

[Version 2.0 by BuddyDk - august 17 2003]
[Easy read, easy print]
[Completely new scan]

CAN THE DEAD RETURN?

“Gwyn . . .”

The voice was soft, feminine, as hollow as an echo, as fragile as blown glass. She flailed at the covers around her, trying to shake off the dream.

“I’m here, Gwyn . . .”

She sat up in bed. The room was no longer completely dark, but illuminated by the flick-ering of a single candle. She looked to the open doorway . . .

And saw herself standing there!

“Don’t you know me, Gwyn?”

“No . . .” A chill welled up inside. She pushed back the covers, got up and ran to the door. The hallway was dark, but for the moon-light that filtered through the windows at either end. There was no candle . . . the corridor was deserted.

It couldn’t be Ginny . . .

Ginny Keller was seven years dead!

PUT PLEASURE IN YOUR READING

Larger type makes the difference

This EASY EYE Edition is set in large, clear type—at least 30 percent larger than usual. It is printed on scientifically tinted non-glare paper for better con-trast and less eyestrain.

The big value in
romantic suspense entertainment
is a Lancer Super-Size Gothic . . .
have you read them all?

#75-354, HOUSE OF FOUR WIDOWS, Delphine C. Lyons
#75-355, THE DEPTHS OF YESTERDAY, Delphine C. Lyons
#75-358, VALLEY OF SHADOWS, Delphine C. Lyons
#75-364, DARK MUSIC, Charlotte Russell
#75-365, CHILDREN OF THE STORM, Deanna Dwyer
#75-379, DANGEROUS LEGACY, Willo Davis Roberts
#75-381, DRUMBUIE HOUSE, Marianne de Jay Scott
#75-394, DEADLY SEA, DEADLY SAND, Iris Foster

Nationally distributed by Curtis Circulation Co. If not available at your favorite newsstand or bookstore, order direct from Lancer Books, Inc., 1560 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036. Please enclose 95¢ for each title ordered, plus 10¢ per copy extra for postage and handling. On orders of four or more copies. We pay postage and handling. A postcard request will bring you a copy of our latest catalogue of the newest and best in paperbacks.

*The Dark
of Summer*
Deanna Dwyer

LANCER



EDITIONS

LANCER BOOKS
NEW YORK



A LANCER BOOK

THE DARK OF SUMMER

Copyright © 1972 by Deanna Dwyer

All rights reserved

Printed in the U.S.A.

LANCER BOOKS, INC. • 1560 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036

BOOK ONE

ONE

Gwyn was not expecting anything unusual in that day's mail, and was certainly not expecting a letter that would change the course of her entire life . . .

She got up at eight o'clock, to the insistent shrill of her radio-alarm, went straightaway into the kitchenette where she tried to coax herself all the way awake with a cup of strong, black coffee. Sunlight streamed through the one large window over the sink and splashed on the tiny, round table where she sat. She squinted and hunched forward like a gypsy woman straining to cast a spell, her face puffy and lined with sleep. She had gone to bed rather late, for she'd stayed up studying for a Creative Drama exam; now, she was quite tired, bone tired. For a moment, as she closed her eyes against the warm fingers of the morning sun, she seriously considered re-setting her alarm to give herself another hour between the sheets, just sixty more minutes of lovely . . .

She snapped her head up as if she had been hit, and she forced herself to drink the rest of the bitter coffee. She dared not return to bed. For one thing, she'd miss the exam which she'd spent so much time preparing for. And for another, she knew how easily she could again slip into the sick, unnatural routine which had possessed her for six months af-ter her parents died.

A temporary breakdown, Dr. Recard had said, an understandable psychological reaction to the tragedy. Yet, no matter how understandable it had been, she did not want to go through something like that again, for that had been the worst period of her life: it had been more horrible than the months after her sister's death when they'd both been twelve years old and inseparable, worse even than the morning the police had come around to tell her about her parents' accident. An under-standable psychological reaction to tragedy . . . She had begun to sleep away the better part of each day. Anything *but* sleep became a chore, an unbearably arduous task. She began to get out of bed just before lunch, napping away part of the af-ternoon, retiring early after a meager supper, sleep-ing, sleeping, sleeping. In sleep, there was no agony, no fear, no desperate loneliness. Her days passed in sleep, until it seemed as if she would never get out of bed, *could not* get out of bed ex-cept when she grew very hungry or thirsty. She had realized that something was terribly wrong with her, but she had not gone to a doctor for nearly six months. Then, when she had gone, it was only be-cause she slept a whole day through without get-ting up for any meals at all and, the following morning, could not remember anything about the lost day. That terrified her. That sent her, thin and drawn and weeping, to see what Dr. Recard could do for her.

Now, for eight months, she had been able to resist the lure of lengthy sleep, and she felt she was gradually making solid contacts with life again, achieving, growing, putting her loss and her agony behind her. One moment of weakness, one extra nap when she really needed no nap, would send her spiraling back down into the bleak despair that had made her so cherish that unneeded sleep.

By nine o'clock, she'd showered, dressed and was on her way to the college campus which lay on a hill only six blocks from her efficiency apart-ment. The day was warm, bright, almost like a painting entitled "Spring," with the cherry trees in blossom along Hudson Street, and birds darting like tiny kites between the eaves of the quaint old buildings which, though well-kept and attractive, had ceased to be single family homes and had been divided into student apartments much like her own. The walk, amidst

all this bustling life and color, revived her spirits and made her forget about bed altogether.

The exam went well, and she knew that she had gotten a high grade, one that would insure the A for the course, which she had been working so hard to get. She stopped for a time in the student union building, but she did not remain long after she'd finished her Coke and sandwich. She had many acquaintances, but no real friends, for all her energies had been put toward re-making herself, rehabilitating herself. She had little or no time, these days, for friends. But that would change soon, when a week passed and there was no morning that she wanted to stay in bed unnecessarily long. Then she would know that she was better, was healthy again, and she would be able to open herself more fully to the world around her.

When she reached the apartment house at quarter past two o'clock, she stopped at the hall table to examine the stack of mail there, and she found only one thing addressed to her: a letter from her Uncle William, an impossible letter that, because it was the last thing in the world she was expecting, left her somewhat tense. She was frightened and shaking by the tune she had let herself into her three room apartment on the third floor of the old house.

She put the letter on the small kitchen table, went to change clothes, poured herself a tall glass of soda over two ice cubes, and sat down to read the daily paper which she'd picked up on campus.

She tried not to think about the letter.

That wasn't easy.

She finished the paper, folded it and stuffed it into the trashcan, rinsed out her glass and put that on the drainboard of the sink.

When she turned, the first thing that caught her eye was the white envelope lying in the center of the blue, formica tabletop. It was a beacon, a flare, and it simply would not be ignored.

Sighing, beginning to tremble a bit again, she sat down at the table, picked up the letter, ripped it open, extracted two sheets of fine vellum paper on which were neatly typewritten lines followed by her uncle's unfamiliar, bold signature. This was the first time in nearly fifteen years she had heard from him—encounters having anything to do with her mother's brother, William Barnaby, were exceedingly rare—and she did not know what to expect, though she expected the worst.

The letter said:

“Dearest Gwyn,

“There is but one way to begin a letter of this sort, after all this time—and after all that has happened between us—and that is with a sincere and heartfelt apology. I apologize. I cannot begin to explain how genuine and important to me this apology is, but I must plead that you not pass it off as some shallow device used to gain your attention. I do apologize. I have been a fool. And though I have required so very, very long to understand my foolishness, I see now that nothing in the past was anyone's fault but my own.

“You know that I was quite against the marriage of my sister to Richard Keller, your father. At that time, twenty-two years ago now, I was frightfully class conscious, and I felt that your mother was marrying far below her station in life. Indeed, my own father felt this way too, and he eventually cut your mother out of the family inheritance because of her marriage; the family's holdings devolved to me, on Father's death, some ten years ago.”

Gwyn looked up from the letter, stared out of the window at the incredibly blue spring sky, and she thought, somewhat bitterly, *How simple and undramatic he makes it sound—how sterile in the recounting!*

Though the biggest fight and the bitterest scenes between her Grandfather Barnaby and her parents had occurred before Gwyn was five years old, she still remembered those awful events as if they had transpired just last week. A few times, at her mother's insistence, Old Man Barnaby and William, who was eight years his sister's senior, would come to the Keller house for dinner; Louise, Gwyn's mother, was always certain that a good family get-together would help iron out their differences—especially with Gwyn and Ginny, the old man's only granddaughters, to lend an air of enchantment to the afternoon. But

the old man never liked Richard Keller, looked upon him as an inferior, and always fomented a serious and roar-ing argument to end the visit. Gwyn remembered her mother's tears, and finally, the day the old man had left for good and notified them that they were forever cut out of his will.

The loss of the money did not upset her mother, though the loss of the old man's love most surely did. Still, she adapted to these new circumstances and devoted more time than ever to her own family, giving them all her love. In four years, she had gotten over her loss—and then her father had died. And her brother, William Barnaby, did not even notify her of the old man's passing until he had been buried for nearly a month. This delay, William insisted on the phone, was at his father's command, a clause in the old man's will. Her mother, aware that old man Barnaby could be ex-tremely vindictive, even carrying a grudge to the grave, was still not satisfied with William's flimsy explanation. But she was more content, after this final insult, to let the estrangement between her and her brother continue—an arrangement that William was not only willing, but eager, to see perpetuated. He still professed a great dislike for Richard Keller and told his sister she would yet one day regret the marriage, despite her lovely twins.

The letter continued with this:

“Of course, your father proved himself a man of admirable wit, cunning and rare business acumen. His success, I must admit, was a great surprise to me. But you must believe that it was a pleasant surprise, and that I was always so very glad for Louise.”

Sitting in her small kitchen, in the pleasant apartment which her trust fund allowances easily paid for, Gwyn smiled sadly at what, without realizing it, her Uncle William had just said. Mon-ey makes the man . . . Keller was worthless, an unpedigreed bum, an outcast compared to the so-daily conscious Barnaby family—until he'd started making big money. With a fortune, he was more acceptable. And, of course, he was easier to accept now that he was dead and gone . . .

“I did not learn that Louise and Richard were killed in the airplane accident until six months after they were gone. I was stunned, Gwyn, and horribly depressed for some time afterward. I could not understand why you didn't imme-diately inform me of the disaster, Gwyn. That was two years ago, but you were seventeen and old enough to understand that relatives should be contacted, that certain priorities in . . .”

She skipped over the remainder of that paragraph. She did not think Uncle William was so dense as to misunderstand her motives for not in-forming him, post haste, of his sister's death. Could he really have forgotten how badly he had hurt Louise when he withheld the news of old man Barnaby's death?

“I waited six additional months, after getting the belated news of the tragedy, and I finally con-tacted the bank that I knew would be managing your father's inheritance until you come of age. They graciously provided me with your address, there at school, but I have required nearly another year to gather the nerve to write these few lines.”

She turned to the second page of the letter:

“Gwyn, let's let the past bury itself. Let's do what should have been done so long ago; let's reunite what's left of the descendants of my father. I have apologized by letter, a very cowardly beginning, but a beginning none-theless. If you can find it in your heart to forgive me, and to forgive, by association, my father, perhaps these years of pointless animosity can be done away with.

“I would like you to spend your summer here in Massachusetts, at the homestead, Barnaby Manor, with me and my wife, Elaine, whom you have never met. I am fifty years old, Gwyn, finally mature enough to admit my mistakes. I pray that you are mature enough to have learned the value of forgiveness, and that we can make a start of repairing old bridges. I will anxiously await your reply.

“Love to you,

“Uncle Bill Barnaby.”

Gwyn did not know at what point during the letter she had begun to cry, but now fat tears rolled down her cheeks like jewels of water, fell off the end of her chin, leaving a trace of saltiness at the corners of her mouth. She wiped at them with her hand, and she knew what her answer would be. She hadn't realized, until now, how much alone she was, how cut off from people, how without love and protection. She wanted a family, someone to turn to, someone to confide in, and she was more than willing to forgive old angers, old prejudices.

She got paper and pen from the desk in the living room and sat down to compose the reply.

She had no trouble with it. The words came as easily as if they were familiar lines of a favorite verse that she had memorized. In two weeks, when the semester ended, she would go to Calder, Massachusetts, to Barnaby Manor, to her Uncle William.

And life would start all over again.

She posted the letter that same afternoon and, in a better mood than any she had experienced since before her parents' death two long years ago, she treated herself to a movie that she'd been wanting to see for some time. And she went shopping for some new summer clothes—light dresses, swim-suits, shorts and airy blouses, sneakers—that might be suitable for the social life and the leisure time on the beach of the Massachusetts seacoast

That night, she had a nightmare which was old and familiar but which, for the first time did not terrify her. In the dream, she was standing alone on a barren plain with nothing but grotesque, stark rock formations twisting up on every side . . . The sky was flat gray and high, and she knew that no other living thing existed in all this world . . . She sat down on the sandy earth of the plain overwhelmed by the soul-deadening emptiness of the world, and she knew that the sky would soon lower (as it always did without fail), and that the rocks would close in (as they always did without fail), eventually crushing her to death while she screamed and screamed—knowing that there would be no answer to her calls for help. This time Uncle William appeared out of nowhere and reached for her smiling broadly. And this time she was not crushed and she was not alone.

In the morning, waking refreshed, she knew that now she was not without friends, without family or without hope. This one contact, yet so brief, with someone who might love her was enough to drive off the nightmare.

During the following two weeks, she did not have a single urge to sleep late or to take naps in the afternoon, and she knew that when her nightmare had gone away, her sickness had disappeared too.

She looked forward to the summer at Barnaby Manor with the enthusiasm of a small child preparing for Christmas morning. In her free time she did more shopping—not only for clothes for herself, but for gifts that she wanted to bring her aunt and uncle, small things given not so much because of their value but because they represented her own ardent desire to give in order to make their relationship a good and lasting one. These were gifts of care, gifts of sentiment, and she shopped especially carefully for each.

Finally on the first day of June, which was a Thursday, she packed her four large suitcases in her Opel coupe locked her apartment for the summer, paid her landlady three months' rent in advance and set out for the drive from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to the small town of Calder, Massachusetts where a bright, new future awaited her, a chance to re-establish contacts with people who wanted to love her in a world where, she had learned the hard way, love was at a premium.

TWO

When she first saw Barnaby Manor, still more than a quarter of a mile away at the top of the narrow and badly paved macadam driveway she stopped her car along the berm. She sat there, peering through the bright windshield against which the afternoon sun reflected, and she took time to carefully examine this place where she would spend the following three months and where, perhaps an old grudge would finally be laid to rest. . .

At first the house did not look particularly promising and seemed to threaten rather than to welcome. It was huge, with at least thirty rooms on three different levels, spotted with railed porches and balconies its slate roof precipitously steep and decorated with the blank eyes of attic windows which looked like nothing so much as observation posts in some fortress. The house was painted in those familiarly reversed colors that one sees along the New England seacoast: predominately royal blue, with a bright white trim rather than mostly white. This gave it a rich—and a decidedly sinister—look.

The driveway edged the cliff from the moment it turned off the public road half a mile behind her, and it fed directly into the loop before the mansion's large oaken doors. On the right as she faced the house the lawn sloped down and came to the cliff where it stopped without guard rails or wall. She could see from here that a set of steps had been carved into the cliff to give the people in the house easy access to the beach. To the left of the house, the Barnaby estate thickly forested, ran on out of sight.

Gwyn had lived in a mansion herself, when her parents were still alive and she was accustomed to money and what money could buy. However, even she was quite impressed with Barnaby Manor, impressed by its formidable dimensions and by the well-kept, ornately planted grounds around it. If the house were not so brooding, so foreboding —

But then she told herself, she was being foolish. A house was not a living and breathing entity. A house was merely a house. It could not have about it a mood, could project no aura, neither good nor bad. Rather, she was seeing in the house a projection of her own doubts and her own fears. Would her Uncle William be as pleasant in person as he had sounded in his letter? Would he really have forgotten all those years of enmity, and would he truly be sorry for the way he had treated his sister, Gwyn's mother? Because she had no concrete answers to any of these questions, she was seeing only danger in the lines of the perfectly harmless old house. It was she who was to blame, then, not the inanimate dwelling.

She put the car in gear, pulled onto the driveway, accelerated up along the cliff's edge toward the mansion. She stopped before the massive oaken doors and was surprised to see them open even before the sound of the car's engine had died away.

As she stepped out of the car she saw a thin wiry man walking toward her. He was sixty years old perhaps, with a leathery face that might have done well for the captain of an ancient sailing ship: all creases and lines, darkly tanned, grizzled. He was wearing a dark suit, blue shirt and dark tie and looked not unlike a funeral director.

"Miss Keller?" he asked rounding the front of her car, his gait swift but stiff-legged.

"Yes?"

"Fritz Helman," he said, introducing himself with an incomplete bow in her direction. She thought that she detected the slightest trace of an accent in his precise voice, though he had obviously made English his native language decades ago. He said, "I'm the family's houseman. I serve as butler, official greeter, secretary to Mr. Barnaby—and in half a dozen other capacities. Welcome to the manor."

He smiled at her warmly, though he seemed to be holding something back, keeping some other expression locked behind that smile. It was not quite that the smile was insincere, just that it did not completely show what he was feeling.

She said, "Thank you, Mr. Helman."

"Please call me Fritz."

"Fritz, then. And you call me Gwyn."

He nodded, still smiling, still withholding part of himself from her. "Your luggage?" he asked.

"Two suitcases in the trunk, and two on the back seat."

"I'll have Ben get them shortly," he said.

"Ben?"

"The handyman and chauffeur." He took her arm in a very courtly manner and escorted her to the open doors, through them into a marble-floored entrance foyer where the walls were starkly white and hung with two flaring oil paintings by an artist she felt she should recognize but could not.

"Mr. and Mrs. Barnaby were hoping that you might arrive in time for lunch," Fritz said. "They delayed as long as they reasonably could, and they've both only just finished."

"I'm sorry if I held things up with—"

"Not at all," he said quickly. "But would you like me to see about putting together a plate of leftovers for you?"

"I stopped for something on the way," she said. "But thank you just the same, Fritz."

She had taken two days for the drive, and she had enjoyed stopping at restaurants along the way—even those that had a decidedly plastic atmosphere and served food that she found barely passable and not always digestible. No matter what the quality of the meal, she was at least out among other people once more, away from the familiar academic background which had been the only place she had been able to function for quite some time. Now, free from school for a few months, no longer bothered by a need for excessive sleep, with some excitement for the summer ahead, she felt as if she were a jigsaw puzzle that had finally been put together. All of the missing pieces were in place, and she was again a complete woman.

While her thoughts were wandering, Fritz had led her down a darkly paneled corridor laid with a deep wine-colored carpet. Other original oil paintings hung on both sides. He stopped before a heavy, handcarved door decorated with wooden fruit and leaves, and told her: "Mr. and Mrs. Barnaby are in the library having a bit of brandy to help settle their lunch."

He rapped once, shortly and sharply.

A man's voice, strong, even, and resonant, said, "Come in, please."

Fritz opened the door and ushered Gwyn in before him.

He said, "Miss Keller has arrived, sir." He sounded genuinely pleased to bring the news.

In the same instant he turned, rather abruptly, and left the room, closing the fruit bedecked door behind him and leaving her alone with the Barnabys.

The library was lined with bookshelves from floor to ceiling, and all of them were filled with hardbound volumes tooled in expensive leather or in good, sturdy cloth. A mammoth desk rested at one end of the room, and three large easy chairs at the other. In between was open carpet, a sort of no-man's land into which Fritz had led her and abandoned her. Though she had been feeling quite secure and competent moments earlier, she now felt full of doubts, uneasy, waiting for some indefinable disaster . . .

In two of the reading chairs, beneath the antique floor lamps, sat William and Elaine Barnaby. He was a large man, though lean, dressed in gray slacks, a burgundy blazer and a blue shirt with a dark blue ascot at his neck. His hair was gray and combed full at the sides in British fashion, and he had about him a look of near nobility. His face was somewhat soft, but not so little lined as to appear weak. His wife, Elaine, was younger than he, no more than forty, and quite beautiful in a cold, high-fashion way. She was dressed in a floor-length skirt and a ruffled blouse, holding a brandy snifter in her hand with the casual elegance that bespoke good breeding and the finest preparatory schools. She was brunette, with a dark complexion and huge, dark eyes that seemed to penetrate straight through Gwyn like twin knives.

No one spoke.

It was as if time had stopped flowing.

Gwyn felt awkward and clumsy as she compared herself to the older woman, though she knew she was neither of these things. Her bright blonde hair now seemed brassy and cheap next to Elaine's dark

locks, and she felt that her pale complexion—from so many months as a recluse—made her look sickly and unattractive. She was certain that, if she took but a single step toward them, she would stumble and fall, making a complete fool of her-self.

Putting his brandy snifter down on the table beside his chair, William Barnaby stood; he was well over six feet tall and even more impressive than he had been sitting down.

Gwyn waited.

She knew she should say something, but she could not. She was sure anything she could say would seem childish and frivolous.

He took a step toward her.

Behind him, Elaine stood too.

“Gwyn?”

Somehow, she managed to find her voice. “Hello, Uncle William.”

They were only half a dozen steps apart now, but neither of them moved to close the gap. The reunion was not going to be so easy as she had anticipated, for they both had too much past to reject to manage intimacy in the first few minutes.

“You look wonderful,” he said.

“Not really,” she said. “I’ve not been well lately. I need to get a little sun.”

It all sounded so inane and pointless, this small talk when they should have been making up for all those lost years. And yet . . . What else was there to do?

Elaine said, “How was your drive?” Her voice was cool, even, and touched by a faint British accent that amplified her sophistication. Her smile was absolutely dazzling.

“Very nice,” Gwyn said, her own voice stiff with expectancy. “I didn’t mind it at all.”

Another moment of awkward silence passed.

Gwyn almost wished she had not come here. This reunion was going to take more out of her than she had to give.

Then, as if snapping out of a trance, her uncle said, “Gwyn, I’m truly sorry for what’s happened.”

“It’s all past,” she said.

“But that makes me no less sorry.”

“You mustn’t worry about it,” she said.

“I can’t help but worry,” he said. “I only wish that I had come to my senses years ago, before so much bad feeling had been generated—while Louise was still alive . . .”

Gwyn bit her lip.

Tears, unbidden, rose in her eyes.

She thought that she saw tears, also in William Barnaby’s eyes, though she could not be certain.

Then, as the fat droplets brimmed up and trickled down her cheeks, the spell was broken altogether, and their uncontrollable emotions forced them to accept each other in a way that intellect alone could not have done. Elaine came swiftly forward, graceful and concerned, and she put an arm around the girl’s shoulders, consoling her with few but well chosen words. When Gwyn had wiped the worst of the tears away and felt somewhat better, Elaine said, “Come and sit down. We’ve got so terribly much to talk about, the three of us.”

Elaine had been right: they couldn’t get done talking. At times, all three of them would begin to speak at once, producing a senseless chatter that made them all break off in laughter. Then they would sip their brandy (a snifter had been wetted for Gwyn), take a moment to reorder their thoughts, and begin again. They talked about the past, about the present, about the summer ahead, and they gradually grew more accustomed to each other until, by late in the afternoon, Gwyn felt as if she had not been separated from them for years, but, rather, for a few short weeks.

She hoped they felt the same way about her, and she was fairly certain that they did, although she now and then sensed a caution, a cool reserve that was not unlike the same air she had noticed about the butler, Fritz Helman. She supposed that this was nothing intentional, but merely the way of those who have been very wealthy all their lives and have insulated themselves from the heat of the real world

beyond their preserves.

Her Uncle William was not a man to indulge in self-pity or in self-recriminations. He was proud and a bit aloof. With others, outside of his circle of family and friends, he would be a bit snobbish, though not unlikable. Once he had convinced her of his sincere contrition for his past behavior—which he did at the outset when she first walked into the library—he never mentioned it again. Indeed, he spoke as if the separation between them had never existed at all, as if they were sitting down for a chat like a thousand others they had had. When he let his mind wander through the past and call forth amusing anecdotes, he laughed both at the stupidities perpetrated by himself and his father, and at the good times from his childhood, before the feuding had begun. He did not apologize repeatedly, and he did not whine over his mistakes; he was a man who was above that sort of behavior.

The conversation, therefore, was almost uniformly entertaining and contributed to a general lightening of Gwyn's spirits. The only time it grew depressing was when they wanted to know about her sickness.

"When you came in," Elaine said, "you mentioned having been ill."

"Yes."

"Nothing too serious?"

"Nothing I could die from," she said, laughing, trying to get them off the subject.

But they were both concerned for her. Her uncle said, "Our own doctor's quite good. I could make an appointment for you if—"

"That's not necessary," Gwyn said.

"It's no trouble, and—"

"It wasn't exactly a physical illness," she said, looking down at her hands which were folded around the thick stem of her brandy snifter and which were trembling noticeably.

When she looked up, she caught the tail-end of a meaningful glance which the two older people had exchanged over this bit of news. For an instant, she almost thought that she had glimpsed an element of a smile in that glance . . . But that did not make sense. Mental illness was a misfortune; there was, surely, nothing about it that anyone could find humorous.

For a while, depressed by her own story, she had to tell them all that she had experienced because of the shock of her parents' death—the long naps, the longer nights in bed, and finally about her battle, with the help of a psychiatrist, to overcome her malaise. It was all very trying to recount, but she decided they had a right to hear about all of it. They were, she hoped, to be her only loved ones, and she did not want to have to keep secrets from them.

Much later, after the conversation had been channeled back to more pleasant subjects, Elaine stood abruptly, set down her glass and said, "Well, I think we've badgered Gwyn enough for now." She turned to the girl and said, "You must be ex-hausted after your drive. I'll show you to your room, so you can rest and freshen up before supper." She looked at her watch. "It's just six-thirty now. That gives you two hours before dinner."

Gwyn's room on the second floor was huge and airy, furnished in genuine colonial antiques including a canopied bed. It had two large windows, both of which looked out on the lawn, the edge of the cliff, and the endless sea beyond. The sky was high and blue, marred only by a few scattered, dark clouds near the horizon—and the ocean threw back this blueness tenfold, like a painter's pot of color.

"It's a beautiful view," Gwyn said.

The waves rolled toward the beach at the base of the cliff, which was not within view from this vantage point, tipped by brilliantly white foam that shimmered like a heat mirage.

"Do you really think so?" Elaine asked, standing next to her.

"Don't you?"

"Of course," Elaine said. "But Will remembered about Ginny, about the accident . . . And he thought maybe you wouldn't like a view of the sea, that it would bring back unpleasant memories."

"Of course it doesn't," Gwyn said. But her voice was strained.

Ginny had died in a boating accident from which Gwyn had escaped with her life. Looking at the sea, Gwyn had not recalled the association—but now she could hardly avoid it. She remembered, with a sudden intensity that surprised her, the empty, hollow pain that had followed her sister's death when they

were both twelve.

“Your life's been so full of death and pain,” Elaine said, touching her cheek. “But it's going to change now. You've only got good things coming to you.”

“I hope.”

“I *know*.”

Elaine showed her the private bathroom at-tached to her room, showed her where extra towels and linens were kept if she should need them. When the older woman left, her footsteps were like quickly fading whispers, testimony to her grace, and she closed the heavy door without making a sound.

Gwyn returned to the window, like an iron filing drawn to a magnet, and she watched the rhythmic pulsing of the great ocean which, in some small way, still harbored Ginny Keller . . . It held her atoms, sundered one from the other, which it had scattered to the four corners of the world, food for the fishes, no longer a person, no longer anything at all . . .

Dr. Recard had warned her that, when she found herself facing a particularly unpleasant chore or memory, that she should not turn from it, but should confront it, should become so familiar with it that it lost its frightfulness. Now, she confronted the ocean, the rolling waves, the low sky which was much like the sky beneath which Ginny had drowned so many years earlier . . .

Why had Elaine found it necessary to bring up the subject of Ginny Keller, when she knew that it could have only an adverse affect on Gwyn's mood? Why couldn't she have just let the subject lie undiscussed once she saw that Gwyn was not bothered by the ocean?

She was only concerned for me, Gwyn thought. She was only trying to be kind.

She hugged herself.

She was filled with a confusion of sadness and happiness, and she did not know for sure anymore whether or not this whole endeavor was a good idea. In the library, when they had talked of so many things, she was sure she had made the right decision by coming here; the summer would be full of joy. But now, she realized that the past could be forgiven—but that it could never be entirely forgotten.

As she stood watching the sea, her thoughts drifted, and in a while the face of Ginny Keller rose up before her, almost as if it were etched on the windowglass . . . It was a pale face, tongue lolling between purpled lips, eyes bulging obscenely, skin a vaguely bluish color, quite dead and quite hideous . . .

THREE

Gwyn was still standing before the window when the knock came at her door less than ten minutes later. She was watching both the sea and the vision of the long-dead girl, repelled and yet mesmerized by the superimposed spectacle provided by her own over-active imagination. The sound of knuckles meeting wood jerked her out of her unpleasant reverie, brought her back to the reality of Barnaby Manor.

She crossed the room and opened the door, expecting to see either Fritz Helman or her Uncle William. Instead, she was greeted by a tall, rather well-built young man no more than three or four years her senior, a handsome man with a thick growth of unruly brown hair and eyes as black as chips of polished coal. He was wearing casual slacks and a floppy collared blue shirt, and he carried two of her suitcases.

"I'm Ben Groves," he said. "I didn't realize there were suitcases in the back seat of the car when I took the others out of the trunk. Fritz just told me. I hope I haven't inconvenienced you at all."

"Of course not," she said. "Bring them in."

She stepped back from the door and ushered him in.

He placed the suitcases beside the other two, at the foot of the bed, and he said, "I could help you unpack, if you like."

"That's okay," she said. "I don't mind. If I don't do it all myself, I'll not know where everything's been put."

He smiled. He had a perfect smile, all full of white, even teeth; his evident good humor was infectious. Gradually, Gwyn began to forget about the sea, about the boating accident, about Ginny . . .

He said, "I'm the handyman, as you probably know. If anything needs fixed—and something usually needs to be fixed in a place so old as Barnaby Manor: a dripping faucet, a sticking window, a loose stair tread—just leave word for me with Fritz or with Grace, his wife. I'll take care of it as soon as I know about it."

She promised not to be shy about calling him.

"And I'm also the chauffeur," he said. "The Barnabys own two cars—a rather ancient but excellently preserved Rolls Royce, and a brand new Thunderbird. I know you've got your own car, but if you should ever want to go into town, and you don't feel like driving yourself, you've just got to let me know."

"I wouldn't want to interfere with your duties to Uncle Will," she told him.

"He rarely needs a chauffeur. He manages the family estate from here, in the Manor, and he really doesn't go out very much. Except for his meetings with local real estate people, and even then the meetings are generally held here." He looked around the huge room, nodding approval, and he said, "Do you like the place?"

"Very much," she said. "There's more room than I'll need."

"Not just your room," he said. "Do you like the entire house?"

"I haven't seen much of it yet."

"I'll give you a tour after supper," he said.

"I'd appreciate it."

He said, "Old houses fascinate me, and this one fascinates me more than most. It's nearly a century old, did you know?"

"I didn't."

He nodded. "Houses were built so much better then than they are built today. The carpenters cared about what they did; they looked upon a house as their own private work of art, even if they were never to live in it. They added so many nice touches that contractors bypass for the sake of economy today."

