a damned spot—no, that was someone else.

Machinery and trucks and oil to run them, all in the sea; men in the sea; men in rubber boats; it was dark and there were submarines. David was in the sea. David wanted a dog. Poor David, poor dog, poor sea dog, poor . . . Her rubber boat was rising on a wave; she clutched at the side of it, she found a hand. There was a hand and an arm there, and someone . . . someone . . .

"My love," Clive was complaining, "this is a dreadful bed. We must see about getting something better."

The sharks took the rubber boat out to sea. She knew where she was now, she wanted to be there.

"Turn over," she murmured.

✧ ✧ ✧

"MR. WOOLWORTH'S SPOONS ARE IN THAT drawer."

"These are beautiful." He was handling the forks, examining the pattern.

"Tuilerie. The knives are La Fontaine. Someday I'll get spoons and a house again, to go round them."

"Yes, spoons do need a house. Forks can take care of themselves." He was laughing at her. "You know—" he looked up with the sudden characteristic surprise she found so attractive—"when I left home there was nothing for me to miss. No spoons. I was only on bowing terms with the things I used in Isobel's house. A shut door disposed of them all. There was no 'I take the sofa, leave you the chair.' I just went, and never walked there again, even in my mind."

She grasped the finality of what he was saying when she came to know him better, and understood that his most important relationships were with objects, with things. He cared for things, he had a sense of responsibility toward the inanimate. He never would say "inanimate"; to him sticks, stones, sand, stoves, cars, chairs were animate. They could be ill, their feelings could be

hurt, they could resist or respond to man's use and treatment. It was not a question of mystic supposition or sentimentality. It was simply a fact that all existing objects were more or less electrified, being compounded of electricity and therefore more or less alive. A collection of things like a house, composed of different materials, would be alive with a greater complexity of life, have more, if she liked, personality than one elementary block of stone. Couldn't anyone—certainly she—see that?

"Where was the house?"

"In Connecticut. Isobel said there were people there 'who mattered—artists, actors, agents, writers of soap opera, all sorts of people with all sorts of flair.'"

"The magazine?"

"No, you know—simple little week-end rich farmers, who've 'snapped up this old place, my dear, and who adore New England.' Isobel's brand of country life. Anyhow she thought them important."

"It's a moot point who's important. By the way, I've always wondered, what is the meaning of *moot?*"

He gave her the dictionary, "to read in her spare time."

The first love token was often trifling in value and sometimes incongruous, inappropriate in the light of fuller knowledge, as when Michael gave her the Tchaikowsky record instead of Scarlatti or Bach, but it was poignantly significant of the love which was beginning,

and cherished. She felt annoyed and bereaved when Debby borrowed the dictionary and took it away to school. She wrote a peremptory letter and received a perplexed reply.

"Yes, I've got it, and of course I'll take good care of it and bring it when I come for my next vacation. It's not a bit like you to be making all this fuss!"

(No, and not like me, either, the me you think you know, to be passionately, completely, exultantly in love with a married man! Clive's—I don't say mistress, because he doesn't keep me . . . except, I hope, forever!)

Debby, away at school during those war years and coming back only for brief visits, did not meet Clive until later.

HE WAS SITTING IN THE GARDEN OPPOSITE the apartment on a low gray bench beneath a tree. She paused, watching the set of his head before he saw her, waiting for the moment when his face would change. It was satisfactory, his word of precision, when lovers brought life, light, warmth and a feeling of security to each other merely by arriving. He took her hands, drawing her to his bench against the side of the wall. Other benches, too close to one another, were occupied, but this one was free, no one could overhear them here.

A snail walked at his foot.

If only time, life, and the electricity in objects would crawl snail-pace for a while! But this was the twentieth century, age of speed and the speed-up, and they two were its children, in a particular way. Born soon after "the birth of the century," they went through childhood, adolescence, youth and what the schoolboy blunder called "adultery," and now the dangerous forties, as the calendar years were going through these things.

We are no help to each other, she thought, our century and my generation, all of us suffering change of life together. If we can just survive the forties and the early fifties, we may find what the doctors promise, a serene, a settled old age, an *Abendsonnenschein.* Meanwhile we are going through the violence, confusion of exaggerated feeling, fear and suffering common to our years.

"The century is having trouble with its glands," she said aloud.

Clive looked surprised, then he nodded. "Can we find something dull, dependable and really slow to do for the next few days?" he asked.

DULL . . . DEPENDABLE . . . SLOW . . .

From her seat in the plane now she was looking down

on gray level water, flat, motionless, one-dimensional, stretched out taut, like a sheet of hammered lead. No one, from this altitude, could perceive the sea's variations of color, from black through blue, through green to surf-foam white; nor, staring on those small monotonous wrinkles below, divine the rough swells, deep layers and rich levels of the sea.

How could a race of the purely air-borne know the powerful, restless, heaving surge-to-and-fro of the tides, or easily imagine what it was like to swim, to meet the undertow, breast the breaking wave, leap to fling oneself upward on towering, curling crests, to float in the troughs between, encountering in all one's tingling body subtle differences of icy temperature?

A poet might tell the air-borne race something about the earth beneath them, as Shelley told the earth-bound about the air. He was the poet of flight, describing pilots, his "charioteers," who "lean forth and drink With eager lips the wind of their own speed, As if the thing they loved fled on before, And now, even now, they clasped it!"

He described planes without naming them, dying before anyone knew the airplane would exist or how it would be named. He saw planes landing—"Twin nursling sisters of the all-sustaining air, On swift still wings glide down the atmosphere . . ." sent them on missions—"Go home over the cities of mankind On whirl-

wind-footed coursers: once again Outspeed the sun around the orbèd world; And as thy chariot cleaves the kindling air . . ."

Once he described the whole mood of the termination of a flight, the coming in, the looking downward, the landing, the relief of stretching after a long trip, the setting out to look the place over, even the disillusionment of finding that here in this unusual country the petty divisions created by our kind go on, that life, here as everywhere upon the earth, has its national strife and narrowness, its envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness, no matter how serene, how unified the world seemed from above.

My vision then grew clear and I could see
Into the mysteries of the universe.
Dizzy, as with delight I floated down
Winnowing the lightsome air with languid plumes
. . . I flocked to earth.
It was, as it still is, the pain of bliss
To move, to breathe, to be. I wandering went
Among the haunts and dwellings of mankind
And first was disappointed not to see
Such mighty change as I had felt within
Expressed in outward things . . .

The words stood out from the thin India-paper page of Michael's edition of Shelley, the small green book she had given him, which he carried, battered and

scratched, in his hip pocket, until all his suits were out of shape. (When had he stopped carrying it? The last few suits she remembered were not deformed with the familiar one-sided bagginess.)

He spouted long passages and made her read them aloud until she knew several by heart. Shelley, Michael said, was a painter's poet; he knew about light, space, perspective, composition and mood, from behind the easel; he had the painter's reflective, screwed-up, squinting eyes; according to Michael, Shelley knew "the secret of the universe."

"And that is?" she had asked a little impatiently.

"That everything is a matter of focus," Michael answered in what seemed to her then merely another cliché.

She knew it now to be true. In all the universe, as in Michael's painting, or in her photography, subject must be revealed through perspective; perspective depended upon angle, angle upon focus, and focus upon distance, light and individual adjustment of sight.

All perception of truth was a matter of focus. No one could adjust camera or telescope for another's eyes, still less for a group, so that all might see what was *there,* in terms of arbitrary imposition of some standard adjustment. Distance and light might be the same for a group of people standing together in the same place, but the focus would always differ with the eyes of the individuals making up the group.

How could any authority tell where a brother stood, or what was the correct adjustment for his eyes of the telescope held out to him, trained upon some truth "perfectly clear to us," "self-evident," or "incontrovertible?" This was the mistake the dictators, spiritual or temporal, were always making.

Not the dictators only, she mused, but all of us. What hot anger, what cold despair if someone we love, moving a little this way or that, or standing higher or lower than our altitude, can make no use of the telescope we have carefully adjusted to our eyes! Our vision is blurred to him? Impossible! He claims better vision of his own? Blasphemy! Sharpen the stakes, prepare the fires, only the deliberately wicked could be so obstinately blind!

Of course if he describes his vision in terms of poetry, or of any art, we can accept it, because we can train our telescopes, properly focused for right vision, upon the poem or the painting and claim what we can see of it as ours, an expression of our truth, of *the truth.*

What Shelley had done for the earth-bound, to explain life in the air, some poet might do for the air-borne, to explain life on the earth. It was a poet's business to explore the far corners of the universe, unknown but not unknowable, and return with certainties.

It was a dangerous business to bring home such news. The same cries might go up, from air-borne as from earth-bound, cries of "Dreamer! Fanatic! Fool! Radical!

Madman! Communist! Fascist!" Cries of "immoral" or "insane," "let us get rid of this dreamer, this subversive character" and that loud bestial howl echoing down the years, of "crucify!"

The earth-bound had not been able to bundle Shelley into the cockpit of a plane, but the air-borne she had invented might efficaciously say, "If you like it so much down there in what you call the sea, which we keep on telling you is a mass of little wrinkles, you know what you can do!" . . . and open the nearest hatch.

She closed her eyes. She was tired of mental agility; PAIN hovered near her head. She would not think of abstractions, such as destiny—*or of her destination*—yet. She would put those away, in favor of the concrete, small, dependable and steady, in the sense of being over-with, limited, fixed within the past, a memory, not a challenge.

She would turn the telescope round, unfunneled from the stars in the interspace of silence, and look through the wide end. What she saw then—yes, even love—must appear one-dimensional, flat, miniature and safe. She would plummet back to Clive.

✧ ✧ ✧

THEY SPENT HER LAST WEEK END IN VERmont, snatching at a sample of prosaic country living, among the seemingly permanent Americana, least

changed by the war. She wanted to show him her New England, as opposed to Isobel's.

The bus deposited them at the foot of a familiar hill, and there was Mr. Stoner, waiting in his Ford. He had not changed much; he was younger than Martia remembered, until she realized that this was Son Stoner. The old man must have died. He took the bags they had scrambled together, and motioned them into the back seat.

"Had many visitors this year?" Clive asked.

"Not yet. It's early. Summertime we're full. Last August must have turned away fifty. This year probably the same."

He gave his attention to the road, narrow, steep, a sunken lane with overhanging lilacs either side.

Stoner's farm was large, white with green shutters, and a painted roof. It stood at crossroads, with rolling fields before and behind, and in the distance Mount Mansfield, wearing its birch and its pine. Stoner's farm was familiar from her childhood, but the little house, Clive's and hers, was not. Yet it must have stood there all the years, overlooked by the absorbed eyes of childhood. It was strange what an arbitrary and enduring pattern there was in childhood's tapestry. She could remember every room in her grandmother's house outside Burlington, every step of the way between the gate and the woods. There were even branches of trees that came back to her, particular twigs and blossoms.

Grandfather Hyde was a doctor. He had his surgery in the village. His practice was widely scattered. Martia drove with him on his rounds in his rickety Model T. It was shabby and temperamental; often he sighed for a vanished mare. She supposed some particular drive must have colored her memory; the air was always soft and cool, the yards full of lilac when she thought of Vermont. Her grandfather had been trusted, dogs and people welcoming him with the same affection. He died before the days that doctors wrote biographies and novels, but he had all the material and a deep understanding of his patients, his friends. It was to his house that Martia went when she remembered Vermont, not to Burlington, where her father taught, where she was born and lived until she went to boarding school—to his house and to the little house.

They found it the next day, standing at the crossroads by the bridge. She saw it first, a deserted farm asking to be explored. She called to Clive, sailing twigs along the stream. They stared together at the weathered clapboards, the sagging porch, the crazy, broken door, the lilac hedge.

When they were in the yard the view, unsuspected from the road, widened before them; they smiled, the same swift, startled and approving smile. The house commanded a four-way sweep. To the north, Mount Mansfield rose from a wooded hill; southward, sloping fields led to another hill, softer in outline, greener, more

graceful; westward the crossroads with the fields beyond led to the footbridge of the stream; eastward, pastures sloped to a smaller stream. On the opposite side long banks of birch and maple rose steeply to a plateau which rose steeply to the sky. There was exciting contrast whichever way they looked.

"Our home," Clive said, "after the war."

They climbed onto the porch, stepping over holes. It had once been screened in, used for sleeping.

"Or eating."

"Or writing. What a place for work! Here's where I'll write the novel. And there must be a darkroom for you."

They went round to the back, finding a small paved yard, framed with buildings once dairies, woodshed, outhouses. There was a stone lean-to against a bank.

He pushed open the door, hanging by half a hinge, and went inside.

"I think it may have been the roothouse," she said as the cold damp met them. "This is an old farm."

She did not want to discuss a darkroom with Clive. Darkrooms were . . . bitter dark, and lonely, and desolate, and Michael's and hers. She took his hand and pulled him back into the sunlight. There was the sound of a car, stopping in the road, and a honking horn. They went round the house to see who it was.

"Mr. Hunt's wanted on the phone," Son Stoner

bawled. "I'll drop you right down. Thought you might be here."

"Come back," Martia said, "as soon as you're through."

She went toward the house Clive had said was theirs, and looked at it appraisingly. Not so mellow as Lou Pilou in France, not so beautiful nor so comfortable as Deep Seas—what was its charm, why had Clive recognized it, why had she? Was it the need they were in as homeless wanderers, so soon to say good-by, a burlesque good-by, in which the woman went to war, spectacularly, through the skies? Were they so obvious, even to a house, that it spoke to them so loud? It was obvious that they were obvious. She was annoyed that Son Stoner had known that they were there. What else did he know, with uncanny country instinct like this house? That they were not married? Probably. That she was little Martia Hyde from Burlington, who came every summer to stay at Stoner's farm, until she went away to foreign parts to marry a young fellow by name of Michael Deane? If he knew so much, he might know more, he might know how Michael died.

She turned quickly to the cellar steps, smooth, worn with people's feet. She trod them carefully. I ought to wait for Clive, she told herself, but the door swung back and she was in the house itself, pushing Michael away, battening him down, hammering him safe into oblivion with firm nail after nail.

Light from the open door and from a window slit revealed the cellar walls, work of another age. Huge rocks, fitted together without cement, supported the framework. Someone had thoughtfully reinforced the center with three strong posts. She patted one of them. The wood felt smooth and cool, with a friendly coolness, not like the damp stone. There was no sign of a furnace, or a cistern, or an electric meter, only some empty bins against the farther wall. She looked for the stairs, discovering them steep and uncompromising, rising to a trap door. She hesitated. Probably this would be nailed down or locked. She should wait for Clive. Then her foot was on the first step and she was climbing, brushing her dress through the dust.

She rose into the kitchen, pushing the trap door aside. For a moment she was alone in the dark, among the memories of the listening house, resentful of being disturbed. Then she lit a match. There was a window ahead. She pushed at its shutters before the match went out. They opened jerkily, creaking in complaint; the daylight came in, revealing all the room, square, low-ceilinged, whitewashed, plastered, with long beams and blackened woodwork. She had seen its counterpart many times in France; she knew it very well; it might have been the kitchen of a Provençal farm.

Stove was there and sink; all else had gone long ago. These stayed, museum pieces from another age, per-

versely enduring. Nobody would want them now. Nothing was made to last so staunchly now. She thought of the new streamlined houses of the postwar world-to-be, so much advertised, all glass and plastic, designed to be packed up today, spread out tomorrow, converted the next day. A house like this was not made for the air age that was coming, that had come. Neither was she, unmoved by glass and gadgets, though not unmoved, literally and soon, by planes! Was Clive an air-age man? She thought not.

In the little while that they had lived together, distracted by the excitement of their new companionship, engrossed in the diversions and discoveries of love, she had forgotten the bridge that she must build, the adjustments she must make to be what Clive "came back to after the war." It made no difference that she was going to the war too, before he did, that she might have a wider experience of some of it than he did; she would be back before him, she was the woman, the symbol of the harbor, the home, point of return. Hers was the problem and the role all women shared, a role created by men. Men who came back from the wars resented civilian complacency and unimaginative indifference, yet they resented even more scornfully any civilian attempt to share their experience.

Had the women of this kitchen an easier day? Time glided by more evenly, physical life was hard and re-

stricted. Was mental life easier? When the wife took down the gun from that chimney, where its outline was still marked, to hand it to the man with anger and a lust for freedom in his eyes, watching him go off with the other leather-coated farmers to dispute the redcoats' right to cross that bridge down the road, did she too say good-by to equality of thought with her man though sharing of his experience? Did she later welcome home a man who said surlily, or helplessly, "You cannot know," and left her at night to go out with those who did? Did she too, in learning to carry on without him, develop alien qualities, unfeminine strengths of will and hardness? Did the women of this kitchen and others like it meet to talk with meaning smiles, after the war, of the times they had harvested, driven off marauders, farmed the farms alone? Did they wonder how it could be that they were excluded so completely from the things they had once been called upon to know and do alone?