He shook himself, as if he was beginning to forget where he was. "I can run on about Barnaby Manor," he apologized. "But I'll save it all for the tour this evening."

"I'll be looking forward to it," she said.

He said, "Well, you're much different than I thought you'd be."

"Oh?"

"Yes. For one thing, you're prettier."

She blushed, wishing he hadn't said that—yet glad that he had. His candor was surprisingly re-freshing, and her ego had needed boosting for a good, long while.

He said, "And you aren't at all stuck-up."

"Why should I be?"

"You're a rich young woman," he said.

"Are all rich young women stuck-up?"

"Most of them."

She laughed. "Money isn't anything to get snob-bish about."

"You're an exception to the rule," he said, smiling.

"I've never worked for a penny of my money," she said. "Maybe that's why I can't be a snob about it."

"No," he said. "That's usually when people get snobbish, when it's inherited wealth. If they had to work for it, they'd always remember what it had once been like to be poor, and they'd not be able to take on a superior attitude." His voice had grown much more serious, and the smile had slid away from his face. He turned from her, as if he didn't want her to see him in anything but the best of humor, and his gaze fell upon the window through which she had been watching the sea. He said, sub-dued for the first time, "I hope that hasn't bothered you."

"What?" she asked.

"The view from that window."

"No," she said.

He turned and looked at her now, concerned. "This is the best of the guest rooms, the airiest. But if the view bothers you—"

"Please, believe me, I love the view," she said, trying to smile and not managing it very well. Why did everyone have to bring up the view from the window? Why must she be repeatedly reminded of her dead sister, and by association, the deaths of her parents as well?

"Good," he said. "But if you want to change rooms, just leave word with Fritz. Some of the other guest rooms face the woods on the other side of the house. Smaller than this, but nice anyway."

"I'm fine," she insisted.

She didn't feel fine at all.

"When you're finished with dinner," he said, "don't forget to come and get me for a tour of the house. I'm most likely to be in the kitchen about that time."

"I won't forget," she promised.

When he was almost through the door, pulling it shut after him, she said, "Ben?"

He paused, looked back at her, smiling still, a lock of brown hair having fallen across one eye. "Yes?"

"Thank you."

He grinned even more broadly and said, "There's nothing to thank me for. I'm more than happy to have an excuse to spend time in your company." He closed the door softly behind him.

Gwyn went to her bed and stretched out beneath the blue canopy, abruptly quite weary. She realized that they were all concerned about her. They wanted her to have a good time here, and they did not want her to be bothered or upset by anything—including the view of the sea from her bedroom window. Their probing was only meant to ascertain if she were happy. Still, it rankled. The sea had never been an object of terror for her, even though Ginny had died in it, even though she had been lucky to escape its smothering mass alive. She had been to the beach and had been swimming in the ocean countless times since that long-ago tragedy. But if they didn't stop reminding her of Ginny, of the shattered boat so swiftly

sinking, of the roiling water, of the screams . . . If they didn't stop reminding her, she was never going to be hap-py here at Barnaby Manor. There was such a thing as being overly protective; they were uncon-sciously destroying the good humor that they were so desperate to build in her. She resolved to make this plain to them if, at dinner or afterward, any-thing more was said about the view from her window.

But the dinner conversation never once touched upon the matter and was, in fact, quite lively and amusing. The food, prepared by Fritz's wife, Grace, was excellent though more typically American middle class than Gwyn would have thought: roast beef, baked potatoes, three vegetables in butter sauce, rolls, and a peach cob-bler for dessert. They drank a fine rose wine with the meal, which seemed in contrast to the other fare, but which brought out a special taste in everything and added an edge of humor to the conversa-tion that might otherwise have been lacking.

After dinner, because her uncle had still more business to attend to before he could call it a day, and because Elaine was tired and wished to go to bed early after an hour or so of reading, there was no objection to her going off with Ben Groves to examine the finer points of the house.

She found him sitting in the kitchen, reading the newspaper which her Uncle Will had finished with that morning and passed on. "Ah," he said, stand-ing, "I was afraid you wouldn't come."

"I wouldn't miss it," she said.

Fritz and his wife were in the kitchen, and Ben introduced Gwyn to the older woman.

"Pleased to meet you," Grace said, offering Gwyn a chubby hand to shake. She was perhaps fif-ty years old, younger than her husband, though her hair was completely white. She was a robust woman, only slightly overweight, somewhat handsome, with few wrinkles in her face and all of these concentrated around the edges of her steady, blue eyes. She dressed and acted in a grand-motherly fashion, though Gwyn somehow felt that this image was an affected one, and that a wholly different Grace lay just below the surface, in the same way that Fritz's outward image did not seem to be the real one. Perhaps this harmless deception was what lifelong servants to the wealthy had to develop. They could never afford to tell their employers what they really thought. A workable facade kept their jobs and their sanities intact.

"It was a wonderful supper," Gwyn said.

"Not fancy," Grace said. "But good nourish-ment."

"Exactly."

"Mr. Barnaby had one of them fancy cooks for years, but he finally got rid of her. He says he's felt better ever since I took over the kitchen."

The woman seemed proud of Mr. Barnaby's ap-proval—and yet, hovering just behind everything that she said, was an elusive sarcasm.

Gwyn turned to Ben and said, "Well, can we start out now? I have to walk off some of that beef and potatoes."

Grace laughed and returned to her work at a countertop, where she appeared to be filing receipts.

"This way," Ben said, taking her out of the kitchen again.

For the next hour, he took her from one room to another—the library; Uncle Will's study; the large dining room where thirty guests could be easily ac-commodated at a huge table; the front drawing room; the sewing room; the music room where a huge piano stood on a pedestal, and where com-fortable divans had been arranged for an audience that, Ben said, had not sat here since Old Man Bar-naby's days; the pool in the basement, filled with bright blue water, heated, encircled by crimson and black tiles; the nooks and crannies which the builders had included everywhere, tiny rooms, hid-den closets, niches in a main room where one could step back and be out of sight, alone with one's thoughts for a few minutes . . . He showed her how the carpenters had built the manor house without nails, using wooden pegs soaked in oil to insure a tight fit of all the joints. He explained that the visi-ble joints, at door frames and window ledges, were all carved by hand, with sharp knives, rather than sawed, to give them a rustic look and a much better fit. When he was finally done, she was as in awe of the fine points of the house as he was.

At the door to her room, he said, "I hope I didn't bore you too much, Gwyn."

“Not at all.”

“I get carried away about the place.”

“It's easy to see why,” she said.

“Tomorrow—might I show you the grounds around the house?”

“I'd like that,” she said. “Shall we say ten o'clock?”

“I'll be waiting by the front door,” he said. “Goodnight, Gwyn.”

“Goodnight.”

In her room, she watched the sea from her window, watched the moonlight dapple the moving waters, and she was once again perfectly sure that she had made the right decision in coming to Bar-naby Manor for the summer. This evening, with Will and Elaine, and later with Ben Groves, had been one of the most enjoyable she'd spent in months.

She prepared for bed, got beneath the covers, snuggled down and turned out the bedside lamp. In the darkness, her mind spinning wearily around and around, she found that she had no trouble falling into a deep, sound sleep . . .

“Gwyn?”

She turned over in her sleep.

“Gwyn?”

She buried her head beneath the pillow, trying to block out the voice, grumbling to herself at this unwanted intrusion.

“Gwyn . . .”

The voice was soft, feminine, as hollow as an echo, as fragile as blown glass, repeating her name over and over again.

“Gwyn . . .”

She rolled onto her back, trying to shake off the dream, still not awake, flailing slightly at the covers around her.

“I'm here, Gwyn . . .”

She was awake now.

She pulled her arms out from beneath the light-weight covers and let the cool air-conditioning blow across them.

“Gwyn . . .”

Yawning, she tried to shake off the lingering dream. It had been a strange one: no visual images, nothing but that haunting voice which called out to her over and over again.

“Gwyn . . .”

Suddenly, realizing that the voice was not a part of any dream, but was real, she opened her eyes. The room was no longer completely dark, but flickeringly illuminated by a candle. She sat straight up in bed, confused but not yet frightened.

“Hello, Gwyn . . .”

Incredibly, impossibly, she looked to the open doorway of her room and saw herself standing there. It was as if she were looking into a mirror—except that this was no mirror image. Her double, in the door frame, was standing, while she was sitting. And while she wore a dark blue nightgown, the figure in the door was dressed in a gauzy white gown that looked as if it were made of hundreds and hundreds of layers of spider webs, all rustling and yet soft.

“Don't you know me?” the double asked.

“No.”

The double smiled.

She said, “How's the view from your window?”

Gwyn felt a chill that did not come from the air conditioner, a chill that welled up from deep inside of her.

“You've decided properly.”

“Decided what?”

“To love.”

Her double stepped back from the open door and turned away, walking quickly out of sight to Gwyn's left, down the second floor corridor.

“Wait!” Gwyn cried.

She pushed back the covers, got out of bed and ran to the door.

The hallway was dark, except for the moonlight that filtered in through the windows at either end. There was no candle. And by the pale, unearthly luminescence, Gwyn could see that the length of the corridor was utterly deserted.

Numbed by what she'd seen, she knew she must be asleep. There was no other logical explanation for it: she must be dreaming. She bunched some of her right arm in the fingers of her left hand and pinched herself hard, almost cried out with the pain. That was not the reaction one might have in a dream, surely. She was awake . . .

She stepped back into her room and closed the door. She went into the attached bath, washed her face in cold water and stared at her reflection in the mirror. Her face looked drawn, her eyes wary.

“You need a suntan,” she told herself.

Her reflection obediently mimicked the movement of her lips. It did not start to make movements by itself, as she had almost expected that it might.

“You were merely dreaming,” she told her reflection, watching it closely. “Just dreaming.”

It simultaneously told her the same thing, moving its lips without making a sound.

She leaned away from the mirror and said, “Is it possible to have a dream last on, after you've wakened?”

Her reflection didn't know, or, if it knew, wasn't saying.

She sighed, turned out the bathroom lights, and went back to bed. She supposed that her aunt, and Ben Groves, so solicitous of her with their reminders of Ginny's death, had primed her for such a delusion as she'd just had.

The clock read 4:10 in the morning, still four hours before she would have to get up for breakfast. However, she slept very little the remainder of the night, dozing on and off, waking again and again to listen for the sound of a whispery voice calling her name . . .

FOUR

Half done with their tour of the grounds—which turned out to be far larger and more elaborately landscaped than Gwyn had at first thought—she and Ben Groves stopped at a white stone bench near the perimeter of the dense woodlands, within sight of a birdbath where two robins played. They sat and, taking a break from the nearly non-stop conversation they had thus far indulged in, watched the birds frolicking.

“Do you believe in ghosts?” Gwyn asked him, without preliminaries, turning away from the robins.

They had talked about so many things during the last hour, jumping from one subject to another, sounding each other out on various topics, trying to get to know each other better, that it was unlikely he would find her abruptness strange.

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“Ghosts,” she said. “You know, old friends to haunt you, old enemies here to take revenge.”

He thought a moment, then said, smiling, “I believe in them.”

“You really do?”

“Yes.”

She was surprised. “Why?”

“Why not?”

“No,” she said, “I’m serious. Why do you believe in ghosts?”

“I believe in ghosts,” he said, “because I believe in *anything* that’s fun.” He grinned at her.

“Ghosts are fun?” she asked.

He leaned back against the stone bench, folding his hands behind his head and crossing his ankles out in front of him. “Oh, most assuredly! Ghosts are an enormous lot of fun.”

“How?”

“Everyone enjoys a good fight.”

“I don’t.”

“Sure you do,” he said.

“Nope.” She was adamant about it.

He turned sideways, his hands still behind his head, and he said, “Didn’t you enjoy Halloween when you were a kid?”

“Yes, but—”

“Didn’t the idea of frightening other people—and of being frightened yourself—appeal to you?”

“That’s different,” she said.

He smiled. “Okay, then.” He seemed to pause for thought, then said, “Have you ever gone to see a horror movie—you know, one with vampires or werewolves—or even ghosts?”

“Sure. But what’s that got to do with—”

He interrupted her by holding up a hand for silence. He said, “Just bear with me. Now, did you go to see any more of this sort of movie, after you saw the first?”

“Several,” she said.

“Why did you go?”

“What do you mean?”

He said, “Why did you keep going back to this sort of movie?”

“To be entertained. What else are movies for?”

“Exactly,” he said. He seemed pleased with himself. “And since the whole point of a horror movie is to frighten the audience, you must have enjoyed being frightened.”

She was about to disagree, when she saw that he was right, and that there was no point on which she could prove him wrong. She laughed. "I never looked at it like that before."

"So," he said, "I believe in ghosts because they're fun."

They watched the robins a while longer. In time she said, "But aren't there—evil ghosts?"

"Probably most of them."

"What if one of these has in mind to do more to you than frighten you? What if it intends you harm?"

"Then I stop believing in ghosts," he said.

She laughed and slapped his shoulder playfully. "It's no use trying to be serious with you."

He sat up straight and cut back the power of his smile. "I can be as serious as anyone else."

"*Sure* you can."

He said, "Do *you* believe in ghosts?"

"No," she said.

"You should always keep an open mind," he said.

She threw a particularly sharp look in his direction, as if she thought she might catch him in some private and revealing expression not meant for her eyes, and thereby know what he was thinking. She said, "And just what is that supposed to mean?"

He was clearly surprised by her tone of voice, and he said, "Mean? Why, nothing particular . . . I was just trying to say that there are more things in heaven and earth than any one person, no matter how bright, can ever hope to comprehend."

"I guess that's true," Gwyn said, somewhat nonplussed. She smoothed down her blue denim skirt and said, "I'll be sure to do as you say; I'll keep an open mind about ghosts."

"They're fun," he said.

"So I've heard."

She should not have snapped at him as she had, she realized, for he could have no way of knowing about her dream from the previous night. But that dream—the dead girl, the flickering candle, the whispered words echoing in darkness—had left her slightly on edge, expecting to encounter another spectral vision of her dead sister at any moment, in the most unlikely places. The first had seemed so real, not like a dream at all, though a dream it had surely been . . .

"Come along," he said, standing and offering her his hand.

She took it and rose to her feet. His hand was large, warm and dry, a strong hand.

"We've got a lot more to see before lunch," he said, leading her away from the robins.

She saw Elaine and Will, for the first time that day, at lunch in the small dining room near the kitchen, since they had taken breakfast in their room upstairs, as was their daily custom. Uncle Will was dressed in a dark gray suit, a dark blue shirt and a white tie, not conservative but not flam-boyant, terribly distinguished. He had a meeting in Calder, with some real estate developers later that afternoon, and he would make a very good impression. Elaine, who intended to accompany him so that she might do some shopping, was wearing a short white skirt and a bright yellow blouse, her dark hair tied back in a ponytail that made her look almost like a girl in her twenties.

"How'd you sleep last night?" Will asked.

"Fine," Gwyn said.

"That bed hasn't been used in a while," Will said. "If it's lumpy or anything—"

"It's perfect," Gwyn said. She had the feeling that they were still unsure about the room they had given her, and that they were giving her a graceful excuse for changing.

"We'll be gone until nearly dinnertime," Elaine informed her. "Would you like to come into town with us?"

"I'll stick around here," Gwyn said.

"Use the pool or the library, whatever you want," Elaine said. "This is your house, now, as much as it is ours."

But after they had gone, she knew exactly what she should do if she wanted to avoid any more dreams of ghosts that called her name in the middle of the night. Dr. Recard had repeatedly advised her

never to run away from the problem, because running from the problem was also running from the source and the only possible cure. She must always seek out the source of her anxiety, always confront it head-on and thereby defeat it. So when Elaine and Will were gone, along with Ben Groves in the old Rolls Royce, she went upstairs and changed out of her clothes into a swimsuit. She rolled a towel around a bottle of suntan lotion, slipped on a pair of dark glasses, and went down to the beach for a swim and a nice, long session under the early summer sun.

Ben had shown her the steps carved into the cliff, though he had not taken her down to the beach. Now, as she followed the rough-hewn stair-case, she realized how easily one might lose balance and topple forward, four hundred feet to the soft sand below, battered by the steps and by the half-wall of rock that framed them . . . She was exceedingly careful and, dizzy from watching her feet the whole way down, came out onto the beach five minutes later, safe and sound.

The sand was yellow-white and clean, except for a few clumps of freshly tossed up seaweed near the water's edge. She chose a likely spot, opened her large towel and spread it on the sand, sat down on it and gave herself a generous lathering with sun-tan lotion. As pale as she was, she might quickly burn, though she remembered that, as a school girl, she had always tanned quickly.

Oiled, she stood up and kicked off her sandals, scrunched her bare toes deep into the warm sand, letting the brisk sea wind sluice over her, cool and refreshing. And she watched the sea . . . It moved in toward her, as if it were alive and watchful, surging murderously forth like a many-humped beast, dissipating itself in the last fifty yards, then crashing to the beach and splashing up, foaming over, sliding inexorably away again only to surge forward once more. It put on a good act of ferocity, but she knew that it was more gentle than it appeared to be. It could not frighten her. It reflected the afternoon sunlight, all green and clear and clean, stretching on out and out as far as she could see. It was immense and so beautiful that she could never fear it, no matter whose life it might have claimed years ago, no matter how close it might have come to claiming her own life as well.

She walked to the water's edge.

It slapped over her feet, cool.

She waded farther into it.

Seaweed scratched at her ankles, brushed her knees, frightening her for a moment, because she thought she had encountered some animal or other. She reached down, pulled a fistful of the stuff up and threw it into the air, laughing at her own fear.

When the waves were breaking above her waist and trying to shove her back toward the beach where they seemed to think she belonged, she turned with her back to the sea and as the water rose, fell back into it, swimming with a powerful, rhythmic backstroke that took her over the crests of the waves and farther out, despite the incoming tide.

At last, she raised her head and saw that the beach lay a good two hundred yards away—her towel swallowed up in all that glaring expanse of sand. It was time to stop and let the ocean carry her steadily back toward land. She ceased kicking, brought her hands in closer to her sides and fluttered them gently, the only movement that she required in the salt water to remain afloat.

Above, the sky was blue.

Below, the sea was blue.

She was like a fly trapped in amber. Caught between the two overwhelming forces, she felt at peace, and she did not think that she would have any more dreams about ghosts.

When she reached the shore again and waded out onto the beach, she fell forward onto her towel, turned her head to the side and let the sun beat harshly on her back. She was determined to be as dark and attractive as her aunt before much of the summer had gone by.

Yet, she soon grew restless and decided that she could get just as good a tan if she were up and moving about, perhaps a better one. She stepped into her sandals, caught the toe strap and wiggled it in place with her toes, then left her towel and lotion behind as she set off south along the dazzling beach.

The cliff remained on her right, towering and rugged, as formidable as castle ramparts, spotted here and there with scrubby vegetation that somehow managed to sustain its perilous existence on the verticle, unsoiled plunge of rock. The cliff also harbored a great many birds, mostly terns. These swept in from the

sea, crying out high on the wind, as if they were about to dash themselves to death on the sheer stone face—then inexplicably disappeared without a trace at the last instant before disaster. If you stopped to seek an answer to this miracle, you would find a number of chinks and holes in the cliffside, ringed by dung and stuffed with straw, the homes of the sea's winged hangers-on.

As she walked, she noticed a long, motored launch, perhaps as long as sixteen feet, paralleling her course. It lay no more than a quarter of a mile out to sea and contained, so far as she could tell, only one man. It rose dramatically on the swell, dipped down and fell away, leaving a spray of foam behind, only to rise up again. In ten minutes, it had halved the distance to the shore and appeared to be angling in toward the beach a couple of hundred feet below her.

She stopped, watching it, holding one hand up to her eyes to ward off the slanting rays of the late afternoon sun.

Yes, the boat was beaching, just ahead. The man in it looked toward her just long enough to wave; then he cut back on the power, letting the tide and his own momentum carry him into the shallows. There, he shut the engine off altogether, pulled it in over the gunwale on its hinges, leaped into the water and wrestled with the heavy aluminum boat, lodging its prow into the sand so that the sea could not carry it away.

She realized, as he sat down on the beached boat, that he had come in to talk to her, and she began walking again.

“Hello,” he said when she was only twenty feet away.

“Hi.”

He was older than her, though most likely younger than Ben Groves, a blond whose hair had been bleached white by the sun. He was deeply tanned, wearing ragged jeans, dirty white sneakers without socks, and no shirt. He was lean, but his arms were corded with stringy muscle that gave evidence of a good deal of manual labor of some sort.

“My name's Jack Younger,” he said. “My father's name is also Jack Younger, though I wasn't saddled with a 'junior' on my name. Can you just hear how that would have sounded—'Jack Younger, Junior'?”

She laughed, liking him at once. His face was freckled, his nose pug, his ears a bit too large, and he had about him the look of one who enjoyed life immensely.

“On the other hand,” he said, “when I'm with my father and must introduce myself to strangers, I often have to say—'Hi. I'm Jack Younger, the younger.'”

“Can I just call you Jack?” Gwyn asked.

“I wish you would.”

“Good. My name's Gwyn Keller.”

“A lovely name,” he said.

“It's not uncommon,” she said. “But I spell it with a Y instead of an E, which gives me a little distinction.”

“Oh, you misunderstand,” he said, with mock surprise. Then, in an exaggerated tone, he said, “I didn't mean your first name—but your last.”

“Keller?”

“Ah,” he said, gripping his heart, “what a musical sound, how full of lilting melody.”

She laughed and sat down on the sand. “Tell me, Jack, did you come all the way into shore just to make jokes with me?”

“I must admit it's true,” he said.

“And were you following me, when you held your boat parallel to my path, back there?”

“Yes, that too.”

She smiled, enormously pleased, and she blushed a bit, though she hoped he wouldn't be able to see that. She had turned a slight reddish-brown from the sun, good camouflage for a blush. “What do you do that you can take time off to follow unsuspecting women?”

“You weren't unsuspecting,” he said. “You suspected me from the very start, as you've just said.” He gripped the edge of the aluminum boat and leaned back, swinging his feet off the sand.

“And you just avoided the question,” she said.

“I tend lobsters,” he said.

“Sure you do.”

“I really do. Or, rather, I tend the lobster traps. The lobsters themselves would be just as happy without my attention.”

“You're a fisherman.”

“As was my grandfather—and as is my father,” he said. He was clearly proud of his vocation, and yet he had the look and sound of someone educated to be much more than a tender of lobster traps.

“What would they think of you if they knew you were dallying around as you are now?” she asked, teasingly.

“They'd say I was a fine, red-blooded boy, an honor to the Younger family, and with a great deal of taste.”

She blushed again, but was sure her sunburn hid it. He had a talent for making her blush more so than anyone she'd ever met, including Ben Groves.

“Besides,” he said, “I've been setting traps all day, and I'd just finished when I saw you walking here. I've been up and about since five this morn-ing, and if I haven't earned the right to dally a bit, then I guess I'm not strong enough for this lifestyle.”

“Do you catch much?” she asked.

“Tons!” he said. “Those lobsters virtually clamber over one another to get in the cages I send down for them. I do believe they battle, claw to claw, for the right to be caught by Jack Younger.”

“The younger.”

“Exactly.” This time, he laughed. When he was finished, he said, “Have you just moved in somewhere here?”

“No,” she said. “Well, maybe, in a way. I'm staying the summer with my aunt and uncle.”

“Who are?”

“The Barnabys,” she said.

The change in Jack Younger's demeanor was sudden, complete and quite surprising. He had been all smiles a moment earlier, his blue eyes adance, full of nervous energy. Now, at the men-tion of the Barnabys, his eyes grew slitted and cautious. His smile metamorphosed quickly into a frown, almost into a scowl. His nervous energy, directed first at humor, seemed now to give birth to anger.

“Is something wrong?” she asked.

“I'm no friend of theirs,” he said.

“Whyever not?”

“I'm sure you know.”

“Don't be so sure, because I don't know.”

He got off the edge of the boat and stepped back into the frothy edge of the sea, his dampened trousers growing ever wetter, grabbing hold of the edge of the boat as if to pull it loose of the sand.

“You're not going are you?” she asked.

“I see no need to stay.”

“Because my uncle's Will Barnaby?”

He said nothing but looked at her with just a touch of disgust in his eyes.

“That's stupid,” she said.

“You wouldn't know.”

“You may not want to be friends with my uncle,” she said, “but why shouldn't you be friends with me? For heaven's sake, I'd never bring myself to touch a creepy old lobster—but I'm not about to shun you just because you make your living handling them!”

He laughed again, though not fully in good hu-mor; half of that laugh was sour. He said, “Are you implying that your uncle is a creepy old lobster?”

She grinned, glad to have the joking back. “Not at all,” she said. “He may be a tiny bit of a cold fish, but basically I love him.”

His laughter had died away, and no smile came to his face now—though he did not frown, either.

“What have you against Uncle Will?” she asked, sitting on the sand again, tucking her legs under her in Indian fashion.

He hesitated, then let go of the boat and sat down on the edge of it once more. “He's just about ruined commercial fishing in this area,” he said. “He's just about finished us off.”

“How so?”

“You really *don't* know?” he asked, incredulous.

“No.” She shifted her legs, drew them in tighter, getting more comfortable, and she said, “I've only been here a day, and I haven't seen either Will or Elaine for years.”

He gave her one last searching look, then apparently decided that he would believe her. He said, “For years, your uncle's been buying up beachfront property and the beaches themselves. He must own the beaches from the manor to a point more than three miles south.”

“Is this a crime?”

“Not of itself,” he said. “But you see, all the lobster men, and many of the other fishermen, used to use Lamplight Cove for a base of operation. We had docks there, and we kept facilities to repair our traps. We also had a keeping tank to hold the catch—the better specimens, at least—until the expensive restaurants' buyers could get around to make their choices. You see, most lobsters are sold quickly, either to speculators in Calder or to scouts from the major seafood processing companies and chain restaurants, who keep a number of offices in the area. But private buyers, restauranteurs from Boston, travel the coast every week to make the following week's purchases. These are the specialty restaurants that usually boil the lobster alive—and they're able to pay quite well, considering that they charge their customers ten bucks and up for a lobster on the plate. Some lobster men prefer to hold their best catches out of the pack that goes to the seafood companies; they tag them, drop them into a community keeping tank, and hope that someone from one of those fancy Boston places will be especially taken with their beauties. Anyway, we kept a tank in Lamplight Cove, which held as many as four hundred prime lobsters. But we lost it, along with everything else we had there, when your uncle bought the bay property and sent us all packing like a bunch of grubby hoboes who'd settled down illegally.”

“Why did you sell to him?” she asked.

“We didn't. We rented the place—and it was our landlords who sold out from under us.”

“Well—” she began.

“Your uncle hasn't done a damn thing with the Cove in a year,” he said, extremely bitter and making no effort to conceal his feelings. “Yet he won't let us move back there. Instead, the docks and buildings we put to such good use are now standing idle. He'd rather collect nothing than get rent from us. He'd rather make our lot in life harder than to make a few dollars from a lease.”

“You've got nowhere else to go?” Gwyn asked.

“Oh, we've Jenkins' Niche, where we are now.”

“Then, what's the problem?”

He spat in the sea. “Jenkins' Niche is exactly what its name implies, a cubbyhole in the coast, well enough protected from the sea in rough weather, but hardly large enough for sixteen separate fishing boats that have to use it. We squeeze in, but we're far from comfortable and farther still from being happy. We wanted to buy it, just the same, but the landlord won't sell. At most, he'll give a year-by-year lease, which he can break at any time. He's given his oh-so-generous permission for us to build temporary buildings there, but we don't know when he may ask us to leave. He's a friend of your uncle's. Now, you see, though we all live north of Calder, we must drive south, through town, down to Jenkins' Niche each morning. Then, once in the boats, we must come back north again, to where the lobster beds are. It means an extra half an hour or forty-five minutes in the car each day—plus again as much extra time in the boats. Perhaps that sounds like a trifling disadvantage, but if you add it to other inconveniences we now suffer—none of which we suffered when we had Lamplight Cove—you can see as how it puts us to the biting edge.”

She had heard all he said, but found it a bit difficult to believe. “Has anyone approached my uncle to—”

“Your uncle,” he said, with grim laughter, “is unapproachable. “He answers none of our letters, and

he takes none of our telephone calls. He refused, on three separate occasions, to even listen to a plea from our lawyer. And he has only replied with the worst sort of invective when he's en-counterred any of us in the streets of Calder.”

“That hardly sounds like Uncle Will.”

“That's him, all right,” Jack Younger said. He was no longer gripping the boat, but had his hands fisted on his thighs, as if he were looking for some-thing to beat out his fury on. “We even tried to em-barrass him through the local newspaper, but we found out it was owned by one of his friends. They wouldn't print our letters to the editor, or publish anything about our plight—and they wouldn't even accept a paid advertisement from us. Ap-proach your uncle? It would be easier to approach the President of the United States in his White House bedroom, without the permission of his guards. Your uncle's as remote as the North Pole!”

“And there's no other cove or bay, besides these two, that's closer to your lobster beds?”

“None,” he said. “The coast here is rugged, but it's very short of well-sheltered backwaters where a thirty-five-foot fishing boat could weather a good blast in safety.”

“Perhaps if I talked to Uncle Will, he—”

“Would feed you some unlikely story that, be-cause you love him, you'd believe.”

“Do I look stupid?” she asked, rather hotly, ris-ing to her feet.

“No, but you look trusting—far, far too trust-ing.”

“I'll ask him, anyway,” Gwyn said.

He stood up too.

She sensed a new tension between them, an antagonism that she did not want, but which, right now, was unavoidable.

He said, “There are new rumors floating in Calder.”

“About my uncle?”

He nodded. “They say he is negotiating to buy up the land around Jenkins' Niche. If he purchases that and locks us out again, we'll have to go at least three miles farther south to find another base of operations. And that will be worse than Jenkins' Niche. To find a *good* place, we'll have to go five miles—which will put us intolerably far away from our beds. We can't keep the lobster catch out of the water for as long as it would take to transport them that far.”

“I'm sure Uncle Will won't be unreason-able,” she said.

“You're more optimistic than I am.”

“He must have had a reason, no matter how it looks to you, for closing down Lamplight Cove.”

He sighed. “If you ever do talk to him about this—”

“Not if, when,” she said.

“When you talk to him about this,” he said, “maybe you better tell him that the fishermen aren't going to put up with another move, not a move like this one would be.”

“Is that a threat?” she asked.

“Call it what you will.”

He splashed to the rear of the old boat. Without looking up at her again, he wrestled it free of the sand and guided it around in the swirling water. He pushed it out a few yards, hopped into it and started the engine. Putting only the tips of the blades into the shallow water, he moved cautiously toward deeper channels. When he dropped the engine down completely, he roared away in a wake of white water, soon out of sight.

FIVE

Gwyn waited until dinner was finished before she brought up the subject of the lobster fishermen. When the three of them had retired to the easy chairs in the library and had begun to mellow the effects of the dinner with tiny glasses of sweet banana liqueur, she said, "Well, I met Jack Younger this afternoon."

Elaine sat up straight in her chair, her shoulders suddenly gone stiff, her face lined with concern and less young than it usually appeared. "Has that old scoundrel been hanging around here again?" she asked, quite evidently perturbed.

"He's been warned by the sheriff," Will said, as stiff and ill-at-ease as his wife. "He's not to harass us any more, and he knows it. What did he want?"

"You misunderstand," Gwyn said. "Not *that* Jack Younger." She smiled to herself as she remembered the comic routine about his name which Jack had gone through when they met on the beach. To her aunt and uncle, she said, "That's his father. I met the—younger Younger."

"Even so, he's no right coming around here," Elaine said. She was more distressed than the situation seemed to warrant.

"Well, he wasn't around the mansion," Gwyn explained. "I went for a swim, as I said—and then for a walk along the beach." Modest, she decided to underplay the reason for their meeting. "We met—by accident, south of here about a mile."

"And what did *he* have to say?" her Uncle Will asked. Although he had settled back into his easy chair and had crossed his legs once more, he appeared to be still ill-at-ease, strained like a rubber band. He ran one long-fingered hand through his silvered hair, over and over again, unconscious of this betrayal of his frayed nerves. But what did he have to be so awfully nervous about?

"He just wanted to chat," Gwyn said. "He didn't know, at first, that I was your niece."

"What'd he have to say when he found out that you were?" Elaine asked. She, too, had leaned back in her chair—and she, too, was strained almost to the breaking point.

"For one thing," Gwyn said, "he talked a lot about a place called Lamplight Cove."

Neither Will nor Elaine had anything to say about that. They seemed to be fighting an urge to glance at each other for reassurance.

Gwyn put her glass down on the stand beside her chair and turned to her uncle. "Is it really true, what he says?"

"What's he say?" Will asked.

"That you've been making life very hard for the lobster fishermen hereabouts. He says you bought Lamplight Cove out from under them, and even though you haven't done anything with it yourself, you refuse to let them rent their old facilities."

"A rather nicely twisted version of the truth," her uncle said. He seemed to have recovered all of his normal self-assurance.

"Is it? I suspected it might be, but he sounded so—honest."

He put down his own liqueur and folded his hands together on his upraised knee. He said, "It's true enough that I've bought Lamplight Cove, *and* that I haven't done much of anything with the place—yet. The Cove is seven hundred yards across and contains more than a thousand yards of beach frontage property, which will develop nicely. I intend, in the near future, to establish generous, expensive homesites for discriminating people—just as I also intend to do with all the other land that I've bought up along this section of the coast during the past six or seven years. Eventually, this area will contain some of the most exclusive and lovely homes in all of America . . ." His voice lifted as he spoke of the project; clearly, he was sure of a large financial success.

"In the meantime," Gwyn began.

He did not permit her to finish, but went on as if he had not even heard her speak. He said, "As soon as I acquired Lamplight Cove, I offered the fishermen the facilities there at the same rental they had always paid. Which, I might add, was precious little; the buildings were shoddy, the commercial value of them almost nil. But I did not throw them out—not as they now attempt to say I did. After all, I am a businessman, Gwyn, and I would not turn down any income so easy—no matter that it's small—as that which the dock rentals would have brought. However, included in my agreement to rent to them were several—ah, conditions."

"Conditions?"

"They had spoiled the environment of Lamplight Cove and were well on the way toward recklessly destroying it altogether. They dumped their sludge oil from their boats right into the bay. They'd also established a complete dry dock, to paint and repair their boats, and they weren't at all concerned that so much of the poisonous products used in these repairs—scaled paint, new paint, turpentine, grease, oil, solvents—were let into the waters of the cove. You see, since they didn't live here, and since they didn't have to earn their living fishing in the cove, they didn't really much care what condition they left the place in. They didn't care whether or not they were killing off all of the underwater plant and animal life in the cove."

"How terrible," Gwyn said.

"But par, for most people," he said.

She said, "Jack Younger never told me any of this."

Elaine, in a tone of voice that made it perfectly clear she thought very little of any of the Youngers or their friends, said, "Well, my dear, I'd have been very much surprised if he had. These people show an amazing skill for twisting the truth."

Her Uncle William said, "They've tried to make me out as a villain to everyone in the area. They've painted me as a vicious man, a money-grubbing, ruthless and pettily vindictive rich man discriminating against the poor, down-trodden laborers. You'd think I was an ogre if you heard only their side of things. But nothing's so simple as that."

"I told him that he was wrong about you, Uncle Will," Gwyn said.

He smiled. He took a sip of the banana liqueur, then put the glass down once again. "Thank you for your loyalty," he said.

"It's nothing to do with loyalty," Gwyn said. "It's just plain, common sense. You couldn't possibly be so mean and petty as he said you were. No one could be."

"I'll wager that he didn't tell you anything about International Seafood Products, either."

She looked perplexed.

"It's a huge concern that processes seafood and cans it. ISP has been trying to buy up seafront land and obtain government permissions to construct a fish processing factory only a mile from here. Do you realize what a plant like that would mean to this area?"

"More jobs?" Gwyn ventured.

He snorted.

"Actually, they'd employ very few people," Elaine said. "The plant would be ninety percent automated."

Her Uncle William leaned forward again, as if engaged in a vital argument about the affairs of the day—which, she soon saw, he was. "In point of fact," he said, "such a processing factory would ruin Calder and the landside around it. Have you ever been anywhere near a seafood plant, a cannery?"

"No," Gwyn admitted.

"The stench of dead and rotting fish—the guts, and other parts they can't use—carries for miles. The sea around the plant is used as a dumping grounds for organic and inorganic wastes, in huge quantities. You have an open sewer, within six months, and another dead section of the sea in a year."

"And the lobster fishermen have been in favor of this cannery?" Gwyn asked.

"Yes," he said. "Not just the lobster men, but all the captains. Because their own traditional grounds are so close, they'd be able to make a better profit on their catches. Add, of course, they'd have a

steady market for just about everything they could bring in.”

Gwyn nodded. “I see.”

“Don't misunderstand,” Elaine said. “We're not against progress, and we're certainly not against capitalism. The seafood company should be allowed to build their plant somewhere. One of the offshore islands, north of here, would do nicely—someplace where there aren't people whose lives and property values would be lessened by such a godawful factory.”

“I'll admit,” her uncle said, “that one of my reasons for wanting to keep ISP out of Calder and the surrounding area is purely monetary. I've spent half a decade acquiring the land necessary to establish a fine seaside community of upper-class homes. I wouldn't want to see the value on all that land be cut by half because of the stench of rotting fish. But beyond this consideration, there's the other, of environmental protection. I don't want to live in a place where a good, deep breath makes me ill—where the beaches are littered with decay-ing rejects from the cannery.”

“Neither would I,” Gwyn said.

“So,” Elaine said, “if you should see this Mr. Younger again, you'll be able to tell just how much of his line is pure hogwash.”

“Actually,” Will said, “I'd think it better if you don't see him again. If you notice him on the beach, avoid him. These people have made some threats—of violence, I'd feel safer if you avoided them.”

She promised that she would keep to herself, though she knew that she would take any opportunity to speak, just one more time, with Mr. Jack Younger (the younger). He had departed, this afternoon, with such a cold, abrupt attitude . . . He had made her feel guilty. Now, she would enjoy letting him know that she had found out exactly who the *real* villains were in this affair.

On the stairs, when she was on her way to her room, she met Ben Groves coming the opposite direction.

“It looks great,” he said.

Confused, she said, “What does?”

“Your tan!”

She looked at her bare arms and smiled. “I'd almost forgotten it. Yes, it's rather good, but just a start. I want to be as dark as everyone else around here, before the summer's over. At least, now, I don't look like a—ghost.”

After some additional smalltalk, he said, “How about going sailing with me tomorrow?”

“You've got a boat?”

“A fourteen-foot beauty,” he said, grinning. “I keep her moored in Calder. Tomorrow's my day off, so ...”

“I'd love to,” she said.

“Be up and ready to go at nine,” he said.

“Aye, aye, Skipper.”

“But leave the corny sea talk behind,” he said.

“Right, Cap'n,” she said, with a mock salute.

“Gwyn?”

She sat straight up in bed.

Her hands were full of twisted sheets.

She was perspiring.

Tense, leaning forward as if she had just been hit in the stomach, she listened intently.

“Gwyn?”

She got up, without turning on any light, trying to be as silent as possible, moving like—like a ghost.

She stood in the center of the room, weakly illuminated by the remnants of the moon, and she looked around, trying to catch sight of any stranger, any shadow darker or lighter than the ones the furniture threw.

She saw nothing.

“Gwyn . . .”

This was no dream. Someone was most definitely calling out to her in a dry, whispery voice.

She walked cautiously to the door, reached for it, found that it was open.

She stepped into the corridor.

Tonight, as the moon waned, there was insufficient moonlight for her to tell whether or not the hallway was deserted. She might have been alone—or she might have been one of a half a dozen people standing there in the darkness.

Holding the door frame, one hand to her heart as if to still the rapid beating she listened.

She waited.

Time passed like syrup running sluggishly out of a narrow-mouthed bottle, drip by drip by drip . . .

The voice did not come again.

She willed it to return.

It did not.

In a whisper of her own, hoping she would not wake anyone else, Gwyn said, “What do you want?”

She received no reply.

“What do you want with me?”

Nothing.

“Ginny?”

Silence.

She walked the length of the corridor, first to the right of her room, and then to the left, moving on tiptoe, expecting to bump into someone—or something—at any moment. She encountered no one and nothing at all.

She stood in her doorway a while longer, listening, then went into her room again and closed the door.

With her back to the heavy door, both moist palms pressed flat against the cool, slick, varnished wood, she cleared her throat softly and, still whispering, she said, “Ginny, are you here?”

She felt like an utter fool, but when she received no answer, she repeated the question: “Ginny, are you here?”

Only silence . . .

And darkness.

Ben Groves, in that so-reasonable voice of his, had told her that everyone should keep an open mind on everything—even about ghosts and netherworld visitors. He had convinced her. But now, it seemed stupid for her to stand around in the dark, in her nightgown, talking to the air and waiting for a supernatural reply. She had never been one for astrology, for belief in anything beyond the human ken.

“It was a dream,” she said. “A repetitious dream.”

Then she remembered that the door had been standing wide open, and that she had most certainly closed it when she came to bed . . .

She tugged at it now, without twisting the knob, and she saw that the latch was slightly loose. Perhaps, because the door *did* lean slightly inward, it had slipped its latch during the night, all by itself, and had gradually drifted open. She'd had a dormitory room at college with a door that did that very same thing. In any event, it was easier to accept a mundane explanation like that than to put any credence in the existence of ghosts!

She got a drink of cold tapwater from the bathroom, let it soothe her parched throat, then returned to bed.

In a while, she slept again.

She did not dream.

Yet, in the morning, when she got up, she found that her door had drifted open again, during the night . . . She took this as proof that the latch needed to be replaced and the door set more evenly in its frame.

SIX

At four o'clock the following afternoon, having trimmed the bright white sails and—at the last possible minute—having dropped them altogether, Ben Groves brought his sailboat, *Salt Joy*, into its slot on the graded beach. This section of the shoreline had been especially built up, then sloped to provide an easy landing zone for the dozens of colorful sailboats that plied the waters around Calder. The flattish bottom of *Salt Joy*, unlike the curved bottoms of some of the other sailboats, slid up the incline with a wet, hissing noise and came finally to rest.

Ben leaped out seconds before she did, grabbed the front of the small craft and, staggering backwards, pulled it all the way out of the water. His arms bunched with muscle, and sweat stood on his brow.

“Are you sure I can't help with this?” she asked. She had turned even a more golden brown color, after nearly a whole day in the glare of the sun, in the reflecting bowl of the sea.

“We brought two cars so you wouldn't have to stay and help,” he said.

“Still—”

“Besides, I'm a perfectionist. I'm afraid you wouldn't fold or roll anything to my approval.”

“I could keep you company anyway,” she said.

“And have to listen to me cursing the canvas when it won't roll right?” he asked, mockingly in-credulous. “I won't have you finding out how per-fectly foul I can be.”

“You're sure?”

“Positive.”

They stood quite close. She felt as if, in the shadow that he threw, she would be always pro-ected, watched over, safe. She had not had this strong a feeling of belonging even with her Uncle William.

“I want you to know,” she said, “That this was the most wonderful day I've had—since I can't remember when.”

“I hope that's true.”

“It is, Ben.”

“We'll do it again, soon. We haven't even begun to cover some of the better sailing areas to the south.”

“I'm already anticipating it,” she said.

Then, without warning, he bent toward her and, putting his arms around her, kissed her lightly on the lips.

His lips were somewhat salty, warm, firm and yet tender.

She kissed back, surprised at herself.

They parted, ending the kiss, though he still held her close. He said, “Was I too bold?”

“No,” she said. Her voice was small, quiet, defenseless.

“I had as good a time as you did, Gwyn,” he told her. “Actually, I think I had a better time.”

She looked up into his dark eyes, saw that they returned her gaze with a steady, unwavering affec-tion.

She stood on tip-toe and kissed the corner of his mouth. “I better be going,” she said, “so you can get the boat packed up.”

“Be careful on the drive back,” Ben warned her.

“It's only a short way,” she said. “No more than fifteen minutes.”

“The greatest number of traffic accidents,” he admonished her in almost fatherly tones, “take place within a few miles of home.”

"I'll be careful," she conceded.

But on the way back to Barnaby Manor, her mind was not on her driving at all. Instead, as the road rolled toward her, under her and away, she let her mind wander through scattered memories which she had stored up throughout the day. . .

She hadn't been lying to Ben when she told him that the day had been so terribly enjoyable. Not since before her parents had been taken from her had she been given so much fun in a single day: the bright and rolling water, the baking sun, the clouds . . . They had played the old game with the clouds, watching them for some image that resembled a face or an animal. They had talked, endlessly, about this and that and nearly everything—and they had grown, or so it seemed to Gwyn, quite close in the space of just a few short hours. He said that often happened on a sailboat—if two people were at least somewhat compatible to begin with. Two people found themselves drawn quickly together, as if to ward off the immensity of the endless sea . . . Afloat on the blue, blue ocean, one was made small, until one seemed of very little value, little worth . . . But with someone to share the experience with, the huge universe could be pushed back, your own importance expanded until the ego was recuperated . . .

Now, as she parked the Opel in the four-car garage attached to Barnaby Manor, she wondered exactly what else had transpired between her and Ben Groves. She felt, inexplicably, as if some new and special relationship had begun, now quite fragile, but perhaps soon to blossom and flower . . .

By quarter past five o'clock—with a good deal of time remaining until dinner—she had showered, dried her hair, inspected her tan in the mirror and dressed. Still full of energy, despite the work that had gone into the day's sailing and despite the energy the heat of the sun had taken out of her, she wasn't satisfied to read or to relax to music in her room.

Downstairs, Fritz and Grace were at work in the kitchen. Though both were polite, neither was a particularly fascinating conversationalist. Neither her aunt nor her uncle were about, and Ben Groves had not returned from Calder. The house lay heavy, cool and quiet, as if it were asleep and must not be awakened.

She went outside to the steps by the sea, and walked carefully downward to the beach, where everything was beautifully golden in the late after-noon sunlight.

Far out to sea, a tanker wallowed southward, noiseless at this distance, like some immense, ancient animal that should have been long extinct.

Watching the huge tanker, Gwyn was reminded of the way that Jack Younger had followed her in his fisherman's launch only the day before, and she knew that she had, without realizing it, come here to the beach in hopes of meeting him once more and getting a chance to give him a piece of her mind.

However, though the time seemed right, not a single fishing boat lay on the swell in either direction.

Gwyn took off her shoes—white canvas sneakers—and walked into the frothing edge of the surf. She wriggled her toes in the rapidly cooling water, stirred up milky clouds of fine sand, and kicked at stranded clumps of darkening seaweed.

When she had walked nearly a mile, no longer charged with so much undisciplined energy, she stopped at the water's edge and faced directly out to sea, watching the creamy clouds bend toward the liquid, cobalt horizon.

She had built up a tremendous appetite and was looking forward to one of Grace's hearty meals, then to a couple hours of reading in her room, and early to bed. She knew that, tonight, she would sleep like a rock, without any strange dreams. She bent down and put on her shoes, turned to go back to Barnaby Manor—and was rooted to the spot by what she saw behind her.

As if following in her footsteps, her double stood no more than a hundred feet away. She was wearing that many-layered white dress that billowed prettily in the sea breeze and gave her an ethereal look, as if she did not belong in this world. And perhaps she did not . . .

Gwyn took a step toward the pale apparition, then stopped suddenly, unable to find sufficient courage to continue.

The *other* Gwyn, the Gwyn in white, remained where she was—though her own stillness did not appear to be founded in fear.

Despite the steady susurrations of the sea wind—which fluffed the stranger's golden mass of hair into an angelic nimbus all around her head—and despite the rhythmic sloshing sound of the waves breaking on the beach, the scene was maddeningly quiet. The air was leaden, the sky pressing down, each second an eternity. It was the sort of silence, filled with unknown fear, that one usually found only in remote graveyards or in funeral parlors where a corpse lay amid flowers.

To break this disquieting quiet, Gwyn cleared her throat—somewhat surprised at the noise she made, and in a voice cut through with a nervous tremor, she asked, “Who are you?”

The *other* Gwyn only smiled.

“Ginny?” Gwyn asked.

She hated to say that. But she could not help her-self.

“Hello, Gwyn,” the apparition replied.

Gwyn shook her head, looked down at the sand, trying desperately to dispel the vision. But when she looked up again, she found, as she had expected she would, that Ginny remained exactly where she had been, in her white dress, yellow hair fluttering.

“I’m seeing things,” Gwyn said.

“No.”

“Hallucinations.”

“And are you hearing things too, Gwyn?” the double asked, smiling tolerantly.

“Yes.”

The apparition took several steps toward Gwyn, cutting the distance between them by a fourth. She smiled again and said, in a comforting voice, “Are you afraid, Gwyn?”

Gwyn said nothing.

“You haven’t any reason to be afraid of me, Gwyn.”

“I’m not.”

“You are.”

Gwyn said, “Who are you?”

“I’ve told you.”

“I don’t believe—”

“Have you a choice?”

“Yes,” Gwyn said. “I’ll ignore you.”

“I won’t let you do that.”

Gwyn looked out to sea, searching for some possibility of help. She would even have welcomed the sight of Jack Younger in his launch, his whitened hair, his deep tan . . . But there were still no boats nearby—only the tanker which steadily dwindled on its trip southward. Already, it was little more than a dot against the darkening sky.

“Gwyn?”

She looked back at the—specter.

“How can you deny me, Gwyn?”

Gwyn said nothing.

“I am your sister, after all.”

“No.”

A tern flew overhead, screeching, and disappeared into the ragged face of the cliff.

“Besides,” the other said, in a tone of mild reproof, “I’ve come such a long, long way to see you.”

“From where?”

“From the other side.”

Gwyn shook her head violently: No. No, no, no! She could not allow herself to go on like this. She could not stand here and listen to—and even converse with—a ghost. That was insanity. If she let this go on much longer, she would slip right past the edge, into madness. And once that had happened, not even Dr. Record could do anything to give her a normal life again. She would be, until the ends of her days, completely out of touch with all that was real . . .

“I’ve missed you,” the other said.

Gwyn bit her lips, felt pain, knew she was not dreaming, but wished ardently that she were.

“Talk to me, Gwyn.”

Gwyn said, “If you are who you profess to be—then, you should look like a twelve-year-old girl and not like a grown woman.”

“Because I died when I was twelve?”

“Yes.”

“I could have chosen to approach you, from the start, as a child, as the Ginny that you remember. However, I felt that you would be more likely to accept me if I came to you like this. You could see, then, that I was not just a hoaxer, but your twin.”

“If changing your form is so easy as you indicate,” Gwyn said, measuring each word carefully, trying to conceal the worst of her fear, “then become a child for me now, right here.”

The other shook her head woefully, smiled sadly and said, “You've got the wrong idea about the powers of a ghost. We aren't shape-changers of such ability as you think; we can't perform tricks like that quite so easily.”

“You're no ghost.”

“What am I, then?”

Indeed, what? Gwyn had no ready answer, but she said, “You're much too substantial to be a ghost.”

“Oh, I'm quite substantial,” the other agreed. “But ghosts always are. You think of them as being transparent, or at least translucent, made of smoke and such stuff; that's what your superstitions tell you to believe. In reality, when we step into the world of the living, we take on flesh as apparently real as yours—though it is not real and can be abandoned at will, without trace.”

Gwyn shivered uncontrollably.

This was insanity, no doubt, no hope to over-come it.

She said, “Why—if you're who you pretend to be—did you wait so long to come back?”

The other sighed and said, “Conditions on the other side wouldn't permit me to make the voyage until quite recently, no matter how much I had yearned for it.”

“Conditions?”

The other said, “Oh, it's a strange place on the other side, Gwyn. It is not remotely like any living person has ever imagined it . . . I get so incredibly lonely over there—so desperate for companion-ship. The other side is still, dark and as cold as a winter night, though there are no seasons; it is al-ways cold, you see. I've wanted to escape it, to come here and see you, speak with you, watch you—but only a few days ago was the time right.”

“I want you to go away.”

“Why?”

“I just do.”

“You're being selfish, Gwyn.”

“I'm afraid,” she admitted.

“I told you not to be.”

“I still am.”

“But I won't harm you.”

“That's not what I fear.”

“What, then?” the other asked.

“I'm going mad.”

“You aren't. I exist.”

They stood in silence for a while.

“Come take my hand,” the apparition said.

“No.”

Overhead, another tern cried out, like a voice from beyond the veil of death, sharp and mournful.

“Take my hand and walk with me,” the specter insisted, holding out one slim, long-fingered, pale hand.

“No.”

“Gwyn, you must accept me sooner or later, for we need each other. I'm your twin, your only sister . . . Do you remember, years ago, before the ac-cident, how very close we were?”

“I remember.”

“We can be that close again.”

“Never.”

“Take my hand.”

Gwyn said nothing.

She did not move.

But the specter stepped closer.

“Please, Gwyn.”

“Go away.”

“Sooner or later . . .” the specter said.

Gwyn wondered if she could dodge to the side and run past the dead girl, back toward the steps and the safety of Barnaby Manor. Thus far, the ghost—or the hallucination—had not appeared to her when she was with other people. If she could get back to the manor, then, and remain in company, she would be fine . . .

“Gwyn . . .”

The dead girl stepped closer.

“Don't touch me.”

“I'm your sister.”

“You aren't.”

“Take my hand—”

Squealing as the dead girl reached to touch her, Gwyn threw herself backward, fell upon the warm damp sand at the water's edge. She scrabbled about, searching frantically for some weapon, though she realized it would probably do her no good at all. If this were a ghost, it would not be hurt by stones or other weapons; and if it were an hallucination, the product of a mind perilously close to complete disintegration, it would likewise be impervious to force.

“Gwyn . . .”

She closed her hands on the damp sand, scoop-ing up balls of it and, rising to her feet, threw them wildly, like a child in a snowball battle.

The sand broke into several smaller lumps, falling all around the specter, striking her white garment.

“Stop it, Gwyn!”

Gwyn bent, scooped up more sand, tossed it, bent again, formed two more balls of sand, threw them, sucking wildly for breath, sobbing, her heart thudding like a piston.

In a moment, weak, her stomach tied in knots, almost unable to get her breath, Gwyn saw that the specter was moving away, running back up the beach toward Barnaby Manor. The dead girl moved quite gracefully, each step etherally light and quick—as if she were not really running, but were gliding only a fraction of an inch above the sand. Her full, white dress flowed out behind her, flapped at her bare legs, and her hair was a golden banner in her wake.

Running . . . ?

A ghost did not run away.

A ghost merely vanished in the blink of an eye, as if it had never been in the first place. And even if this were not a ghost, but an hallucination, wouldn't it still simply dissolve before her eyes rather than take flight in such an unmagical man-ner?

Confused, but sensing something important in this detail, Gwyn started after the departing figure, stumbling in the loose sand, then running on the hard packed beach closer to the water. Exhausted already by the day's activities and by the one-sided sand battle she had just finished, she continued to lose ground. The specter ran faster, putting more and more beach between them.

“Wait!” she cried.

But the dead girl ran on.

“Wait for me!”

The specter slowed, looked back.

Gwyn waved. "Ginny, wait!"

The specter turned and ran again, faster than before.

She turned a corner of the beach and was out of sight.

When Gwyn turned the same thrusting corner of the cliff, she found that the dead girl, at last, had vanished. On her right was the rock wall, the sea on her left. Ahead lay three-quarters of a mile of featureless white beach until one came to the steps below Barnaby Manor. There was nowhere the dead girl could have hidden; she could not have run that three-quarters of a mile in the minute she was out of Gwyn's sight. Yet she was gone . . .

SEVEN

Somehow, Gwyn found the energy to run the rest of the way back to the stone steps in the cliff, tears of weariness burning in her eyes, her thoughts roiling confusedly over one another. Her legs ached with the exertion, from ankles to thighs, and they felt as if they would crumple up like accordion-folded paper. When she finally reached the steps, she found that she did not have the ability to climb them, and her mindless flight from her own fear came to a welcome and inevitable finish.

She sat on the lowermost step, her back to the cliff, looking out to sea for a moment, as if she might sight an answer to her problems afloat on the bright water. Of course, there were no solutions to be so easily discovered. She could not sit here and solve her problems, but must get up and go looking for answers.

She put her elbows on her knees and let her head fall forward into her hands as if she cupped cool water in her palms.

She closed her eyes and, for a short while, she did not think about the ghost, about the dead, about anything. She listened to her furiously pounding heartbeat and tried to slow it down to a more reasonable rate. When that had been accomplished, she listened to the wind, the sea, and the few birds that darted in the lowering sky.

What was happening?

Madness . . . ?

Had she been lonely for so long that, at last, she was conjuring up nonexistent ghosts to keep her company? Was she slipping rapidly past the razor's edge of sanity, resurrecting the spirits of long-dead loved ones to help her stave off this terrible over-whelming feeling of isolation with which she had lived, now, for many months?

That seemed to be the only possible explanation . . . However, why should this sickness come now, when she was happier than she had been in months? She was no longer so isolated as she had once been, but was snugly in the bosom of the Barnaby household. She was wanted, and she was loved—two things which should have helped her recover fully from that previous bout with mental illness, that awful urge to sleep and sleep and sleep . . . She had her Uncle Will, and she had Elaine—and perhaps she even had Ben Groves to comfort her as well. She no longer needed imaginary companions, spirits of the dead to talk with—so why, at this of all times, was she hallucinating them?

Or, weren't these things hallucinations at all?

Was this a real ghost?

Impossible.

She could not permit herself to think along such lines, for she knew that surrender to madness lay that way. After all, she was no stranger to mental collapse . . . Anything was possible, she knew, any manner of relapse. This time, apparently, her deep, emotional disturbance had manifested itself in a different way: in ghosts instead of beckoning sleep, in agitated hallucinations instead of in lethargy . . .

She shuddered.

She opened her eyes, fearfully, but saw only the sea, no ghost of any description.

Birds swooped low over the waves.

If the problem were entirely psychological, then, and in no way mystical, if these ghostly visions were merely products of her own badly disturbed mind and not manifestations of the supernatural, she should seek professional help as soon as possible. She could telephone Dr. Recard the first thing tomorrow morning, when he would be in his office. She should tell him what had been happening to her, set up an appointment, and go to see him. That would mean packing and driving home again, leaving Barnaby

Manor and the wonderful summer she had expected to have. It would mean postponing the development of the new relationship between her and Uncle Will . . .

And, in the final analysis, it was just this which kept her from proceeding as she should have. Now, more than anything else, her newfound family life was what counted. If she lost that, allowed it to be tainted by this new sickness, she knew that she would never have the spirit to fully recover her senses. If she left Barnaby Manor now, she would be leaving, also, all hope for a brighter future.

She would stay. She could fight this out on her own ground, and she could win. She knew she could. Hadn't Dr. Recard told her that, more important than anything else, even more important than what he could do for her as a professional psychiatrist, was what she tried to do for herself?

She would stay.

She would not mention the ghost to anyone—not to Uncle Will, or to Elaine and certainly not to Ben Groves—for she did not want them to pity her; all that she wanted was to be loved and respected; pity was the death of love, the instrument that killed respect. They mustn't know how unstable she was, how frayed were her nerves. Dr. Recard had told her that one should never be ashamed of having suffered through a mental illness and should never hesitate to seek help out of some misplaced embarrassment. She knew he'd spoken the truth. Yet . . . Yet, she could not help but be ashamed of her lack of control, her need for medical help. Her aunt and uncle knew about her previous sickness, but she loathed to tell them about this much more frightening siege she was now experiencing.

She stood up, as if she carried a leaden weight across her shoulders, and she dusted off the seat of her shorts.

It seemed to Gwyn that this was a watershed period of her life, a decisive turning point after which she would never be the same again. Here, she must take a stand, and she was gambling her whole future on the outcome of this confrontation with herself. There was not to be any area for compromise, no dealing, nothing but a win or lose solution. She would either prove capable of exorcising these demons that had recently come to haunt her, or she would slip all the way into madness.

She was more frightened than she had ever been in her entire life, and she also felt more lonely than ever before.

The terns cried above. They, too, sounded forlorn and despairing.

She turned and started up the steps in the cliff.

Twice, she grew dizzy and had to lean against the stone wall on her right, catching her breath and her balance.

Often, she looked behind, expecting to see the white-robed girl close on her heels. But the steps were always empty.

BOOK TWO

EIGHT

At dinner that evening, in the smallest dining room, Gwyn had considerable difficulty keeping her mind on the conversation. Her thoughts kept drifting far afield, indeed, down strange avenues of inquiry as she gave serious consideration to ghosts, specters, the living dead, the occult in its countless facets . . . She thought, often, about the nature of madness, hallucination and even self-hypnosis . . . All of these were decidedly disturbing and unpleasant, though nonetheless pressing subjects; she could not bring herself to ignore them for very long, because she felt that they must all be faced as part of the solution to her condition. At times, however, she was caught wool-gathering. Having lost track of the table conversation, she would have to ask her aunt or her uncle to repeat a question.

"I'm sorry, Elaine," she said, for the sixth time in less than an hour. "What did you say?"

Her aunt smiled at her indulgently and said, "I asked how you enjoyed your sailing today."

"It was a lot of fun," she said. And it really had been. But right now, the joy seemed to have paled; the only truly vivid memory she had of the day was her encounter with—the ghost.

"You didn't meet Jack Younger again, did you?" her uncle asked, his brows furrowed.

"No," she said.

"Or any of the other fishermen?"

"No," she said.

He blotted his lips on his napkin and said, "Gwyn, I don't want to pry at all . . ." He hesitated, then said, "But I do think that something's wrong here."

"Wrong?" she asked. She tried to sound bewildered, and she smiled tentatively, though not genuinely. She reminded herself of her earlier decision. This was to be only her problem; only she could solve it.

"For one thing," her Uncle Will said, "you're clearly preoccupied."

She put down her fork and said, "I'm sorry. I know that I've been terribly rude, but—"

"Don't worry about that," he said, waving his hand impatiently, as if to brush away her comment. "I'm not interested in the symptoms—just the source of the symptoms. What's the matter, Gwyn?"

"Really," she said, "it's nothing."

Elaine said, "Will, she's probably just tired out after all day on the water."

"That's right," Gwyn said, grasping at the offered straw, anxious to avoid any situation where she'd be forced to mention the ghost. "I can hardly keep my eyes open."

"You're sure that's all it is?" he asked. His eyes seemed to bore right through her, to discover the convenient lie.

"Yes," she said. "Don't worry about me, Uncle Will. I'm having a marvelous time, really. What could be bothering me?"

"Well," he said reluctantly, "I guess there's nothing. But if something *were* upsetting you, Gwyn, you would let me know about it right away, wouldn't you?"