Did they find it hard, after their war, to "take a woman's place" when they had been forced to take all places and to "man" them gallantly? Were some of them relieved to be returned to the enduring, conservative, constructive things of life—the making of good bread, the rearing of strong children, the provision of comfort, of color, woman's world, so quickly, so often destroyed by man's world of war? Were others, career

women without knowing it, dismayed at the enforced return?

It was a rare man who realized the need for a bridge, other than the obvious bridge of intercourse, between husband and wife. Such a man was Clive. Clive felt, Clive told her, that together they could build an enduring bridge, a strong one, to span the folly, the confusion, the violence of the world.

She smiled at the old stove, she looked around the kitchen, and then, as though she heard a thin-lipped comment from an invisible figure rocking in the chair which had left these grooves by the chimney place—"Get out of my kitchen, hussy!"—she began to plead, "Isobel had her chance! Isobel made no bridge." The room remained noncommittal. She turned, impatient for Clive and for air. She left the house without seeing the rest of it; that she would do with Clive, when they came back.

"When you see him, when you see us together," she assured the shadows in the kitchen, "you will know."

She stepped briskly down the road to join him. They never came back. She never saw the rest of the house, but it seemed to her always that it had been their house. She went to it in thought, more than she went to another, even to Deep Seas.

She wondered sometimes if they saw her there—the people, if there were people, who bought it—wandering

through the kitchen, appealing to the stove, against the judgment of the farm wife, if they heard her, sometimes, leaving in search of Clive?

✧ ✧

THE TRAIN WAS HOT, OLD WOODEN ROLLING stock, with no air-cooling system, but they had a compartment to themselves. He slept. She lay beside him carefully. He was exhausted and he must not wake, but she with angle shots of the last days in her mind—so much crushed into a few weeks—could not sleep, in spite of her body's drowsy satisfaction after love.

He stirred, turning restlessly as the compartment creaked. They were in a siding, waiting for a train to pick them up. She pulled the sheet around his shoulder. Light from the station fell across his face. She leaned over him to adjust the shade. He smiled; the beating of her heart quickened. This was so peculiarly the culmination of her life, this melting tenderness, flowing from her to him. She thought of phrases—"fiery passion," "molten gold," "they shall be one flesh"—clichés he would hate, but all true when she lay with Clive.

She was still awake, still watching over him, as the engine hooked on and the train began to move. Acceleration brought its own dismay.

"One more night in some hotel bedroom, and then emptiness, incredulity."

She felt his weight against her as the car jerked, rolling him near. He was still there, she could touch him, she could wake him, hear him speak. She pressed against him, exploringly, imploringly. He turned over, he took her in his arms. She knew again the illusion of safety she felt when he was near. Exploding bomb, crashing plane, sinking ship, blackouts, loneliness, fear were all dismissed, shouldered aside at his touch. Contact was the framework of the bridge.

✧ ✧

"CONTACT . . . CONTACT . . ."

"Rodger-dodger . . . rodger-dodger . . ."

"Over . . . over . . ."

"Kitty."

"Rodger."

She was in the navigator's stowaway behind the co-pilot, with extra headphones on. The air was full of static and a rising whining wind.

"Chow," the navigator shouted at her elbow. *"Chow . . . chow . . . chow . . . chow . . . chow!"*

But it was too hot to eat and the air about her stank. The compartment was full of fumes, fuel fumes, from the heavy load of gas in the rear. That was why she was

sitting forward—everyone had to sit forward, the take-off was dangerous—but this pilot could set his plane down like a glass of water spilled on a table and take it up as smoothly.

"Jeez, some pilot!" a voice on the intercom said.

". . . Saviour, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea."

The sea was down there below; she craned to look at it.

"Careful or you'll lose your dinner," the navigator said.

An enormous dredge rose black against her eyelids' red, carrying loads of mud, dripping over, falling back to the river bed, dumping its load out of sight.

"Work on the foundations," Clive's voice urged.

"I can't, with all this din. . . ."

Dinner, Donner, dinner, donner, *Din.*

✧

DINNER AT THE ALLIED INN, PUSHING HER tray behind his, picking up this and that, so that she came out with an odd assortment of salads and desserts to toy with, while Clive, who was always hungry, polished up his veal; taking their trays outside, to the meager courtyard with its illusion of coolness, not borne out by the glass dome above.

This being shut in by glass was stifling, menacing.

They shared a table with three men who glanced incuriously at her uniform until they saw the War Correspondent tabs; then they stared, or she fancied they stared, at her derisively.

If this last dinner were a dinner with all the civilized fragilities of silver, linen, candlelight and servants, in their own shared home; if everything about them were their own and had belonged to them for years, would it be easier or more difficult to swallow gaily? Easier, she decided, for then at least the hurt would be personal and private, not public before these fishy, speculative eyes, with intrusive thoughts behind them.

"A personal hurt would be ours and, by right of being ours, almost desirable."

They could cherish a shared hurt, in shared dignity, the dignity of the enduring, of stone.

She could feel the worn walnut table beneath her elbow, the ancient rush mat beneath her feet, in the dining room of the house that he had never known. Marie came waddling in, over the brick floor from the kitchen. Good smells came with her. She was carrying a steaming silver dish of her specialty, a Marseillaise bouillabaisse.

How carelessly all those years one had eaten well, with someone else to do the inspired cooking! Martia had never been a housekeeper, "a housewife"; she was not married to a house, she told a passport official in-

dignantly. Even in the early thin days of her marriage there had always been some comfortable woman to take the broom or the brush or the pots and pans away from her, with a pitying smile, an indulgent *"On voit bien que Madame ne sait rien faire!"*

Now there was no good dinner, no Marie, no home full of the quiet timeless ways of another age. She looked at Clive, frowning over insipid food. There was a substitute for the outward home. As long as he was in the world and hers, a thick plate, a tarnished spoon, an uninspired meal with a spot on the tablecloth could not dim the luster of their being together, of the bridge that sprang up between them anywhere they were.

She wanted to say these things, and others as important, but there were alien ears above three chewing jaws censoring whatever she might say. Old Marie trotting in and out muttering and exclaiming to herself was not an interruption, even when she burst into the table talk to put Madame right on this or that item of a local importance. Marie listened, naturally, avidly to every word, as these were listening, but she listened differently. Marie had the listening heart, the golden ear of an affectionate solicitude. You were Marie's Monsieur-Dame, she was Monsieur-Dame's Marie.

That was prewar European paternalism; this was America, where women "did without a maid" or "didn't like a servant in the house." Martia understood

that, too; in certain moods she could find herself agreeing with the clichés and the platitudes—"You care for things if you take care of them." "I like my things just so." It was not Marie and her ministrations that she was homesick for. The word revealed the sickness. She was sick, for she wanted a home, with Clive in it, and their friends, music, books, fireside, dog, radio, even slippers.

What was the use of these domestic thoughts chasing their tails in her brain? She was due at the airport in thirteen hours and after that she would leave the ground. . . . *I love the ground you walk on, I leave the ground you walk on. . . . Darling, darling, darling, come with me, or let me stay with you!*

Are you forgetting that this is not your husband? Are you forgetting Isobel?

Isobel.

Whom I know so well.

She never thought of Isobel, except maliciously. Isobel thought breakfast in bed was sloppy, Clive once told her. So it would be in Isobel's house. There was a false, indecent primness about Isobel that muddied everything. A man walking with a woman in the darkness of a garden meant only one thing to Isobel. That was because no man could walk with Isobel in the dark of unusual circumstance without being made aware of sex. Yet Isobel had no sex to speak of—or to

do with—pallid stuff, not like this John Donne woman who was Martia, Clive assured her. Only the passionate could be chaste; what had the others to be chaste about?

"Darling," he said, fumbling for the comforting words she needed, "you're right for me, we're right, we're one. Oh, Lord, I wish that I could handle words!"

She had said the obvious: "Handle me instead!" and felt his arms tighten around her.

✧

SHE WOKE SLOWLY, JOY AND OPPRESSION in her mood before she remembered what caused them. The joy came first, Clive beside her, sleeping in a curve like an old-fashioned hammock, puffling a little to his pillow. The absurd sound he made, contrasted with the stern face it came from, filled her with amused delight. She would have liked to share the amusement with him, but you could hardly wake a man to tell him he was puffling if you wanted to win people and influence friends.

She watched the back of his neck, remembering how in the darkness she had run her hands slowly over it, remembering the smooth firm skin, the slope of his shoulder blades, exploring, wanting her hands to come to the help of her eyes if he got blurred at the edges in the long nights ahead. (Ruth had told her once that

when John was away for a year he "got blurred at the edges," till she could not sharply recall all the lines of his face.) Beneath the layers of sleep she had been conscious all through the night that he was there, that it was well and would be well with her till day. Now it was morning, she knew the strength of her dismay. They would be going in an hour or so their very separate ways.

She sat up cautiously, reaching for her comb, then her compact. Now he might wake; he slept on. She touched his temple and ran her fingers through his hair; if they were to have any last-minute time together, he must wake. She wondered whether he often woke in hotel bedrooms beside strange women and whether it would seem different to him this time beside her.

Why should women crave to be different in this one relationship when they liked to follow fashion slavishly, in herds? How strong, how fundamentally fierce, vanity or *amour-propre* could be, especially when wounded! If Clive should snub her when she was most vulnerable, if he confused this night with other nights, part of the bridge must crash.

"Don't dramatize," she told herself. "When you called out Michael, how much did it mean? So if Clive says an Isobel, a Dorothy or Jane . . ."

He stirred, reaching for her, eyes still closed. He

pulled her near, stretching and smiling. His eyes opened. Their faces reflected the same frown.

"It's here, it's now."

The words stopped. She could not speak. His lips were hard against her own. It was a mad scramble in the end. She was almost late for the first of the hurry-up-and-wait routines of her war.

THERE WAS A CHANGE IN THE MOVEMENT of the plane, a slackening of speed, a loss of altitude. A half-familiar voice said at her ear, "Sinking fast," with the right intonation of excitement and solemnity. The plane dropped away beneath her; her stomach rose between her ears, as it did when she was in an elevator, or walking up the aisle to Michael, or in Clive's arms. Cocteau described it, in the pink paper-backed volume of *Le Potomac* she read with Michael in the twenties:

On était là, tranquillement,
Sans penser à ce qu'on évite,
Et puis tout à coup on n'en peut plus,
On est à chaque heure du jour
Comme si tu descend très vite
En ascenseur:
Et c'est l'amour.

The change from the general *on* to the particular *tu* brought her a small customary satisfied recognition of the right unusual word. The rest of the poem was as good and as pertinent, but she had no time to linger over testing the photographic qualities of a memory stored with tag ends in English and French. The pilot's metallic voice was coming through the intercom.

"Attention everyone."

The sign above the door flashed FASTEN SAFETY BELTS. NO SMOKING.

"We are about to land."

There was a pause. The tin voice spoke again: *Click*. "We will circle twice and come in from the west." *Click*. "Rodger-dodger." *Click*.

There was a stir in the seats ahead. She looked away quickly, not wanting to encounter curious or even friendly glances from fellow passengers. She got an impression of heads turned toward her, with the blurred-at-the-edges unreality of the sinister row in the railway carriage in *The Lady Vanishes*—a blow on the head started that adventure too—but these were not menacing faces, exactly; they looked interested, bewildered and a little frightened in the brief glance she caught of them. The odd thought came to her that perhaps she was not the only one who did not know her destination; perhaps no passenger knew where the plane was bound.

It banked steeply. She looked down. It was circling an island like the Azores, circular, with a deep valley in the middle, massive rock cliffs with the sea breaking on the edges of them, and no other land in sight, but this was not the Azores; there was no string of villages, no two-spired cathedral, no miniature port, no green-and-brown fertility. It was a more remote, more lonely outpost, a gray granite island set in a gray-black sea.

A desolate small fear sprang up to nag at her. Suppose *they* should decide that she was seriously ill and make her stay there, under the care of some foreign doctor, far from everyone and everything that she had ever known or cared about, worse, from everyone and everything caring or knowing about her? This island wasn't "where she belonged to be," as a country woman once complained to her.

She remembered men she had interviewed and photographed in the Azores during World War II.

"Plague in the village, everything off limits, out of bounds, the wind blows all the time and the Portuguese don't even allow we're here. It's a helluva war," one sad G.I. had said.

There they sat, among the bedraggled black and white sheep and the dust, waiting for the planes to come as once men waited for the old three-masted barkentines. The only difference was that nowadays the ships came through the air, with motors instead of masts.

It was still the equivalent of being marooned. That was why the photographers, reporters and shows included posts like the Azores, "to keep up the men's morale."

✧

IT WAS HOT AND AIRLESS IN THE HALL, though a steady wind rattled the windows and blew against the doors. The G.I.s sat in rows, their faces blanketed by the same expressions of discontent, loneliness and inferiority.

She knew the curious frustration of their half-existence. It was her own existence for a long time, at Ruth's, on the street, when she went to the studio, never "allowed" by the Portuguese or someone "to be officially there." It was to conquer this hollow state of unreality that she had been so ready, so passionately set to turn to Clive. Where did these men turn?

She watched their faces slacken and relax with momentary interest as the show began. She could see them from the center where she sat, ranged three deep around the walls; she could catch shots of them, half profile, beside her. She was using the concealed minicam focused through the pocket of her shirt, a useful gadget for work of this kind. She studied the audience, then

she looked at the stage, curious to see what Willa Ross, star of *Ride on Pluto,* would find to do without the trappings and the paraphernalia of her shows. Ross usually starred by walking on and off, singing a number, putting over a line or two, but the body of her shows was carried by the ballet and the chorus. Here she had only whatever local G.I. talent there might be—so far a quartet of self-conscious khaki minstrels, with a sergeant at the piano.

The piano was old, tinny and on the verge of being badly out of tune, but the sergeant played with a brilliance that was hard to bear, because it was unexpected, evoking a strange world, lost, far away, believed in passionately by a few, as the damned believed in Paradise. It was not the enlightened or limited world of the concert hall, of the brilliant performers, of the Boston Symphony, of Schnabel, Gieseking, Marik; it was a world, a state of being, where Bach made supreme sense for everyone; where the subtle, challenging, bold outpourings of his concertos and his fugues mattered to everyone; were profoundly important, not for the notes themselves, nor the performance, but for the essence of freedom, of courage, of the dignity of the human spirit behind them. It was *that* lost world.

She looked at the audience to see if some understood, if some were transported with her, but they all seemed to be waiting, indifferent, expectant for the real show

to begin. One person beside the pianist was sharing the recall-to-my-country of the Bach. Willa Ross's face was white around the edges of her make-up, her eyes, deep with comprehension, fixed on the sergeant. She too then was a citizen of that far-off City. There were three of them in this shed in the Azores, exiles and refugees, displaced persons as all human beings were displaced—what else was the story of Eden? Some thought it possible to struggle back, some set out to struggle back, others settled down to make the best of their exile until they should be recalled. Meanwhile they had many temporary homes; she had Clive for hers. She stirred restlessly, like a woman who has bought a new property, seen it, loved it, spent a delirious first week end there, and been hurried abroad before she could familiarize herself with it, live in it, walk the floors, watch the wallpaper fade in at dawn, fade out at night, sit in the drawn-up chair, explore all the corners. Still she was lucky; she had it to go back to. She had Clive. She could feel the warmth and lightness of his spirit, the warmth and lightness of his body—how surprisingly light a man's body was when you were under it!—the completion between them; she could remember perfectly, but she was none the less displaced, from her temporary home now as well as from her Place of Origin.

There was polite applause for the end of the over-

ture. The accompanist swung into *Ride on Pluto,* Willa sang. The audience stirred, it came to life, and the men began to enjoy themselves. After an encore, a tall blond man with an English voice gave a lecture on sex, in the manner of a briefing. The humor grew broad, the allusions coarse, there were roars and catcalls. Willa sang again. A G.I. did some patter and impersonations. Willa sang "Waiting for a wooden wedding." The man who lectured on sex told a few suggestive stories. The show was over.

She photographed the flushed and grinning faces, as she had photographed the desperately bored and grim ones before. Did this sort of harping on sex in words ease or create tension? she wondered. It was an unnatural business, these men marooned here, their women lonely at home, plague in the native village and a wind that never stopped blowing. She put her hand on her camera, then took it away. She could hear the reaction of the editors if she sent them shots of glum faces. They would find no news value in an evening spent with the marooned and one musician. She looked for the sergeant. He had disappeared into the woodwork with his Bach. Willa was talking to a group of G.I.s. She could photograph that. It was good for them to talk to a woman, even though they might have hoped for something younger and for more of it; still it was

a gorgeous pink dress on a gorgeous white star, it was change and diversion, they were looking eager, pleased, momentarily content. She took a conventional shot for publicity—"the high morale of our troops around the world"—then she slipped away. It was raining. The wind buffeted her face and clawed at her clothes as she struggled forward. She reached the quarters she was sharing with Willa and sat down on her cot. A group of drenched black and white sheep were huddled bleating beneath the window. She heard the crunch of a heavy boot on the gravel outside, and thought confusedly, The Gestapo! It would not have surprised her if they had marched in, the heavy-booted, the arrogant, the foul of the world, fascists, communists. The place was like a prison suddenly.