"Of course," she lied.

"I want this to be a perfect summer for you," he said.

"It will be."

"Don't hesitate to come to me for anything."

"I won't, Uncle Will."

Elaine smiled and said, "He's got a bit of the mother hen in him, doesn't he, Gwyn?"

Gwyn smiled and said, "Just a bit."

Will snorted, picked up his fork again. He said, "Mother hen, is it? Well, I suppose that's not so bad. I'm sure I've been called a lot of other things much worse."

At two o'clock in the morning, unable to sleep, Gwyn heard the first soft, almost inaudible squeak of unoiled hinges as her bedroom door was opened. She sat up in bed in time to see the white-robed girl standing on the threshold.

"Hello, Gwyn."

Gwyn lay back down without responding.

"Gwyn?"

"What do you want?"

"Is something the matter?" the ghost asked.

Gwyn lifted her head once again, for the voice had sounded much closer than before, too close for comfort. She saw that the dead girl had crossed half the open space toward her bed, a strangely lovely vision in the thin moonlight.

"Gwyn?"

"Yes, something is the matter," Gwyn said.

"Tell me?"

"You," Gwyn said.

"I don't understand."

"Of course you do. You're not real; you don't exist, can't exist, except as a figment of my imagination. I'm not going to lie here and talk to you. I can snuff you out if I want; you're little more than a dream, a fancy daydream."

"No, Gwyn. I *do* exist."

Gwyn lay back and closed her eyes. "No."

"Yes, Gwyn. Oh, yes."

The voice was very close now.

Gwyn rolled over onto her stomach, reached out and hugged the feather pillow, trying to force her-self to sleep. But that was, of course, quite useless.

She felt the bed sag: the dead girl must have sat down on the edge of it . . .

The dead girl said, "I told you, on the beach earlier, that I am not transparent, not made of smoke. When I chose to visit this realm of the liv-ing, I came cloaked in flesh. To the naked eye, I am as real as you are."

Gwyn said nothing.

Suddenly, without warning, a soft, warm hand touched the back of Gwyn's neck, delicately, tenderly.

Gwyn leaped, rolled onto her back, terror-stricken, looked up at the dead girl. "You can't touch me! You aren't real, or substantial, not at all. You're a dream, a delusion, an hallucination, and you must be gone when I tell you to go."

The dead girl smiled.

"Stop it!" Gwyn said.

"Stop what?"

"Stop being here!"

The dead girl reached out to touch Gwyn's cheek.

"No," Gwyn said, desperately. She got out of bed on the far side, hurried into the bathroom and closed the door behind herself.

"Gwyn?" the dead girl called from beyond the door.

Gwyn looked at her face in the mirror. It was pale under the tan, and lined with fear and fatigue. Yet, it did not look like the face of a madwoman . . .

She splashed water in her face, took a long drink, then decided the best thing to do was to return to bed. Perhaps the night's fantasies were concluded.

In the main room, the dead girl stood by the window, her hands on the sill, leaning toward the night. She was looking intently out to sea, her back to Gwyn, apparently oblivious of the other girl's return. Ignoring this hallucination, trembling violently, Gwyn returned to the bed, got beneath the covers and pulled them up under her chin. She rolled onto her side, her back to the windows, and she tried not to think about the figure standing there in fluffy white lace . . .

"I don't want to upset you, Gwyn," the dead girl said.

Gwyn lay still, waiting.

"I came back because I was lonely."

Please let me sleep, Gwyn thought.

"I thought we'd get along well together. I thought you'd be glad to be with me again."

Gwyn put her hands to her ears.

The voice filtered through her fingers: "I should have realized you'd need time to adjust to me. But you will adjust, Gwyn, and then we'll have fun—like we used to."

Gwyn tried to recall if Dr. Recard had ever said anything about hallucinations. What was one to do in a situation like this? Just play along with the delusions until one had gone utterly mad?

The dead girl said, "I still remember the pain of drowning. It was like a warm, wet blanket I couldn't get out of . . ."

Gwyn shuddered. Unbidden, the memory of the small explosion, the swift fire, the craft sinking into the sea all came back to her as vividly as if the nightmare had transpired only yesterday.

"My chest ached so badly, Gwyn . . . as if a fire had been lighted inside of me, hot and sharp . . ." She paused, as if, even now, that agony welled up anew, as strong as it had originally been. "Oh, I managed to break the surface once or twice, but all I gasped down was seawater. I couldn't seem to get a breath of fresh air, no matter how hard I tried."

"Please . . ." Gwyn said.

The ghost ignored her plea.

"I suppose I panicked. Yes, I know that I did. I was beating at the water, like a fool. Every flail of my arms drove me farther from the surface, but I was too scared to understand that. And I was screaming, too. Every time I screamed, I got more water in my lungs . . ."

"Stop it," Gwyn said. But she spoke so softly into her pillow that the dead girl could not have heard her.

"Isn't it strange," the dead girl said, "that all I had in my lungs was a bucketful of cool water— while it felt like a fire raging in there?"

Gwyn detected a change in the voice, more clarity; she thought the ghost must have turned from the window to speak directly at her. She did not turn over and look.

"You can't ever imagine how terrified I was, Gwyn. I knew I was going to die, and I knew there wasn't anything I could do about it. I could see the surface, because it was lighter than the water under me, but I just couldn't reach it. It was so cool looking, green and nice . . ."

Gwyn tried to get her mind off Ginny, off the past. She thought about Ben Groves, the *Salt Joy*, their afternoon together, in hopes that she could destroy this delusion, this ghost.

When the next few minutes had passed in silence, Gwyn thought perhaps she had succeeded, that the specter had at last been driven out. However, when she turned to look, she saw that the dead girl was standing by the side of the bed, looking down at her, a sad expression in those large, dark, unearthly eyes. "Don't you believe me, Gwyn?"

She shook her head: no.

"Why should I lie to you?"

Gwyn had no answer.

"I am your sister, Gwyn. Is there any way I can convince you, any way I can bring us together? I'm

so lonely, Gwyn. Don't push me away like this. Don't block me out of your life after I've gone to so much trouble to come back to you."

As she watched the specter, Gwyn wondered if she had been reacting to it in the wrong way. By pretending she didn't see it, by refusing to listen to it—wasn't she just running away from it? If the ghost were a manifestation of her own sick mind, an hallucination produced by her own sub-conscious, wouldn't it be best to face it, to shatter its illusion of reality? Surely, if it were a figment of her imagination, it would not withstand close scrutiny; to date, she had been running from it; if she confronted it squarely, shouldn't it erode like a formation of mist?

"Do you remember Earl Teckert?" the ghost asked. It had walked back to the window and was staring at the sea.

Gwyn swallowed hard. "Who?"

"Earl Teckert, from Miami."

"I don't remember him."

The specter still faced the window, her smooth complexion bathed in the milky radiance of the moon. She said, "You had a terrific crush on him, at one time."

"On Earl Teckert?" Gwyn asked.

The ghost turned from the window, grinning, as if it sensed Gwyn's decision to confront it—and as if it knew that it would last through any such con-frontation. "Yes," it said. "You vowed that you would never give him up to another girl, no matter what." She chuckled. "And you said you intended to marry him just as soon as possible—if not sooner. You were really strung out on him."

Confused, Gwyn shook her head. "No, you're wrong. I don't know any Earl Teckert, and I—"

"You knew him when you were ten years old," the specter said, still smiling.

"Ten?"

"Remember?"

"I don't think—"

"Earl was a whole year older than we were, a dark-haired little angel of a boy whose folks kept the summer house next door to ours, just outside of

Miami, This great romance of yours developed the year before my—boating accident. You fell in love in June, told me you'd marry him in July, and couldn't stand him by the end of August."

Gwyn did remember now, though she hadn't thought of Earl Teckert in a good many years.

"You *do* recall!" Ginny said.

"Yes."

"We used to build sandcastles on the beach."

"I remember."

"Just the three of us," Ginny said. "And we'd both be trying to get his attention. I think, perhaps, I had half as much of a crush on him as you did."

Gwyn nodded, remembering the pleasant sum-mer afternoons and the warm sand between her small fingers. She said, "I kissed him once, square on the mouth." She laughed as the scene came back to her in full detail. "I startled him so badly, he was speechless when I let him go. And he refused to play with us again for nearly a week. Every time he saw us coming, he ran the other way."

"That's him, sure enough!" Ginny said. She shook her head, her bright yellow hair a moonlit wreath that shimmered about her face, and she said, "He was terribly bashful."

Gwyn began to reply—then stopped suddenly, fear flooding back into her like a wave of brackish water. If this ghost were the product of her own sick mind, an hallucination, a delusion, then how could it talk about things which she, herself, had forgotten? Shouldn't the apparition's conversation be strictly limited to those things which Gwyn could remember?

"Is something the matter, Gwyn?"

She licked her lips, swallowed hard. Her mouth was dry, and she felt as if she had a fever.

"Gwyn?"

It was possible, Gwyn supposed, that the hal-lucination, the ghost, could tap her subcon-scious mind for the old memories. Though she might have forgotten Earl Teckert, consciously, the old memories still

lay in her subconscious mind, waiting to be re-discovered. The brain, after all, stored every experience; it never forgot any-thing. All one had to do was dig deep enough, find the right keys to the old doors, and even the most trivial experiences were to be found, far out of sight in the mind but not completely lost. Yes. That was it, must be it. The ghost, her alter-ego, the second half of her splitting personality, was able to tap her subconscious, to dredge up these bits and pieces of the past which she seemed, her-self, to have forgotten.

“Gwyn?”

“What?”

“Something's the matter,” the ghost said.

She turned away from it.

“Gwyn?”

“It's nothing.”

“Tell me.”

“Really, I'm fine.”

“Gwyn, I am your sister. You used to share things with me; we used to have no secrets.”

Gwyn said nothing.

“I came from the other side, through all that long darkness, to be with you again. You mustn't reject me; you must share with me, accept me.”

Gwyn had begun to cry. The tears welled up in her eyes, hung in the corners until they became too heavy to stay there any longer, burst out through her tightly closed lashes and ran down her cheeks, warm and swift and salty, catching in the down-turned corners of her mouth, then trickling on down her chin. She wanted to stop crying, felt that it was desperately important for her to stop crying and get herself together again—but she simply could not. She saw now that dispelling the hallucination was going to be far more difficult, a far longer battle than she had at first anticipated. And perhaps she would never be able to get rid of the delusion, to cure herself, regain normality . . . When she ignored the specter, it still did not vanish as it should have; though it stopped speaking to her, it remained quite close at hand, hovering, waiting, listening, watching . . . And when she boldly confronted it, unafraid or trying to be unafraid, the thing also remained, undeterred, gaining control of the conversation. Indeed, when she confronted it, the specter proved itself much more substantial than she wanted to believe it was . . .

What would happen if she did not improve, if she couldn't be rid of these delusions?

Must she go to Dr. Recard again? And if that was necessary, would even he be able to help her over so serious an illness? Could anyone help her regain her sanity once she was freely talking to dead people, seeing ghosts, feeling their hands on her neck . . . ?

She bit her lower lip and tried to tell herself that the situation, no matter how dangerous, was not as bleak as it seemed to be. She was going to pull through this, just as she had pulled through her previous trouble. Once, Dr. Recard had said that the only hopelessly ill mental patients were those who refused to admit there was anything wrong with them. He said that if you could recognize your sickness, knew you were in trouble, you would al-most surely pull out of it. She had to believe that he was right. The future was not lost, nor was all hope abandoned. She'd fight through it. Over and over, she reassured herself, told herself she'd win out, but she only believed half of what she said.

In a few minutes, the tears stopped flowing, dried on her face, leaving a crinkled, sticky feeling after them. She wiped at her face with a corner of the sheet, but didn't feel particularly refreshed. She supposed she should go into the bathroom and wash her face—though she dreaded meeting the ghost again . . . Then, realizing that she was shrinking from her condition, that she was retreating from recognition of her illness, she pushed the covers up and got out of bed.

The room was empty.

She went to the hall door and looked out.

The ghost was nowhere in sight.

“Ginny?” she whispered.

She received no answer, except a slight, almost inaudible echo of her own word.

She closed the door, smiling. Perhaps she was already better. If she could admit the ghost was a

delusion, how could the delusion persist?

She went and washed her face.

In bed again, bone weary from the day's strenuous sailing and from her contacts with the spirit, she soon fell asleep. Her sleep was troubled, filled with dark, stirring figures that she could not readily identify but which seemed to threaten her. She turned, murmuring, whimpering, scratching at the sheets until long past dawn.

NINE

The following morning, after breakfast in his room, as was his usual routine, Will Barnaby entertained a visitor in the library on the first floor, a somewhat portly gentleman with long sideburns, a mustache and thinning hair, all of which he kept in trim. The visitor, Edgar Aimes, was as well dressed as his host: an expensively tailored summer suit in a lightweight, coffee colored Italian knit fabric, black leather hand-tooled Italian shoes, a light brown shirt and a handwoven tie. But the similarity between Barnaby and Aimes did not end with their clothes. Aimes was as quick and as observant as his host, with dark eyes that seemed always watchful, in search of an advantage, an edge, something that might prove useful in bargaining. And when Aimes spoke, his voice was almost as self-possessed and authoritative as Barnaby's voice. Almost. Clearly, both men were accustomed to having money and to dealing for large stakes.

Barnaby took a chair behind his desk, leaned back, motioned Aimes to sit down in the easy chair by the bookcases.

"What's the word from Langley?" Barnaby asked, watching Aimes very closely, as if he distrusted him.

Aimes sat with a long sigh. He said, "Well, he's still asking too much for the property."

"How much?"

"Forty-two thousand dollars."

"That sounds—" Barnaby began.

"Unreasonable," Aimes finished.

Barnaby tapped his fingers on the blotter of the desk. "You think that's too much?"

"I *know* it is."

"What should he come down to?"

"For Jenkins' Niche?" Aimes asked, giving himself time to think, to figure. His own profit, as the real estate agent for Barnaby's growing property acquisitions, was dependent upon the purchase price. He didn't want to drive it so low that he hurt himself; yet, he didn't want Barnaby to pay an inordinately high price. After all, he wanted to remain as Barnaby's agent, a rather lucrative position, considering how fast Barnaby had been buying up seafront land.

"For Jenkins' Niche, of course," Barnaby said.

"Thirty-five thousand," Aimes said.

"So he's asking seven too much."

Aimes waited, not wanting to commit himself further.

"Is he adamant?"

Aimes said, "He pretends to be."

"What's that supposed to mean?" There was a sharp edge in William Barnaby's voice that was not lost on the real estate agent.

"It means that he can't really intend to stick at that figure. He knows, as well as I do, what the Niche is worth. He's being stubborn, hoping we'll take it for, say thirty-seven or thirty-eight thousand. It's worth his time to hold out on us, for a couple of thousand extra."

Barnaby was silent for a time, toying with a silver letter opener, using the sharp point of it to slice up the pressed paper blotter on his desk top. His face was absolutely expressionless, hard and stony—though the slight flush in his face gave evidence of the barely restrained fury which boiled just below the surface.

Aimes waited, cleaning his fingernails with the tiny point of a pocket knife, not watching Barnaby,

apparently bored. After so many years in a hectic business, Aimes knew how to wait in silence when a situation called for patience.

“How long might Langley play around with us?” Barnaby asked at last, drawing Aimes' attention from his fingernails.

“It's difficult to say. He hasn't anything to lose by stringing us along. He knows how badly you want the Niche, to add it to your other land. He probably figures that you'll break down before he will.”

In a tight, hard voice, Barnaby said, “I didn't ask you for a longwinded reply. I asked for a figure, a date. How long will he play around with us?”

“Perhaps two or three more weeks,” Aimes said. “Another month.”

“That's too long.”

“In a month, I'll ram him down to thirty-five thousand. Isn't it worth the wait to save seven thousand dollars?”

“No.”

“You're telling me to take his price?”

“Yes,” Barnaby said.

“That's senseless.”

“I don't care.”

“Will, you're letting your emotions get in the way of good, sound business sense.”

Barnaby frowned. “That's your opinion.”

“No, that's the truth.”

“How so?”

“It's those fishermen, isn't it?” Aimes asked, no longer interested in his nails, watching Barnaby.

“I'll break them,” Barnaby said.

“Eventually,” Aimes admitted. “But why the rush?”

“I don't want to have to wait to break them,” Barnaby said. “I don't want to have to wait.” He had picked up his letter opener again, was slash-ing at the blotter once more.

Aimes said, “Will, I know that a lot of ugliness has passed between you and these men. I can understand that you want to—well, put them in their place. But—”

“Please, no lectures,” Barnaby said.

“I hate to see a man waste money.”

“It won't be wasted.”

“Revenge is worth seven thousand dollars?” Aimes asked, putting away his penknife.

“To me it is.”

Aimes sighed. To him, revenge wasn't worth anything. He said so.

Barnaby ignored him. He said, “How soon can the deal be concluded if we meet Langley's price?”

“It's against my better judgment to let you do this—”

“Forget that.”

“Okay, then,” Aimes said. “I've already run a title search on the land, and I've got all the other papers ready. At most, a couple of days and the Niche is yours.”

“Fine.”

Aimes started to get up.

“Wait, Edgar.”

He sat down, patient again.

Barnaby said, “These fishermen must have a lease with Langley, for the use of the Niche . . .”

“I've checked that.”

“And?”

“It's pretty one-sided. There's a dozen different clauses for the landlord's use, if he wants to break the lease.”

“And that contract is transferable with the land?”

“Of course.”

Barnaby smiled. “Then they'll be out on their ears in a week, maybe less.”

"There'll be more trouble," Aimes warned.

"I don't care."

"Well, I don't know about that," Aimes said, fidgeting a bit in his chair, wiping at his thinning hair with the palm of a sun-browned hand. "Those fishermen are a rough bunch, Will. They can get nasty when they feel they have to."

"Not to worry," Barnaby said grimly, his lips tight, his whole face set in an attitude of commitment. "I can be nastier."

Aimes was not satisfied. "Will, one of the worst things that you can do, that any businessman can do, is to let your emotions get the best of your reasoned judgment. I've seen men get obsessed with revenge before, and I've seen them be ruined by it. Without exception."

"I'm not obsessed."

"Perhaps not."

"And I will win."

"You may."

"In any case, you're just the hired help, Edgar. None of this is really your concern."

Aimes caught the warning in Barnaby's tone, and he was forced to agree. "Yes. You're absolutely right about that."

Barnaby rose from his seat, dropped the letter opener again. He said, "I'll expect to hear from you as soon as Bob Langley accepts our offer."

"You'll get a call," Aimes said.

"Good luck, then."

"When you're overpaying by seven thousand, and the seller knows it, you don't need any luck," Aimes said. "It's already sewed up, right in your back pocket."

"It had better be."

"I'll be back to you on this sometime today."

Alone, then, William Barnaby poured himself a small brandy in a large fishbowl snifter, and he sat down in the easy chair which Aimes had just vacated. He reached up and turned off the lamp beside the chair and, in the darkness that the heavy draperies preserved, the bittersweet brandy on his tongue, he thought about the inevitable triumph which was soon to fall into his hands . . .

A good businessman, he thought, had to be tough, the tougher the better. Though Edgar Aimes thought differently, Barnaby knew that it did not hurt a businessman to harbor a grudge. A grudge sharpened his senses, made him more alert, gave him a deeper motivation than mere profit. If there was a personal triumph attached to a particular business success, then a man worked all the harder to achieve his aim. Edgar was wrong, then, quite wrong. Perhaps that was why he'd not done more with his real estate agency than he had, why he wasn't the millionaire he should have been. Revenge was an excellent tool to spur one on toward the accomplishment of more mundane affairs.

He took another sip of brandy, put the big glass down on the table beside the chair.

And, he thought, hadn't the fishermen asked for this, every last bit of this? Of course they had! By trying to force International Seafood Products down the throats of everyone in Calder, they'd proved that they had no one's interests at heart but their own. When one proved, by his actions, that he had no care for his neighbors, he invited retribution.

He supposed that Edgar's warning about possible trouble from the fishermen was well meant, and valuable. After all, the fishermen *were* a rough tumble lot, and they might easily be capable of violence. He would have to be careful, and he would have to look out for his own. But in the end, he knew, everything would be resolved in his favor. He truly was, when all was said and done, tougher than any of them.

TEN

Unaware of her uncle's business conference with Edgar Aimes, Gwyn Keller sat in the small, in-formal dining room, alone, picking at a platter that Grace had piled high with buttermilk pancakes. The genuine blueberry syrup had begun to congeal around the edges of the cakes like purpling blood as she let the food grow cold. Her glass of orange juice had only been half drunk; the chips of ice in it were melted, and it was now too warm to drink.

Her fruit cup had hardly been touched, the frost on its sides having slid off into a slushy puddle at the base of the crystal pedestal, staining the white tablecloth. She had finished two cups of black coffee, though she had not really wanted even that much.

When Grace came to see if she wanted anything more, the older woman was surprised to find so much food untouched.

"Was something wrong with the pancakes?" she asked, rubbing her soft hands together.

"Oh, no," Gwyn said.

"You won't hurt my feelings if you tell me the truth," Grace said, looking anxiously at the cold griddlecakes.

"Really, they were fine," Gwyn said.

"I could whip up another batch, if you—"

"Don't worry, Grace," Gwyn said. "The trouble's with me, not with your cooking."

"Would you prefer eggs? I can fix you something else."

"I'm not really hungry," Gwyn said.

The older woman studied her carefully for a moment, then said, "You aren't looking too well this morning, dear. Your eyes are all puffy, and you look pale under that tan." She stepped closer and laid a palm against Gwyn's forehead, searching for a fever.

"I'm not sick at all," Gwyn said.

"We could have the doctor here in half an hour."

Gwyn smiled and shook her head, cutting the other woman off. She said, "I was so exhausted from yesterday's sailing, that I couldn't really sleep well, if that makes sense. And after tossing and turning all night, I've pretty much ruined my appetite. I feel gritty and altogether unpleasant, but I haven't any virus."

"Just the same," Grace said, "you take a couple of aspirins and lie down a while. It never hurts to take aspirins, if you might be catching a bug of some sort."

"I'll do that," Gwyn assured her. "Maybe later today. Right now, I feel like I want to be up and around."

"You're sure about breakfast?" Grace asked.

"Positive."

"You take care."

"I will."

"You start to feel ill, you tell someone right away."

"I promise, Grace."

When the cook had gone away, taking the platter of uneaten pancakes with her, leaving Gwyn alone with the other odds and ends of the meal and with the curiously depressing sunlight which spilled through the window opposite her, she felt as if the exchange between them had been absolutely false—not only on her part, but on Grace's part as well. Gwyn had concealed the real reason for her own loss of appetite—the "ghost," her fear of total mental collapse and eventual institutionalization—while Grace had hidden something equally important. What . . . ? Gwyn felt that there was something distinctly false about

the older woman's professed, motherly concern for Gwyn, though she could not exactly put her finger on it. Grace's entire role as a cook, elderly housekeeper, was quite phoney, one hundred percent pretended. Gwyn was sure of that. It was almost as if Grace were being paid to act the part of a cook in some grandiose real-life play, with the Manor as a complex stage. This was the same tint of unreality, of unexposed illusion, which she had also seen about Fritz, when she had first come here—a mad-denyingly unspecifiable falsity . . .

Or was this suspicion only another facet of her own severe mental instability? Was she beginning to see strange conspiracies all around her, hidden faces behind incredibly real masks, plotters lurking in every dark doorway? In short, was she growing paranoid, in addition to all of her other problems?

If so, she was finished.

Abruptly, she stood up, letting her napkin fall to the floor, not noticing it, and she left the house for a stroll around the grounds.

The day was still and warm, the sky high and almost cloudless, incredibly blue and dotted with swiftly darting specks that were birds.

The lawn around Barnaby Manor was so cool, neat and green that Gwyn was persuaded to take off her tennis shoes so that she could feel the slightly dewy grass between her bare toes. She walked, unthinkingly, along the same trail she had first covered with Ben Groves, examining the white statuary, the geometrically arranged flowers, the carefully sculptured shrubbery, her eyes soothed by the complimentary lines that flowed from one object to another.

By the woods, where she sat on the white stone bench, the purple shadows of the forest soothed her, cool and soft, cutting the glare of the morning sun, sheltering and safe.

Yet, in time, she realized that she had not come outside to see or enjoy any of these things—not the lawn, the shrubs, the statuary, the flowers, not the white bench or the shadows of the trees. Instead, she had come out with only one intention, unconscious at first but now quite evident: she wanted to go down to the beach . . .

The beach and the sea seemed to be the focus for everything that was happening to her. Ginny had died at sea, in the boating accident that had almost claimed Gwyn's life, as well. Now, at this house by the sea, the ghost had appeared to her . . . And it had made its most bold approach on the beach, by the surge of the waves. Somehow, Gwyn felt, if she were to find an answer to her sickness, she would find it in or by the sea.

She went down the stone steps to the beach, being careful not to trip and fall, running one hand lightly along the rugged wall.

Still carrying her shoes, her feet sliding pleasantly through the warm, dry sand, she started southward, unintentionally moving toward the curve in the beach where, only the day before—running northward with her close behind—the ghost had disappeared. Occasionally, she looked out to sea, not really seeing anything but the color of the roiling water, and sometimes she looked up at the terns which were busy already. Most of the time, however, she kept her eyes on her feet, on the shifting sand which made way for her, letting the lift and fall of her own feet hypnotize her.

She had never felt so tired in her life, so sleepy, as if she had been awake for days . . .

She had lied to Grace about not having slept the night before. She *had* slept, though she'd awakened from countless nightmares, each worse than the one before it, all of which centered around a chase in which she was pursued by a faceless *thing* . . . The size, shape, texture, and substance of the pursuer always changed, from nightmare to night-mare, though one thing remained constant: its hands. Always, in the dreams, long-fingered, black hands, with nails as sharp as razors, reached out for her, rattling at the back of her neck . . .

All that considered, she had still slept—so why was she so terribly sleepy now?

The sound of the boat engine came to her over the rhythmic crash of the waves, though she did not identify it until it was nearly to shore. Then, looking up, surprised, she saw Jack Younger beach his fishing launch not a dozen steps in front of her.

For the briefest of moments, when she recognized his sun-whitened hair and his lean, brown good looks, she smiled and waved at him, almost called out his name. Then, suddenly, she recalled what he

had said about her Uncle Will, the accusations he had made two days ago, and her smile gave way to a grim, tight-lipped frown as she realized that, now, she would have to confront him with his pack of lies. The very last thing she would have thought she needed, this of all days, was an argument with Jack Younger (the younger). However, strangely enough, the prospect of it lightened her spirit considerably, put a much healthier glow on her cheeks, and jerked her out of the creeping malaise that had possessed her ever since she'd gotten out of bed a few disproportionately long hours ago. At least, in the heat of the argument, she ought to be able to put aside all thoughts of the ghost, momentarily forget her worries about her own mental condition. And that was, of course, to be desired.

He approached her, apparently unable to see that she was going to give him a piece of mind, grinning, his teeth bright, his freckles like the specks on a brown hen's egg. Affecting a mask of mock admonishment, he said, "You shouldn't be here, on the beach, you know."

"Shouldn't I?" she asked, in a perfectly neutral tone of voice, deciding to make him initiate whatever verbal battle there was to be. She was quite sure that there *would* be one.

"Yes," he said, smiling again, pushing his white hair back from his forehead. "You shouldn't be here on the beach. As I understand it, mermaids are supposed to keep in the water."

Ordinarily, his compliment would have pleased her, though she would not have let on that it did. Now, however, it only served to give her anger a sharper edge, for she interpreted it as nothing more than a smooth line to soften her up, a false compliment to keep her from asking him why he'd told her a lot of awful lies about William Barnaby. She felt as if he were attempting to use her, mold her reactions, and she did not like that.

"You aren't smiling," he observed.

"Should I be?"

"Yes."

"Oh? Why?"

"For one thing," he said, "I'm the funniest man in the entire fishing fleet."

"And for another?"

"Mermaids should avoid getting frown lines."

She still did not smile.

"Headache?" he asked.

"No."

"A bad breakfast?"

She said nothing, but watched him.

"Have I done something?" he asked. And then, as if remembering, just then, he said, "Are you angry about what I said, day before yesterday?"

"Of course, I am," she said.

"I didn't mean to make you angry with me,

Gwyn," he said. "I was only telling you the truth as I -

She interrupted him with a forced laugh, trying to sound as if she were mocking him. She was pleased to see him wince at the harsh sound of her voice.

"Now the roles are reversed," he said, no longer smiling. "You see something funny, and I do not."

"It's quite funny," Gwyn said, "to hear you talk-ing about 'truth,' since you have so much trouble recognizing it yourself."

"Oh?"

"Even now you're not being truthful," she said.

"How so?"

"You're pretending you don't understand what I mean, while you understand perfectly well. You told me a long string of lies about my uncle, sent me off thinking I was staying with a genuine human monster. But you neglected to add a few de-tails that would have painted a very different pic-ture."

"What details?"

"Oh, come on—"

He stepped closer, shaking his head. "No, really. I want to know what details you think I left out."

She folded her arms across her chest, still hold-ing her tennis shoes in one hand. “Okay. You asked for it.”

“I sure did. Tell me.”

For days now, it seemed as if the world were striking out at her, striking out blindly and malevolently, bringing her pain and worry. It was nice to strike back for once, even in this limited fashion. She said, “For one thing, you told me that Uncle Will, when he first bought the place, refused to rent the facilities at Lamplight Cove.”

“He *did* refuse!”

“Outright?”

“Yes,” Younger said.

“That's not the way I hear it.”

Younger said, “Barnaby wouldn't listen to reason, wouldn't give us a chance to—”

“Don't continue to lie to me, please,” she said, in an even voice. “I know that my uncle would have let you rent Lamplight Cove if you had been willing to meet certain conditions which were al-together reasonable.”

“Such as?”

“He asked you to stop polluting the waters of the cove; if you had agreed, you could have rented the buildings there. He asked you to cease dumping sludge oil from your boats into the cove waters, but you somehow couldn't agree about that. You re-painted your boats there, and you let old paint, tur-pentine, solvents and other garbage run right out into the cove, where the fish and plant life were being killed.”

“This is all a lie.”

“You're quite bullheaded, aren't you?” Gwyn asked.

He said, “I assure you, Gwyn, that your uncle did not make any conditions. He merely bought the cove out from under us and told us' to get pack-ing. He offered no reasons for the eviction, and he provided no alternatives of any sort.” He sighed, bent down and sifted sand between his fingers, looking up at her. “Besides, we positively were not polluting the water around Lamplight Cove—or anywhere else, for that matter. A responsible fisherman—and most all of them are respon-sible—would never dump sludge oil overboard, be-cause he knows the sea is his livelihood, his entire means of support. Sludge oil is pumped into barrels and sold, periodically, to a reclaiming plant near Boston. And though we had a dry dock at Lamplight Cove, it was extremely well policed by everyone who used it; no contaminants could have gotten into the sea from there, not even by acci-dent.”

“Are you saying Uncle Will lied to me?” she asked, looking down at him, fuming.

“He's been known to lie,” he said. “Look, why don't you let me take you to Lamplight Cove? You'd see how clean it is. By no stretch of the imagination could you say—”

“I'm sure it's clean, *now*,” she said. “After all, you people have been gone from there for a year.”

“It was clean before,” he insisted. “Your uncle lied to you.”

“I suppose he also lied about International Sea-food Products?”

He fielded that one easily. “He probably did. What did he tell you about ISP?”

In brief, clipped sentences, no longer able to conceal the depth of her anger, Gwyn told him ex-actly what her Uncle Will said about the proposed seafood processing plant, how it would damage the ecology, foul the air, and ruin the land values all around Calder.

“Lies,” Younger said.

“What is true, then?”

He said, “Oh, there *are* seafood processing plants just like the one that he described for you, have no doubt. They're messy; they dump rotting fish into the sea just as he said they do; and the odor of decay clings like glue to the land for two or three miles in every direction.”

Confused, she said, “Well, I thought you said he was lying.”

“He is, Gwyn. I would be against the construc-tion of a plant like that. After all, Calder is my home, the sea my livelihood *and* my love. But the ISP plant wouldn't be anything like that. It's a super-modern, one hundred percent mechanized place. They pack the flesh, but they don't then discard the scales, guts and bones, as many plants do. Much of that, along with the meat that can't be cut into filets, is pulverized

to make a high-pro-tein flour substitute. That's used in the making of other foods, and much of it's exported to poverty stricken countries overseas. What guts and bones can't be used for that are pulverized for fertilizer. The ISP plants don't throw out anything, and they produce no unfiltered wastes that are dumped into the sea. Furthermore, they've more than met all the federal government regulations on air emissions, and their new plants don't give off any odor at all. They have a plant like the one they want to build here up in Maine. I've seen it. It's clean as a church."

She turned away from him. Trying to digest all that he had told her, she looked far out to sea, squinting against the fierce glare of sunlight that shimmered on the water.

For a time, they were both silent.

And still.

But, eventually, when he felt that he had given her sufficient time to think, he got impatiently to his feet, anxious to hear her reaction. He said, "Do you believe me, Gwyn?"

"No."

Inwardly, however, she was not quite so certain what she should believe and what she shouldn't; circumstances were no longer clear cut, but shadowed and vague. She supposed there was at least a modicum of truth to what Younger had said about International Seafood Products, though she was sure that the plant could not be so clean as he said it was. After all, her Uncle Will had said that it would be filthy, and so far as she could see, he had no reason to make up elaborate lies for her. On the other hand, what reason did Younger have for lying to her?

He said, "Your uncle really is lying to you, Gwyn, as hard as that may be to accept. I can't say why he's lying, but he most certainly is. His behavior is usually difficult to fathom."

Gwyn turned to face him again, her eyes so daz-zled by the sunlight on the sea that he appeared cloaked in shadows and spots of moving light. She said, "I suppose you'll tell me that you never made threats against Uncle Will, either."

"Me, personally?" he asked.

"Don't play word games with me," she said, angrily.

"I'm not."

"You know perfectly well what I mean," she said. "Did the fishermen, in general, make threats against him?"

He said, "There's none of us who like your uncle, of course, but there's also none of us who would hurt him—or even threaten to hurt him. That isn't our way." He paused, saw that she was still not prepared to believe him, and he said, "One thing I *do* understand about William Barnaby."

She waited.

He said, "I understand his fanatical belief in classism, though it seems foolish to me."

"What do you mean?"

"He's a very refined bigot," Younger said.

"That's absurd!"

"Oh," Younger said, "he's not an out-and-out ra-cial bigot, because that's not fashionable any longer, not even in the least well educated social strata. I'm sure he wouldn't consciously dis-criminate against a black man or a Spanish-American merely because of race. In fact, he'd most likely go out of his way to show racial minori-ties special courtesy. No, your uncle's bigotry is based on far different standards, though it's none-theless petty for that."

"What other standards?"

"Social rank and position," Younger said. "I suppose this kind of snobbish bigotry isn't uncom-mon in wealthy families with a long social history and genuine blue-blood ancestry. Yet, he seems like a fool for clinging to it. Gwyn, your uncle seems to hate all fishermen, automatically, without even knowing us, simply because we aren't of his own social level. He pushed us out of Lamplight Cove because he didn't want to have to associate with us, even in the role of our landlord. He was terrified that his hoity-toity society friends would think of him as a patron to the likes of us, as a ren-ter of old docks and flensing sheds. And when we had the gall to stand up and argue with him, he hated us twice as much as before; in his mind, you see, we should always remain silent and assent to whatever he does to us, merely because

we are—by his scale, and no other—his social inferiors, a pack of dirty laborers.”

“Uncle Will isn't like that,” she said.

“Then you don't know him at all.”

She said, “He used to be like that, I admit. But he's gotten over that, outgrown it. He's changed.”

“Has he, now?”

“Yes” she said. “And I'm proof that he has.”

Younger looked perplexed. He said, “You're proof? How?”

“That's a private, family story,” she said. She thought about her dead father and how mindlessly, unreasonably, the Barnaby family had hated him, how they had rejected him for being born into a family of less social stature than theirs. “But I can assure you that Uncle Will realized his own shortcoming along these lines, and that he's changed.”

“I doubt he has.”

“You're impossible,” she said.

“No more than you are,” he said.

She sat down on the sand and began to slip on her tennis shoes, fiddled with her laces, managed to string them tight and tie two neat bows even though her hands were shaking.

While she was thus engaged, Younger walked closer to the water's edge, turning his back on her, and began to scoop handfuls of sand up, balling the wet earth and throwing it out to sea. He worked fast, scooping and pitching, scooping and pitching, as if trying to drain himself of his anger. His broad back and brown muscular arms worked in a healthy, flowing rhythm that was not unpleasant to watch.

Shoes tied, Gwyn got to her feet, brushed sand from her clothes, and turned away from him, head-*ing* back toward Barnaby Manor.

“Gwyn?”

She turned.

He was facing her now, his hands hung at his sides and covered with wet sand, perspiration strung across his forehead in a band of transparent beads.

“Yes?”

He said, “I wanted to be friends.”

“So did I,” she said. “But you never gave it a chance.”

“It wasn't all me,” he said.

She did not reply.

He said, “Don't go yet.”

“I have to.”

“Let's talk a while longer.”

“We've nothing to talk about.”

“Why don't we get together tomorrow for—”

“That won't be possible.”

“But—”

“I've been told that I'd be wise to avoid you,” she said. “And now I see that was good advice.”

She started walking away again.

“Gwyn, wait!”

She continued walking.

“Who told you to stay away from me—that uncle of yours, that sweet and unprejudiced paragon of a man?” he shouted after her, his voice ringing from the cliffs, flat against the rolling sea.

She ignored him.

“I'm right about him, you know!” he shouted.

She did not respond, but walked a little faster. As the tone of his voice grew uglier, and as he put more volume to it, she grew more afraid that he would follow her.

He shouted something else.

With relief, she found that she had put so much distance between them that his words were in-distinct.

Fifteen minutes later, moving through shimmering curtains of heat waves as the mid-day sun beat down mercilessly on the brilliant white sand, Gwyn reached the steps that wound up the cliffside toward Barnaby Manor like a stone snake. As she stepped to that cool, shadowed shaft of risers, she discovered that the dead girl—pale, quiet, soft and wraithlike, but nonetheless real—was waiting for her. The dead girl looked up, her blue eyes bright as gems, smiled gently, pushed a yellow, lock of hair out of her face with a long-fingered hand as white and as unearthly as anything Gwyn had ever seen.

“Hello, Gwyn,” the girl said.

The specter sat on the third step from the bottom, her bare feet on the first step, still dressed in a fresh, white gown of many layers. Her hands were again folded on her lap like trained animals returning to their proper place, and she looked as if she had been here a long time, keeping her eerie vigil.

Gwyn's mind had been fully occupied with the possible ramifications of her conversation with Jack Younger. Confused by everything that he had told her about the ISP plant and about her uncle, not wanting to believe him at all but nevertheless believing him at least a tiny bit, she had not had time to think of the ghost in more than an hour. Now, coming across the dead girl, her fears flushed back to her in a rush, like the crashing wall of water from a broken dam. Again, she felt a thousand years old, brittle and ready to crack apart.

“You don't look well,” the ghost said.

Gwyn said, “I'd like to use the stairs. Would you please move out of the way?”

Her voice came out shallow, nearly inaudible, and it betrayed the intense fear which she was trying desperately to control.

The specter didn't move.

Gwyn started forward, caught herself before it was too late, stopped. She realized that she was not now capable of touching the dead girl as she had before. She was not up to discovering, as she had discovered that other time, that the ghost would feel as solid as she felt, as real as any living person.

“Please,” she said.

“I want to talk to you.”

Gwyn waited.

The dead girl drew her feet up to the second step, propping her elbows on her knees and leaning forward so that her chin was cupped in the palms of her hands. She said, “I saw you talking with Jack Younger a while ago.”

“And?”

“Do you like him?”

Gwyn was unable to respond, her throat constricted, her tongue clinging to the roof of her mouth.

“He's quite handsome,” the dead girl said.

“Why don't you chase after him, then?” Gwyn asked.

The specter laughed. “I'm beyond that sort of thing now. I have only one love, the one that brought me back to this world of the living. I love you, Gwyn, my sister, no one else.”

Gwyn turned away from her.

“Don't go away,” the dead girl said, rising to her feet and reaching out toward Gwyn.

Sensing this approach without seeing it, Gwyn walked quickly across the beach, to the edge of the sea. Without removing her shoes, she let the cool water break across her feet, let it stir frothily around her slender ankles.

The specter appeared beside her.

The white dress swished back and forth in the sea breeze, while the golden hair streamed behind her like a lighted torch, just as Gwyn's own hair did.

“I love the sea,” the ghost said.

Gwyn nodded but said nothing, watched the incoming waves, hoping that their hypnotic flow would lift her up and away from all this, settle her down in some quiet place, alone.

“Even though it killed me, I love the sea,” the ghost said. “It has such power, such beautiful power.”

Far out, a luxury liner ran southward, full of holiday passengers intent on a four-week cruise to and

through the Caribbean. Gwyn wished that she were with them, instead of here. And she wished, too, that Jack Younger would show up now. If he saw the dead girl too, then . . . But that was sheer nonsense, for the dead girl did not really exist.

“I don't think you're ever going to accept me,” the specter said, as if reading Gwyn's thoughts.

“That's right.”

“We could have so much fun together, if you would really listen to me, if you'd stop thinking that I'm nothing more than an illusion. But I sup-pose that, in the world of the living, a ghost is just much too much to be believed. When I was alive, I doubt I'd have believed in one. I've made a serious mistake coming back, and I see that now. I really do. I'm an anachronism. You think that you're seeing things, and that maybe you're even going crazy. I didn't mean to bring you unhappiness, Gwyn, just the opposite. I wanted so badly to be with you once more, to be close to you. Twins are always closer than regular brothers and sisters; it was easier for me to come back, because my ties were closer to you than most ties the dead have with the living . . . I wanted to see you again and share all the things we once shared, to have the fun together that we used to have when we were young . . .” As the dead girl spoke, incredibly, her voice cracked and grew small, as if she were on the verge of tears.

This startling evidence of feelings, of emotions in the specter, was more than Gwyn could stand, crazier and more frightening than almost anything else that the vision, the hallucination, had done to date. She began to cry herself, silently, big tears running down her cheeks. She wanted to turn and run, to scream for help, but she could not. Once, this fear had seemed to energize her, to give her the strength to flee. Now, all strength was gone, energy sapped, resources used up. She felt more weary, more sleepy than before, all soft and muscleless, limp and cold and nearly dead herself.

The specter said, “There's only one other solu-tion, then, as far as I can see.” She seemed to have thoroughly recovered from her momentary lapse into that emotional and very unghostly self-pity. Her voice was strong again, unwavering.

Gwyn continued to watch the waves, did not look at her and did not ask what this solution might be. Whatever the specter said, it would not be good.

The dead girl said: “Instead of me crossing over to be with you, here in the world of the living, you could join me, in death . . . Yes . . . There, neither of us would be an outsider. We would both belong, and we would be happy together . . .”

Gwyn's heart was racing, her face flushed, her mouth as dry as the sand that lay behind her.

The dead girl went on, rapturously, “It would be so easy, Gwyn. You needn't suffer, not at all. It would be nearly painless, and then there would be all of eternity for us.”

Gwyn wanted to run.

She couldn't.

She was rooted there, weak and sick.

“Take my hand, Gwyn.”

She made no move to do as the ghost asked.

Seizing the initiative, the dead girl reached out and quickly took Gwyn's hand in her own, held it tight.

Gwyn did not have the energy or, indeed, the will to resist this unpleasant intimacy.

And why should she resist, after all, when ab-solutely none of it was happening, when the entire episode transpired only in her own mind, an utterly senseless fantasy, a mad illusion, a fragment of her mental illness . . . ?

“We could just walk out there, into the sea, together. We'd let the warm water pull us out, caress us. We'd let it carry us away,” the dead girl said, her voice pleasantly melodic, convincing. She made death sound as desirable as fame or fortune, as sheltering and wonderful as love. “Come along with me, Gwyn, come be with me forever, forget all the worries you have over here . . .”

The dead girl's voice echoed from the hot air all around them, now tinny and strange, deep and shallow at the same time, melodic but flat, like a voice from some other dimension.

Perhaps it was just that.

The specter said, “We could shed these bodies in the cleansing salt water, just as I once did by myself. We'd never need them again, for we'd be going where flesh is unheard of and not useful, where

everyone is made of force, of energy, where we'd never need to be apart again, not for all of time . . .”

“That's— No. No, I—”

“Come, Gwyn.”

“Please, no, I . . .” But her voice was thin, and she could not say what she felt, could not express her terror.

The dead girl stepped farther out into the water, still holding Gwyn's hand. She kicked her feet in the water and grinned, as if to show how much fun it would be, like a game, a water sport: drowning. She held Gwyn's hand so tight, insistently, tugging at her, smiling enticingly, her blue eyes bright, al-most fevered.

“No . . .”

“It won't hurt, Gwyn.”

“I don't want to die.”

“It will be nice.”

Gwyn still held back.

“It'll only be bad for an instant, when you panic,” the dead girl explained, patiently. “You'll feel like you're lying in a wet, warm blanket—and then that you're smothering in it. Before you know it, the panic will pass and the resignation set in, and then the joyful acceptance will come to you, and you'll embrace death.”

“I won't.”

“Yes. It's not at all as you've heard it is, not like anyone living has ever imagined it.”

Gwyn found that, involuntarily, she had taken a step into the water, so that it sloshed well above her ankles.

“Come along . . .”

“No!”

“Gwyn—”

Gwyn tried to turn and pull away.

She could not.

The specter held tight.

“Wait, Gwyn.”

“Let go of me!”

“Gwyn, you'll like it.”

“No!”

“We'll be together.”

Gwyn whimpered, struggling to escape the grasp of the pale, dead hand, telling herself repeatedly that none of this was actually happening, that she was caught up in a web of madness, of self-deception. Yet, she was unable to shrug off the deeper, more irrational fear that the ghost was genuine . . .

“Die with me, Gwyn . . .”

She slapped at the pale arm, twisted, pulled.

“Death is not so awful.”

Screeching like one of the terns, her teeth clenched tightly together, Gwyn gave one last, desperate, wrenching twist with her body and was suddenly, surprisingly free. She staggered back-ward, kicking up the water. She whirled, nearly fell, somehow regained her balance and ran for the flight of stone steps.

As she ran, she saw something in the sand which, in a single blazing instant, drove all thoughts of madness from her. She saw something there that proved the ghost was not a ghost and was not a figment of her imagination.

However, she did not stop, for what she saw ter-rified her almost as much as had the idea of in-sanity—and the possibility that the spirit was genuine. As frightened as ever, but for different reasons, she gained the steps in short order and, sobbing, ran up them without any regard for her safety, taking them two at a time. She had to find Uncle Will and tell him; she had to get help at once.

ELEVEN

William Barnaby watched Gwyn take several long swallows from the glass of cold water, then said, in a measured voice which was intended to soothe her, “Now, are you feeling any better?”

“Yes,” she said. “Thank you.”

“What on earth's happening?” he asked, smiling, sitting down on the edge of the desk.

Only minutes ago, she had raced up the stone steps, miraculously avoiding a fall, had crossed the wide, well-manicured lawn and entered the manor as if there were a pack of slaving devils close at her heels. She'd found him in the study, sitting behind his desk and working through an enormous sheaf of papers. She had been so incoherent—both because of fear and exhaustion—that she had been unable, at first, to tell him what was the matter. When he'd ascertained that she was not hurt, but only badly frightened, he made her sit in the easy chair where Edgar Aimes had sat earlier, then went to fetch her a glass of cold water from the kitchen. Now, she had drunk most of the water, and she felt that she'd gathered her wits about her enough to tell him what had happened. She said, “I have a strange story to tell, about ghosts, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't interrupt me.”

“Ghosts?” he asked.

“In a way.”

“Go on, then.”

She told him all of it, from the beginning. Once near the start, he shifted uneasily and interrupted her to say, very adamantly, that there just weren't such things as ghosts; she reminded him that he'd agreed to let her tell the whole story in her own way and at her own speed before making any comments about it. Then, she told him how the apparition had first appeared to her in her bedroom, how she'd thought that it must be only the remnant of a dream, went on through the subsequent visions, until she finished with a detailed explanation of what had transpired today on the beach, by the stone steps, and most importantly at the water's edge, only a short while ago.

He did not move from the edge of his desk during all of this, and he did not move even when she was finished, almost as if he thought that a change in this own position would somehow act as the catalyst to set off the explosion which he fancied he saw building inside of her. He looked at her strangely, warily, and he said, “I'm quite intrigued by this, Gwyn. But it's all so—well, baffling.” He was choosing his words carefully, keeping an un-felt smile on his face.

“Isn't it, though?” she asked.

“How do you explain it?” he asked. He was extremely cautious, not wanting to upset her. Clearly, he believed that she was more than slightly emotionally disturbed, and he felt that he must handle her with the proverbial kid gloves. She didn't mind his reaction in the least, his treating her as he might a mad person, for she had not expected him or anyone to swallow such a story without doubts.

Candidly, she said, “Well, at first, I thought that I was losing my mind. In fact, I was sure of it. I was convinced the ghost was an hallucination, until something I saw on the beach, a while ago, proved me wrong.”

He seemed to relax when he realized that she was willing to face such a drastic possibility as insanity, though he appeared not to have heard her mention the clue to the ghost's real nature, for he said, “You're going to be fine, Gwyn. If you can admit that you've got an emotional problem, then you're a long way toward—”

She interrupted him before he could say anything more. “I haven't any emotional problems,” she said. “At least, I haven't got any that are tied up with this ghost.”

“But you've just admitted—”

“The ghost is not a ghost,” she said. “It’s someone masquerading as a ghost.”

He looked shocked, and then he became wary again. He said, “But who? And for what reason?”

She shrugged. “I don’t really know. I haven’t had time to think it out, but—mightn’t it be the fishermen?”

“What would they have to gain, and why would they strike out at you instead of at me?” he asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Besides,” he said, his voice gentle and comfort-ing again, “what makes you think this ghost is ‘real’?”

“Hallucinations don’t leave footprints behind them,” she said, smiling up at him.

“I don’t understand.”

She said, “When I pulled away from that woman, when she was trying to drag me into the water, I ran back toward the steps. On the way, I noticed two sets of footprints leading to the water’s edge, mine and hers. If I’d imagined the whole thing, how could there be two sets of footprints?”

He got up, at last, paced to the bookshelves and then back again, stood near to her, looking down. He said, “You chased this—ghost perhaps half a mile along the beach the other day, before she—disappeared. Did you see footprints then?”

Gwyn frowned. “I didn’t look for them.”

“Think about it. Can you recall her prints in the sand? When you rounded the curve in the beach and found she’d disappeared, didn’t you think to try following her prints?”

Uneasily, Gwyn said, “No. I didn’t.”

He nodded. Sadly, he said, “Gwyn, I don’t like to suggest this, but, could you have imagined seeing the footprints, as you’ve imagined seeing the ghost itself?”

That notion had not occurred to her. Now it did, and it rested on her mind like a dark, cold worm. Summoning up her last dregs of self-confidence, she said, “I’m sure the prints were real.”

“There’s one way to find out,” he said.

She stood up. “We’ll go look.”

They stood on the beach, looking down at the white sand, the sea wind ruffling their hair. They were both silent, each waiting for the other to say something, each aware that the silence could not last forever, each dreading the beginning of the conversation.

At last, Gwyn looked up at him, afraid, embar-rassed, but determined to go on. She wiped at her eyes and said, “I didn’t imagine them. I’m sure I saw them.”

Only one set of footprints led from the stone steps to the edge of the water, and only one set of footprints came back: both made by the same per-son, both made by a girl wearing a pair of tennis shoes, both sets made by herself.

“I saw them,” she said, again, more quietly this time, as if she had ceased to try to convince him and was only trying, now, to make herself believe it.

“I’m sure you did,” he said.

“I mean *really* saw them,” she insisted.

“Gwyn, you should come back to the house and rest.”

“I’m not crazy.”

“I didn’t say you were.”

Desperate, striking out at him because she could not see anyone or anything else to strike out at, she said, “You implied it!”

“I didn’t mean to imply it,” he said.

He was walking slowly toward her.

She didn’t move away.

She looked at the sand.

It was still marked only by her prints.

He said, “I’ve told you, I don’t think your pro-blem is anything so severe as a complete mental breakdown. Emotional instability, yes. You’ve been through so very much, so many deaths, Gwyn. You need a lot of rest, a lot of relaxation. You have to get your mind off the past and learn to look forward to

the future.”

“I saw those prints.”

He said, “I feel responsible for this, in a small way. I shouldn't have given you the room with a sea view. I shouldn't have reminded you, that way, of your sister.”

Only half-listening to him as he drew nearer, she bent and looked more closely at the sand. “Look here,” she said.

“Gwyn, let's go back to the house. I'll call the doctor, and he can give you something to—”

She repeated: “Look here, Uncle Will.”

He bent down, playing along with her. “What is it?”

“Someone's taken a broom over the sand here,” she said. “You can see the bristle marks.”

He looked and said, “Where? I don't see any.”

She pointed. “Right there.” She looked toward the steps and said, “They swept out the 'ghost's' footprints.”

Sadly, and as if the words were the most difficult that he had ever been called upon to say, he told her: “Gwyn, lovely Gwyn, you are imagining things.”

“Damn you, *I see those broom marks!*” She enunciated the last five words with exaggerated care, as if she were talking to an idiot and wanted him to be sure to understand.

He touched her shoulder with one large, dry hand, as if he would quell the terror building in her.

She drew back.

“*I see them!*” she hissed.

Quietly, but with force that penetrated to her, he said, “Yes. But I *don't* see them, Gwyn.”

Their eyes locked for a long moment; then she dropped her gaze, a tremor rising from her stomach and spreading throughout the upper half of her body, an intense chill she could not throw off. She still saw the broom marks before her where some phantom had erased the tracks made by another phantom. She blinked, willing them to disappear, but could not shut them out.

He said, “There was no ghost. You never saw one, and you never spoke to one. And there were no footprints made by the ghost, either. It is all an illusion, Gwyn, a bad dream.”

She looked up, feeling small and alone, worse than she had felt since she got her uncle's letter back at school. She said, “You really can't see them, can you?”

“They aren't there,” he said.

“You're sure?”

“Yes.”

She looked down.

She still saw them: broom marks.

She shuddered and hugged herself with both arms, still possessed by that chill, the doubt setting in, confidence shaken loose by the tremors that passed through her.

“You should come back to the manor with me now, Gwyn,” her Uncle Will said. His voice was deep, masculine, reliable. He was offering her shelter from the world—and from herself.

A tern swept by above them. It called out in a high, funereal wail, disappeared into the side of the cliff, just as Gwyn's own happiness had disappeared without warning.

She said, “I think I'm very sick, Uncle Will.”

“It's not that bad.”

“No, it's very bad,” she said.

Another tern squealed, attacked the cliff, popped out of sight. Her happiness was already gone; what did this symbol represent, then—if not her sanity?

He said, “Come back up to the house with me, Gwyn.”

“Will you help me?”

“I'll call the doctor.”

“I may need more than that,” she said.

She felt like a lost child.

“You'll have whatever you need,” he said.

She nodded; she believed him. But she didn't think anything would help her now.

“Gwyn?”

She looked at him again.

He said, “You're my entire family—you and Elaine. I haven't any children of my own, as you know. You're the closest—you're the *last*—relative I have in the world. I've lost others, in the past, because of my own thick-headedness, but I won't lose you.”

She stood up as he did, but she continued to look down at the sand, where the broom marks lay at her feet. She kicked at them, blotting them out, though that didn't do much good. They marked the sand other places as well, every place the imaginary dead girl had walked.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He put his arm around her and turned her back toward the steps, gentle, with strength enough for both of them.

Halfway to the steps, she stopped and said, “This is worse than the last time.”

“You'll feel better when you've rested,” he assured her. “You're tired, and you aren't thinking straight.”

She said, “No, it really is worse than the last time. Will you call Dr. Recard and tell him what's happening to me?”

“I'll call him today,” he said.

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

She let him lead her the rest of the way across the beach, up the steps to the top of the cliff, across the well tended lawn and into the big manor house where the ghost-hallucinations had begun and where, she ardently hoped, she'd get rid of them forever.

TWELVE

A man and a woman, both young, lying in the lush grass at the edge of the clifftop and sharing a pair of high-powered European binoculars, had watched the scene on the beach between William Barnaby and Gwyn, watched with particular fascination. The man, Ben Groves, Barnaby's chauffeur and handyman, was not as frivolously behaved as he took pains to be in Gwyn's company, but serious and intent on what developed below, as if his whole future might hinge on the outcome. The woman with him, no less concerned than he was, was a yellow-haired beauty in a many-layered white dress. Her eyes were incredibly blue, her complexion pale, her whole attitude one of unearthly fragility . . .

"Well?" she asked.

He waited, still watching, and did not reply.

"Ben? What's happening?"

He put the binoculars down and rubbed at his eyes, which felt furry after staring at that magnified, sun-brightened sand. He said, "Don't give yourself an ulcer, love. It looks as if it worked, all according to plan."

She sighed, as if a great burden had been lifted from her slender shoulders. She said, "I just haven't been sure of myself during any of this. It's quite different than acting before a camera or on a stage."

"You were superb today," he said.

She flashed him a quick look of unfeigned surprise and said, "How would you know about that?"

"I watched you."

"When I was trying to get her to drown herself?" the girl asked, astonished.

"That's right."

"From where?"

"Right here."

"With the binoculars?"

"Yeah."

She giggled. "I didn't know I was going to have an audience. Why didn't you tell me you'd watch it?"

"I didn't want to cramp your style," he said.

"Nonsense. I always play better with an audience. You know that, darling," she reached out and touched him.

"Anyway," he said, leaning to her and kissing her lips, "you were quite fine. You even scared me."

"I scared *her* witless."

For a few moments, then, they were silent, letting the cool breeze wash over them, enjoying the soft grass on which they lay.

"Light me a cigarette?" she asked.

He rolled onto his back, extracted a pack from his shirt pocket, lit one for her, passed it over.

When she'd taken a few drags, she said, "I still don't feel a hundred percent right about this."

He snorted derisively and lighted a cigarette for himself, puffed out a long stream of white smoke. "With what we stand to make from this little charade, you don't have to feel a hundred percent right about it, love. You don't even have to feel a full ten percent right about it, as far as that goes. All that lovely cash money will do a lot to soothe the conscience."

"Maybe," she said.

"I know it will."

"But, basically, she's such a sweet girl," the blonde said. "And she's had it pretty rough to date, what with her sister and her parents dying—"

“For God's sake, enough!” he bellowed, flicking his cigarette over the edge of the cliff and rolling onto his side to face her and be closer to her. He was the strength that kept them going, he knew, and he had to raise her spirits now. “You can't afford to be empathetic, Penny.”

“I know.”

“It'll get us nowhere.”

She nodded.

“We've had a good stroke of luck, to fall into this deal, and we've got to be ruthless about exploiting it.”

She smiled. “I'll stay up tonight and practice being ruthless before my mirror.”

He hugged her and said, “That's more like it.”

“I just hope it doesn't have to go on much longer,” Penny said. “It's fraying my nerves.”

He said, “Just remember what it was like when you hadn't any money, when you had to—take to the streets. And remember how bad it's been for us to get going, to get any roles worth dirt. What we make here will give us a chance to set up our own productions and to hell with all the casting directors we've had to bow to.”

“I guess I can hold up,” she said, finishing her cigarette.

He said, “Besides, it won't be more than a day or two now. Gwyn's ready to go over the edge. Maybe tonight. Maybe tomorrow. But soon.”

BOOK THREE

THIRTEEN

Louis Plunkett, the county sheriff, was a huge man, three inches past six feet tall, weighing two hundred twenty-five pounds, all of it muscle; his friends called him “Tiny.” An ex-marine in his mid-thirties, he kept himself in tip-top shape and was more than just a little bit impressive. When he served a summons or a warrant or made an arrest, he was seldom resisted by those to whom he was bringing the force of modern law; and those who were foolish enough to argue with him and make his duty a difficult one, always wished, later, that they had been less caustic and less belligerent.

Yet, despite his size, Louis Plunkett's face gave evidence of a gentle soul lying close beneath all that hard-packed muscle. His hair had receded back from his forehead, giving him a high-domed, extremely vulnerable look that accentuated his soft, brown eyes that were far too large for his face. His nose was small, almost pug, his mouth not hard but soft and sensitive. His face was splashed with freckles, giving him the look of a young farmboy; indeed, almost all that he required to complete that image was a pair of bib overalls and a length of dry straw dangling from the corner of his mouth.

To a stranger, he might look too big, too clumsy, and somewhat unsophisticated. If the stranger with such an opinion of Plunkett were a law violator and acted on that judgment, he would be sorry in-deed, for Plunkett was exceptionally intelligent, in his own way.

Louis Plunkett's personality was as at odds with itself as was his formidable appearance, containing opposites that somehow worked in perfect harmony: inside, as well as out, he was half man and half boy, half the weary cynic and half the gay innocent, the pessimist and the optimist rolled into one, choosing to love but often hating as well. He did not like to see violence, and he went out of his way to avoid causing it. He disliked having to use his fists on a man—or his gun—and he preferred even to avoid verbal force when persuading a lawbreaker to see the light. He always tried to reason with an opponent or a potential opponent, using his deep calm voice as a tool to settle other people's bubbling anger. Yet, when the occasion demanded, he could easily hold his own in any fight, against anyone, even against two or three adversaries—as he had proven twice during his career as a law enforcement officer. He held back none of his great strength when he had to fight, and he was brutal to the end of it—after which he had to take a couple of Alka-seltzer tablets in order to settle his stomach, which had been turned by the sight of blood.

Plunkett was also scrupulously honest and fair-minded. Yet he knew that a man in his position had to provide special favors to certain influential citizens—or find himself out on his ear come election time. He did not have to permit the wealthy and the well-known to break the law, though he did have to let them stretch it a bit, now and then. And, on occasion, he was expected to assist them in a matter he would have preferred to be left out of.

It was just such a matter that had brought him to the manor house at William Barnaby's request, the morning after Gwyn's near-breakdown on the beach. He arrived in the county sheriff's car, with the

gleaming gold-colored shield on the door, ex-actly at 8:00, prompt as always. Five minutes later, he had been ushered into William Barnaby's study and seated in the visitors' easy chair.

"How are you this morning, Sheriff?" Barnaby asked.

Casual friends of Louis Plunkett's called him Lou, while close friends called him Tiny. William Barnaby, however, to both their satisfaction, merely called him Sheriff.