A voice outside said, "Did you find the lady's pants for her?"

"No, the plane was locked."

"What's she doing with all them VIPS when she should be under the Army!"

There was a loud laugh and some indistinct muttering. She threw herself down on her cot. She was tired. The wind went on blowing in a rising whine. Clive was far away, farther than he had seemed an hour before. There was now between them a dimensional barrier of more than time and distance. She could not define it,

she could only feel it. He belonged with the sanities, to the world of which the sergeant played. She was in this other world, trying to remain confident, clinging to the bridge between them.

The door opened. Willa came in. "What did you think of the show?" she asked.

"Good. They liked it. Ate it up. Poor guys."

"After the war——"

"After the war, we'll be happier than before," Martia caroled out of tune. *"Après la guerre,* there'll be good times everywhere, And the boy who tried your life to wreck—"

"—Who turned you down, three times, by heck—"

"—Will execute the chicken-roll and fall upon your neck, After the war."

"That dates us, doesn't it?" Willa said, climbing into the other cot. "Why is it things like that stick in the mind?" She yawned and fell asleep and snored, while Martia stayed awake, uneasily. The island, full of sleeping men, seemed sinister. On a ship there were sleeping men about you in the darkness. That was different. On a ship you were moving forward even while you slept, you were getting somewhere, you were on your course. Here you were stationary, anchored to an island, Prometheus to a rock, among castaways.

It was a relief to find the C-54 waiting in the morning sunshine.

✣ ✣ ✣

THIS OTHER PLANE, IN WHICH IT WAS NO relief to be, was coming in now, smoothly, for a landing. She heard a jumble of voices round her as the engines shut off.

"You going far?"

"Fellow back there said this was the place where we would be examined."

"Do they look at all the luggage?"

She glanced at the rack above her. There was her old army musette she still used for plane trips, her coat and her pocketbook. Had she other luggage? She could not remember. There were more important problems, if there was a medical examination, for instance. . . .

"Godforsaken-looking place."

"Jeez, if I stayed there long I'd be a soak."

"I could do with a cup of coffee."

"I grant you . . ."

. . . *Grant her* . . .

"Any place where we can get refreshments?"

. . . *a place of refreshment* . . .

Who, on earth, was that . . .

. . . *and everlasting blessedness* . . . praying aloud?

The plane was down now, running smoothly along

the gray landing strip, past black and white sheep wandering between Quonset huts and construction sheds. The pilot's voice came over the intercom.

"Please remain seated. Customs and Consignment Officials will interview you in your seats. We will get clearance quicker if you will keep your seats."

What does he think we will do, she thought irritably, make a concerted dash for the door? We couldn't get out if we tried. And what is a Consignment Official?

The plane rolled to a stop. There was a wary silence, then the door of the cockpit opened and the pilot walked to the rear. It was odd, she thought as he passed her, that there seemed to be no other personnel on board but this grave boy. She was reminded of a sinister situation which she could not quite recall, something to do with a ship and a one-man crew, in a play she had seen a long time ago. She was tilted in her seat when the tail of the plane swung down and came to rest; the safety belt, still fastened, kept her in this undignified and helpless position of a beetle half on its back, and she was unable to see anything except the tops of the tall construction sheds lining the runway.

There was the sound of steps being wheeled into place, the door swung open and the pilot got out. Then there were voices, speaking in English. That's a relief, she thought, for if I had to cope with a foreign language in this condition . . .

Five men got on. Four of them went past to the passengers ahead. The fifth stopped beside her, opening a notebook. He was a homely, middle-aged man in a neat dark-blue uniform, like a ticket collector on a local train. She caught his mild blue eye. . . . The Examiner in *Outward Bound*—that was the play. She wished she had not remembered it.

"Your name is Deane?" he asked her pleasantly enough.

She nodded. He checked something on the page, then, instead of proceeding with the usual questions which she was braced to parry, he said, "Report to M.D."

Fear made her unreasonably annoyed. First, it was unexpected, then it was alarming because it showed that the pilot must have reported that she was ill, whereas she wanted to give her own version to any official, especially to the doctor, if she consulted him. She realized that she had half resolved to continue the journey for as long as she could, undetected; at all costs to go farther than this bleak, depressing dump. Last (and this being unimportant, she was able to dwell on it most), she hated abbreviations—DAR, FEPC, CIO—all those assorted letters of the alphabet, requiring effort to translate; she made it a point of pride to translate before she would consent to consider them.

It was a distaste she had shared with her father. He

held it an assumption of jocular intimacy "downright disrespectful to the subject and rude to the person addressed." She particularly disliked the routine familiarity of doctors and nurses—how in even a well-run hospital you were treated with dignity only so long as you were vertical; the moment you became horizontal you lost name and rank and became "honey" or worse, a part of the speaker, "time for our breakfast, our bedpan, our nice long sleep."

"What is his name?" she asked crisply to correct the situation here, at least.

"Whose name, ma'am?"

"The doctor's."

He looked puzzled. "There is no doctor here, none on the island, ma'am."

"But you told me to report to him."

He shook his head. "Couldn't have."

"Didn't you say 'Report to the M.D.' just now?"

"Oh, I see, ma'am. You misunderstood me. I said 'report to M.D.' for luggage inspection. Luggage is lined up under the party's initials. You'll find yours at M.D. in the Consignment shed. They'll show you where, outside."

He bent to unfasten her safety belt and help her to her feet.

"I'm sorry we haven't a doctor here, if you wanted to see one—" he paused—"but you'll feel better soon."

"I didn't want to see one," she said quickly, standing up, ill at ease, hesitating at the edge of her seat, reluctant to leave it.

"Don't be afraid," he said gently, and at that Fear came.

✧

EVERYTHING WAS GRAY OUTSIDE—THE RUNway, the rocks, the sheds, the sea, and what she could observe of the sky. Gray mist swirled about her and the plane. It was like the embarkation, only worse, and more confusing; for one thing, she seemed to be peering through the large end of a funnel at a procession of Martias coming toward her.

"Reflection," she told herself, and then corrected that to "mirage," for she was watching different Martias advance—Martia of yesterday, Martia the day before, Martia a year ago, Martia thirty, Martia twenty, Martia at nursery school, Martia two-year-old, all carrying assorted luggage, all running toward her, heads down, parting with an eager purpose. The illusion was so real that she side-stepped to avoid collision with the first one, but, as happens with images in mirrors, the figures sidestepped too and she found to her dismay if not exactly her surprise that they were clustering round her, lining up behind her and beside her, merging into her, one by

one. They did not look up as they arrived; she was clearly not a person to them but a place, a habitation, where they might relax and put down the bundles they were carrying.

If there were a doctor on this island he would surely not find her case boring for a lack of symptoms, but so long as she knew they were symptoms and could observe them in detachment she must be holding her own; at the moment she did not seem to be in danger of PAIN.

She stood still, testing the edges of personality cautiously, as one feels for an aching tooth. A voice said through a loud-speaker somewhere in the middle mist, "Now if you all are ready, will you come this way?"

She smiled at "you all," until she realized that the voice had no trace of a Southern accent. It meant what it said, that if she and all the other Martias were ready, they were to go that way. She wondered whether she were really the last Martia in the row, the Martia who contained the rest, or whether in a day and night she might be merging with them into tomorrow's Martia.

"But I am tomorrow's Martia, today's Martia, all the Martias there are! I hit my head, and I am still groggy from it. I am seeing illusions, but I know that I am I."

"Quite right," the Voice said from the middle mist, as if she had spoken aloud.

"Think of the others as your safari of carriers—that will make it easier," the Voice advised. Then, as she

still remained standing where she was, it prodded, "We do not like to hurry you, but it *is* a long process and there *are* others coming after you."

She looked behind her then, but she was quite alone. No one was near her from the plane. She drew an uncertain breath, swallowed bravely, and went forward.

"Good," the Voice said. "Now if you will just follow the arrow . . ."

She followed the arrow, for a long time, down a tunnel like the subway at Times Square, except that she could never see to the sides of it on account of the thick mist. Presently it flickered above a doorway to a building with M.D. in neon lights above it.

"We all get our name in lights once, or our initials anyway," the Voice remarked.

The door opened electrically as her foot reached the threshold, and she found herself in the first Consignment shed.

THE MIST HANGING OVER THE ISLAND BEcame dense fog in the shed, the old London pea-soup variety filling throat and eyes. Blinking, she got an impression of a bleak hall, with dim shapes of bags and suitcases piled high on long counters, officials behind them, people in front struggling with their keys or

nervously accounting for contraband. She took a few steps, eyes smarting, nose streaming, then the walkie-talkie voice of her custodian, as she had come to think of the Voice, spoke almost in her ear.

"We had better get through Preconsignment first and settle the stuff you have there. Portal on the right, please."

She turned obediently, through another door, into a quieter place. Here the fog was not so dense, but she had to stand for a moment, rubbing her eyes and crying into a grimy handkerchief, before she was able to see. She was in a long room full of books. There were shelves from floor to ceiling, and cases stacked in the aisles, but there was none of the rest of the gear, or the personnel, of a library. A Customs shed was a strange place in which to find books. Perhaps these were the confiscated. She glanced at the nearest titles: *The Hooded Hawk* by D. B. Wyndham Lewis, *The Land of Spices* by Kate O'Brien, *The Catcher in the Rye* by Salinger, *The Collected Poems of John Donne, Madonna of the Peachbloom,* Maurice Hewlett . . . Unless the island belonged to Russia, that theory was out.

She looked at another shelf and found children's books: *Little Men,* in an old-fashioned green edition, like the copy Grandmother Banning gave her when she was eight; Andrew Lang's Fairy Books (she collected those when she was ten; here were the Brown, the

Crimson, the Lilac, the Gray and the rest); *Phantastes; The Wind in the Willows,* in the English edition, illustrated by Arthur Rackham (Debby's was a fat blue copy, poor defrauded child); *The Bibliothèque Rose,* in red and gold, with *Les Malheurs de Sophie, Un Bon Petit Diable,* and a long string of others.

There were shelves of paper-backed yellow French novels, and white Tauchnitz copies of English novels of the twenties and thirties. Whoever assembled them must be a contemporary with the same knowledge of French and English literature and the same tastes. Here were first editions of the Georgian poets; she hadn't seen those four bright-colored volumes since she stayed in Oxford and "discovered" them in Blackwells.

There were manuals of photography beside *Les Editions du Pantheon,* that expensive undertaking edited by John Holroyd Reece. What had become of Reece? She blamed herself for losing sight of him and other good friends in Paris. She had dropped everyone, or perhaps they had dropped her, and then came the wars dropping bombs.

There was a battered set of Kipling with the swastika, his mark, which he subsequently removed from his books when the Nazis took it for theirs. There was a dark-red collection of Hardy; here *Les Cahiers Verts;* here Jane Austen in a funny little clothbound set of 1898 which she had never seen anywhere except on her

father's bedside table; *Yoga; The Martyrdom of Man.*

What a mixture of old friends! She lingered, stirred as she always was by books, and she was about to look further and perhaps to pull one out when the Voice came over the microphone.

"Newspapers and periodicals in the room to the right, pictures, statues, objets d'art on the left. Furniture, clothes, hats, jewelry, miscellaneous objects on the first floor. Toys, gardening tools, cars, radios, phonographs, pianos, kitchen utensils, household linens, and miscellaneous on the second floor."

Not a library, then, a department store? But——

"Nothing is new," the Voice added. "There is only one of each, and nothing is for sale."

She was doing her best to ignore, to keep at bay, to control her misgivings, but there was no use pretending that she could not hear herself whistling in the dark, or deny the strange, sinister quality of this experience, like the disconcerting magic in Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête.* There, too, one was directed by Voices and saw inexplicable things. She was feeling languid from the loss of altitude, she was beginning to feel the climate of the island, or perhaps she was faint from eating nothing on the plane. She felt a weakness, a need to sit down; she looked about her for a chair. There was a marble bench at one end of the room, opposite a plaque with an inscription. As she made for it, she passed the open

door, to the room on the left, and glanced in. What she saw there held her rigid with surprise.

There were the Chinese rugs, the three silk hangings, the two ginger jars, the wooden chest and the picture of a ship, which should be in her living room—the five things she cared for most and took with her wherever she moved, last to be packed, first to be placed.

The hangings were the "Peiping Flower Stitch" she had brought back with her from Marco Polo's part of China, on the borders of Tibet.

✧ ✧

ONE COULD SEE THE MOUNTAINS OF TIBET from Cheng-tu on the right sort of day; she had seen them clearly the day she bought the silk.

She snatched an hour of shopping from her schedule of interviews and briefings to take a ricksha and go by herself to the Street of the Silversmiths to look at filigree silver. But there was nothing there she wanted, nothing she had not seen in India or cheaper in the shops of New York. She turned into the Street of Silk. The usual crowd gathered, following her around, taking sides in the uneven bargaining. She knew no Chinese and the merchants no English beyond "tea please, tea please." She drank it from toy bowls, eloquently sipping, smiling and nodding at the silks. She shook

her head at the first price because it was expected, but that was the extent to which she bargained, and the crowd was disappointed at her spirit. One old woman grabbed her arm shook it angrily, miming that she was gypped, but she was feeling ashamed to be paying so little, on account of the inflation, for such treasures. She breakfasted for three thousand dollars, had her shoes shined for five hundred, and said casually to the *Times* man, "Lend me fifteen thousand dollars." He had obliged with a bundle taken from his helmet. That was 1945. The silks cost a few American dollars and gave her priceless pleasures. There were no more coming from China now, no more likely to be made in all the countries over which the red blight crawled. There were no more native arts; the traditional, the beautiful died first.

She set out with the bundle of money in her shoulder bag and a letter from Clive in her pocket, and because she was lonely and happy at the same time, she smiled at the women, riding on wheelbarrows pushed by their men; she held her thumb up, Ding Hao, to the giggling staring children watching her pass. She remembered a small boy singing and dancing in the dust as he herded a flock of ducks by holding a rod behind them. All the children she saw were high-spirited, obviously loved and indulgently treated by the adult coolies who strained and sweated, pushing and pulling heavily over-

loaded carts. She saw four men pulling an airplane on a wagon. She photographed that, and took some shots of the casual way other planes were stowed in barns and back yards, side by side with the most primitive living she had seen anywhere in China. Everything was made out of bamboo, from the neatly plaited fences around the farms and compounds to the tools and bowls and utensils of everyday life. The farms looked prosperous and picturesque, shut in behind their tall trees. It was the most conservative and attractive part of the country because it was inaccessible, unvisited by white people before the war, except for missionaries. She had been lucky, and known her luck, to be sent out on that tour.

The day she bought the silk was the day Jimmy Wei, the interpreter whom she had come to know and to feel a real affection for, told her a part of his story, how in the bombings his wife had died, not from a bomb but from typhoid fever, from drinking contaminated water in the shelter. His two children had survived.

She saw his face darken with a somber pride as he quoted a poem of Chen Tao's:

> They vow to sweep the heathen herds
> Off from their native soil or die
> Five thousand knights, sable clad
> All perished in the desert lie;
> Nay, the white bones that bleached clod
> Along the Wuting River side,

But they still come and go like living men
Home, somewhere in their loved one's dream.

There was another translation:

Thinking only of their vow that they would
crush the Tartars—
On the desert, clad in sable and silk, five
thousand of them fell. . . .
But arisen from their crumbling bones on
the banks of the river at the border,
Dreams of them enter, like men alive, into the
rooms where their loves lie sleeping.

Where was Jimmy Wei, and where those other faces? There was another poem he had written out for her:

And I was glad of a chance to rest,
And glad of a chance to drink with my friend. . . .
We sang to the tune of the wind in the pines;
And we finished our song as the stars went down.

It was good to quote poetry, to remember Jimmy Wei, to cling as long as she could to the remote, the romantic impersonal past. "China, the hangings, I left some of myself in the streets of the City of Silk." But she must come back now, to the dreadful *now,* to the *knowledge* mushrooming up.

There were still the picture and the chest to account

for. These were not Chinese; these were from Nova Scotia, they came from Deep Seas, equally part of her.

What were they doing here?

✧ ✧

SHE SAT DOWN HEAVILY. SHE TRIED TO close her eyes, but she was afraid of the silence, so she kept them open, fixed on the plaque instead, reading the inscription's three familiar lines:

All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp my hand and come!

A strange inscription for a library—only, of course, this was no library; this was—what did the Voice call it?—a Preconsignment shed.

She sat very still as though by not moving she could avoid or delay coming to a conclusion. She would not define it further, even to herself, but she was convinced of this much: that if she did follow the inscription's words, if she rose and extended her hand, it would be Taken. She was frightened. She was afraid to the pits of all her stomachs, as the Frenchman said. She would consider the edges of her fear, then it might pass before she reached the center. She was afraid because she knew that the things upstairs were hers, the things down-

stairs were hers, and these were her books—she knew it without looking into one of them. She had owned them, read them and lost them, shed along the way. She did not want them now, nor did she want those other things in those other rooms on those other floors. She had finished with all these things, she did not want to stay there a moment longer, wasting her eternity in musty museums. . . . There, it was out, it was formed, she had let the Conclusion take shape by implication. It was taking a great Gray Shape and she was frightened. To whom could she appeal?