"I'm fine," Plunkett said, his voice soft and without edge.

"You've had breakfast, I trust?"

"Yes, sir."

"I could have Grace whip up a batch of hotcakes or something," Barnaby told him.

Plunkett sensed that the invitation was not gen-uine, only what the other man thought was expected of him. But he *had* eaten, so the answer was easy to make. "Really, sir, I've been well fed by the wife."

Barnaby sighed, almost as if he were relieved the formalities were over with, and he handed the sheriff a set of papers which was the only thing on the top of his desk.

The big man looked through them, nodded.

"Do you foresee any trouble?" he asked.

"When I post them?" the sheriff asked.

"Yes."

"Not then," Plunkett said.

"But later?"

"Yes, there'll be trouble later."

"I'll expect your support."

Plunkett frowned at the papers in his large hands, and he said, "I had heard you were trying to buy the Niche, but I didn't know that the deal had already gone through."

"Just yesterday," Barnaby said. "You've seen the deed transfer; it's all perfectly up-and-up."

Plunkett considered this for a moment and said, "According to law, don't tenants have as much as thirty days to vacate the premises when a new landlord takes over and wants them out?"

"Various laws define this as a proper courtesy period," Barnaby said. "However, I'm not feeling especially courteous toward these fishermen, Sheriff."

Plunkett was clearly not satisfied with that answer.

Barnaby said, "In a case like this, Sheriff, the landlord is in the driver's seat, always has been and always will be, as long as the concept of pri-vate property exists. You see, if I evict them now, returning a proper portion of whatever rent they've paid, they'll need a full week to get a restraining or-der from a judge—if they can get one at all. By the time the order is enforced and they're back in the Niche, most of the courtesy period will be up anyway. Besides, the whole procedure will require legal help, and that will cost them more money than the court order would be worth."

"I see." Plunkett was not happy. Laws were not necessarily being broken—but they were most surely being stretched to the limit.

"Well," Barnaby said, in a sprightly tone of voice, dusting his long hands together, "shall we be on our way, then?"

Plunkett looked surprised and sat up straighter in his chair. He said, "You're not coming with me, are you?"

"Of course."

"That's not necessary, Mr. Barnaby."

"I'll enjoy it."

"But perhaps it's also unwise."

"Why?"

"There might be trouble, sir."

Barnaby frowned and said, "You told me, only a few moments ago, that there wouldn't be trouble. Now, what could have happened in the last minute or two to change your mind?"

Plunkett shifted uneasily in his chair, rolled the papers up in one huge hand. "Well, sir, in all truth, I didn't expect trouble if I went alone. But with you there . . . You know how much some of those

fishermen hate—how much they dislike you, sir.”

“I know.”

“Well, then—”

“But I don’t suspect they’ll cause trouble with you along,” Barnaby said. “And I want them to know I’m dead serious about this. I want them cleared out of Jenkins’ Niche within thirty-six hours.”

Plunkett got to his feet, realizing that it was useless to argue with a man like William Barnaby. Still, in one last hope of averting the coming trouble, he said, “Can’t you at least give them a week, sir?”

“Impossible,” Barnaby said.

“But thirty-six hours is so little time to—”

“I will not tolerate these dirty, uneducated, man-nerless little men being on my land any more than thirty-six hours!” Barnaby had slowly raised his voice until he was nearly screaming; his face was flushed, his hands fisted at his sides as if he were holding his anger tightly between his fingers. “I will not be associated with the likes of them, not for a single minute longer than necessary, not even as their landlord, Sheriff. And that is my last word!”

Plunkett nodded sadly.

“Shall we go?”

“About that time,” Plunkett agreed.

By 8:30 that morning, they were on their way to Jenkins’ Niche with the official eviction notices . . .

Gwyn had dozens of dreams that night, all of them bad, a few of them nightmares:

—She was running along a dark, narrow, low-ceilinged corridor, pursued by a faceless woman in white robes; the woman cried out to her, trying to get her to turn around and run in the other direction; but she knew that behind her, the corridor opened into the void; however, before long, she found that it opened onto the void at both ends . . .

—She was being chased by a formless creature through dark woods, and she could not escape those trees except by moving out onto a featureless plain which encircled them; the plain, she felt, was more terrifying, in its perfectly level scope, than were the shadowed trees where her stalker waited and watched . . .

—She was climbing a slope whose summit was obscured by deep shadows, trying to escape from a transparent woman with blood-red eyes who was climbing the same slope behind her; she scabbled at the rocks, tearing away her fingernails, skinning her hands, falling to her knees repeatedly—only to rise up again and plunge on; the transparent woman wanted to carry her down to the bottom of the hill and throw her into the still black lake down there, an event that must not transpire, no matter what the cost of preventing it; at the top of the slope, Gwyn knew, she would find hope and a future; instead, as she crossed the brink, she discovered that the hill was capped by another black lake, just as evil as the stagnant brew below; then, the transparent woman caught up with her and, squealing in a voice filled with echoes, shoved her forward, off the stone rim and down toward the black water . . .

Gwyn woke from this last nightmare with a scream caught in the back of her throat, and she sat straight up in bed, flailing at the covers with both arms.

“Gwyn?”

Gasping, she looked toward the voice, saw Elaine and, blinking, realized the slope and the black lake and the transparent woman had all been parts of a dream.

“Gwyn, are you feeling all right?” Elaine bent over her anxiously, her pretty brow furrowed with concern. She felt Gwyn’s forehead for a fever, and finding none she gently pressed the girl back until her head touched the pillow once more.

“I’m okay,” Gwyn said, barely able to spit out the words. Her mouth was terribly dry and fuzzy, the corners of her lips cracked, her throat parched and sore. She managed to ask, in a voice all feathery and strange: “May I have a glass of water?”

“Of course,” Elaine said. “But you won’t try to get up while I’m out of the room, will you?”

“No.”

Elaine disappeared into the bathroom. A moment later, Gwyn heard the delicious sound of running

water in the sink. When the older woman returned with the water, she took it and greedily drank it down, almost without pause, as if she had just spent a week in the desert.

“Better?”

She relaxed. “Yes, thank you.”

Elaine returned the glass to the bathroom, came back and sat in the chair beside the bed, picking up a hardbound book which she had been reading to pass the time.

“What happened?” Gwyn asked. She rubbed at her eyes, as if the gesture would clear her memory. Not only her mouth was fuzzy upon waking, but her memory as well. She felt dizzy and weak and awfully sleepy—even though she’d just gotten up from a long sleep. She could not seem to put her thoughts in order.

“Do you remember anything about what happened last evening?” Elaine asked.

Gwyn thought, hard.

It was so long ago . . . yesterday . . .

She could not recall what had happened.

“You thought that you’d seen Ginny—your sister,” Elaine said. Obviously, from her expression and the tone of her voice, she was reluctant to talk about it, put the sickness into words.

“You came to Will with a story about footprints on the beach, or some such . . .”

“I remember now,” she said, quietly.

“You were in bad shape, so we called Dr. Cotter.”

“I don’t remember that—oh, yes. A gray-haired little man . . .”

“He thought you needed as much rest as you could get,” Elaine said. “He gave you a sedative.”

“What time is it now?”

“You slept all night and most of the morning, as Dr. Cotter said you would,” Elaine explained. “It’s now 11:30 in the morning.”

“You didn’t sit up with me all night, did you?”

“There wasn’t any need,” Elaine said, “since we knew you’d not come around until sometime this morning.”

“I’m being such a bother.”

“Not at all. That’s what we’re for. That’s what a family is for, to help one another.”

“I’m so tired,” Gwyn complained.

“That’s good, because you need to rest as much as you can.”

Gwyn said, “Even though I just woke up, I think I could go right back to sleep again.” She smacked her lips, wiped a hand across her mouth. “But I’m also famished.”

Elaine smiled. “That’s one problem easily solved.” She got to her feet and said, “I’ll go tell Grace that you’re ready for your breakfast. Is there anything you want, especially?”

“Whatever she wants to fix,” Gwyn said. “Anything at all. I’ll eat every last crumb of it, no matter what it is.”

Little more than an hour later, when Gwyn had devoured a stack of flapjacks in sweet apple syrup, two buttery pieces of toast, two eggs sunny-side up, a cup of coffee, juice, and a raisin-filled sweet roll, she felt bloated but content. She used the bath and returned to the bed, weak-kneed and woozy but able to manage on her own. Beneath the sheets again, she felt sleep stealing over her the moment her head touched the pillows; invisible hands tugged at her eyelids.

“You rest, now,” Elaine said.

“I’m not good company.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

“But I can’t stay awake. I feel so . . .”

“Sleep all you want.”

“I will. I’ll sleep . . . I’m so tired; I’ve never been as tired as this before. I feel like I’m coming apart at the seams.”

“You’ve been through a lot, Gwyn.”

“Goodnight, Elaine.”

“Goodnight, dear.”

And she slept again . . .

She woke.

She was alone.

The house was still and quiet, like a living being that encompassed her and was now holding its breath.

From the angle at which the sunlight pierced the thin under-drapes that had been drawn across the two windows, she knew that it must be late in the afternoon. She had slept nearly a full day, except for the brief period of consciousness when she'd eaten her breakfast.

They had let her sleep through lunch, which was especially considerate of them . . .

Thirsty, she got up again. Her legs were as weak as before, her head as light. Even the dull glow of the sun that came through the partially curtained windows was too bright for her, and she squinted her eyes as she crossed the room. She got a drink of water in the darkened bathroom, returned to bed, drew up the sheets and closed her eyes once more.

Her arms felt leaden. Her entire body seemed to have grown heavy and inert, like a lump of earth.

It was extremely pleasant to be lying there in the large bed with absolutely nothing to do . . . without cares of any sort . . . and with no tedious studying to be done, no important exams to be preparing for, no reports or term papers or speeches to be written . . . free from all responsibilities and commitments . . . Her two pillows were incredibly soft, and the starched bedclothes were soft as well—and the limitless darkness that lay behind her eyes, the beckoning world of contented sleep, was infinitely softer than anything else . . .

Abruptly, Gwyn opened her eyes and pushed the sheets away as if they were sentient beings trying to smother her; she had been chilled to the core by the memory of how she had once slept away entire days rather than face up to the problem of everyday life. Her problems now were a hundred times more confusing and complex than those which had driven her into her first bout with mental illness; how much more desirable they made escape seem than it had ever seemed before. However, she knew that if she gave in, if she had a relapse of the other sickness on top of her present ills, she would be utterly lost, beyond Dr. Recard's patient care, beyond anyone's help.

She sat up, perspiring, pale and shaken.

She shouldn't have slept all night and morning, and she should never have taken a nap after lunch. What's more, Elaine should have realized how dangerous too much sleep could be for her, considering her past . . .

Yet, she was still sleepy.

She swung over the edge of the bed, looked down and saw that the floor appeared to be a hundred miles away, impossibly distant, quite out of reach. Her stomach churned at this confused perspective; she felt as if she were going to be physically ill. She fought down that urge, aware that her body was merely seeking another excuse for her to remain in bed. Putting her feet down on the thick carpet, she pushed against the mattress and stood up, swaying like a drunkard. She grasped the headboard of the bed to steady herself, regained her balance, let go and stood entirely on her own power, feeble as an old woman, but up and around nonetheless.

She decided she would shower, change into shorts and a blouse, then go for a walk, perhaps even down to the beach to take in the last of the day's best sunshine and the cool breezes which would be coming in across the choppy water. She should always, she reminded herself, return to the scene of any trouble, rather than flee from it; flight was escape, just as sleep was, and she couldn't afford to be cowardly.

Certainly, sleep was not the answer; and rest was the wrong solution: indeed, these were clearly only parts of the problem.

She went into the bathroom, turned on the shower, worked the twin faucets until the spray was just stingingly hot enough. She let the water stream over her, until she was beet red, then finished the ordeal with a bracing explosion of the cold water, a galvanizing experience which brought her more fully to her

senses than she had been all day.

She dressed casually and went to the window where she could look out at the sea, as if challenging it and all the associations that it had lately come to have. A few minutes later, still weary but ready, she left her room and went downstairs.

FOURTEEN

William Barnaby responded to his wife's summons, followed her quickly down the long front hall and joined her by the largest of the front windows, half-hidden by thick draperies, where they had an unobstructed view of the lawn. Out there, Gwyn stood by a small fountain, intent upon the four marble cherubs that poured real water out of marble vases into a small but lovely reflecting pool.

"Christ!" Barnaby said, punching the palm of his left hand with his right fist. "She's supposed to be kept in bed."

Elaine said, "I couldn't stop her."

"Why couldn't you?"

"I caught her when she was here at the door, ready to go out, and she was adamant. She said the worst thing she could do was sleep away the rest of the day."

"She's right—but that's wrong for us." Without taking his eyes off his niece, he said, "Why weren't you upstairs in her room, watching over her?"

"I can't be there twenty-four hours a day," Elaine said.

"But you're supposed to be there when she wakes up," he said. "That's a chore you said you'd be able to handle the best."

"Normally—"

"We can't afford excuses," he said. "We have to be right in the first place."

"I was not trying to shirk my responsibility; I did not intend to give you any excuses," she said, a hint of anger tinting her voice. "All I meant to do was give you the facts of the situation." When he did not respond to her, when his eyes did not drift away from Gwyn for a moment, Elaine went on: "The facts are that she was given a powdered sedative in her orange juice at breakfast, and should have slept nearly until supper-time. I'm sure she woke, on and off, but she shouldn't have had the desire or the energy to get out of bed."

"But she did."

"Obviously."

"Are you certain she was given enough of the sedative?"

"Positive"

"Next time, increase the dosage."

"But we don't want her totally unconscious," Elaine said. "We want her to wake up, on and off, so she can realize what's happening to her—so she'll think the old sickness is coming back."

"Sure, sure," he said. "But we don't want her out of the house again. If she should stumble upon something—"

"Like what?"

He had no answer.

"We've planned this well," she said. "Gwyn's not going to stumble across anything, because we've not left any loose ends lying around."

"She's heading for the steps," he said.

Elaine looked out in time to see Gwyn started down for the beach, soon out of sight.

Will turned away from the window, a scowl on his face that made him look ten years older than he was. He walked swiftly toward the front door and pulled it open.

"Wait!"

He looked back at her.

She said, "Where are you going?"

“To follow her.”

“Is that wise?”

“I want to know what she's up to,” he said.

“She's just going for a walk on the beach.”

“That's what she told you, but she may have been lying,” he said.

“Will, she doesn't suspect that we're involved in this, that it's all a put-up job. She thinks that she's losing her sanity. You've talked to her; you know. She hasn't any reason to be suspicious of us, of anyone in the manor.”

He hesitated.

She said, “Let her go. She'll be back soon enough, all worn out and even more of a candidate for the sleep treatment.”

“What if she meets that Younger kid again?” he asked.

“So what if she does?”

“I don't like her talking with him.”

“What could happen?”

“She might tell him about the ghost.”

“And he'd think she was crazy. That couldn't hurt our plans any.”

He wiped a hand across his face, as if sloughing off his weariness, and he said, “Just the same, there's a chance, no matter how slight, that Younger will believe her, or part of what she says. Or perhaps he'll be able to convince her of the truth about Lamplight Cove. And, remember, she doesn't know what's happened at Jenkins' Niche just this morning. Any fragment of the truth might shatter the whole illusion.”

“Will, she simply won't take the word of someone like Younger—not against your word. Can't you see how much it means to her to have a family life again? She will swallow whatever you tell her.”

He frowned and said, “I wouldn't trust to that. After all, she's Younger's type, not mine, with a gutter heritage not unlike his. She and I are from different worlds; she and Younger are brother and sister below the surface, products of the same kind of parents. No, we have got to keep her away from everyone else, make sure her only contact is with the people in this house—until we've got her in the state we want.”

“Suppose she sees you following her.”

“She won't.”

“But suppose she does. Won't that do more to shatter the illusion of the loving uncle than anything Younger might be able to persuade her of?”

He hesitated.

“If you want to know what she's doing down there,” Elaine said, “you can use the binoculars from the edge of the cliff. That's safer; you won't be seen.”

“I don't know . . .” But he had already begun to close the door.

“Come on, then,” she said.

He closed the front door and followed her along the corridor that led to the rear of the house and the kitchen. But halfway there, he had already decided that his wife was correct, that nothing was to be gained by watching Gwyn on the beach. Even if she met Younger, her confidence in him would be unswayed, no matter what the boy said. “Forget it, Elaine,” he told her, stopping her before she reached the kitchen door. “She's not going to find anything on the beach.”

“Of course she isn't.”

“This is still a minor crisis,” he said. “But I think it's one we can deal with well enough.”

“What have you in mind?”

“I want to talk to Ben and Penny.”

“About another little performance?” Elaine smiled and touched his arm with one hand.

“You don't think that would be overdoing it, do you?” he asked, taking her hand in his and holding it tightly.

“Penny's a great actress.”

“But we don't want the girl getting too familiar with the—ghost,” he said. “That would take a lot of

fire out of the big finale—and we've put too much thought into the last act to ruin it now.”

“Penny can handle it,” Elaine assured him.

He thought a moment and said, “We ought to have something prepared for her as soon as she gets back, to wipe out any gains in self-confidence that she might have gotten from the walk.”

“We'd better see Penny right away,” Elaine said, leading the way back toward the main Starr-case, her flowing brown hair like a cape from a nun's bonnet. “Gwyn might come back at any moment.”

Together, they went upstairs. '

At Ben Groves' door, at the far end of the main corridor from Gwyn's room, Elaine knocked three times, rapidly, waited for an answer. When Groves didn't respond, she knocked again, more insistently this time.

He opened the door, looking worried, smiled when he saw them and sighed. “It's only you,” he said, stepping back out of the way. “I thought it might be the kid.”

“The kid is why we're here,” Will said. He followed Elaine into the room while Groves closed and locked the door behind them. He did not sit down, for his nerves were too keen to allow him relaxation. Instead, he paced to the windows and back again, rubbing his hands together as if they were covered with something sticky.

“What's wrong?” Groves asked.

“She's gone out for a walk,” Barnaby said.

“The kid?”

“That's right—and to the beach.”

“She's supposed to be knocked out,” Groves protested.

“Well, she isn't,” Elaine said, somewhat crossly.

“And we've got to schedule a new performance,” Barnaby added.

“See if you can contact the spirit world now,” Elaine told Groves.

“What?” he asked, bewildered.

“The ghost,” Elaine said. “See if you can scare us up the ghost.”

Groves grinned, now. “Oh. Yeah, just a minute.”

He went to the closet door, opened it, pushed some clothes out of the way and looked up a dark flight of attic steps. “Penny, we're having a conference. You want to come down?”

A moment later, he stepped back to allow a blue-eyed blonde into the room. At her appearance, both Elaine and Will smiled, reassured that their plan was foolproof. Penny was almost an exact double for Gwyn Keller, as much like Gwyn as Ginny had been, at least in appearance.

“I guess it's time for me to start earning my money again,” Penny said, sitting on the edge of Groves' bed.

“That's right,” Elaine said. “And you're worth every penny of it.” She smiled as she offered around a pack of cigarettes.

FIFTEEN

She stood halfway between the surf and the cliff, at the turning in the beach where the dead girl had disappeared two days ago, when Gwyn had been chasing her. This had not been her original destination—at least not consciously. When she'd first left the house, against Elaine's wishes, she'd started walking northward, along the unexplored arm of the beach, with the excuse that the scenery would thus be new and more enjoyable than a walk into familiar places. In fifteen minutes, however, she understood that she was only trying to avoid a confrontation with the landmarks of past terrors. She was running, again. Resolute, then, she had turned and started back to the south, passed the stone steps and went on for another half an hour until she came, at a leisurely pace, to the bend in the beach. She half expected that here she would find something important, something she had overlooked and which would settle this whole thing—though she had no idea what this might be . . .

The sun was low in the sky, though it continued to make the beach as hot as an oven. And she was weak, still, and tired. She would not, however, give up the last shred of her hope. For the most part, she was convinced the ghost had never existed, that she'd never seen anything more than an hallucination, that the footprints were illusions, as were the broom marks that had followed them. But a glimmer of doubt still existed, deep inside of her, a minimum of hope that it would all prove to be something else quite different. This glimmer kept her here, searching the clean sand with an intent gaze.

She searched along the surf for some kind of indentation in the sand which would be sufficiently deep to conceal a young woman who was approximately the size of the—the dead girl. She found nothing. Moving slowly in toward the cliff wall, each step rapidly becoming a major effort as her unusual weariness increased, she eventually discovered, to her own great surprise, the well-concealed series of small caves, all large enough to accommodate a man, which lay there . . .

Even half a dozen steps away from them, one could barely see the tops of these caves. Here, the beach was hove up like the back of an angry cat and was, for the most of its width, higher than the entrances to the caves, providing a natural blind. Within two yards of the cliff wall, however, the beach sloped drastically, giving way to the subterranean chambers at the bottom of a seven- or eight-foot incline.

Gwyn stood at the top of this slope, looking down, not sure if she should risk a moment of optimism or not. Previously, in scouring the beach, she had seen no footprints besides her own; two days of wind and shifting tides had wiped the open sand clean of any trace of the dead girl's ghostly passage. At the bottom of this slope, on the other hand, in the dimly lighted entrance to one of the caves, other footprints marked the sand where the wind and the waves could not get in to erase them.

Careful not to lose her balance and fall, Gwyn went down the steep hill, and braced herself against the cliff wall at the bottom. She crabbed sideways until she reached the cave in question.

Her heart was thudding, more from excitement than exertion, but this was the only sign that she felt close to some strange truth . . .

In the deeper, looser sand of the slope, the other set of prints was little more than a staggered series of formless depressions, not at all sufficiently well defined for identification. But at the bottom, in the cave entrance where the sand was level and not so deep or dry as on the slope, the prints had taken well and remained clear: slender and feminine, the tracks of a woman in her bare feet—as the ghost had been . . .

Gwyn would not permit herself the elation that bubbled within her, because she realized that the footprints might have been made by anyone, a curious explorer from somewhere farther south along the beachfront, and not by a ghost. Moving cautiously, so as not to disturb the tell-tale tracks, she slipped to the mouth of the cave and then inside, walking only so far as she could see, though the subterranean

system seemed rather large and complex. She saw, when she turned to face out toward the daylight, that the bare-footed woman who had been here before her had not gone deep into the cave either, but had stood just inside the entrance, looking out. Though this seemed to prove the woman had been waiting there, looking up the slope, expecting to see someone at the top, it was not proof of a ghost—or of a hoaxer.

Gwyn stood there, near where the woman had stood, trying to see what value this discovery had.

None.

Even if she showed Uncle Will these tracks, what would they prove? That someone had been in the cave before her? So what?

She looked down at the footprints again, shivered.

Wasn't it possible that—yes, even likely that—if she did go to fetch her Uncle Will for him to take a look at the footprints, that they would be gone when the two of them returned from the manor house, that where prints were now, only clean sand would be then? Or perhaps, if she still saw the prints—might he be *unable* to see them, just as he had been unable to see the broom marks on the sand, yesterday? That would be conclusive proof that she was not the victim of a hoax, but was in-deed losing her mind.

And that would be intolerable, that abrupt closing off of all alternatives. Instead of confirming the slim possibility of a hoax—for whatever reasons—it would amount to nothing more than another carefully positioned brick in the rapidly growing edifice of her madness.

For a moment, she considered going deeper into the cave to see if it might lead anywhere in particular, but she finally decided against any further explorations. Clearly, the barefoot woman had not gone any farther than this; therefore, nothing beyond this point could interest Gwyn or help her solve the overall puzzle of the ghost. Besides, she had no flashlight and no way of marking her route so that she could retrace her steps in the event that she became lost in the twisting corridors of stone.

Dejected, she started out of the cave and almost overlooked the flash of white near the cavern mouth. Catching sight of it out of the corner of her eye, she turned and, her breath held at the back of her throat, recognized a scrap of flimsy, white cloth. It was the same fluffy fabric from which the dead girl's gown had been made. This scrap had caught on the jagged edge of a rock and been torn loose, apparently without the dead girl being aware of it. The breeze caught it and stirred it like a tuft of white hair on an old man's head.

Gwyn touched it, reverently, as if it were a sacred relic, pried it free of the jagged stone and held it in the palm of her hand.

This was real. She could touch it, feel it, run the flimsy stuff through her fingers. With this to show Uncle Will, she could get some help in discovering who was . . .

Then again, how did she *know* that the scrap was real? Hadn't she felt the dead girl touch her, and hadn't she actually wrestled with the ghost? If she could hallucinate something as seemingly real as that, couldn't she hallucinate this piece of cloth?

And even if it were genuine, what did it prove? That someone had been in this cave, had lost a piece of garment on a jagged rock? That didn't mean the "someone" was a ghost, a hoaxer pre-tending to be her dead sister. The cloth might have come to be here two days ago, or it might have hung on the rock for a week, a month. Indeed, it might have been here so long that the sun had bleached it white, though it had once been a different color. In short, it was proof of nothing.

She looked around for something more, any-thing more, but she found only sand and stone—and possibly footprints.

Sighing, she jammed the white scrap into the pocket of her shorts. The climb up the steep slope outside of the cave was exceedingly difficult and required every last bit of her strength, though she would normally have made it in a few seconds, with little effort. She kept falling to her knees and sliding back, the treacherous sand shifting like a liquid beneath her. In the end, she was forced to go up on her hands and knees, clawing frantically for each foot she gained. By the time she had reached the surface of the beach, she was gasping for breath, shaking like a storm-blown leaf, and coated with perspiration which dripped from her brow and streaked across her face.

She toddled across the beach, to the water's edge, and sat there where she felt it would be cooler.

Her head ached and seemed to spin around and around, as if it were coming loose. In a while, the sensation of movement ceased, though the headache remained.

When she felt rested enough, she got up and started back toward Barnaby Manor, her rubbery legs twisting and bending but somehow managing to support her. Each step increased her weariness, brought a deep yearning for sleep more intense than that which she had suffered in her previous illness, so intense, in fact, that she could not understand it. She didn't know, of course, that she had been drugged heavily, twice, in the last twenty-four hours, and that a residue of those drugs still worked within her, like a quiet little fist.

By the time she reached the bottom of the stone steps that lead up the cliffside to the Barnaby estate, Gwyn was drawing her breath in long, shuddering sobs, bone weary, fuzzy-eyed. She sat down, letting her head fall forward, her arms folded across her knees. She didn't see how she could manage to climb clear to the top.

However, the sun was setting, bringing a shadowed twilight to the empty beach, and night would soon lay its black glove over everything. She didn't want to be down here when darkness fell, no matter whether her ghost was a real ghost, an hallucination or a hoaxer. When she had steadied her heartbeat and regained her breath, she got up and began the dangerous ascent.

The first few steps weren't bad.

The sixth seemed twice as high as it should be.

The seventh was a major obstacle.

After that, her strength fell away, and the steps rose before her like a series of mountains.

Darkness was falling more rapidly than she'd anticipated—or she was taking an inordinately long time to make the climb—leaving pools of shadow on the steps, so that she sometimes misjudged where the edge of one of them lay. A chill draught moved down through the natural flue, bringing goose pimples to her flesh and giving her the odd sensation that a giant lay above, breathing down on her.

The twentieth step seemed to slip away from her, like the moving riser on an escalator; she lost her balance, felt herself tilting backward, a long hard fall behind her . . .

Desperately, she flung herself forward, trying to regain her precarious but precious balance. She over-compensated for the backward tilt, and went painfully to her knees, clutching at the steps as if she thought they would shift out from under her.

Darkness pressed in.

The draught grew chillier.

In a while, she started up again, staying on her knees this time, moving ahead as she had on that slope of sand by the caves. This, in the end, proved the wisest course, for she finally reached the lawn above without further injury and no more close calls.

She lay on the grass, catching her breath, then got up and, crying slightly at her own weakness, walked toward the welcome lights of Barnaby Manor . . .

"I told you a walk wasn't what you needed," Elaine said, helping her into bed.

Gwyn slid down under the sheets and lay back against the pillows, thankful for the smell of clean linen and the enveloping softness. "I see, now, you were right," Gwyn said.

"Dr. Cotter said you should rest."

"I'm awfully tired."

"What would you like for supper?" Elaine asked.

"Nothing."

"You've got to eat."

"I'm not hungry, Aunt Elaine."

The older woman made a face and said, "But you've hardly had anything to eat all day!"

"Breakfast."

"One meal isn't—"

Gwyn said, "But it was an enormous breakfast; it filled me up; I've not been hungry since, really." She wanted to stretch, but didn't have the strength to lift her arms. She yawned instead and said, "All I want

to do is sleep, get my strength back.”

“If you're sure you're not hungry.”

“I'm sure.”

Elaine picked up a bottle of tablets by the side of the bed and emptied one out into the palm of her hand. “I'll get you a glass of water to take this with.”

“Take what?”

“A sleeping pill.”

“I don't want a sleeping pill,” Gwyn said.

“Dr. Cotter prescribed them.”

“I don't need one,” Gwyn said, adamantly. “I feel like I've been kicked around by a herd of horses. I'll sleep without help.”

“Dear—”

“I won't take one.”

Elaine sighed and put the tablet back into the bottle, capped the bottle and put it on the night-stand again. “If you won't, you won't.” She turned off all the lights except the reading lamp by her chair, sat down and picked up her book.

“What are you doing?” Gwyn asked. She raised her head from her pillows and looked at the older woman.

“Reading, dear,” Elaine said.

“You're not going to sit up with me, are you?” Gwyn asked. She felt almost like a helpless little girl, a child so afraid of the dark that she needed a chaperone to help her get to sleep.

“Of course I am,” Elaine said. She was dressed in a brown stretch sweater, brown bellbottoms and stylish boots. She did not look at all like the sort of woman who would insist on mothering anyone, yet here she was, insisting just the same. “If you won't take a sleeping tablet, as Dr. Cotter said you should, then I ought to be here to watch out for you, in case you need or want something.”

“I don't want to be such a burden on you,” Gwyn said.

“This isn't a burden. I've been wanting to read this novel for several months.”

“You'll be more comfortable in the library,” Gwyn said. “I insist you don't ruin your evening worrying about me.” When she saw that Elaine was not affected by any of this, she said, “Besides, the light bothers me; it keeps me awake.”

Elaine closed her book on a flap of the dust jacket, to mark her place, rose to her feet. “Promise you will sleep?”

“I'm in no shape to do anything else,” she said.

And she wasn't.

Elaine bent and kissed her forehead, pulled the sheets closer around her, picked up the book, turned out the reading light, and left the room.

The darkness was heavy but not oppressive, a welcome preliminary to sleep.

Gwyn thought, briefly, how fortunate she was to have both Elaine and Uncle Will to look after her, especially at a time like this when everything seemed to be falling apart for her. Without them, she would have been so terribly alone, so much more vulnerable to this sickness, so helpless. But with them, she felt, she had a good chance of recovery, a better chance than she would have had if she'd no one to turn to ...

Sleep reached up.

It was not threatening, but gentle.

She let it touch her and pull her down.

“Gwyn?”

She opened her eyes and found that she had rolled onto her stomach in her sleep. She was peer-ing out through a cocoon of sheets at a fragment of the wall behind the bed, and she could see that the reading light—which was dimmer than any other light in the room—had been turned on again. She hoped Aunt Elaine had not returned to keep a vigil.

“Gwyn?”

She froze.

A small hand touched her shoulder, shook her gently, then more and more insistently.

“Gwyn?”

She rolled over, pushed the sheets away from her and looked up into the pale face of the dead girl, Ginny, her long-gone sister.

“How are you feeling, Gwyn?”

She was beyond screaming for help, beyond fighting with the ghost, far beyond any reaction at all—except a dull and unemotional acceptance of the impossible.

“You’ve been sleeping so much,” the dead girl said, “that I haven’t had a chance to talk to you. I didn’t want to wake you, because I knew how much you needed your sleep.”

Gwyn said nothing.

“You’ve been so overwrought, and it’s mostly my fault.”

Gwyn closed her eyes.

She opened them again.

It didn’t work: the ghost was still there.

“Are you listening to me, Gwyn?”

Against her will, she nodded.

“You looked so far away,” the apparition said. “I didn’t even know if you could hear me.”

“I can hear you.”

The ghost sat down on the edge of the bed. She said, “Have you thought over what I talked about?”

Gwyn was actually unable to understand the specter’s meaning; her mind was disjointed, scattered with the fragments of thought, smashed by her weariness and by her fear which, by now, was a common part of her.

“Will you come with me, to the other side? Will you die with me so we can be together again?”

Gwyn looked away from the dead girl, trying to block her out altogether, uselessly hoping that her eyes would light upon some distraction which—by completely dominating her attention—would force the apparition to disappear. After passing over a dozen objects and rejecting them, her gaze came to rest on the bottle of sleeping tablets which stood on her nightstand, almost within her reach.

“You’ll like the other side, I promise you, Gwyn,” the specter said, leaning closer.

Its voice was like the sough of a night wind through the tilted stones of a deserted graveyard. It curdled Gwyn’s blood and made her look all the more intently at the escape offered in the contents of that small medicine bottle.

“I could open your window,” the apparition said. “Straight down under it is a flagstone walk. If you jumped—”

Gwyn ignored the whispering voice and rose on-to one elbow, leaned out and grasped the bottle of tablets. She took the cap off and shook out one pill. It was white, very shiny and hard; she supposed she could take it even without water. She put it in her mouth, after gathering saliva, and swallowed it.

“Sleeping pills?” the ghost asked.

Gwyn lay back.

The ghost took the bottle out of her hand. “Yes, dear, this would also be a good way to do it.” She took a second pill out and held it up to Gwyn’s lips.

Gwyn kept her mouth pressed tightly shut, bit-into her lower lip so hard that she thought she would soon draw blood if she weren’t more careful.

“Dear Gwyn, it would be much less painful than jumping from the window or drowning in the sea. Just a long sleep leading into an even longer sleep . . .”

Though she knew that this was only an hallucination, had to be, Gwyn was not about to open her mouth and accept the tablet, even if it were imaginary.

“Say, a dozen of them,” the ghost said. “If you could manage to swallow only a dozen of them, that ought to do the trick.” She pushed the pill against Gwyn’s lips.

Gwyn turned her head.

“Perhaps you’d like a glass of water to take it with,” the specter said, rising. She put the bottle and

the tablet on the nightstand and went into the bathroom.

Please let me sleep, Gwyn begged. I can't stand it anymore . . . I just can't . . . I'll start to scream, and I won't be able to stop screaming again, ever.

But, as mentally and physically exhausted as she was, she did not sleep, but lay on the edge of it, ready to fall.

She heard water running in the bathroom.

Then it stopped, and the specter came back with a glass in her hand.

“Now,” the ghost said, “we'll get them down, won't we?”

Gwyn closed her eyes as tightly as she closed her mouth, bringing creases to her forehead and colorful streaks of light to the blackness behind her lids. She wished that she had the ability to close her ears, too, to seal out that cool, hypnotic whisper.

The pill touched her lips.

“It will be easy, Gwyn.”

She turned her head, felt the pill follow her, still jammed against her mouth.

“Gwyn?”

Panic began to rise in her as she felt a scream straining at the back of her throat. But then, mercifully, she also felt the pill she had taken beginning to work on her. Sleep came closer. She relaxed and gave herself over to it and was carried away in-to darkness, away from the ghost, away from everything.

SIXTEEN

Forty-five minutes later, in the kitchen downstairs, while Gwyn remained sound asleep in her room, the other six members of the manor household sat around the big table drinking freshly brewed coffee and eating pastries which Grace had baked earlier in the day. No one felt much like eating a full, cooked meal; there were too many building tensions in the air, and there was too much immediately at stake to permit proper digestion.

However, the four different kinds of pastries were all crisp and delicious.

"Maybe you really should have been a cook, Grace," Ben Groves said, grinning at the gray-haired woman over a half-eaten apple tart. "I mean, you do have a flair for it."

"I was a cook once," she said. "Long hours, lots of work, and only mediocre pay—unless you've style to handle the so-called gourmet dishes. Which I don't." She took a bite of her own pastry and said, "I prefer life with Fritz, here. It's infinitely more exciting than spending your days in a hot kitchen."

"With Fritz," Ben said, "you're lucky you haven't been spending your time in a hot jail."

"I resent that," Fritz said. "I've worked the con games in half the countries of Europe, and I've not been caught once."

This sort of light banter continued for another several minutes, though neither Elaine nor William Barnaby joined into it. They drank their coffee and ate their pastries like two strangers at a table of close friends, though the illusion of rejection was not the fault of the other four. Fritz, Grace, Ben, and Penny had learned, very early in this strange association with the Barnabys, man and wife, that their wealthy patrons were not inclined to camaraderie.

At last, when he was finished eating and had wiped his hands on a linen napkin heretofore folded on his lap, Will Barnaby interrupted their chatter and directed a distinctly admonitory remark to Penny Groves. "You were pretty damned foolish upstairs, just a while ago," he said. "And I mean by your own account of it."

The girl looked up, finished chewing a mouthful of blueberry muffin and said, with surprise, "I was?"

"You did say that you attempted to force her to take another sleeping tablet, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Didn't that strike you as foolish?"

She said, "I didn't mean her to have it. I was only trying to scare her, and I succeeded."

"Suppose she had taken it?" Barnaby asked.

"She wouldn't have."

"But suppose that she'd opened her mouth. Would you have given it to her then?" His face was tied up in an ugly, dark knot.

The blonde thought about it for a moment, then said, "Well, I would have had to, wouldn't I? I mean, if she'd opened her mouth for it, and if I'd taken it away after all of the spooky act I'd put on, she'd have been sure to smell a rat."

"Then," Barnaby said, "you were inexcusably foolish."

"Look here," Ben Groves argued, "those pills aren't all *that* powerful. Two of them wouldn't have killed her, by any means."

Barnaby suddenly slammed a large fist down on-to the table, rattling all the dishes and startling his associates. Elaine was not startled at all, for she knew him too well not to anticipate his outbursts. He said, "Gwyn must not be physically harmed. We mustn't take the slightest chance of killing her. It's not a matter of mercy, or anything like that, God knows; but if she dies, her estate might never come my way."

"It would be sure to," Fritz said, dusting powdered sugar from his hands. "You *are* her last living

relative.”

“It would take years,” Barnaby said. “And the state would be right in there, shouting about a lack of last wills and testaments; the state would want it all and would get a huge chunk of it, no matter what a court finally decided.” He was red-faced just thinking about that delay.

To head off another explosion on her husband's part, for the sake of group unity, Elaine said, in a more reasonable tone, “You see, the girl's got a history of mental instability. It shouldn't be difficult to convince a court that she's gone past the edge—especially if she goes on about ghosts or even hoaxes of ghosts. If she can be certified in-competent to control her own affairs, Will is sure to be given management of her estate, without any of the fortune being lost to inheritance taxes.”

“And with that,” Barnaby added, “I can develop these properties I've been purchasing over the last ten years.”

“But you've got a stake in this too, all of you,” Elaine reminded them. “Every risk you take is as much a danger to your own reward as it is to ours.”

There was silence around the table for a while.

Then Penny said, “I won't make a mistake like that again.”

“Good,” Barnaby said.

Fritz raised his coffee cup and said, “To for-tune.”

Three others joined in the unorthodox toast. The Barnabys, as usual, sat back and watched it all as if they were visitors at a zoo.

SEVENTEEN

The following morning, which was Wednesday morning, her Aunt Elaine was there when she woke, shortly past nine o'clock, and she was full of smiles and small jokes to cheer up the patient. The older woman helped her to the bath, where she left her on her own. (Brushing teeth and washing her face, combing the snarls from her long yellow hair, were almost more than Gwyn could manage; she didn't even attempt to shower, for she hadn't the energy or the will to stand up that much longer.) When she was back in bed, propped up on extra pillows, Elaine brought her a huge breakfast on a bed tray, helped her remove the lids from the hot dishes. Though Gwyn was sure that Grace's cook-ing was as good as usual, all of the food looked col-or-less and tasted stale, and she had no appetite at all for it, though she forced down more than half of everything. She recognized these often-suffered symptoms of chronic malaise; before, when she had been tempted to sleep her life away, food had been tasteless and without visual appeal. The world had gone by in a senseless blur as she curled tighter and tighter into her own mental cocoon . . .

But, though she recognized what was happening to her, she no longer wanted to fight it. She had been having such pleasant dreams . . .

In her dreams, her parents lived. There had been no accident, no deaths, and they were together again. Likewise, in the dreams, Ginny had never perished at sea. They were all so happy in their dream life, having so much fun . . .

Indeed, the dreams seemed more real than the waking world, very sharply detailed and filled with emotions. They were preferable to the drab sur-roundings she discovered upon waking, and she longed, now, to get back to them.

"Do you feel more rested?" Elaine asked.

"Yes," she said.

But she was still quite tired.

"You'd like to sleep more, wouldn't you, dear?"

"Yes, Elaine."

"I'll get you a tablet."

"Thank you."

The sound of running water.

The rattle of the cap being removed from the medicine bottle, the hollow sound of it being put down on the nightstand again.

A hand lifting her head.

"Here you are, dear."

She opened her mouth.

Elaine popped the pill inside.

Gwyn reached, helping the older woman tilt the waterglass, took a long swallow of water, washing down the tablet. Then, pleased to know that the dreams would soon be returning, she lay back and waited for sleep to overtake her.

At 12:45 that same afternoon, while Gwyn slept upstairs, Sheriff Louis Plunkett sat down in an easy chair in William Barnaby's study, holding his large black hat in both hands, like a superstitious man religiously fingering a talisman. He had hoped to meet Barnaby at the front door and conclude this business without having to come inside. However, Fritz had answered the door and escorted him to the study, giving him no choice but to almost literally beard the lion in his own den.

Plunkett got up, paced around the bookshelves, looked at the two watercolors in ornate frames, checked the view from the window, went back to his chair, looked at his watch, found that he'd only passed three minutes with all of that.

He was nervous, partly because this was one of those cases he despised being involved with, and partly because he'd thus far had nothing at all for lunch. A man his size, as active as he was, had to keep his regular meal schedule, or he got nervous. So he was nervous.

At last, Barnaby entered the study and closed the door behind, all smiles. He was still pleased with the efficient, no-nonsense way that Plunkett had posted the eviction notices yesterday and delivered all the right papers to all the right fisher-men with nary a hitch. He offered his hand, shook Plunkett's, then went straight to his chair, sat down and picked up his letter opener, which he usually toyed with when entertaining a visitor in this room.

"What's the problem?" he asked Plunkett, though he was not really expecting a problem.

The sheriff had one for him, anyway. Plunkett frowned, his large face creased with two lines from the sides of his nose to the perimeters of his square chin; he stopped twisting his hat in his hands and placed it on the arm of his chair. He said, in a businesslike voice in which there was no longer a reluctance to skirt the issue at hand. "Well, I went out there late this morning, to see how they were getting along, to find out if there were any hitches in the moving."

"Out to Jenkins' Niche?" Barnaby clarified.

"Yes, sir."

"They have—what? Twelve hours?"

"Somewhat less than that, now."

Barnaby smiled and nodded happily. He said, "That was very efficient of you, Sheriff, to make the follow-up call."

"You don't seem to understand me, Mr. Barnaby. I came here to you because we seem to have a problem," Plunkett said. He ignored the other man's compliment, perhaps more because of a deep-seated dislike for William Barnaby than because of any great modesty.

"Problem?"

"They won't leave."

"The fishermen?"

"Yes, sir, of course."

Barnaby froze, the tip of the silver letter opener pressed against the ball of his thumb. He said, "Won't leave?"

"That's what they say."

"They told this to you, directly to your face?"

"Yes, sir."

"They must be joking!"

"They seem serious, Mr. Barnaby."

"They *have* to leave."

Plunkett said, unable to disguise his uneasiness at being involved in an event of this sort, dots of sweat on his forehead, "I told them that, Mr. Barnaby."

"They've been evicted, dammit!" But Barnaby was talking more to himself, now, than to Plunkett.

The sheriff nodded.

Barnaby put down his letter opener.

Plunkett noticed a tiny dot of blood on the other man's thumb, where the point of the silver tool had broken the skin.

Barnaby seemed unaware of his wound.

"So we've a problem," Plunkett repeated.

Barnaby said, "What are you going to do about it?"

Plunkett picked up his hat from the arm of the chair and began to play with it again, twirling it around and around in his calloused hands. He said, "I warned them that they were breaking the law, and I explained the consequences of trespassing af-ter the delivery of an eviction notice. But, in point of fact,

there's really nothing that I can do to them—besides yell my head off.”

Barnaby was clearly appalled at this admission. He said, “You can evict them by force if they aren't out of the Niche by tonight!”

“No, sir, I can't.”

A dangerous look entered Barnaby's eyes, like an influx of muddy water into a clear stream, polluting his gaze. “Are you saying that you won't do your job on this?”

“That's not what I'm saying at all,” Plunkett protested. “But I simply *can't* do a forced eviction. They intend to keep men in the Niche twenty-four hours a day, on shifts. That means there'll always be at least twenty of them waiting for me at any one time. Even if they only intend a nonviolent resistance, locking arms and that sort of thing, I can't deal with that big a group myself. I'd need at least ten good men with me, and you know I don't have them. I've got two deputy sheriffs, that's all.”

Barnaby was temporarily satisfied with that answer, though he was not happy. He thought a moment and said, “Couldn't you arrest a couple of them, just the ringleaders? If the top few men—Younger and his cronies—were thrown in the tank, the rest would fall apart.”

“I doubt that, sir,” Plunkett said. “It seemed to me that they were all equally determined about this. I believe, if we tried jailing any of the top men, the rest would only be more resolved than ever.”

After a short silence, Barnaby said, “Is this a token resistance or a real battle? Do they intend to overstay by only a day or two—”

“They're not leaving until their legal thirty days are up,” the sheriff said, finding it difficult not to smile.

“That's intolerable.”

“But that's the situation, sir.”

“And your hands are tied?”

“Quite effectively, Mr. Barnaby.”

“Then I have to wait them out—or get my own court order that would permit the state police to step into the picture.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well,” Barnaby said, leaning back in his chair as if the decision had been made, the problem solved, and he could now relax. “Thank you for coming to me about this, Sheriff. Can you find your own way out?”

“Certainly, Mr. Barnaby. Good day.”

“Same to you, Sheriff.”

Alone in the quiet study, then, Barnaby picked up his silver letter opener, raised it high overhead, and drove the point through the blotter and half an inch into the top of the desk. “*Bastards!*” he hissed.

They were all together again: mother, father, Ginny, Gwyn . . .

They were very happy.

In all her life, Gwyn had never been happier.

They played on the beach together, at the Miami summer house, went swimming together, joked and laughed, went to the movies together, read in the evenings, always together, a perfect life . . .

When she woke, at half-past two Wednesday afternoon, she tried to regain those dreams, to shove away the bedroom, the daylight, the real world, and sink back into the past.

“Are you awake?” Elaine asked.

Reluctantly, Gwyn opened her eyes and looked at the chair beside her bed, where the older woman sat with the book folded in her lap. “Yes,” she said, through a mouth that felt gummed with cobwebs.

“Feeling better?”

Actually, she was not feeling better at all, despite her rest. If anything, her body felt heavier, more bloated; her eyes were grainier, her mouth dry, her stomach a ball of knots that not even an escape artist could untie. But she didn't want to upset Elaine after all the older woman had done for her, and so she lied. She said, “Yes, I'm feeling much better, thank you.” And she tried a feeble smile which was only a partial success.

“You slept right through lunch,” Elaine said.

"I didn't miss it, really."

"You should still eat. I've had Grace keep some-thing warmed up for you. While you use the bath, I'll bring it."

"Please," Gwyn said, "I'd rather just sleep."

"You can't take medicine without food in your stomach," Elaine said. "Now, don't be head-strong."

Elaine helped her to her feet. Her head was lighter, her legs more rubbery than before, but she managed the short walk to the bath and had the strength to refresh herself and return to bed by the time the woman had come back with the tray of food.

"Eat hearty, now."

"It looks delicious," Gwyn said.

In fact, it looked colorless and stale.

To please her aunt, she forced herself to eat: pot roast, browned potatoes, corn, a salad, rich chocolate pudding. Everything but the pudding was a chore to chew up and swallow, especially since the food was without taste or was nause-atingly flat; her reaction to each dish varied from bite to bite, so that she knew the shortcoming was in her own appreciation, not in the food itself. The spoon and the fork each weighed a couple of pounds and kept slipping from her fingers . . .

Though she could force herself to eat, she could not make herself hold up a viable conversation, and she did not even try. Her thoughts kept return-ing to the dreams, making her smile as she recalled a pleasant fragment of some unreal scene. The dreams were so wonderful, so filled with real hap-piness, because no one had died in them: death did not exist . . .

"I think I've had enough," she said, after a few minutes, trying to push her tray off her lap.

Elaine examined the dishes, looked worried. She said, "You most certainly haven't had enough. One or two bites of everything. Let's see you clean up your plate."

"Oh, Elaine—"

"No excuses."

Though the fork and spoon were still as heavy as before, she ate faster. The sooner she was done, the sooner she could have another pill, could lie back and sleep and dream . . .

While Gwyn struggled with her lunch, William Barnaby sat in his study downstairs, holding the telephone receiver to his ear and listening to it ring again and again at the other end of the line. He hoped that Paul Morby was at home, and that the man could take on the job that he had for him. If Morby couldn't be gotten, Barnaby didn't know to whom he could turn for help. While he waited, he held the silver letter opener in his free hand and tapped the point rapidly against his blotter, not to any time he had in mind, but to the furious tempo of his anger.

The phone was picked up at the other end: "Hello."

The gruff voice, deep-toned and uncom-promising, was evocative of Morby's appearance: tall, heavy, a man made out of planks and wire and hard pressed steel, with hands twice as wide as any other man's hands and enough crudely shaped cles to attract all the girls on the beach.

"Barnaby here," Will said.

"Yeah?"

"I have a job for you."

"Can you hold on?" Morby asked. "I was com-ing in with the groceries when you rang. I want to pop a couple of things in the freezer."

Barnaby preferred the kind of employee who'd let the frozen goods be ruined rather than make such a request, but he said it was all right, he'd hold the line. Men like Morby, with Morby's talents and his lack of scruples, were difficult to find.

He had used Morby twice before in the last two years, both times when a business deal was stymied by a man reluctant to sell his land. In one case, Morby delivered the adversary a rather thorough beating. In the second instance, Morby had burned the man's house to the ground, in such a clever fashion that no one had suspected arson. Not only had this made the potential seller more anxious to be rid of his property, but it made the purchase of the land cheaper for Barnaby, since the value of the house—now

that there was no longer a house—could be subtracted from the package offer that Edgar Aimes had made.

Morby was good. He was dependable, and he could keep his mouth shut. If Sheriff Plunkett couldn't do anything about the squatters at the Niche, Morby could, with more speed and effectiveness.

“Okay, the ice cream's in the freezer,” Morby said, picking up the phone again. “What'd you want?”

“Remember the second job you did for me?”

Morby said, “The house?”

“That's it.”

“What about it?”

“Can you take on a similar contract?”

Morby thought, then said: “When?”

“Tonight.”

“Short notice.”

Barnaby said, “But I'll pay a good bonus if this goes right.”

“It always goes right when I do it,” Morby said. After another long silence, in which he considered his schedule, he said, “Is this another house—and if so, what size?”

“A boat,” Barnaby said.

Morby was surprised, but he recovered rather quickly. “You want me to do to a boat what I did to a house, is that right?”

“Yes.”

“How big is it?”

“A lobster boat, maybe thirty-six feet.”

“This boat—is it in the water, dry docked, in a showroom or what?”

“It's docked, on the water.”

“Boats are very hard to work on,” Morby said. “There are so few ways to get in and out of a boat, you see. It's easy to draw a big crowd, and that can mess up an otherwise easy contract.”

“There shouldn't be anyone on the boat,” Barnaby said.

“This around here?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose I could do it.”

“Will you be able to get your—supplies in time?”

Morby said, “I keep an emergency kit here, so I'm usually ready to go for something like this.”

“Fine,” Barnaby said. “Now, we should get together, at the usual place, to go over the details.”

“You can bring the pay then.”

“I will.”

“The bonus too.”

“The job's not finished yet.”

“It'll be done right.”

Barnaby hesitated only a second, then said, before Morby could tell him to forget it, “Okay, sure. The bonus too.”

“When?” Morby asked.

Barnaby looked at his gold coin watch and said, “It's two-thirty right now. I've some other things to attend to, so—why don't we say quarter past four.”

“I'll be there,” Morby said.

They both hung up without saying goodbye.

When she learned who was calling, Edgar Aimes' young secretary lost her cold and almost impolite tone and put Barnaby straight through to her boss without further delay.

“Hello, Will,” Aimes said. “What can I do for you?”

“I'd like to see you, Edgar. We've got some important business matters to discuss.”

“Has something come up?” Aimes asked.

“More than a little.”

Aimes thought a moment and said, “I have to come out your way in about an hour, to show a pro-perty along Seaview Drive. I could stop by at say four-thirty and—”

“That won’t do,” Barnaby said. “Edgar, I think this is something we need time to discuss, perhaps over dinner.”

“Tonight, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“But Lydia and I were going to—”

“Cancel it.”

“Will, I—”

“I think a dinner discussion between us is far more important than whatever you were going to do tonight,” Barnaby said. His voice was firm and left no doubt that he expected full compliance with his request.

Aimes sighed. “What’s the trouble, then?”

“I don’t want to talk about it now, though I will say that it involves Mr. Morby, whom we’ve employed in the past, if you remember correctly.”

“You employed him,” Aimes said. “I have met him only once, and I wouldn’t hire him.”

“Nevertheless, you see why I’d like to have din-ner with a nice, reliable couple, like you and Ly-dia. In a public place, where we’re sure to be seen—say between eight o’clock and one in the morning, somewhere that we can have drinks and make an evening of it.”

“I understand,” Aimes said.

“How about the Kettle and Coach?”

“That would be ideal. It’s what we’ve done in the past, on nights when Mr. Morby was working.”

“Exactly,” Barnaby said. “Shall Elaine and I meet you there, then? Say at eight-thirty, in the cocktail lounge.”

“We’ll be there,” Aimes said.

Again, both men rang off without saying good-bye.

Just as Gwyn was finished with her lunch and gave the tray to Elaine, a knock sounded on the closed bedroom door. A moment later, the door opened, and Will Barnaby looked in. “How are you today, Princess?” he asked Gwyn.

She smiled and said, “Better.”

He came over and sat on the edge of her bed, took one of her damp hands in his. “I told you it wasn’t as serious as you thought it was. All you needed was rest, plenty of rest.”

“I guess you were right,” she said. But his presence brought back the memory of the ghost, the footprints on the beach, the broom marks, her whole illness. She said, “Have you called Dr. Recard, Uncle Will?”

He said, “I called him first thing yesterday morning, even before you’d gotten awake.”

“What’d he say?”

“That you were to rest, really rest. If you aren’t feeling better in a week, then you’re to go see him. I’ll take you there.”

She relaxed. “He didn’t think it was serious enough to—put me in a hospital somewhere?”

“No, no,” Will said. “Just get lots of rest.”

“I’ve been doing that.”

“Except for your walk on the beach yesterday,” he said.

“I’m sorry about that.”

“You should be,” he said. “You knew you weren’t supposed to be up and around yet.”

“I didn’t mean to upset anyone,” Gwyn said. She turned her head and looked at Elaine, who was smiling down at them, holding the bottle of sleep-ing tablets.

“Let’s forget about yesterday,” her uncle said, patting her hand. “I’m sure you won’t do anything like that again.”

"I won't, I promise."

"Good," he said, letting go of her hand. "Now, I'll talk to your aunt for a minute, if I may, and give you a chance to recover from that feast you just finished."

He stood and took his wife's elbow, led her through the door, closed the door after them, and walked her several paces down the hall.

In a whisper, she said, "What's wrong?"

He told her, succinctly, about the squatters at Jenkins' Niche and about his phone calls to Morby and Aimes. "So," he concluded, "since we have to be out in public tonight, for an alibi, I thought we might as well move up the schedule with Gwyn. We'll make tonight the final act with her."

"But we agreed, originally, that she could use another day of sleep, to wear her down."

"If we're out of the house tomorrow night, too," Barnaby said, "it may look a little strange. We can't very well go out to dinner with Edgar twice in a row, to talk business."

"I guess so."

"Therefore," he said, "you won't be giving her another sleeping pill today. She'll have to be wide awake for the festivities tonight."

Elaine said, "If you'd been only five minutes later than you were, I would already have given her a tablet." She clenched the medicine bottle tightly in her right hand. "But don't worry about a thing, darling. I'll take care of her from here on out—and I'll be damned glad to get this over with a day early."

"You think she'll crack tonight?" he asked.

"With what Penny is going to do to her?" Elaine asked. "There just isn't any doubt, so far as I can see. She's on the verge of a complete breakdown already. She hasn't the will power to refuse a sleeping pill any more, and she seems even anxious to sleep. With tonight's little show, she's going to lose what control she has. By the end of the summer, you'll have been appointed to manage her trust."

"I think so too," he said. "Well, you get back to her, while I tell Groves what's going on."

"Then you can be ready tonight?" Barnaby asked.

Penny Groves stubbed out her cigarette and said, "I'm ready right now, as far as that goes."

"Nervous?"

Groves answered for her: "Penny and I are pro-fessionals; we're never nervous about a per-formance."

"Good. Tonight, then."

Elaine came back into the room and dropped the bottle of sleeping pills into the pocket of her bellbottom slacks, the top still screwed on tight. She fluffed Gwyn's two pillows, straightened the covers and said, "Now, you try to rest, dear."

Gwyn looked at the bulge in Elaine's pocket made by the medicine bottle, looked at the empty nightstand and said, "But don't I get a sleeping pill to help me?"

She could feel the dreams receding, growing cold, streaking out of her reach . . .

"Dr. Cotter said that you're not to have too many of them," Elaine said, making up a convenient lie.

"One more won't hurt."

"Doctor knows best."

"But I can't sleep without them."

"Just rest, then, dear."

"But—"

"Really, Gwyn, it'll be best to wait until tonight, at bedtime, before taking another. Now, if you close your eyes and don't worry yourself about the pills, I'm sure you'll doze off."

Gwyn was not so certain about that. She was so exhausted that her weariness was no longer a contributing factor to her sleep, but an obstacle to it. Her eyes, though gritty and burning with fatigue, would not stay shut, but popped open like shutters if she hadn't the tablet to help them stay down.

"Oh, by the way," Elaine said, "Will and I are supposed to go out this evening, for a dreadful little business dinner with associates. It's not going to be much fun, so if you—"

“Oh, no!” Gwyn said, rising up onto one elbow. “Don't stay at home because of me. You've done too much of that already. Besides, I'm feeling much better than I was.”

“You haven't been hallucinating again, have you?” Elaine asked, delicately. “No—ghosts?”

“None,” Gwyn said, forcing a smile. That wasn't too much of a lie, really. In two days, the only en-counter she'd had with the ghost was the short visitation the night before, when it had attempted to get her to take an overdose of sleeping pills. Her visions *were* tapering off.

“I thought you hadn't,” Elaine said. “But I wanted to hear it from you before I decided whether we should leave the house tonight. Well, if you're sure you'll be okay, I'll tell Will not to can-cel out on the dinner.”

“I'm fine,” Gwyn assured her, not feeling fine at all. However, now her ailments seemed physical more than mental, and she could cope with that— she thought.

“Also, if it's okay with you,” Elaine said, “I'll tell Grace to make you a supper that can be heated, then give her and Fritz the night off so they can take in a show they've been wanting to see.”

“I'll do fine on my own,” Gwyn said.

“Oh, I wouldn't leave you entirely alone,”

Elaine said. “Ben will be in the house. He'll look in on you from time to time, and he can give you your sleeping tablet around eleven.”

In the downstairs study, when he had finished talking with Penny and Ben, William Barnaby removed one of the watercolors from the wall, re-vealing a small safe, which he opened with a few deft twists of the combination dial. Inside the safe were a few important papers, most of which were only duplicates of others he kept in a safety deposit box downtown. There was also a savings account passbook and a neatly bound bundle of cash.

He took out the passbook first and looked at the bottom figure: \$21,567. It was a pitiful amount, for it represented the last immediately available funds of what had once been a multi-million dollar fortune . . . So much money had gone down the drain in the last decade or so. Of course, he and Elaine enjoyed living high; but there had also been a few real estate deals that hadn't panned out like he'd thought they would. He had almost a million tied up in seafront property now, of course. But unless he was able to get the money to develop that land as he intended, he would lose considerably when he resold it.

Angry and nervous, he shoved the passbook into the safe again, took out the bundle of cash. It contained slightly more than seven thousand dollars in small bills. He peeled off two thousand dollars to pay Morby, thought a moment and then added another five hundred as a bonus. Morby might be expecting an extra thousand, but he wouldn't turn the job down if he got only half that much.

Barnaby returned the remainder of the cash to the safe, closed the small, round metal door, spun the dial, tugged on the chromium handle to be sure that it was locked, lifted the watercolor from the floor and hung it where it had been.

He went to the bar cabinet behind his desk, got out a bottle of Scotch whiskey and poured himself a double shot: neat, with no ice and no water. He drank it down fast, for he needed the boost it gave him. It was a busy afternoon—and it was going to be an even busier evening . . .

The rest of that day passed slowly for Gwyn. She dozed off and on, for ten or fifteen minutes at a stretch, waking each time with a start, not knowing what had frightened her, never fully recapturing her pleasant dreams of a life that never was and could never be. She tossed and murmured when she slept, skirting those desired dreams, coming even closer to horrid nightmares. When she was awake, her bones ached, and every joint felt ar-thritic. Her eyes were too tired to allow her to read; thus, the minutes ticked by in agonizing half-time.

She thought of asking for a pill again, but she knew that Elaine would say no. And she knew, too, that so much medicine, so much unnecessary sleep, was not good for her. Yet, she desired it . . .

Hour by hour, her nerves grew more frayed.

She began to think of Ginny again.

The ghost . . .

Her naps became fewer and farther between, only five minutes long now, and always turbulent. Each time that she woke from one of them, she remembered every detail of the mini-nightmare that plagued her. It was always the same one: she was by the sea, with the dead girl, being dragged into the crashing waters against her will, too weak to resist, too weak to cry out, most assuredly doomed . . .

BOOK FOUR

EIGHTEEN

A few minutes past eight o'clock that evening, Ben Groves knocked on Gwyn's bedroom door, then shouldered it open, bringing her supper on the familiar sickroom tray.

She sat up, aware that she was not looking her best, and she brushed self-consciously at her tangled yellow hair.