✧

ONCE IN A CROWDED ROOM IN THE *préfecture* in Paris an old woman, involved in some altercation with authority, caught hold of her arm; an unprepossessing old woman, shabby, not too clean, her crisis, whatever it was, had made her sweat grimy runnels, streaked from forehead to chin. She was clutching a string bag with one hand and clawing Martia's sleeve with the other, demanding, "To whom shall I complain? Eh, then? Tell me that!"

Martia, bent on getting her own errand done before the place closed, naturally brushed her off. The face came back to her now, grotesquely weeping and eating an apple at the same time. She remembered seeing the

hand she had shrugged off drop away, dive into the crumpled bag and come up with a sour-looking bruised windfall, dropped from some market cart. The stumpy discolored teeth bit into it angrily with small, sharp, defiant bites, as if to say, "You won't get *this* away, nor this, nor that, you dirty species of Life." *Sale vie. Triste vie.* To whom should she complain?

✧

THERE WAS THE DRUNK ON THIRD AVENUE, dribbling vomit down his shirt. The door of the saloon was still swinging behind him as he stood there swaying, dazed from being bounced. She drew Debby aside.

"Where in hell am I?" he was mumbling. "Lady, will you please tell me where I am?"

Then as she didn't answer, he weaved toward them shouting obscenities. She put herself between him and Debby, walking by him as quickly as she dared, "for one mustn't provoke them to anger."

He tried at first to follow, but the turn was too hard to make and he stood helpless in the center of the pavement, saying plaintively, "Lady . . . lady . . . I only want to know where I *am!* God, won't no one tell me where I am?"

Debby pulled at her arm as they crossed the street. "Mother, tell him."

Martia, guiding them both through traffic, paid no attention to what Debby said until she repeated it.

"Why don't you tell him?"

Then she could only shake her head.

"Even if he was drunk, he was human," Debby said indignantly when they reached the pavement. "Why couldn't you tell him? He only wanted to know where he was."

"But, darling, I don't know—who knows where he was?"

Debby looked at her amazed. "On the corner of Third and Forty-ninth," she said scornfully. "That poor man! I wish you'd told him. Somebody should tell him."

Those were not the whereabouts he wanted to know, of course. It would have done no good, no good at all, to say with Helen Hokinson, *"Joyeux Noël,* my good man. You are on the corner of Third Avenue and Forty-ninth, and you have just been bounced from a saloon."

What good would it do, for instance, what help would it be, if some kind soul—*soul* was the right word, she thought hysterically—were to inform her now, "You are on a bench in a hall of a consignment shed"?

Still, perhaps it would be more comforting than silence!

Even if I am dead, I am human.

"God, God, God," the drunk had muttered.

Of course—God.

In moments of difficulty and danger in whom do you put your trust?

In God.

Relying on such sure support, you may safely rise and follow your guide, for where that Name is invoked, we trust no evil can ensue.

So she made the experiment. So she rose; and nothing happened.

"But I know that I am dead," she told the silence. "I am dead."

"As dead as you or I or anyone can be," the Voice said cheerfully, "and that's not so very dead, is it?"

She would have liked time to try, to digest, to test, to realize this statement, but the Voice swept on.

"These are the things already consigned, only waiting the formality of your release—all the rooms you lived in, stairs you climbed, elevators you used, beds you slept in, loved in, sinned in, mirrors you looked into, umbrellas you lost, china you handled, silver you ate with, cameras you focused, pocketbooks you carried, records you played, books you borrowed, all the physical objects you have come into contact with. Are you prepared to release them? Is it your will to consign them to their proper places? Those in favor will signify their assent in the usual manner."

She heard a sonorous "Ay" roll out around her. She had forgotten the safari of other Martias.

"Then if you will read the inscription above that lever, and, after you have read it, pull the handle down . . . Thank you."

She read the inscription, a familiar verse of Kipling's:

> Cleanse and call home thy spirit,
> Deny her leave to cast,
> On aught thy heirs inherit,
> The shadow of her past.

She pulled the lever. There was a noise behind her, a sigh, a concerted *poof,* the magnified sound of a cloud of dust shaken from a vacuum cleaner. The room behind her emptied. The whole building would be empty now, she knew it without checking.

"Look down," the Voice said. "Look!"

A shutter slid back beneath her feet. She was standing on glass over space, watching her "consignment" plummet down, sprung from the opening jaws of a dredge. It gave her the triumphant sensation of the old-time engineer, the man who pulled the switch, setting all in motion.

"A good job done," the Voice said. "It's a relief to have it all tidied away at last, isn't it? Don't you feel lighter, by tons?"

She did feel relieved of weight, of material things. She was free of things.

"They're all on microfilm," the Voice said. "You'll see some of them again, in their proper settings, in the projection room. And now for your personal luggage."

. . . carried by the shadowy safari—so she was not quite free. She was free of things, but not of selves.

✧

SHE TURNED TO GO, AND WAS ASTONISHED to see that the room was not entirely empty. There were two things on the bench by the door—a plastic duck and a battered rubber ball. She hesitated, curious to know why of all her possessions these were not consigned.

"They are not yours," the Voice explained. "The little M.D.—Martia Deborah, isn't it?—is beginning her collection."

Marty-Deb's duck, already consigned here—she remembered the day she bought the duck as a bribe.

"If you will let Granny take all the photographs she wants of you, if you will stand the way Granny says, you can have anything you want from the toy shop."

The morning in the studio was critical, with three bursts of temper and two breaks for the door, but finally the enchanting and now famous "portraits of

a child" were taken, peace made, and in the afternoon they took a taxi to Schwartz's. The dolls were passed in review, the baby carriages, the cars, there was a toy hammock, and a toy kitchen, with all the equipment to make a full meal, there was a writing desk, and a complicated seesaw, electric games, and a nursery radio-phonograph. This was Marty-Deb's favorite, until she saw the duck. It was small, it was painted green and brown, with an orange beak. It stood among other animals to be floated in the bath, and its price was forty cents. The radio-phonograph without any records cost twenty dollars. Marty-Deb went from one to the other, back and forth. The duck was clutched in her hand. The phonograph was set in motion by the interested and somewhat biased clerk, and after three quarters of an hour of vacillation she chose the duck. Now here it was with the red-and-white rubber ball from the first Christmas stocking.

She felt then for the first time an appropriate sorrow that she must be dead, while Debby and Don and Marty-Deb traveled without her the hazardous, incomprehensible long road through life to the Consignment shed to . . . where?

"Defend, O Lord, these thy children with thy heavenly grace; that they may continue thine for ever; and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until they come unto thy everlasting kingdom."

"Our Father . . ."

"You may find the chapel better appointed for prayer," the Voice said.

✧

SHE FINISHED HER OUR FATHER IN A CHAPEL. The air was thick with wavering mists of incense; candles were still burning from a service. She knelt at the back of the empty seats, given up to silence, and as she knelt, Liszt's *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la Solitude* sounded, not on the organ, but on the piano, for which it was written. She recognized the shimmering legato of one of the few artists who ever played that sublime, unknown piece of Liszt's later period of simplicity.

"Marik! I have the record . . . had it . . ."

"It is Marik," the Voice agreed, "but not a record. She is playing in person. They had to move a Steinway grand into the organ loft."

She glanced up through heavy mist like a gauze curtain, until she saw the pensive profile of the artist against the dull-red hangings in the loft. Organ lofts looked the same, smelled the same everywhere, a dusty, sweet mingling of wood with leather hymnbooks; if they were Roman or Anglican, of disembodied incense; organ lofts were timeless, never-never platforms, suspended between here and there.

She knew what it was like to be in one, "aloft" alone with the rafters and the top of a reredos. She had sung in her school chapel on Sunday evenings; she had sung in England, in St. Paul's Cathedral, with the great massed choirs for the *St. Matthew Passion,* and later, for a brief time, in the Bach Choir. She knew what it was like to make music for listening congregations, as she knew what it was like to be listening in those congregations, in churches all over the world: Saint Mary the Virgin in Oxford; Saint Eustache in Paris; Chartres Cathedral; Salisbury Cathedral; the strange cathedral in Durham with those contradictory sculptured heads ranged round the crypt who leer at Abraham and Sarah receiving their great news, wink at the Annunciation, weep at the Nativity and smile at the Crucifixion; the little New England churches of her childhood; the other Saint Mary the Virgin, in New York, and now *here,* wherever here might be.

It should have been Carnegie Hall. She was going to get tickets for the concert just before she took . . .

"Took flight?" the Voice suggested.

The music changed to Liszt's *Apparitions,* with the shimmering water effects Debussy discovered later and Ravel used in his *Ondine.* Who, knowing only the rhapsodies and the flamboyancies of his best-known, always-played pieces, would recognize this Liszt, her Liszt (not Clive's Liszt), of the *Bénédiction,* the *Jeux*

d'Eaux, the *Berceuse,* the *Vallée d'Obermann,* from the strange spiritual musings of his *Album d'un Voyageur?* Where did he voyage? How did he reach *There?*

> There above noise and danger,
> Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles. . . .
> If thou canst get but thither
> There grows the flower of peace,
> The rose that cannot wither,
> Thy fortress and thy ease. . . .

There Liszt had surely been; *There* for brief moments those who could hear him went. She listened, marveling, acknowedging the solidarity of human achievement, the disciplined effort, controlled, deliberate sacrifice, of the composer, of the pianist. The edges of her spirit drew together in pride; she lifted her head.

There should be no groveling for any sin, hers or the Fault in Eden, since she was, or she had been, human, of the race that composes music, measures stars, transforms planets, sustains, endures, laughs, builds bridges, and will not put up with what it calls "poor conditions" on its jaunt to death. . . .

"Yes, and kills, and condemns and turns indifferently from the starving, the tortured, the frightened, the uncomprehending . . . but still a race that need not cower drooling in the dust in front of Death."

The music soared in remembrance, regret, resignation, hope, triumph. It came to an end. A light went out above the piano. The artist appeared at the railing, looking gravely down at Martia in the shadow. She was raising her hand in a quick, foreign gesture, a courteous "Go with God."

"You too," Martia would have said to her, "you too go with God."

"You know at whose funeral she is playing," the Voice stated.

Martia thought she knew. "I would like to thank her."

"Debby and Don will thank her for you. They arranged this."

Debby . . . Don . . . Sharp desolation caught her.

"I want to say good-by."

"You did when you embarked. You said, 'I love you both.' They heard you. They got the message."

She saw them then, kneeling together in the front row, their backs to her, Don with his arm around Debby, drawing her close. She went to stand behind them, a groping hand on each. Now it was clearer where she was—in the mortuary chapel of Saint Mary the Virgin, her church in New York. She could hear a congregation rustling behind her. She did not look around. She felt shy, an intruder, ill at ease at her funeral, as she had been ill at ease at her birthday parties

when she was a child, inadequate to greet the friends or the enemies focusing attention on her.

Clive would not be there. Clive had never been willing to step inside a church with her, any church. He particularly hated hers.

✧

"WHAT CHURCH?"

"Anglo-Catholic. High Church Episcopalian to you."

"Well, well," Clive said, and his tone was unpleasant, "a Roman Catholic who flunked in Latin. And what does this do to us?"

"I don't know what it does to you——" she began.

"A lot," he interrupted. "You'll be worse than Isobel. The pseudo—"

"Not pseudo, Clive."

"—is worse than the thing it apes, more boring, more fanatic. One thing I won't be," he added bitterly. "I won't be anyone's struggled-against sin! If it's going to be like that, it's going to be good-by, my girl!"

"Just like that?"

"Yes, just like that."

How angry he was, how bitter, how disgusted!

But of course it wasn't, it couldn't be "like that." There were the telephones, the wistful appeals, the

notes, the reminders, the concerts—"surely it's safe to hear music together!"—the dinners—"because even the merest friends can have dinner together"—the difficult evenings, the savage, sad good-bys in taxis, at elevator doors, in the apartment; the lapses, the anguished desires, the remorse, the confessions. "I am sorry not to be sorry," the purpose of amendment, and the whole go-round again, not a merry-go-round, a wheel; she knew what it was to be broken on the wheel.

✧

THEN BEGAN THE STRUGGLE, THE HORRIBLE struggle to be free, when so little of her wished to be free. Clive was brilliant, subtle, fun; Clive was passion, ecstasy, comfort, reassurance; Clive was completion, home, country, world. There was angry aching loneliness, beside the telephone, in reach of his voice.

He did not believe and was angry with her for believing, but he made it harder for her by being unexpectedly understanding about her beliefs now and then. His mind was sharper than hers. He could make good use of reason. She had nothing to help her. All was treachery—her mind, her instincts, her likes, her dislikes, even her repugnance for being labeled "religious" by all those people to whom the word was a synonym for "stupid," "sentimental," "hysterical," or even contemptuously, "approaching change of life."

Everything within her fought against her, fought treacherously on the side of the Devil and of Clive.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER IF ONE OF them had not come back from the war. Each could have borne that kind of bereavement. The trouble was that she came back changed. She was not alone, or unusual in this change, in her conversion, or reconversion, to religion. In 1946, in England, for instance, so many women flocked to the convents of the Anglican Church that the novices of one order had to live in tents. Clive was ribald about tenting when she told him this, ribald and cruel with contempt. He was not the only one bewildered by the change in her. Debby and Don were too.

"Why don't you marry him?" Debby asked the first time she saw them together.

"I can't. He's not divorced."

That was understandable, but when she went on to say that even if he were it would be impossible for her to marry him so long as Isobel lived—that no one understood or would tolerate apparently.

"Surely you've both earned the right to a little happiness," Debby said.

"Why worry about marriage?" was Clive's point

of view. "We're lovers. We have all that matters."

Love without marriage is sin.

✧

"I CAN'T, I CAN'T STOP LOVING HIM."

"Who asks you to?"

"The Church." She said it angrily, in her despair.

"The Church asks no such thing." Father Kenelm's voice was patient. There was a ring in it of humor and compassion which took the sting out of wounded pride and indignant rage and was healing to her misery. "The Church says love him, of course, love him more deeply, love him forever, love him in Christ."

✧

THERE WERE BOOKS TO READ, PRAYERS TO say, meditations to make. She rebelled against all of them. She went to a retreat where everything she read, everything she thought, she craved to share with Clive.

✧

SHE WROTE TO HIM.

"It was this last paragraph, in the diary of Madeleine Ségur, which moved me and made my noontime meditations in the chapel troubled and difficult. I saw your expressive hands with their characteristic gestures, so

much a part of me forever, and I thought of your letters, so much more beautiful than hers, and of you, and of the strangeness of life which should bring me, of all people, to this, of all places! And of love, and of how 'they that are separate in this world are knit together,' and of you, so all that I want! And how it is for your sake, too, that I purify myself, or try to. And how, with much of me rebellious, I can do no other, and how God, since He *is* love, must be feeling a million contradictions and pains and puzzlements and aching in that love for those lovers of His, those sparks that are wandering in His night. It is hard for a spark to be a candle. I doubt I ever shall."

Clive sent the letter back.

"Don't desecrate our love with this religious bilge," he wrote, and the pen had torn into the page. "I can stand anything but artificial exaltation."

✧

"DON'T YOU SEE I LOVE YOU AS MUCH AS ever—more!"

"All I can see is the waste."

✧

ALL I CAN SEE IS THE WASTE. ALL I CAN SEE is the waste. All I can see is the waste. All I can see is the waste.

✧

WHERE WAS CLIVE? NOT HERE, NOT AT this funeral. Free of her, quite free.

✧

FATHER KENELM WAS RISING FROM HIS seat in the nave. He walked toward her. She took her reluctant hands in an anguish of farewell from Debby's and Don's bowed shoulders, feeling them stir and half lift their heads to look after her; she could not turn to look back. She went slowly to stand in front of Father Kenelm, then to kneel for his blessing.

"Depart, Christian soul . . ."

The mist thickened, like a wavering curtain drawn around the chapel, shutting off candles, incense, priest, shutting off Debby, Don, and those others, enemies or friends, whose faces she had not looked at. She rose from her knees alone, to take her departure alone.

✧ ✧

SHE DEPARTED, DISEMBODIED, DISEMOTIONED, to a ludicrous yet vaguely logical place, a church bazaar in a parish hall. She recognized these booths and tables, beneath inadequate lighting, heaped with "tasteful ar-

rangements" of the superfluous; here, with painful smiles, good-natured people would pick up, turn over and surreptitiously put down again small arty objects nobody wanted to buy, nobody cared to keep.

She was exasperated, at charitable sales in her childhood, by having to put in time (and now some eternity?) in aimless, amateur bustle of forced cheerfulness, helpful activity "directed to a good end." She looked for the only good end she wished direction to, and saw it, a door at the other end of the hall, but to reach it she must go by several booths.

The first was a flower stall, enclosed in canvas with a canvas roof. Indirect lighting gave the effect of sunshine on a hot June day. It was the first cheerful light she remembered since the start of her journey and for some time before that. It made her feel better. It disposed her to linger by the empty stall.

"Nice weather," she said tentatively, lest it should not prove empty. "Dr. Johnson spoke through his ill-fitting wig about the weather, didn't he? It does influence us, even when we're 'departed.'"

There was a silence "of the most complete," as Martia's French governess would have described it. In some ways the Voice (Voice of America, Voice of Amnesia, Voice of Conscience?) reminded Martia of Mademoiselle Lelong. Neither encouraged small talk. She felt abashed.

"I wonder what a Figment looks like, a Figment of my Imagination?"

Mademoiselle Lelong would certainly have described the Voice thus, and given Martia something "for the stomach." According to Mademoiselle, everything, especially the inexplicable, had its "roots in the stomach." Crime came normally from indigestion. It was good, therefore, to lie down after every meal and "give the digestion its free rein." Mademoiselle's metaphors were cheerfully mixed. She would have loved to explain this adventure of the island in terms of soup and soufflé; she would have explained it once for all, clearly, even to the flowers—bluebells against a backdrop of real beech woods; primroses and daffodils beside a real stream; crocuses and lilies of the valley on the edges of a lawn; old-fashioned roses, Damask, China, Musk, Briar, Cramoisy and Yellow Tea, all in their beds and borders. The flower stall covered half an acre.

> "I know a little garden close
> Set thick with lily and red rose,
> Where I would wander if I might,
> From dewy dawn to dewy night,
> And have one with me, wandering."

The last line hurt. She stopped quoting and began to examine the flowers in the central bed.

"Grown by you," the Voice informed her.

A hummingbird whirred at the larkspur in a tall line along a picket fence.

"Unconsigned possessions, 'little unremembered acts of kindness and of love,' times you took disappointment bravely; times you comforted others at your own expense; 'whatsoever ye have done of good or endured of evil'; here they all are. You can send them now to particular people at particular times, or release them to the general good. You wanted to thank Marik, for example. You might send her a bouquet for her concert."

"Would she get it?"

"By special delivery. Not in the form of flowers, in their essence. There's a passage in the concerto she is afraid of taking too fast. You could send her some steady nerves to waft her over that, a dozen brave roses, an azalea——"

"No, I hate azaleas!"

"You sowed some, all the same, from a rather artificial kindness you did once."

"I'll send roses."

"Will you pick them yourself, or leave it to the Dispatcher?"

"I'll pick them myself."

"You will find the scissors and the basket . . ."

Silver scissors, golden basket.

"Lust, dull envy, sloth, insensitivity and greed."

There were ants, in anthills and in glass-covered "cities," black ants, red ants, like the red ants of Chabua.

✧

SHE WAS IN CHABUA, PHOTOGRAPHING Search and Rescue personnel, listening to the stories.

One man parachuted down and was caught in a tree. He pulled his shoulder straps free first by mistake and was left dangling, head downward, a foot from the ground. He struggled and managed to free one leg from the parachute. Then he put his hands on the ground to take the weight from the other leg that he was suspended by. He lifted them quickly, covered with red ants. He brushed the ants off, trying to keep his arms up, in an agonizing position. He poked out his gun and tried to shoot the strap of the parachute holding his leg. He fired five times and succeeded only in fraying the strap. He put the sixth bullet through his head. The Rescue squad, helplessly witnessing his agony from a hovering plane, agreed that this was the best thing he could do. Already the ants were on the march up the tree.

"They take ten minutes to strip a deer of its flesh," the young pilot told her, "leaving a clean skeleton. He was my navigator," he added. "We were buddies."

✣

ANTS . . .

"Inhumanity, perverted will, evil domination of others, pride, pride, pride," the Voice whispered.

She turned, shuddering, from the anthills under glass, to a container of hairy-legged spiders with bloated gray bodies.

"Any particular consignments this time?" the Voice asked.

"Surely no one . . . are there ever . . . ?"

"Oh, yes, people sometimes designate the unjust, the cruel, the tyrants. A good many consignments have been sent to the Gestapo, the NKVD, the Kremlin. Some souls—rather black ones—do pick out individual people whom they have a grudge against: one man spent the time allotted to him choosing the most venomous specimens and dispatching them, gift-wrapped, to his wife, but mostly people scatter their consignments as thinly as they can, hoping no two will fasten on the same sentient victim. Children, animals, even plants come in for their share. No one on earth escapes the flies. It is these which Tennyson speaks of in his 'dreadful hollow, where each man walks with his head in a cloud of poisonous flies.' "

She looked at the containers.

"Yes, yours," the Voice confirmed.

"So many!"

"About the average collections, enough to sponsor gray days, depressing, jeering thoughts, hopeless feelings, resentments, fears, little injustices, plenty of pains and aches."

"What happens when they get there?" she asked, fascinated, horrified.

"The saints transmute them, the brave fight them, the weak sink a little farther under them."

"If we only knew . . ."

"I'm afraid you can't claim ignorance," the Voice pointed out mildly, "what with one thing and another, can you? Father Kenelm, and many others, spent a lot of time informing you, Sunday after Sunday, about it. He's an excellent transmuter, by the way. Send him some."

"No," she said. "If I didn't send him any of the good—and I'm sorry I didn't—I won't send him any of the bad."

The steamy, ill-smelling air was closing in on her oppressively, making her feel nauseated, dizzy. She tried to take her hypnotized eyes from the hornets, buzzing viciously against the glass walls of their container, from the spiders, watchful in their webs, from the creepy-crawlers, stirring sluggishly, and from the ants. . . .

"Must I release them?" she begged. "Can't I . . ."

"Can't you what?"

"Take them somehow, deal with them myself!"

"They're out of your hands, out of your lips forever," the Voice said firmly. "Now you must pull the lever."

A hot feeling of discomfort and shame went over her.

"Even the saints have found this moment trying," the Voice said gravely. "Saint Peter's rooster, the dunghill on which it crowed . . . Saint Mary Magdalene——"

"Please," she said, "don't . . ."

"Oh, there's nothing private about it. They permit it to be spoken of, they desire it to be known, for the sake of the interdependence of the whole. There is the Communion of Saints, but there is also the Sharing of the Common Guilt. Pull the lever. The ants will multiply while you hesitate."

She put out her hand reluctantly.

"Pull," the Voice said sternly, "and look down."

She looked beneath her feet, through the floor that was glass, and saw a dark cloud swarming down on the world. She felt outraged, rebellious, but there was no one to rebel against, to blame, except her self.

Down there on the earth, her weary, unsuspecting earth, there would be women whose corns would begin to hurt, whose tempers would fray on account of her. There were children who would whimper with cold or with hunger, men who would turn defeated into the

nearest bar. Decent, tired people, hanging onto their self-control, would be goaded over the edge by her consignment. Angry, hateful, unforgettable words; mean, sly little lusts; unworthy cruelties—these would be sponsored now by her—would beget their kind to be stored up here, and released like these, in the chain reaction of Sin.

"There is nothing you can do about it now," the Voice reminded her. "The time when you might have killed your consignment was *then;* you could have transmuted it, disposed of it, destroyed it, then. Now, like a bombardier after bombs-away, you cannot take it back."

✧ ✧

SHE CLOSED HER EYES, HER HAND STILL gripping the lever, and found herself in the plush seat of a movie theater—a luxurious seat, in the mezzanine, with a handle to adjust it comfortably, the handle she had just been using.

She had arrived in the middle of a silent film, with captions. A passionate young man was shouting, according to the subtitle, "I hate him for what he did to you."

The camera panned to a woman's face, a subtle face like Rosaye's in *La Kermesse Héroïque,* with wit, humor, courage, dignity.

"You mustn't hate him," she was saying. "Hate will only hurt us."

The man moved. Martia saw that he was crippled.

"It doesn't matter; I don't matter."

"Darling, you matter to me," the woman said.

"I come second."

"No, David, first." She put her arm around him. "I've always loved you more than I love anyone, *anyone* else."

"She's lying, of course," the Voice said in Martia's ear. "She was always the sort of woman who is mate first and mother second, but David needs the lie, and so . . ."

David! Then Isobel? But Isobel was not this woman! Isobel had no beauty, humor, wit.

"You never saw her, did you?" the Voice went on.

"No, but Clive and Ruth—"

"—told you about Isobel. You took Clive's word. You took Ruth's—a jealous friend's spiteful estimate of the woman who had married the man she wanted. You never bothered to verify. You wanted to despise Clive's wife. Is she despicable? Look at her! Look at David. You never wanted to meet David. You resented Clive's interest in his son because it was interest deflected from

you. You preferred Dick Spade to David, Dick Spade who got hurt—drunken young idiot—driving a bunch of other drunken young idiots, crash, into a truck."

"He paid for it," she said quickly. "He was always brave about the accident."

"There were compensations," the Voice said. "He got full indemnity, he had an income to begin with. He was able to go on doing what he wanted to do. He painted, he made a success of his painting. Some of the recognition he received was due to the knowledge among critics and public that he was a cripple, and some of the chores and obligations which would have taken from his painting time if he were normal he was able to shelve, onto Don, onto you, onto anyone else passing by. No, on the whole it was not a handicap to Dick Spade to be a cripple. Others paid more heavily than he did for his accident. The truck driver was blamed. Do you want to see what happened to his family in direct consequence of Spade's drunken driving? You can watch it on the screen."

"No," she said, "no, please!"

"The girl, Spade's date that night, had to have a hysterectomy, at nineteen. She was slated to marry, later, and to have two children, on the books."

"Books?"

"Books we keep here—the ledger, you might say. She did marry, but Spade deprived her and her husband

of those children, and them of the lives they would have lived."

"Not purposely, an accident."

"An avoidable accident. David's was different. David was maimed, sticking to a useless duty, unable to send the SOS which might have saved him and his ship, but able to listen to the sort of dance music drunken young idiots were dancing to, while he and his ship went down. He paid, for you, for others, for Dick Spade. He got no special compensation, and he didn't choose a sedentary occupation. He was an active, outdoor sort of boy, a more unselfish, better sort of person than Dick Spade, whom he was maimed to save, among all the other citizens of his country."

"I know," she said, "I know."

"Yet you preferred Dick Spade."

"Because I never met David."

"Did Clive want you to meet him?"

"No," she whispered, her eyes on a close-up of Isobel, completely unlike the Isobel she had created and confidently would have sworn to in a court of law.

"Why not?" the Voice demanded.

"Because . . ." she began, holding her head, aching now in long strong throbs, waking up the PAIN, which should be dead if she were dead.

PAIN that never died. Worm that never dies.

"You would always have preferred Dick Spade no

matter how well you might have grown to know David."

"Yes."

There was a silence.

"Why?" the Voice prodded.

"Because Dick spoke like Michael."

Sound is the most evocative thing there is. Voices matter. You know this, who have chosen to manifest Yourself as a Voice. Clive knew this. It was one of the most enduring spans of our bridge, the bridge we were trying to build.

There was a close-up now of Clive upon the screen. She was able to search his face without his knowing it, to meet his eyes without the impact of meeting them, to stare her fill without the flurry of contact, without defenses or self-consciousness.

It was the sort of appraisal one can give to a face asleep, but here Clive was awake, looking at her. This, then, was her lover, the man whom, in that vague court of law one referred one's clichés to, she would once have sworn was "the love of her life," since Michael, of the life that was left to be hers since Michael. Yes, she had thought that once, had acted on it, suffered through it, renounced it, because it was there to renounce—but was it?

"*Did* Clive love me?" she cried out suddenly.

"That is a question for him to answer, one day, not

for you," the Voice replied. "We are concerned only with your consignments now. But I can tell you this: each of you was loved more deeply by people you discarded and never thought of again."

Clive faded out, and a large brown dog came on the screen, bounding sedately in dignified circles on the lawn.

"Crosby!" she said at once, and began to laugh. The dog was absurdly like him. It cringed in bewilderment, its well-being gone. Its large sad eyes looked into hers questioningly, uncomprehendingly.

"Crosby," the Voice said, "who had come to love and depend on you, who had made you and Debby and Deep Seas a part of his life, who wanted his children to share that life, Crosby who never could understand why you took it all away."

"Why, Martia, why?" Crosby's abrupt strained voice asked out of the mouth of the dog.

"It was impossible. It would never have worked. I would have hurt him more in the end."

"Perhaps, but it was you who thought it would work, as you put it, in the first place."

"Why, Martia, *why?*"

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry, Crosby, I'm sorry."

The dog continued to look at her miserably. She closed her eyes. When she reopened them the screen was gone, curtains were folding back on the stage.

It was time for the floor show.

Tara ra boom de ay—all the safari of Martias pranced onto the stage like the Rockettes.

They lined up in a row, behind a long counter, where they put down their baggage in rhythmic movement. The smallest Martia carried a long piece of knitting raveled together. The one in the middy held a mongrel dog. She looked at it, remembering, refeeling the limitless love of the ten-year-old for Pongo.

I loved that ridiculous dog far more than I loved Clive! she thought, amazed.

There was the blue-leather suitcase labeled "Debby," the brown one labeled "Don," the canvas air bag, Clive, the battered brief case of the letters, the stacks and stacks of letters she carried round the world in this same battered brief case he had taken from her hands on their first train trip together to New York. There was the container of good-bys, the good-by she said to Debby and Don at the embarkation, the good-bys, over and over to Clive, in how many places! And the good-by she had never brought herself to say, releasing Michael. There was a small leather dispatch case for her individual personal unshared-with-anyone things. There was a small box marked "religion."

"Is religion luggage? I thought it a part of me."

"That's what I'm here to find out," caroled a figure

in blue, appearing from the wings. "I am your Examiner. Let's see what you ram-in-'er." He whirled up the row of waiting Martias, marking the bags with chalk as he went—one, two, like a ballet dancer or a clumsy imitation of one.

He stopped suddenly in front of two bags, one large, one small.

"Now, now," he said severely to the Martias standing behind them, "wot's the idea of cheating? Open up these 'ere."

The small one was labeled *fun,* the large one *sorrow.* So large an amount of sorrow? So small an amount of fun?

The Examiner shook his head. "Got 'em mixed, 'aven't you? This one's near empty." He turned the *sorrow* upside down and shook its contents out. They were obvious, recognizable, but he was right: they took up far less space than the suitcase indicated. "And this—" he rummaged in the *fun*—"look at all this, 'odge-podged in any'ow."

Fun. All the times she had laughed, spoken gaily, wanted to dance, all the presents, the surprises, the car drives, the visits, the innocent vanities of new dress or new hat, the fine day, the dancing, the swimming, Loon Lake at dawn, fishing, riding, flirtations, dinners with Michael, jokes shared with Clive, the *New Yorker,*

pleasant books, shadowy clouds on distant hill, and a great deal more, a great deal more *fun* than she had been aware of—and a great deal less *sorrow.*

"I beg your pardon," she said to the Examiner.

"Granted as soon as asked," he turned to answer, in atrocious cockney, reminding her of Michael's imitations.

She caught her breath. "Tell me, tell me about Michael!"

"We have no consignment on Michael. You will have to carry that farther."

The figures of all the Martias moved together, taking up their packages, bags and belongings. There was one small black suitcase with no Martia beside it. The sight of it abandoned, left behind on the stage, on this island, filled her with sharp anguish, out of all proportion, out of rhyme and reason. "Oh, look out for the bag!" she wailed as the kicking legs of the safari departed in their lock-step, dance-dip jive.

She closed her eyes; she leaned back in her seat.

✧ ✧

"IT IS AN INDIVIDUAL JOURNEY," THE Voice was explaining. "People make it all kinds of ways: some by train, some by boat—as in *Outward Bound,* you will remember—some on horseback, some

on foot. For those who walk, the first part of the way crosses a moor instead of the sea, but the essence of the journey is always the same; the same stages are reached, and passed. If by boat, to an island; if by train, to a junction; if by coach, to an inn; and the first step is always a sorting out of luggage consigned to Limbo."

She was glad that she had lived in the age of the airplane. She could not have endured the tedium of traveling in a train or a coach, "a death-coach"—how right the old expressions were!—but there was a simple grandeur, a dignity of traveling on foot, a "mark my footsteps, good my page," about walking, which would have suited her.

Instead, she was air-borne; she was back in her seat on the plane.

As it sheered upward and slanted away, she looked down on Limbo. There was a ceiling of low-lying white clouds over the island, mysterious from above, lonely from beneath. Into that never-lifting mist had she "consigned" Debby, Don, Clive?

"Friends, kindred, days,
Estate, good-fame,
Plans, credit and the Muse."

Debby! Don! Clive!

Remember to Whom you have consigned them, be at peace.

"Nothing refuse."

But she had refused something, withheld something—the black piece of luggage labeled "Michael," she could see in the rack above her head.

✧ ✧ ✧

THERE WAS LESS PAIN NOW, LESS CONFUSION. Her head had cleared. She was in the present, the timeless now, free of things, and free of selves, except of one thing, one self, "to be called for later, collect."

She had said that once to Clive.

Go with God, Clive.

Go with God, stay with God, all precious things, all precious friends, hid in death's dateless night.

She had always been aware of death, particularly lately—she lived in the atomic age—but the method of dying had never seemed so important to her as the fact of death. It was surely irrelevant whether one were pulverized by hydrogen explosion or worn out by pneumonia, if one might not remain on the earth indefinitely.

Someday, like Cabell's "insane fish" from which mankind descends, who conceived it to be his duty to live on land and succeeded in doing it, man might decide not to die and succeed in that enterprise. The decision would be a difficult one if it were left to the

individual. The writer, composer, painter, pianist—the artist—aware that one life is never enough to develop a skill beyond its most rudimentary stage, would elect to live, but so would the dictator. Life Everlasting—not on those terms, not on the earth, she decided.

She had left the earth; she had left the island of Limbo, in the waters of Lethe; now she was traveling on.

✧ ✧

SHE WAS JARRED OUT OF HER MOOD OF EXhilaration and contemplation by the pilot's voice coming over the intercom.

"Attention, please! Flight 33 has now completed seven hours of flight and has refueled in zero hours, zero minutes, zero-zero time. Refueling operations lasted sixty minutes, but since we set back the clock as we left the airport of the island, those sixty minutes have been lost and we are able to state that the plane was refueled in *no* space of time. It is now high noon. Over, over." *Click, click.*

There was a rustling, a bending of heads as the passengers set their watches. She looked down, astonished. Yes, she had hers. It had stopped. She rewound it and set it to twelve. She was frowning.

There was a lost hour, lost in many places and ways

she could remember—on the *De Grasse,* for instance, at one A.M. when the ship's clocks were put back to midnight, and the hour of dancing, of flirtation, of drinking at the bar, of dreaming at the moonlit rail, which people had just lived through, was suddenly wiped out, obliterated, consigned to Limbo—that had even been the phrase, the unregarded cliché: consigned to Limbo.

She could understand a lost hour, and a plane, this plane especially, refueling outside of time, outside of space, but this talk of a specific time, of seven hours, baffled her. Seven hours could not be long enough for the events paralleling the voyage, on the earth. At least a day—normally two, probably three—would pass between death and funeral. The phrase disquieted her for another reason. There should be no time, or the passage of time, *here;* there should be relativity in eternity *here.*

Why did the pilot—*and who, by the way, was the pilot in the pattern?*—count hours and minutes impressively over the intercom which he otherwise used so sparingly? At this stage of the journey one might expect to do without the symbolism of physical transportation, unless some of the passengers, in spite of their experience in the Consignment shed, still did not realize what had happened, still did not guess that they were dead, and that for them the continued allegory,

the symbolism of plane, of high noon, of seven hours, was a necessary part of their awakening.

It was surprising, however, that it could be helpful to be further mixed up with watches, hours, schedules and all the other props of a jaunt by air, except the stewardess with a cup of coffee and a sandwich. She was struck with the discovery, now that she made it, that there had been no food or drink, nor had she desired or expected any since the journey started. There was a reassuring Orpheus-in-the-Underworld touch about that. Reassuring? Most people would think it the opposite—or would they? Wouldn't most people prefer to be dead than insane?

Supposing she were right in her conclusions and had died, in a hospital bed, with Debby and Don peering down at her through the transparent window of an oxygen tent, which she took for the glassed-in promenade of an airport, and the nurses and hospital personnel for shadowy people about her, officials and passengers?

Suppose that after dying she had gone to her funeral and traveled to Limbo, where the events of her past life had unrolled before her, as they were supposed to unroll, "all the events of my life passed before me in review," an underworld cinerama—where would she expect to be now? What would she expect to be seeing,

borne upward toward the Presence of God, soaring through the interspace of silence, a silence of awe, of ecstasy, the lower worlds left behind, the joys of heaven ahead?

Nebulae, perhaps, supernovae, comets with sparkler tails, moons, flickering silver stars, massed choirs of Paradise on an auditorium of clouds, chanting the drama of continuous creation, a wandering cherubim dipping his wings in a grave salute, the blue mantle of Saint Mary in the Beatific Vision?

And if she were wrong—that is, insane or ill, embarked on a normal, terrestrial plane trip—what would she see then?

If the island they had left were the Azores, as first she had taken it for, the plane should now be somewhere off the coast of Africa.

Open your eyes, look out, look down!

She took a deep breath, she leaned, she looked.

Clouds parted below to show a blue, tideless sea with coral under-reefs. There was no traffic on it, even at the edges where a heat haze merged with dusty beach.

Darkest Africa did turn out to be this light sandy color, seen from the air. She had flown over it, she had photographed it in black-and-white and color.

"Thirty-three Thousand Miles by C-54! Woman Photographer Flies Rocket Route in Mission to C.B.I."

Could she be flying it again, ill from a blow on the head?

✣

SHE MUST NOT ALLOW HERSELF TO BE SWEPT into a panic. She must concentrate on what she saw and heard. She must be able to describe her conclusions, her symptoms, logically. If she could persuade whatever medical examiner undertook her case that most of her mind remained lucid, or a large part of it did, the cure might not be hopeless—she changed this—the cure might not take long.

She peered down. Here were the dried-up rivers and sand dunes, like pressed leaves on the desert; here were the date trees in regimented regularity; then these were left behind, the sea receded, the wings of the plane became ugly, dusty, dirty, and now it was over the desert, flying low.

In 1945 it had been easy to see, and she had been able to photograph, the tank tracks of Rommel's and Montgomery's armies leaving their patterns on the sand. It had been possible to reconstruct those desperate skirmishes in the scuffed-up dust which no wind disturbed, no wind was likely to disturb, since no currents of air moved over this part of the desert. Now and then a

crashed plane had shown black against the paleness of the sand, now and then a broken tank.

Here there were no signatures on the ground, not even the destructive signatures of war—nothing but hot, hard sand.

"Hedge-hopping over hell," the correspondents with her had called it then.

> If thought can reach to Heaven,
> On Heaven let it dwell,
> For fear thy Thought be given
> Like power to reach to Hell.

She could still make neat analogies. She must remember to point this out to the alienist. Alienist, alienate, alien . . .

Concentrate now, look down, on the parched inhospitable terrain spread below the plane.

She did not believe that this was Africa.

✧ ✧

THE JOURNEY BEGAN TO BE ROUGH. THERE were air pockets. The plane was tossed about like one of those celluloid balls balanced on a stream of water she had seen at fairs. It was oppressively hot and beginning to be stuffy. With each laboring breath she

felt more sick, more apprehensive, more depressed, more heavy and more earth-bound.

She stared at the black bag labeled "Michael," and then at the heads of the passengers in front of her—alien souls, each a separate continent, the dark, unexplored, mysterious, withheld territory of another being.

Were they absorbed like her in self-examination, bewildered like her and frightened? She had a longing that they might turn into the correspondents, swapping stories and cigarettes, typing with their oxygen masks and parachutes beside them, getting ready to scoop one another and file at the next stop.

She did not want to see the faces of these fellow travelers; she had not wanted to look at them from the start. She was conscious of deliberately closing her eyes whenever one of the heads moved as though it might turn.

She did not like the faces of strangers, she did not like humanity's faces; *like* was not the right word; she feared human faces; nor was *fear* the right word; dread, horror, hatred—a mixture of these? She shrank from the human face, the shield, the mask behind which lived the disconcerting stranger, the too familiar animal, glancing out upon her now and then.

She had seen faces reflecting every emotion. She had peered at them from beneath the photographer's black cloth, through the miniature eye of the Leica, in the

reflecting screen of the foolproof Rolleiflex. She had been said to have an "eye for a face," like the reporter's "nose for news," a flair for the unusual, the significant, the slant, the story.

Faces had been her stock in trade. She had made her reputation and most of her living out of faces. They crowded before her now: the beggar in Clive's Calcutta, plucking at her clothes, bleating like a sheep —"Maa, Maa"—in front of the filthy shrine of the Kali Ghat, where the gutters of the road were strewn with rotting refuse, blood and excrement, where kites tore at the entrails of a just-beheaded sacrificial goat, and children and dogs rolled in the muck; frightened ten-year-old wives with shamed eyes, tying amulets to a branch of the fertility tree that they might have more babies, more sons, to take away the rebuke they were afraid of, being married and still without sufficient sons; worshipers drinking water from the holy Hoogli, a gray, slimy ooze running from a gutter, after it had washed over the feet of the statue of Kali; an eldest son, lighting his father's funeral pyre at the Burning Ghat; the skull bursting as she watched and the brains spilling out; the feet sticking out from the pyre, gray, unburned, clay-colored toes moving in the heat; bodies, cremated three or four hours after death—some must be burned alive. In the old days the widow must throw herself upon the fire. If she hesitated, relatives tossed

her on, the eldest son poked her in and held her down with a stick; after the body was consumed, the navel, which does not burn, was gathered up, rolled in the mud and dumped into the river where people were bathing and drinking a few feet away.

She had photographed the Burning Ghat and the faces there; she had photographed the faces of the women in the "cages" of Bombay, streets of iron-barred shacks and cells where prostitutes of all ages, from grandmothers to children, shared diseases and carried on their trade. Dim light might hide the filth of the cells and the rags on the beds, but it could not hide the expression on the faces, or the smell.

Blocks of these cages belonged to wealthy and respectable owners, who pocketed the earnings, from two to eight annas a throw—less than one would dare to give a porter for carrying a suitcase. Sometimes a man owed money to the moneylender—Martia had photographed moneylenders—then he sent his daughter to the cages to work out the debt. She could not leave the 6 x 8-foot cage, after she once entered it, day or night, for any purpose. The sea was only a mile away, with its freshening breezes, but she and her working companions would not know it was there.

The sordid squalor of the cages, Martia decided, lay in the reduction of lust to matter-of-fact function, in surroundings less alluring than a kennel or a sty. The

women were clothed. There were no provocative gestures, no songs, no dances, nothing of honest sex, just rows of listless cronies, sad-eyed girls and wizened, painted children, peering out apathetically, while a male madam unlocked the doors to let in customers. The customers did not look eager, furtive or satisfied—merely functional, with the expression that a man has when he spits absent-mindedly at crossroads.

She exhibited these faces and others—victims of cholera, of famine, war casualties, survivors of Dachau—next to her portraits of American debutantes and brides in what the critics called "significant contrast." It was one of her best, most exciting exhibitions. It brought her three awards.

LOSE FACE, ACQUIRE FACE.

She had acquired numberless faces—"captured her subjects" was the phrase. They had looked at her face as she captured them, seeing the expert's hard professional appraisal, the mechanical smile; seeing her indifference to their predicaments, to their misery; seeing the calculated, set-apart scrutiny of the exploiter. They had looked at her, perhaps for help, in their extremity, in the crisis of their "human-interest stories." They had seen her concerned with obtaining the best shot, the

telling effect, the marketable angle, the gimmick which would sell.

She had made her comfortable living out of agonies and joys which should have been sacred or shared. It had never occurred to her that she owed any part of that comfort, of that living, of the money she made, to those whose lives provided the material.

People had been her material.

The Creator took dust out of which He made people. She, and those like her, took people out of which they made dust.

"Few of us pay our just debts to our sources," she would have pleaded.

Moreover, photographs like hers were justified because they aroused compassion, they startled, they informed the public, they combated indifference.

Did they do these things?

If her own compassion was not aroused on the spot of the occurrence; if she, a spectator of the actual event, had not been moved to a gesture of sympathy, of intervention, however futile; if she had not rushed forward to help, or dropped to generous knees to pray for the help she could not give, why would the casual eye looking over *Life,* or *Time,* or *Look* or *Pic,* or any of the other markets for her work, be more moved than she?

Familiarity bred acceptance of the misery of others.

Secondhand knowledge could be hardening. Her pictures had done more harm than good; her pictures had betrayed the divine, the human face.

"I was an hungred, I was thirsty, I was a stranger, I was naked, I was sick and in prison and ye—photographed Me."

True, Lord, and sent the circulation up.

Shallow, superficial, self-centered!

Self-centered, superficial, shallow, sinful!

Hissing words like little snakes wrapped themselves around her.

✧ ✧

THE PLANE LURCHED INTO A SICKENING AIR pocket. All heads turned. She saw masks made of wax —smiling, unlined faces, mannequin doll faces—converging upon her.

She screamed.

No sound came through the slit that was now her mouth. She put up her hand and felt the smooth cool wax where her warm cheek should be. Her fingers traced the smile, hard, vacuous, immovable, on her curved cupid-bow lips.

She knew how she looked; she looked like these, imprisoned now like these, under a plastic mask.

The plane righted itself, the heads turned away. She sat in sick terror, rigidly smiling.

✧

"I HAVE LOST MY FACE."

The Chinese knew, and dreaded to lose face.

"It is no worse than it was. I am going wherever I go, behind a mask, but I did that before, I have done that always. I was able to signal sometimes from behind it. I shall be able to manage that again."

They set their face as it were a mask.

My confusion is daily before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me.

The shame of my face.

God be merciful unto us and bless us, and show us the light of His countenance.

His countenance.

"I cannot, of course, countenance any such thing."

And hide not Thy face from Thy servant, for I am in trouble.

I am in trouble. I am faceless.

Faceless.

✧

WHO WOULD REMEMBER HER FACE, AND HOW would it be remembered?

Crosby had seen it, implacably, complacently set against him.

Clive had seen it, in desire, in self-righteous renunciation.

Michael had seen it, on that last morning when his body turned to hers, and his spirit turned away. What face had he seen—a face without emotion, without understanding, a hard face, the face of his enemy?

"Why did you betray me?" she had asked him all these years, never "Why were you forced to leave me? How did I betray you?"

Now that she asked, too late, there were obvious answers ready to spread themselves out before her desolate eyes. They came in rhetorical questions.

"Was it because of my acceptance of the misery of the world as a normal condition for everyone but me? Was it my acceptance of his misery, my complacent acquiescence in his failure as a painter? Was it because he could not bear to live beside the closed mind, the critic who had *rangé* him, who was content with his verdict upon himself, who accepted it without argument, without demur, from the start? Was that why, Michael, why?" Or was she making herself too important, was she perhaps not involved, not responsible at all? But she was responsible for this much, for not being *there,* for him, looking out of her face, when he had turned to her.

She might re-examine that, as an act of reparation, or if it were futile, as a pastime, appropriate to journeying in this plane, with a black bag balanced on the rack above, the black bag labeled "Michael," which she must bring with her on these eternal travels.

Marriage was only binding "till death us do part." It was not marriage she was bound to, burdened with; it was sin, unconfessed sins against Michael, not sins of the flesh, as with Clive, sins of the mind, the mean little mind and meaner spirit.

News-hound, rubble-hound Martia, professing to be shocked by the "vulgar invasion of privacy" of newspaper reporters, columnists, radio commentators! Photographers were "different"; photography was "art," because it was hers and she could make it beautiful. She had blasphemed against some of Michael's deepest beliefs, for he, at least, had never taken his camera seriously. A painter, he once told her, evolves his pictures out of himself, a photographer out of others.

A painter creates; a photographer at best edits, at worst distorts, exaggerates, misrepresents. She had taken photography seriously, had been self-righteously pleased to rival Michael and in the end surpass him, had endorsed the wrong values, worshiped false gods.

She had been ridiculously pleased when Michael's friends "took her seriously as an artist" and said so in front of him. She had patted herself on the back for

"helping Michael in his career after the first false start." She had accepted at once, without hesitation, with never an argument or a moment's hindsight of wavering, his verdict upon himself, his decision to burn the canvases and put away the paint, when, if she had said firmly, "Better to fail at this than succeed at anything else," he might have gone on and won.

He should have known these things, he should have been strong? Perhaps, and perhaps he had been right, perhaps he had seen clear, but she should still have fought, contested his decision, insisted, upheld the dream for him; or if it were true and he must give in and turn away from his fountain of life, she should at least, at the most miserable least, have seen it with him as a tragedy, have rebelled, suffered, cried out for him.

She had washed the trays, hung up the negatives, liked and admired the prints and helped to make his career.

"Why, Martia, why?"

Because she was impressed by Michael the fashionable fad-of-the-moment photographer, as she had not been by Michael the painter? Because she could reach and overtake, had reached and overtaken, the photographer and "beat him at his own game"—but was it a game to Michael? Because she resented his betrayal of himself in the way we resent those whom we tempt to break their vows, breaking them? Was it all of these, or none

of these, or because she was married to Michael and this was all she could bring him in the marriage?

No wonder he had chosen at the last to spell it differently!

Whatever it was, whatever it had been, she had time now to speculate, to speculate endlessly, eternally, imprisoned, locked away, beneath this grotesque carnival disguise, thrust far out of reach, out of sight.

She would have cried, but her eyes were hard marbles, her mouth a set smile.

✧ ✧

SHE COULD NOT SPEAK THROUGH THE STIFF, solid mask, but she could still hear and still see. Were the senses to be sealed off one by one beneath thickening layers of stupidity and sin? Then use them, use them to the last moment of lucidity, store up impressions, maintain contact, with Whom, with what? With the terrain below, to begin with.

She leaned forward, propping the heavy mask on her hands. She looked out. The plane was still flying low, over uninhabited land, hot, parched land, like the worst parts of the planet she had seen, like the desert in which the lost tribes wandered, like Iran, like Abadan, "the second hottest place in the world." Which was the first? she wondered idly. How did one know it was first?

Some Bureau of Statistics had done the research and knew. Everything about everything was known by someone somewhere on the earth, except the things that mattered—how to get rid of loneliness, of fear, greed and hatred, how "to live in peace with all mankind," and now, what she needed to know, how to be dead worthily and unafraid. How to be dead!

She swerved, in panic, back to Abadan. In Abadan the temperature could, and did, while she was there, rise to 160 degrees. A bugler must dip the mouthpiece of his instrument into cold water or he would sear his lips; a mechanic must wear asbestos gloves and work mainly at night when the temperature might drop to around 110. In Abadan the wheels of the plane she arrived in sank three inches into the runway overnight. In Abadan she was billeted in a small stone room whose windows were completely blocked out with grass, down which water trickled in a murky stream. Fans churned the illusionary coolness into a sluggish mist. There was a lizard in her room. They eyed each other nervously and kept to their separate spheres of influence. Crossing the compound one morning to the rigged-up showers, she had passed a small white dog whose hair seemed to be smoking in the heat. She picked him up and put him under the shower. For that merciful action now recalled, and perhaps still unconsigned, would some dog succor her if the plane went down to a landing

here, in a worse place than Abadan, than the desert, than Iran?

She would think of Iran in order not to think of masks or of Michael. She was still able to take short flights from this Flight, still able to recall sights from the past, *choses vues,* although the scenes which came most readily now to her mind were ghouly, disagreeable ones.

Iran, for instance, was not her conception of a country to remember earth by. Iran in no way resembled the Persia it displaced. Illuminated manuscripts in the British Museum, the great collection arranged between the wars by the Upham Popes, editions of the Persian poets, and Flecker's descriptions of Ispahan, had led her to think of Persia romantically as a lush, green, pleasant garden, full of bulbuls and roses; but Persia was hot, dry, dusty, arid, with only one navigable river winding through it, muddily. The bulbuls, the roses, the poets, the princes, had vanished, displaced by oil experts, engineers, Russian pilots, British officers, the personnel of an American air base. Iran, in 1945, spelled *Oil,* not nightingales, never nightingales.

What did this land beneath her spell, if it were land? (What did Death spell, if it were Death?) She would have been relieved to know that there was a place there, anywhere down there, as possible, as hospitable, as Abadan, a place inhabited or inhabitable by humans.

So far she saw none. So far the plane might have been laboring over the less-photographed parts of the moon, but a hot, living, resentful moon, not a sober, burned-out, dead one. The surface of this terrain looked like porridge before it begins to boil.

The plane was flying low; it seemed to be dragging along against the pull of gravity. This must be the earth still, since to leave the earth, to cut "upward" through a few miles of atmosphere would mean to be frozen as hard as a board. This must be earth, since the plane was not a rocket—or was it? Were these masks new equipment? Had she embarked on a trip to outer space? Was this porridge below a part of one of the planets—Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn? No, for those planets were cold, colder than earth, with thick shells of ice and solid hydrogen. No, for those planets were too far away, years away from earth. No, for dead or alive, she was still in the universe, and there were still "rules governing the universe."

There were things to remember, consoling things, important things, for instance, the principle of relativity. "Our local results do indeed have universal validity." Was that so consoling? "What Einstein's principle of relativity states is that wherever you are in the universe, whatever your environment, the same mathematical equations will suffice to describe your observations."

When she studied Jeans, Eddington and later Hoyle this had seemed a very satisfactory, comforting doctrine. She had memorized it for future use, this future use! She had hazily taken it to mean that the universe was the same sort of universe throughout, that therefore there would be a continuity of experience, her experience in it; but when one reflected, when one analyzed the statement, it said only that the same equations would suffice to describe one's observations. What equation should she use for this land below? She had almost said this hell below.

Arid bleakness, malevolent negation of life, hot, hard, hateful soil!

"Our Father, Who art in Heaven, where are we?" the young poet wrote; and the drunk said, "I only want to know where I am!"

Could He be Father, Creator of globular clusters and bacteria, of Orion and the Dark Bay, of Michael and Martia?

Our Father Who art in Heaven, where, *where* are we?

THERE WAS ONE FACE IN HISTORY WHICH was never a mask, that Face Saint Veronica wiped with a handkerchief.

But Martia traveled Jerusalem with a Leica and flash bulbs. If she had been standing there, by the Via Dolorosa, watching the passing Christ, she would, for want of a camera in those days, have taken the picture with her eyes, her news-hound, rubble-hound eyes, concerned with the telling angle, the timing, the right effect. She would no doubt have "caught" Veronica's "dramatic surge forward to relieve the Agony"; she would have reproduced the story of that Event for her public, her crowd at the taverns or the temple, who had not been able to be there.

She would have been congratulated, given an award for "her outstanding contribution to the pictures of the year," the coveted award—of thirty pieces of silver?

No, Lord, no!

Melt the hardness of this heart, this waxen heart, if it be wax and not a stone!

The face is wax, a face without emotion, an unlined face, the empty face of the beauty ads, the cold face of the graven image, her face now! She raised her shaking hands, she saw their waxen hue, but they were flexible still, she could move them still, could reach with them still. . . .

She leaned forward, touching the shoulder of the man in front of her. The smiling face turned, faced hers, shrank aside.

He did not want to be touched by her. He was

shrinking from her as she would shrink if one of These turned to touch her. He was afraid as she would be, he was terribly afraid, for how could he know *who, what* was there, touching him? How could she know *who, what* was there to be touched? Except that once they were human, and therefore kin, that they were in this plane, this predicament together, under these masks, and that they did not care to share their experience while they still could?

She sank back. The mask in front moved, leaning away from her.

✧ ✧

SHE RECALLED ST. JOHN CRYSOSTOM'S PRAYER. She had learned it by heart in that retreat where she was told it was "better to fail at one's own vocation than to succeed at another's."

"Heavenly King, Paraclete, Spirit of truth, present in all places"—even in this place, this plane?—"filling all things, Treasury of good and Choirmaster of life: Come and dwell within us, cleanse us from all stain and save our souls."

It was followed by another:

"Let thy mercy O Lord be upon us, and the brightness of thy Spirit illumine our inward souls! that He

who abideth evermore with thee in glory may kindle our cold hearts and light up our dark minds."

Burn, burn, burn, kindle, light, melt, help, save, deliver me, a sinner, from this waxen death, from this second death, from the mask of this second death!

✧ ✧ ✧

FASTEN SAFETY BELTS. NO SMOKING, THE electric sign flashed, as though safety were possible with or without a belt, as though a cigarette could be wedged between plastically sealed lips!

Now the porridge was on the right, was on the left, was in the sky, as the plane banked to land. There was no movement among the passengers, no stir, no rustle; the masked heads were still. Her head was still, but her heart was pumping hard, in sickening, laboring spurts, and her stomach felt queasy, as though she were going to faint. She had claustrophobia behind this solid mask, behind any mask. She put up her hands to tear at it. There was no join, no crack in which to insert a fingernail.

It was face-saving, she thought wildly, there was privacy behind it. No one could watch her terror, could tell what she felt. She had strained for this protection behind her own face, once. Now she had it. She should

relax. She should smile and smile and be a villain in peace. Only this wasn't peace, and she wasn't relaxing. She was sitting stiffly still, in growing horrow, in gray fear, wanting to scream, to kick, to lie down in the aisle and give up, give up everything, give up everything forever.

Then came *angoisse,* sharper than anguish. She felt sweep over, sweep into her, the sum total of the miseries of all the times she had been wounded, from the yanked hair, the "need Marty come?" of jeering older cousins, to the days of creditors "exerting pressures" after Michael's death, the dunning telephones, the blackmail of harassments and petty humiliations at one's place of work, the aching soreness of injustice assaulting the dignity of well-being, of human being, first personal, then impersonal. She embraced them all, from small insulting sore-pricks to the larger bludgeoning tragedies of rejection, of superfluity, of being here, now and probably forever, the unneeded, the unwanted, the uncared for.

✧ ✧ ✧

EVEN BEFORE THE PLANE STARTED TAXIING to a stop, the heat struck up, struck in, enveloping her.

She sat stickily, rigidly enduring, feeling the runnels of sweat start from every pore.

But she had no pores, no heart to be pounding, no stomach to feel queasy, no guts, no bowels turned to water, no head to ache, no mind to grow dizzy. Her anguish—she had an anguish—must be of the spirit alone. She should remember that, should insist on that, should not allow herself to interpret anything in purely physical terms, since she was dead, dead and done for, dead and disembodied, dead, and damned?

The plane came to a stop with a lurch and a slither, slewing it around. There was only one sign here of planned construction—an ugly fuel pump, with dusty pipes and tubes and complicated contraptions of corrugated metal, glaring in the sun.

"Passengers will disembark," the pilot's voice said over the intercom.

There was no rush to obey. Here and there a hand moved hesitantly to a safety belt and came away again without unfastening it.

She unhooked hers and struggled to stand up. The door swung open, letting in a scorching draft of airless air. She stood in the opening and saw there were no steps down.

"Are we expected to jump?" she wanted to ask, and was dismayed again when no words came through her sealed, smiling lips.

✣

SOMEONE JOSTLED AGAINST HER. SHE WAS pushed, she lost her balance, she jumped, she fell on her knees and then on her face in the sand. Only it wasn't sand; it was a putrid clay, soft and boggy, laying hold on her clothing, laying hold on her flesh.

She clawed to free herself from the sticky, burning filth. Her terror was that she would hear the door closing behind her, with a metallic-sounding, automatic, final click, and the plane take off without her.

She arched her shoulders and neck. She managed to turn her head without getting up from the sand.

It was still there, door open, motor cut, silent, and about her, wrestling like her with the clay, were—these others, pushed out too?

She had no strength to give thought to them. The sun, cooking the clay to sluggish bubbles, beat upon her skull, her neck, her legs, her arms, striking in to the bone and beyond it.

"Me marrow boils, Mum, when I think of it," a Cockney cook said to her once.

This was marrow boiling.

✧

THERE MIGHT BE SHELTER IN THE THIN black shadow of the plane's wing on the sand. She crawled forward, blistering hands and knees at each contact with the slimy, searing quicksand, clutching to drag her back.

✧

HE SHALL DEFEND THEE UNDER HIS WINGS, and thou shalt be safe under his feathers.

Under the shadow of thy wings shall be my refuge.

My trust shall be under the covering of thy wings.

Under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

Under the shadow of these dusty, aluminum wings, rejoice? This was no Bird of God, scorching in the heat.

✧

SHE REACHED THE LINE OF SHADE. REACTION from the violence of the effort came in a trembling weakness, followed by apathy, an apathy so deep that it seemed more of her died and was swallowed by the clay, as she went on breathing, standing, waiting, with what was left, a mask among other masks.

✧

THEY STOOD IN A ROW BENEATH THE NARrow wing, in their enforced silence of waiting.

Then the jeep arrived. It came through the sluggish haze, growing like a black stomach-dot-before-the-eyes, and at first she thought it was that.

It came slowly, on its caterpillar, tractor-tread wheels, churning over the clay. There were figures in it, rubber-covered, gloved, helmeted, masked in asbestos and plexiglass, "dressed for the weather," an English accent echoed absurdly in her mind.

Five of the rubber men, if these were men, got out of the jeep when it stopped; the sixth stayed at the wheel. One walked toward the waiting group, turned aside, lifted a stick above his head and rapped with it on the plane.

The pilot appeared, wearing a suit like theirs, putting on his helmet.

(She had no protection, no suit, no helmet. Who said now, "I hope you are comforted, or comfortable"?)

He lowered a swinging rope ladder and climbed heavily down.

(So there was a ladder, but not for her, or these.)

The pilot stood for a moment, testing the clay with his boot.

The hands of his passengers moved in a single supplicating gesture toward him. He turned his back on them, facing the rubber figure. They touched each other's shoulders in ritualistic greeting, then they walked to the jeep and got in.

It went into the distance, where heat haze met horizon, where she thought she could see a tunnel in the ground.

The four left behind began refueling the plane from a long hose attached to the pump. It was leaking. Fumes of gas were added to the stench of the oily clay in which her feet were sinking.

When the tanks were filled, one of them climbed into the plane and began to throw out the things, the pitiful, hoarded things—pocketbooks, carpetbags, briefcases, suitcases, paper containers, and the black bag labeled "Michael."

They thudded upon the clay. A dredger behind the fuel pump viciously scooped them up and dropped them, torn and matted, into a burning vat.

When this happened it was another dying, a small, intimate, last, convulsive wriggle of the back-broken snake; an angry dying, there was in it the shock of the robbed, the assaulted, for now she did not know, now she could not know, what was in the black bag. This loss, this uncertainty must be here forever, or for as long as what was left of her lasted.

✧

THERE WAS NOTHING REASSURING ABOUT these rubber thugs, like clumsy land-divers, in their bloated suits, staring at her through goggle eyes, out of shapeless heads. She could not see beyond asbestos wrappings and convex plexiglass, but she knew that they were staring.

It was a brutal, jeering, cold, contemptuous appraisal, the only cold thing in this part of the universe, adding to her pain and fear, to the pain and fear and apprehension of the group, suffering beneath the plane.

She shrank, with every raw, burning, desolate, violated nerve, from these watchers and from these watched.

When the jeep came back she was looking at her feet. They had sunk another inch into the slime.

✧

ONE BY ONE THEY WERE CHOSEN BY A CONtemptuous wave of a stick, one by one dragged over the clay and thrown into the jeep, one by one carted away still vacantly smiling out of their pretty pink-and-white masks.

Five times the jeep came back and five times went

without her. Each time as her straining eyes found the black, wavering dot emerging from the distant ground she was swept with an aching terror, which grew with the growing shape, until she was cold in the burning air, faint, dizzy, shaken, but not from the "physical" discomfort, a moment before intolerable.

Each time the rubber feet came near she had a craven longing to crawl before them, ingratiating herself, as cats, feeling themselves disliked, will purr and rub against the feet of those with a phobia against them.

"Leave me! Leave me! Just this once! Just this little while longer!"

But when the rubber hands were laid on someone else she was crying as desperately, "Take me! Take me! Now . . . now . . . now! Me! Me!"

Futile anger came, and then engulfing apathy of waiting, the desolation of endurance.

There was room for them to have gone as a group in two trips of the jeep, but speed and efficiency would be discouraged here, as would even this limited form of unwilling companionship. The pain, weariness, boredom, impatience, revulsion and dread of anticipation, the torment of waiting for the torment, would have been lost or lessened. And as for being alone, "the sin ye do, by two and two, ye pay for one by one." She wished her memory would not send up these tag ends of obvious, applicable quotations.

✣

THE PILOT CAME BACK, WALKING BY THEM, preoccupied. He climbed into the plane.

The rubber glove holding the stick hesitated. It pointed at the mask beside her. This, by his clothes, was the mask who had sat directly in front of her in the plane, whom she had touched on the sleeve, who had shrunk from her, who was now alone, to face, faceless and alone, his waiting destination.

Pity came with her larger relief that she was left. She had a desire to pray, but what words would she use, and why for this mask rather than another?

O God, thou hast cast us out, and scattered us abroad; O turn thee unto us again.

Thou hast showed thy people heavy things; thou hast given us a drink of deadly wine.

Help me with thy right hand, and hear me.

Help him. Help this unknown brother.

From the ends of the earth will I call upon thee, when my heart is in heaviness.

My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh also longeth after thee, in a barren and dry land where no water is.

These also that seek the hurt of my soul, they shall go under the earth.

Thou that hearest the prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.

The river of God is full of water. . . .

✧

WATER! IT FELL ON THE EARTH, IT RAN IN streams, it welled up in springs, it soared up in fountains, it deepened in rivers, it dropped in tears.

Drop, drop, slow tears,
And bathe those beauteous feet
Which brought from heaven
The news and Prince of Peace:
Cease not, wet eyes,
His mercies to entreat . . .

Her own tears dropped. She found that she could weep, she could weep at last, for pity, for sorrow, for sin, for the helpless weak, for the wayward strong, for the obdurate, the lost, the lonely, for these poor masks, and those, whatever they might be, in rubber.

✧

THERE WAS A NEW PAIN NOW, A SEARING where the tears ran, a melting of the wax upon the face. She hardly noticed it, intent on the urgencies of prayer,

until suddenly she heard the sound of murmured words through her own free-moving lips, and felt the melting mask run stickily away, like muddy snowdrifts in the spring.

✧

SHE COULD SEE THE LADDER DANGLING FROM the open door of the plane, like thread from a needle's eye. "A thread of hope runs through it." Another absurd cliché might turn out to be true.

She dragged her feet out of the clay and lunged forward with sharp determined cries, good to hear, good to utter, piercing music of her new wild hope.

Excited voices behind her showed the transformation was happening to others, but she could not look. Stumbling, falling, crawling, she reached the door, grasped the ladder and swung herself up into safety.

She sat in her old seat, pulling the mirror out from the pocket flap, staring into it, shutting her eyes, opening them again, to look at her new face and then at the faces of the other passengers, brushing past her to their seats, bringing with them a stale stench of clay, four strange survivors with expressive, purified, unearthly faces, like tired eagles.

"We look like eagles," she said aloud for the pleasure of hearing herself speak.

One of the unmasked, a woman, answered over her shoulder, "Yes, we do" and began to cry for relief that she looked like a living bird.

✧

IT WAS A STRANGE RESEMBLANCE.

There were the dictators' eagles—Roman, Russian, French Imperial; there was the American benign, bald-headed one. There were the mystical eagles of the Middle Ages, the Soaring Eagle of the Knights of Heredom, the Double-Headed Eagle with Wings Displayed of the philosophers. There was the bird of the Bible.

He shall make thee young and lusty as an eagle.

The children of men shall put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

She stared into the glass. It was unrecognizable as hers, this face, marked with sharp lines of suffering, of hard-acquired wisdom; chiseled at the edges with strength; unrecognizable, yet more representative than any other face she had worn; distinct, but sharing with these unmasked and a myriad others the shadowy image of the Visage behind it.

When I wake up after Thy likeness I shall be satisfied.

Satisfied, *comblée,* filled.

✧

SHE WAS STILL SWELTERING IN THE CABIN of the plane. It was like being in an aluminum cooking pot between two fires. The air was heavy and hard to breathe. She could think only of the heat, the sweat running down her skin, her wet, clinging clothes giving off the stench of clay.

There was her thanksgiving to be said, but saying it would be inadequate. Grace for escape from hell should be intoned, or shouted, or exploded into song, the song of the three children, blessing the Lord in their burning fiery furnace.

O ye Fire and Heat, bless ye the Lord.

✧

NOW SHE HEARD THE NOISE, THE DEEP-down-dreaded-all-the-time noise of the returning jeep!

It was coming, churning up the clay with a dreary drudging sound that seeped into the plane. She did not lean to the opposite window to look out. She knew what she would see.

They were coming, as she had known and refused to accept that they would. *They* were coming, and "There's an end to't," the end to everything.

✧

SHE SAT STILL, DELIBERATELY WASTING THE last few minutes which would be hers, letting them slip, second by second, drops from a glass of water she would later crave to drink, emptied in proud protection, in vain, brave defiance, out upon the sand.

The plane shuddered, as if it too felt revulsion of terror and despair. The pilot was beginning to tune up his engines.

"Of course," she thought, clinging to desperate, uncompromising rejection of *Their* standards, "there would have to be that touch too, the cheap device of getting a last obvious effect out of the Torture of Hope. *They* have read up on the Inquisition, the technique of capture on the threshold of escape, the classic 'What, my son, about to leave us now?' I think the banality of this . . . place—" she did not say its name aloud, since names conferred existence—"its crude vulgarity, will wear me down in the end."

But there may be no end.

✧

THE SECOND MOTOR REVVED, THE THIRD, THE fourth. Propellers, motionless outside her window,

whirled into invisibility. Her spirit revolved with them, strained at lifting the plane into the air, ran beneath it, pushing and prodding, forcing it upward.

There was a pounding on the door.

The heads in front of her turned, masks once more, like hers, masks of terror, of helpless indecision.

Her spirit broke away from them, it ran, flinging itself into the seas of space, calling upon God for mercy, for rescue.

"Forsake me not, O Lord, my God. Upon me, upon these, upon us Thy children, extend Thy hand. Save us and help us, we beseech Thee!

"Destroy us utterly in Thy displeasure, but let it be Thy hand, and not another that erases . . ."

✣

THE DOOR WAS OPENING. IT OPENED. A MAN lurched in. He sank into the seat beside her and no rubber Shape followed.

The door shut with a small, clear click, heard faintly above the motors roaring all together. Their roar increased. The plane shuddered, shook, rushed forward, wheeling in a half circle over the hot, soft, porridgy ground. Clouds of steam rose to the windows. Now it was taxiing to the take-off. Now it was halted for one

last, long moment, rocking where it poised. Now it was off, now up, now on the wing.

✧

SHE CLOSED HER EYES.

Across her lassitude, emptied of everything, even of self-consciousness, she felt the stranger's arm reach groping upward, brushing past her shoulder to the air vent.

Coolness flowed over her. She was standing beneath a waterfall, she was swimming in the gray lake at dawn, she was breathing clear air, she was singing her thanksgiving, she was Song.

O ye Servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.

O ye Spirits and Souls of the Righteous . . .

She was neither servant of the Lord nor righteous, but she knew how each must feel, safe among the saved. She could let herself slide now into sleep.

It was a sleep she had encountered on the earth, after pneumonia, after operations, after childbirth, this heavy lassitude, this deep relief, this abandonment of curiosity, interest and, for the moment, of personal stake in existence.

After trauma there was sleep.

He giveth His beloved sleep.

IT WAS DARK WHEN SHE OPENED HER EYES, dark in the plane and dark outside, the luminous blue of lingering twilight, of late afternoon in winter cities, of misted, far-off hills, of Chinese skies and Chinese embroidery, with green and orange-tinted edges, deepening to rose and, if she looked back, to red.

Cool air from the open vent flowed over her. She moved, meeting the rough edges of the stranger's proximity. He was heavily asleep, one arm thrown against her knees, shoulder, thigh and ankle pressing hers.

Normally—when she lived on earth, if that were normal—she would have been impatient, irked by the casual contact disposing her to claustrophobia, but now she felt no discomfort, no deliberate, sharp withdrawal or protest of rejection. Her need for protective barriers had melted in the molten wax.

She stretched; the stranger turned. She saw his face in the dusk from the window and the half-light from the ceiling, a face like hers and the other bird-like faces emerging from masks into renewed existence.

He was smiling. She had seen this smile when a promised party or a present turned out to be more wonderful than a child expected; smile of direct, pure, concentrated joy, unmixed with adult calculation.

His eyes were renewed eyes too. Meeting them, she felt no fear of his secret hostility, private withdrawal or escape; no need to reveal or conceal herself, content to *be,* existing beside his existence.

He put out his hand slowly, as a hand should be given in greeting. She took it as slowly, in acceptance.

✧

HIS THUMB MOVED, PRESSING THE HOLLOW of her palm. Her sensitive nerves tightened. She was caught up into communion, not of the saints, nor of sinners—of the saved, perhaps; fusion of soul through contact; not the mystical ecstasies of Donne in seventeenth-century conceits, nor Du Maurier's Victorian sentimentalities in *Peter Ibbetson* (both had contented her once); this was a modern concept, for twentieth-century minds, in terms of electro-dynamics.

She knew now what it might mean to become a Thermophile, to reflect, refract and polarize currents of a light "broadened by a number of fine fringes at its edges"; she understood what *raptus* means, and Ruysbroeck's Sparkling Stone.

✧

AFTER THE FIRST SHOCK OF ACCELERATION toward him she straightened out and leveled into calmer vibrations.

She could see his face beside her in the night lights of the plane. He had leaned back, leaving his hand in hers, he had closed his eyes, inviting her to listen, like a row of intelligent selves, "all ears," a line of interpreters under their glossy headphones, dealing with a summary of the news.

"News from a foreign country came"—news of foreign life.

It came in uneven waves, on different levels of meaning, the score of an unfamiliar fugue. She could hear the voices, separately or together, announcing and developing the theme.

✧

She followed the cello part first, translating the slow heavy plaint into equivalent words.

When the big planes went over or came down to refuel or to put off passengers, *They* wanted us to feel that all was lost, the future, the past, the story of our kind upon the earth.

We were given the discouraging news, we heard of the advances made in science, we were told about the atom and the hydrogen bomb and were shown their results; we knew there were jet-propelled rockets and flame-throwers, and what men used them for.

They encouraged us to look at the planes, when our heads were above the Clay, for then we would think

of wings, aspiration, prayer, escape—planes did take some of us away—we were bound to hope, and so to despair, and sink lower.

Yes, I had flown; not in a plane like this, but those who have flown in any, even the little, rickety, noisy earliest planes, are different from those who have not. There are men and women of the air, divided from the rest of the world.

They approve of division.

No, I don't know who *They* are. I never saw beneath the rubber. Beings without hope. I think *They* once had hope. I think *They* may have been men, or men have evolved from *Them*. *They* hate us with such comprehension.

They know when a soul gets numbed. *They* feed it then, different foods. *They* lined us up to wait for packages that the living want the dead to have—bitterness, misunderstanding, blame, hatred and, hurting most, relief that we are dead; but silly, sweet things too, moments when they think "I wish he were here to see this or to do that," short times when they forget that we are dead, and grieve as they remember.

They send us breezes then, cool swallows of clean water, a firmer piece of the Clay to stand on for a while, a little more hope than we can muster for ourselves, faith that eternal hell is eternal, everlasting damnation everlasting, but that our sojourn there need not be in-

finite. The condition may exist forever, unchanging and unchangeable, but the souls passing through the condition can change. Nothing is static, even there; all things sink or rise, transmuted in that Fire.

The living could help us more. It is bad to receive no package, to have no one remember or care. It is bitter to stand in line in the slime for an eon or two, to take out, put away hope, to go through an I-won't-get-anything-again-this-time-either-or-perhaps-this-once-I-will—and-which-will-hurt-the-most? routine, for nothing in the end; and after our strong despair, lest we should harden or find a numbed relief, be tossed a crumb of comfort, in Coventry Patmore's phrase, "After exceeding ill, a little good," a share of the General Issue, sent out by the Church.

Meager, impersonal prayer, divided among so many, amounts to a grain of rice, a finger-drip of water, but we do want what is ours, "whatever is coming to us," and we will line up again.

Surprising things, sent in love, hurt too—clumsy bundles of half-tied words and jokes, royal nonsense of our hopeful days, miniature, shrunk, out of all proportion, looked at from the Clay, but precious still, shining, leaving us damned lonely when they fade.

I never got many of those.

The other kind sting and rub your face farther in the Clay.

I never did decide which hurt most; I always joined the line-up. It was voluntary; a line-up imposed would have mattered less.

They distributed exactly what was sent, since *They* are just.

Justice without love makes hell.

No man's just deserts could be worth the having.

Now the violin interpreted the theme an octave Higher.

I imagine I get out at the next stop. I wish I could go farther; I would like to travel on with you.

People who don't have to stay there can go on quite far.

They didn't tell us that, but I believe it. *They* didn't tell us anything we might want to hear. We lived through whatever was happening and put it together after; it burns deeper so.

I was there, like the others, for sin unrepented before death.

I don't know what sin. I knew in the beginning. It was burned out by the end.

Not remembering may be part of the payment, or perhaps even memory is consigned.

I know it was mortal sin.

I used to think it encouraging that all the bad sins were "mortal," that the sins, not the sinners, died. I didn't know Elizabethan English well then.

"The mortal moon is now obscured . . ." Shakespeare's inimical moon, his deadly, not dying moon. . . . Some say he meant the Armada, which came in a crescent shape. . . .

I tell you another poet who should have been born in our age, who described all phases of flight—Shelley. . . .

✣

Shelley . . . Shelley . . . Shelley . . . the orchestra took it up, repeating key phrases, tossing them on her heart.

They lined us up to wait for packages that the living want the dead to have——

Bitterness, misunderstanding, blame. . . .

Silly, sweet things too. . . .

I never got many of those. . . .

The other kind sting and rub your face farther in the Clay. . . .

Michael! Michael! My love!

✧ ✧

HIS HAND LEFT HERS AND WENT TO HIS HIP pocket, hesitated there and came back, dropping between them.

She plummeted back to the plane and the level of con-fusion; all direct contact with him snapped.

Shelley . . .

"Green," she said aloud, "fat and shabby, leather, and on the title page 'to Michael from Martia'?"

"I don't know."

You almost remembered. You put out your hand to where the book should have been.

He was looking at his hand, surprised.

You carried it there, there in your hip pocket. Michael, Michael, remember!

He was shrugging uncertainly.

✧

"THOSE WHO ARE FORGOTTEN, FORGET," HE said aloud. "I remember all that matters, not the

volume of Shelley you talk of, if I had it, but Shelley; not personal relationships, with the 'personal' always tacked on in front, taking up too much room, but relationship. I have general memories of some things which were beautiful and some things which were ugly; I have likes, attractions, aversions, shrinkings, my immortal part, religion and my soul."

"Of course," she answered steadily, "of course you do have those."

But suicide means to succeed in destroying the self. Michael is gone forever, no matter who this may be.

✧

THE PLANE WAS LOSING ALTITUDE, DROPPING through starless dark.

She must make up her shaken mind.

She must choose between two ways.

Her freedom to follow either was not in question. She might never be free to act on the choice that she made, but she was free to choose, or—constrained to choose, as all are constrained, confronted with This or with That.

Once Choice had appeared, there could be no evasion, since even the decision not to choose was only another choice, the worst to be made, perhaps.

✣

SHE WAS COMING TO THE PLACE OF DECISION with terrifying speed, unprepared or, like the French, prepared for the war before but not for this one; in a state of darkness, confusion and uncertainty; mentally dulled, emotionally buffeted, fettered to choices, good or bad, made before, on insufficient premises, as this choice must be made.

It was so one arrived at decision before the Cross of the Crossroads, blinded and helpless.

✣

EITHER WAY THERE WAS RISK.

If she decided to leave the plane with Michael—supposing this were Michael—choosing Companionship and the Second Chance, would she be yielding to subtle temptation—pride in setting wrong right, smug assumption of responsibility for another soul, my-brother's-keeper conscious well-doing and a desire to be coming to the Wedding Feast this time wearing the right garment?

✧ ✧

THE LIGHTS OF THE LANDING STRIP WHEELED up to meet them, first on the left and then on the right as she leaned to look.

There were no other lights but those, pin-pointing edges of a narrow road, a country road in the sky.

"We're coming down," he said, taking her hand. Once more the strong mysterious current caught and held her.

Was this renewal of the fusion between them love or self-love, or the old need to be needed?

How can I be sure, before I choose?

That would be certainty, not choice.

✧

THE PLANE WAS DOWN NOW, TAXIING IN through darkness. There was nothing but darkness visible.

"Where do you suppose we are?" she asked him, trembling.

"I don't know," he answered, untroubled, "but wherever it is, it must be exactly where we should be. I learned one thing, bad as it was back there, eternally

bad; it was where I *was*. It was right for me, and this also must be right."

For him, but would it be for her?

IF SHE DECIDED TO LEAVE THE PLANE WITH Michael instead of traveling on—to that place which Authority would designate as right for her—would she be making the mistake that Michael made, on a higher level, but still, suicide?

She was probably beyond a choice of mortal sin now, beyond sinning, but there could be better or worse, steps down, steps up the spiritual ladder, a degree nearer to God.

If she decided to leave the plane with Michael, would the choice mean that she might never journey farther, never arrive at final knowledge, never rest before the feet of God?

Should she travel on, alone to the Alone?

Should she companion Michael?

Either way there was risk.

But "Never" was an unlikely word.

And if she knew for certain this was Michael, would she hesitate?

✧

THE PLANE STOPPED AND THERE WAS SI-lence. No one moved. Then the door of the cockpit opened; the pilot walked through. He came toward them slowly, stopping to speak to the four passengers ahead.

She overheard one of them answer, "I wish to proceed," and she understood.

He was asking the question no one had asked on the journey, the question she had dreaded from the beginning, being unable to answer: "Your name and your destination?"

"I am not sure of my name," she said when her turn came to speak, "but I know my destination," and as she proclaimed it the trumpets and the organ and the bronze bells pealed out with an orchestra of high unearthly instruments, sweeping from the fugue into concerto, *Amans, in propinquum, Opus No. 1.*

She took Michael's other hand in hers that he might hear it transmitted.

"And they should not follow strange paths or singular ways," she translated for him, using the words out of Ruysbroeck, "but they should follow the track of love through all storms to that place whither love shall lead them. And if they abide the time, and persevere in

all virtues, they shall behold the Mystery of God and take flight toward it."

✧

THE TREMOR OF THE DEPARTING PLANE HAD faded into a rushing sigh: "If . . . they abide . . . the time . . ."

They stood together in darkness, waiting for transportation.

A bird of God sang from somewhere near them, not the paradisal bird, but not terrestrial. Another answered. And there was a green, growing, hopeful smell of trees.

Photo by Yolla Niclas

EVELYN EATON

The well-known author of *Quietly My Captain Waits, Give Me Your Golden Hand* and other novels was born in Montreux, Switzerland, and educated at Heathfield, Ascot, England, and the Sorbonne. She is now Visiting Lecturer in Creative Writing at Sweet Briar College. She writes: "During World War II, I was one of five women and nine men (all well-known newspaper or radio commentators) to fly 33,000 miles by C-54 covering twenty countries, including China—we flew the Hump—and most of Europe. While in flight I thought of this book. I took six years to digest it and one year to write it. It was a departure from the modern novels I wrote first, the historical novels I wrote next, and the *New Yorker* type of short story I also wrote. It was the first