"Sleeping beauty," he said.

Morosely, she said, "Hardly. I haven't had a shower today, and I know I must look like a witch."

"Not at all," he said, putting the tray on her lap and adjusting the two sets of tubular steel legs that supported it on the mattress. "You are lovely, as usual."

"And you're a liar," she said.

"Have it your own way," he said. "You really *do* look nice. But that's neither here nor there. The important thing isn't how you look, but how you feel, right?"

"Right."

"So how do you feel?"

"Not hungry," she said, looking down at the food.

He laughed and said, "I'm afraid you don't have any choice about that. I got strict orders from Mrs. Barnaby to see that you eat it all. And I'm not to let you start the dessert until everything else is gone."

"Have Uncle Will and Elaine left for their dinner engagement yet?" Gwyn asked, picking up her fork and studying the tray for the least offensive looking dish.

"A few minutes ago," Ben said.

"Good," Gwyn said. "I was worried that they wouldn't go. Aunt Elaine has been so good with me, almost too good. I was afraid she'd reconsider at the last moment so she could stay here and look after me."

He sat down in the easy chair where Elaine usually sat, and he said, "She feels you're recovering nicely."

Gwyn nodded and forked buttered noodles into her mouth. They had little taste, but more than anything else she had eaten in the last day and a half. She worked at the dish until she had emptied it, which seemed to take forever. Recently, she felt as if her entire life consisted of sleeping and eating, and that only the former was not an arduous task.

"I hope your illness didn't have anything to do with the sailing we did the other day," Groves said, when she had begun to eat the warmed chicken breast on the largest plate.

She looked up, surprised. "How could it?"

"I don't know," he said. "But you seemed to get sick right after that, so I thought perhaps—"

"Hasn't anyone told you what's wrong with me?" she asked.

"Why should they?"

Gwyn considered this a moment. She should have known that neither Uncle Will nor Elaine would gossip about her to the help, yet she had automatically assumed everyone in the house knew about her

ghost. She was relieved that Ben, at least, had been kept in the dark.

"Believe me, Ben, I really enjoyed being on the *Salt Joy* with you," she said. "It was the nicest day I've had in a long time. My illness has nothing to do with that."

"What a relief!" he said. "Well then, maybe we can go out in the boat again, when you're feeling up to it."

"I don't see why not."

He peered at her tray with an exaggerated look of anger. "You've hardly touched your chicken, so don't put your fork down yet."

She laughed and said, "You'd make a very good mother."

"I try," he said.

Because she had not taken a sleeping tablet since that morning, and because Ben's presence was considerably more vital, in an undefinable way, than Elaine's was, she found herself more alert, her mind functioning in less of a haze than it had for the past forty-eight hours. Inevitably, then, she began to think about the ghost and about all the things that might be connected with it, and she broached a tangent of the subject with him.

When she'd reached her dessert, she said, "Do you know any of the fishermen who've been giving Uncle Will trouble?"

"A bad lot," he said.

"Which ones do you know?"

"Younger, Abrahams, Wilson, nearly all of them."

"Is it true they threatened Uncle Will?"

"They did, all right."

"How?"

"In vague, but definitely meaningful terms," he said.

"Do you think that they'd carry through on those threats?"

He grimaced and said, "They're not an easy group of men to get along with, and they don't hold their anger well. Yes, I believe they'd have gone through with the threats if Uncle Will hadn't reported them to the sheriff."

Outside, night had fallen; the remnants of an orange sunset lighted a half inch of the horizon on the far side of the house but did not light the sky beyond Gwyn's windows.

She ate several more spoonfuls of the same kind of chocolate pudding which she'd been served for lunch, then said, "Do you think they'd be the kind to strike out at me, when they saw they couldn't easily get at my uncle?"

"What do you mean?"

She couldn't tell him without mentioning the ghost, and she did not want him to know about that, because she was still pretty sure that it was only an illusion, the symptom of emotional instability.

He said, "Do you mean would they hurt you?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"Not likely," he said. "At least, I don't think they'd stoop so low as to carry a grudge against innocent bystanders. Why? Has something happened?"

"Nothing, really," she said.

"Then why did you ask?"

She ate another spoonful of chocolate pudding and, rather than answer him, asked another question. She said, "What do you know about International Seafood Products?"

He looked at her strangely and seemed, at first, unable to find a response. "What do you mean?"

She finished her pudding, enjoying the taste of the last few mouthfuls, and she said, "I understand that ISP wants to build a seafood processing plant nearby."

He nodded. "ISP wants to, and the fishermen want them to—but everyone else in the area is dead set against it."

"Why?"

"The filth, of course."

She said, "As I understand, ISP wants to build a modern plant that wouldn't foul the sea or the air."

"You've heard wrong, then."

"But don't they have a plant like that operating up in Maine?"

She thought that there was a look of deep anxiety on Ben's face, though she couldn't imagine what he had to be anxious about. He leaned forward in the easy chair and finally began to reply, when the telephone rang, somewhere downstairs.

"That's Mr. Barnaby's private line, in the study," he said. "I'll have to go down there to answer it. I'll be right back."

He departed before she could say anything, and she heard him taking the main stairs two at a time.

Ben picked up the study phone and said, "Hello?"

"It's me," Penny said. She was calling from the house phone, in the kitchen, to give him an excuse to get out of Gwyn's room, according to plan.

He sat down heavily in Will Barnaby's leather chair, behind the desk, leaned his elbows on the blotter and said, "Elaine told me that the kid would be dopey—from all the drugs she had this morning and from her own state of mind."

Apprehensively, Penny said, "And she isn't?"

"Depends on your definition of 'dopey,' he said. "She's not her usual self, to be sure. But she's a damn sight more alert than I expected her to be."

"What happened?"

He said, "She got inquisitive. She wanted to talk about the fishermen, and I think she was close to telling me about you—about the ghost."

"But she didn't?"

"Not quite. However, she did ask me what I knew about ISP, and she proved to be damned knowledgeable on the subject."

"You don't think she knows?"

"No. Maybe she suspects something . . . though she musn't know just what. She thinks maybe the fishermen are behind the ghost."

Penny said, "Ben, maybe we shouldn't go through with it."

"It's not that bad," he said. "I didn't mean to put you on edge, Penny. I only wanted to warn you that she's not a walking zombie, like we thought she'd be at this stage."

"She may catch on—"

"No, she won't," he said. "She'll tumble for it, and we'll break her down tonight for sure."

"Well—"

"Think of all that money," he said.

"I've been thinking of it for a hundred years."

"We're too close now to back off."

She was silent a moment, then said, "You're right. I'm going to go up there now and scare the hell out of that kid."

"That's the stuff."

"You be ready, according to the script."

He said, "Have you ever known me to miss a cue?"

"Never."

"Okay, go to work, love."

The final act had begun.

NINETEEN

When darkness came to Jenkins' Niche, it brought Paul Morby with it, more of a ghost than Penny Groves could ever have been. For eight years, Morby had been a member in good standing of the United States Army's Green Berets, one of the world's most deadly, violent and insidious guerrilla warfare fighting forces. He'd spent four long years in Vietnam, having completed more than three hundred missions into enemy-held territory, all of which ended in success. He had killed men, and he had suffered no remorse, for that was what he had been trained to do. When he finally checked out of the service and came home, it was clear to Morby that his fortune lay in the use of those tricks and talents which the army had taught him, and he applied the methods of war to domestic, personal problems—for a fat fee. He had worked for out-and-out criminals, for borderline operators, and for men who were ostensibly honest, such as William Barnaby. Thus far, he had never had to kill anyone for money, and he avoided those jobs in which murder was almost essential or highly likely. He burned down houses, set up banks for men who wanted to rob them, and committed a dozen other prosecutable felonies, all without regret. The Green Berets preferred men with few scruples, then bred the last dregs of honesty from them. It was not in Paul Morby, then, to be sorry about anything that he did. When he came into Jenkins' Niche, just after dark, he did so with only one thought: do the job right, earn the money.

He never thought about taking the money and leaving the job undone, for he wanted to be given any repeat business that Barnaby might have for a man like him, in the future.

Like any good craftsman, he knew that the quality of his product must remain high, higher than any competition's product, if he were to survive at doing what he liked to do. The only difference between Morby and any other craftsman was that Morby's craft was far more dangerous than most; and his end product, rather than some tangible piece of goods like a pair of shoes or a leather wallet, was destruction. Morby liked to destroy, because it was exciting. He couldn't imagine going through life as a clerk or nine-to-five office worker.

He came in by sea, in a midnight black wet suit and diving tanks. He had entered the water farther up the shore, out of sight of the Niche, then swam just below the surface until he rounded the point and struck in among the docked fishing craft. Behind him, on a thin chain latched to his waist, he towed a waterproof tin box which contained the tools of his trade: a well silenced pistol with two spare clips of ammunition, a plastic-wrapped package of gelignite plastic explosives, a mini-timer to set off the charge when he was well away from the scene, and a set of keys which could open the locks on almost any boat made.

The docks were built out from the beach, forming a perfect cover for his final approach. He swam in beneath one of these and came out of the water in the shadow of the old wooden planking, where no one would see him.

He pulled back the black rubber hood that clung tightly to his head, and when his ears had adjusted, he could hear laughter and voices, not too far away along the beach.

Morby smiled to himself, because he knew that, in a little while, none of these men would feel much like laughing.

Unsnapping the chain from his waist, shrugging out of his oxygen tanks, he opened the tin box and took out his pistol, the gelignite, the timer and the keys. The last made a brief jangling noise as he tucked them into a snap pocket of the wet suit, but he was confident that no one had heard them.

Cautiously, he left the shadow of the pier and went to scout around, to locate the bulk of the fishermen who had the night duty in the Niche, and to find the most likely target for the gelignite. Barnaby hadn't cared which boat was blown up, just so one of them got ripped to shreds.

"The cops will find traces of the gelignite," Morby had warned.

Barnaby had said, "But it's the only way to be sure the boat's a total loss?"

"Yes," Morby said. "A fire can be fairly rapidly extinguished on a boat. If I set a fire, I'd have an escape problem, and I doubt I'd end up doing much damage."

"The gelignite, then," Barnaby said. "And so what if they find traces? Do you really think they'd come back to me, a respectable man of the community, a millionaire?"

"You're the only one who wants them out of the Niche, though," Morby said, jabbing a thick finger at the older man.

"That's true," Barnaby had said. "However, why should I pull a stunt like this when they'd have to be out in thirty days anyway?"

"That's a good point," Morby had admitted. "That ought to convince the cops that you're clean, that on top of your good name and all your money." He gave Barnaby a searching look and said, "But I've wondered the same thing myself. Why *are* you going to take a risk like this, when they'll be gone in thirty days, anyway?"

"That's personal," Barnaby had said.

And Morby, aware that he could not push the point any further, had let it drop at that.

Now he was prowling the Niche in the darkness, listening to the fishermen exchange jokes around a large beach fire, and staking out the most likely looking ships to see which he wanted to blow to smithereens.

Morby went over the side of the *Princess Lee*, padded along the gangway to the galley steps, went down these one at a time as silently as a cat on cotton. The galley door was closed, but not locked. He pushed it open without any trouble. He went in, followed a corridor aft, until he found a place against an inner partition, where the gelignite would do its best work. He bent down and began to mold the plastic charge to the base of the wall, stringing it out just enough to rip up the major seam in the floor and let the water in soon after the flames.

In a minute, he was finished. He picked up the mini-timer, set that to a full five minute fuse, jammed it into the gelignite.

He stood up, folded the plastic wrappings and stuffed those into another safety pocket in his wet suit.

The job finished, he turned to leave—just in time to encounter a middle-aged fisherman in blue jeans and a sweatshirt; the man had just come down the galley stairs, as quietly as Morby had, though his quiet had been that generated by familiarity and not by purposeful stealth. He stepped into the corridor and flipped on the overhead lights, bathing Morby in what seemed an intense, white glare.

Morby brought up his pistol.

The fisherman gaped at the sight of the big man in the diving suit, for he had clearly not known there was anyone down here.

"What the hell—" he began.

Morby shot him three times, all in the chest.

The fisherman dropped like one of his anchors, stone dead.

Morby waited, very still, for someone else to follow the dead sailor. When a full minute had passed, he realized that the man had been alone.

Quickly, then, he walked down the corridor, stepped over the body and went up onto deck, without a glance backward. He had not wanted to kill the fisherman, but he'd seen no other possibility. The man had caught sight of his head, his face, and would be sure to remember him. Though Morby lived just outside of Boston, he kept a summer cottage at Calder, and he would have been spotted by this man sooner or later.

Now, with the mini-timer's fuse rapidly running down, Morby went over the side of the *Princess Lee*, swam to the beach and risked a quick run along the sand to the dock where he'd left his gear. It was still there.

He pulled up his hood, slipped into his oxygen tanks and buckled them across his chest.

The gelignite had not gone off.

He put the pistol and the ammunition clips into the tin box, sealed that, snapped the chain onto his belt. Lifting the box, he started forward, wading into the deeper water under the dock. When he was in up to his waist, the explosion lifted a dark lid off the world and let a fierce red-white light in. The noise followed: like the worst thunder in the world.

Morby grinned, waded deeper, then went under. In the confusion on the beach, it was easy for him to swim out of Jenkins' Niche unnoticed.

TWENTY

While Ben was downstairs on the telephone, Gwyn got out of bed, chose a pair of clean pajamas from the bureau, and went into the bathroom to freshen up and to make herself more attractive. Her hair really needed washing, but once she brushed the tangles out of it, it didn't look too bad. She washed her face, powdered it slightly, applied a thin coat of clear, moisturizing lipstick. Slipping into the clean pajamas, she looked and felt like an altogether different person than the girl who had just eaten supper. She was still tired, very tired, but not so weary as she had been these past two days. And, right now, though sleep was attractive, she did not long for it in quite such an unholy fashion as she had this afternoon.

When she came out of the bath, Ben Groves had not come back yet—though the dead girl was there.

“Hello, Gwyn.”

She stepped around the apparition, went to the bed and got under the sheets, as if it had not spoken.

“That's not a nice way to be.”

She said nothing.

She prayed for Ben to return.

The ghost came and stood at the foot of her bed, raised its arms in her direction. “The longer you ignore me, the more you try to shove me out of your life, Gwyn, the harder it is for me to stay here.”

“Then, go away.”

“You don't mean that.”

“I do.”

“Without you?”

“Yes.”

“But don't you love me?”

Gwyn said, “No.”

“I'm your sister, your blood!”

“You aren't.”

The dead girl made a face, disgusted, and she said. “Don't persist in these foolish denials.”

“They aren't foolish at all. My sister died when she was a little girl, when she was only twelve. You're a grown woman, someone else altogether or a figment of my imagination. No matter that you look like me, that you look like Ginny. You're not.”

“I've explained this all before, Gwyn.”

“Not to my satisfaction.”

“Gwyn, I do need you. The other side keeps tug-ging at me, wanting me back. If you won't accept me, I can't stay here. But I need you, more than I've ever needed anyone or anything, to make things more pleasant on the other side, to have someone to talk to.”

“I'm imagining you,” Gwyn said.

“You aren't.”

“I may be going mad, but I know it. That's something, anyway.” She was trembling badly.

The ghost climbed onto the bed, making the mattress sink at the bottom, and she crawled up toward Gwyn. She touched Gwyn's bare arm with her fingertips, and she said, “There, now, does that feel like a figment of your imagination?”

Gwyn said nothing.

“I've told you that, temporarily, I'm as real as you are, as fleshy as you, and not to be ignored.”

“Then you'd better get out of here before Ben gets back,” Gwyn said. “If he sees you—”

“Oh, he won't.”

“I thought you said you were as real as me, tem-porarily?”

“I am,” the dead girl said. “But a ghost has cer-tain abilities that come in handy. I can keep him from seeing me, if I wish.”

Gwyn said nothing.

“Please speak to me, Gwyn.”

“I'd be talking to myself, then,” Gwyn said. “And I really don't need that. So why not go away.”

The dead girl studied her closely for a moment, then crawled even closer on the bed. She said, “Gwyn, I'm your sister, and I love you, and whatever I do is for your own good.”

Gwyn was quiet.

“It's better for you on the other side, with me, in death. Here, you have no one, no one at all; you're alone and afraid, and you're clearly quite ill. I'm going to take you with me, for your own good.”

Gwyn did not realize the full import of what the dead girl had said, for she was still operating under the assumption that she could best handle the sit-uation by ignoring it. Then, a moment later, it was too late for her to puzzle out the specter's meaning, for the creature unexpectedly leapt on top of her, bearing down onto the mattress, locking her there with its knees and its weight, clamping two white, dry hands around her neck and feeling for a strangler's grip.

Gwyn frantically grabbed those ghostly wrists.

They felt solid.

She tried to push them away, to break the spec-ter's hold on her throat, but she could not manage that.

“It'll only hurt for a minute,” the dead girl promised her, smiling sweetly down in her face.

Gwyn reared up.

The ghost held her tight.

The pale hands increased the pressure on her throat, like the two halves of a soft but capable vise.

Gwyn gagged, tried to draw breath, found it dif-ficult and almost impossible to do even that small thing.

Terror, then, returned tenfold.

She let go of the wrist and struck out for the dead girl's face, dragged nails along the pale face and brought one thin line of bright blood to the surface.

The ghost cried out and let her go.

Gwyn heaved up again, with all of her might, holding back nothing, her system flooded with adrenalin, and she shoved the specter out of the way. She leaped out of bed, stumbled on a trailing end of the sheet and fell to the floor.

The specter grabbed the back of her pajamas.

“Ben!” she cried.

The word came out in a croak.

Gwyn squealed, rolled forward, freeing herself., scrambled to her feet. Even a couple of minutes ago, she would not have thought she had so much energy left, but now her strength seemed boundless, her endurance without limits.

“You can't run,” the specter said.

She started for the door.

It stepped in front of her.

“You can't run anywhere that I won't follow you, Gwyn.”

The dead girl started forward, holding her hands out, just far enough apart to allow Gwyn's neck to fit between the wriggling fingers . . .

“Ben!”

The name was louder this time, but would probably still not carry all the way downstairs.

The ghost was much too close.

Gwyn put her head down and ran forward, toward the door, struck the dead girl a glancing blow and

dashed into the upstairs corridor. She was disoriented for a moment, not having expected to escape, but located the stairs in short order and ran for them.

“Gwyn, come back to me!”

At the head of the steps, she collided with Ben Groves, who was on his way up, and nearly succeeded in knocking them both down the whole long flight in what would surely have been a deadly fall.

TWENTY-ONE

“Gwyn, what on earth's the matter with you? You were screaming so loudly I could hear you downstairs.”

He held her by her shoulders, tenderly and yet firmly, and he shook her until she stopped sobbing and was able to speak coherently again. She held onto his arms, glad to have him here, feeling protected by him as she had felt on the *Salt Joy* and on their walk around the grounds. She said, “I'm not losing my mind, Ben.”

He looked perplexed, then smiled tentatively. He said, “Well, of course you're not.”

“But I thought that I was.”

“You've lost me.”

She said, “It was the sickness, that you didn't understand . . . I was seeing ghosts, my dead sister, hallucinations—” It sounded foolish, like the babblings of a madwoman, as if she had already gone over the edge. She went on, nonetheless: “Now I know I wasn't having hallucinations at all, because she just tried to kill me, to strangle me.”

“She?”

“The—ghost. The woman pretending to be a ghost. I can still feel where her hands were on my throat.”

“You mean there's someone else in this house?” he asked.

“She was just in my room.”

“Let's go have a look,” he said.

“No.”

“Why not? Gwyn, if there's someone in the manor who doesn't belong here, we've got to see who she is.”

“I'm scared, Ben.”

He slid his arms around her, all the way, and gave her a quick, reassuring hug. He said, “There's no need to be scared, Gwyn. I'm here, and I'll take care of you.”

“Don't let her touch me.”

“I won't, Gwyn.”

“She must be a crazy woman.”

“Let's go see what this is all about.”

She turned around to go back with him, and she screamed, bringing her hands up to her face as if she could block out the reality by blocking out the vision itself. The dead girl, impossibly, stood not more than six feet away from them, smiling.

Ben said, “Gwyn? What is it?”

“There she is!”

He looked where Gwyn pointed, pursed his mouth, looked down at the girl at his side. He said, “There isn't anyone here but you and me.”

“There is!”

He gave her a searching look and said, “No one at all, Gwyn. The hallway's empty.”

“You don't see her?”

“There's no one to see, Gwyn.”

The dead girl grinned, wickedly now, and said, in a voice as thin as rice paper, “I told you, before, Gwyn, that we have a few tricks that come in handy.”

“She just spoke,” Gwyn said.

His grip on her tightened, but he said nothing.

“For God's sake, she just talked to me, Ben! You mean to tell me you didn't hear a word of it?”

But she knew that he hadn't.

He said, “No one spoke.”

“She did. Yes, she did.”

“No one but you and I.”

She remembered what Dr. Recard had said— that you could not be going mad if you thought that you were, that the truly mad person was ab-solutely sure of his sanity. Therefore, if Dr. Recard were to be believed, she must not be insane now, could be nowhere near insane; yet she remained uncheered by this reasoning.

The dead girl stepped toward her.

. “Stay back,” she said.

“I need you,” the specter said.

“Don't touch me!”

Ben said, “Gwyn, there isn't anyone here!”

The dead girl grinned, almost on top of her now, and she said, “A fall down these steps would do it, Gwyn. He'd think you fell, and then you'd be with me forever.”

Her head swam. In the back of her mind, leer-ing, she saw the head of Death, where it always lay at the edge of her memory, waiting to claim her just as it had claimed so many who were dear to her in years past. “No!” she said.

The dead girl reached for her, palms flattened, arms stiff. “Just a quick shove—”

Gwyn pulled away from Ben, who would clearly be no help for her, turned and grabbed the stair railing, started down toward the first floor as fast as she could go.

“Gwyn!” the ghost called after her.

And Ben, not hearing that other-worldly plea, cried, “Gwyn, what's gotten into you.”

She did not answer either of them, did not look back until, as she neared the bottom steps, she heard Ben scream behind her. She whirled in time to see him falling, head over heels, thumping rudely from step to step by the rail, clawing out for support—and then coming to a brutal and final stop. His head caught between two stairs railings, twisted and sheet-white, breaking his neck. His face was streaked with blood, his eyes bulging, more blood running from the corner of his mouth.

“Oh, God,” Gwyn said.

The ghost, smiling, stooped by the body. “He's dead,” she said. “Well, he'll be happier now.”

Madness?

Reality?

The dead girl stood again and started down the steps. “Well,” she said, “you've already reached the bottom, safely enough. We'll have to look for some other way for you to reach your end. But there are plenty, dear, so don't fret. And it'll be less painful than his end was, I assure you.”

Gwyn turned and ran along the hallway, deeper into the dark manor house, alone with the dead girl, so terrified now that she could not even cry, and could barely draw a breath. Madness . . . ?

TWENTY-TWO

The Kettle and Coach, on the outskirts of Calder, was more crowded than usual, and considerably rowdier than the Barnabys liked it, though neither was put out by the cloud of cigarette smoke that hung over the cocktail lounge, or by the roar of conversation that, by its very volume, almost ruled out conversation. They actually seemed to enjoy the close quarters, the hustle and the bustle, and they had a smile and a few words for almost everyone they saw. After all, the more contacts they made, the more sound their alibi for the eve-ning.

From the cocktail lounge, they went into the dining room, where they ate a leisurely dinner, ac-companied by a bottle of good wine and a lot of unimportant business talk between Will and Edgar Aimes. It was near the end of this dinner that waiter brought a message from the cocktail lounge.

“Mr. Barnaby?”

Will looked up, smiled. “Yes?”

“A phone call, sir. You can take it in the lounge.”

“Thank you.”

“Business?” Edgar Aimes asked.

“Our friend Mr. Morby, I should imagine.” He smiled at Mrs. Aimes, who had no idea who Mr. Morby was and never would. He said, “You will excuse me,” as if she were the only important person at the table.

His special attention took her mind off Morby. She flushed and said, “Of course, Will.”

He followed the waiter to the lounge and had the proper telephone pointed out to him, tipped the waiter a dollar, waved away the man's profuse thanks, and stepped into the glass booth, drawing the folding door tight shut behind him.

“Hello?”

“Morby here.”

“How are things?”

“The job is finished. I thought you'd like to know that it went well, as smoothly as it could have.”

Barnaby smiled. “I bet those tramps were screaming their heads off, eh?”

“I wouldn't know,” Morby said. “I don't stick around to see how a job affects anyone.”

“Well, I would have,” Barnaby said, chuckling.

“And you'd never last in a profession like this,” Morby said, without rancor, as a man might say the sun will rise in the morning.

“Perhaps you're right.”

“Of course I am,” Morby said. “And if you've any work for me in the future, don't hesitate to call.”

“I won't.”

Morby hung up.

By the time he got back to the dinner table, Barnaby was feeling like a million bucks, or better. And if the second half of tonight's plans were running to schedule, he'd actually be worth far more than a measly million, in just a few months time.

The young fisherman was not going to back down from his position, and the longer he held to it, the more he stirred up the men who were listening to him. His name was Tom Asher, and he swore that the *Princess Lee* had not been ripped open by an explosion in her fuel tanks nor by any gas fumes trapped in a lower hold. He said, “It was plastic explosives, as sure as I stand here. I was in Vietnam eighteen months, and I saw that kind of blow-up a hundred times. If it'd been a gasoline explosion, from the start,

you'd have had a fireball, a big mushrooming effect. But this was compact and neat, ripping right through the top and right through the bottom of the boat. The fireball, what there was of it, came later, when the gas tanks went. You could see that, a second explosion a few seconds after the first. And from the smallness of the fireball, I'd say her fuel tanks were nearly empty. No, it wasn't an accident. It was a shaped charge, a planned blow-up."

Jack Younger (the elder), was a squat, muscular man with a full gray beard and bushy sideburns, a chest like half a barrel and arms as thick as the limbs of large oak trees. He was the strongest of the fishermen, and he was the most reasonable as well. Right now, he felt as if he were the only thing holding back a second explosion that might be far more damaging than the first.

He said, "Tom, you can't seriously be saying that the *Princess Lee* was sabotaged?"

"I'm saying it," the young fisherman told him.

"But who would do a thing of that sort?" Younger asked.

His son stood next to him, a pace or two behind.

He admired his father immensely, and he could usually expect him to win out in any contest of fists or wits. Tonight, however, it was evident to Younger (the younger) that Tom Asher was going to carry the largest part of the group with him.

"I've already named the culprit," Asher said.

The other fishermen murmured agreement.

What was left of the *Princess Lee* had burned and sunk in the water of the Niche and had not set fire to any of the other ships, thanks to the quick reaction of all present. Now, the campfire had died down too, and they were all illuminated by an eerie red glow that left the tops of their faces swathed in darkness and turned their chins the color of blood.

"Barnaby?" The elder Younger asked.

"Yes. Who else?"

"But, Tom, use your sense. Why would he resort to some stunt like this, when we must be out of here in another month anyway?"

"That man's not sane," someone behind Asher said.

"He's nuts," Asher agreed. "You can't ever say what a nut is going to do—or why."

"You don't become a millionaire if you're nuts," Younger cautioned them, wagging a finger like their father.

"Now, Jack," Asher said, "you know Barnaby was born a millionaire. He didn't have to earn it, not a penny. He's still nuts, I say."

"But where's your proof?" Younger insisted.

"Aboard the sunken *Princess Lee*," Asher said. "The state police will find fragments of the plastic explosives."

"And will that lead back to Barnaby?"

"It may. That stuff's not easy to get."

Younger sighed and shook his burly head. "Do you think that a creampuff like William Barnaby could sneak in here—"

"Come off it, Jack!" Asher said. "You know I'm not trying to sell the idea that Barnaby did it him-self. He would have hired someone to do it. He *did* hire someone!"

"Again—proof?"

"I, for one, don't need proof," Asher said. His features looked like the lines in a grotesque horror mask as the dying firelight washed up over him and bled away into the night.

"Great," Younger said, "a lynching."

"No one said anything about that," Asher said. "We'll just go to the manor and confront him with it. We'll make out—as if we saw the man that did it. How's he to know we're lying? If we play it right, we can get him running scared, and he may let something slip."

"That happens in the movies, not in real life," Younger said.

Someone said, "Have you forgotten, Jack, that Scott was aboard that boat when she went up, and that there's likely no piece of him left bigger than a quarter?"

They were all very silent.

"I haven't forgotten," Younger said, sadly.

"Then what the devil are we waiting for?" Asher wanted to know, his face screwed up as if his impatience was a bolt which had tightened inside of his head. He had always been in favor of taking a harder line against Barnaby; now, with the death of Scott against the *Princess Lee*, he felt that his stand had been the right one all along.

Younger frowned and said, "Well, I see that you're set on it and there's no talking reason to you, no considering what alternatives we might have."

The men muttered agreement.

"We'll take my ship, then," Younger said. "But there will not be any violence when we get to the manor, no rock throwing, no window smashing or any contact with Barnaby beyond the verbal. I will not tolerate that, and I'd turn my best friend over to the coppers. Understood?"

"You're right," Asher said, "We only want to confront that scum with what he's done."

"And that'll come to naught," Younger said.

"Maybe it will, Jack," Tom Asher admitted, now that he had won the main battle and felt that he could afford to make a few small concessions for the sake of unity. "But really, Jack, what else can we do and still keep our self-respect?"

Younger had no answer to that.

They stamped out the fire and drowned it with several buckets of seawater, then boarded the *Wan-da Lynne*, the thirty-six-foot Younger ship.

When they were under way, Jack Younger drew his son close and, in a voice too low for anyone else to hear, said, "You stay by me the whole time, you hear?"

"Sure, Dad," the boy said.

"If there's any trouble, no matter how harmless it seems at the start, you don't join in with it, but you run."

Jack Younger, the younger, nodded agreement. As they set out of the Niche toward the open sea, he wondered what knowledge, if any, Gwyn had about this affair . . .

TWENTY-THREE

Fleeing from the bloody scene on the stairs, her thoughts in a turmoil, Gwyn reached the end of the long, main corridor and pushed open the swinging door, stepped into the dark kitchen, aware that the dead girl was not terribly far behind her. She crossed the kitchen to the outside door, put her hand on the knob before she realized what a fatal error she had made.

Once she left the manor house, she had to cross a long expanse of open lawn before she could reach either the sheltering woods or the steps down to the beach, and the specter was certain to see which way she was going, and give chase. Once her destination was known, she had no hope of hiding there.

On the other hand, if she remained in the house, she could creep from room to room, down the complex hallways, up and down the main and back stairs, like an animal avoiding a hunter, both of them in a confusing maze. The house was certainly huge enough for . . .

Still standing there, unable to make a decision, she realized how ludicrous her plans were. Since Ben had been unable to see the ghost, then it was either real, or a figment of her imagination, in which case there was no hiding from it.

Abruptly, she had a disconcerting thought: sup-pose it were imaginary; then who had pushed Ben down the stairs? The answer was chillingly clear: she had pushed him herself.

With the realization that she might be, on top of everything else, a psychopathic murderess, she put her face in her hands, as if her fingers could close out the world. She might have frozen there, in terror at what was happening around her and to her, might have finally broken down if she had been given another full minute or two of silence in which to contemplate her own sickness; however, the specter called out to her from the hallway beyond the kitchen door, jolting her with that by now well-known, ethereal voice. "Gwyn?"

Thrust into action by the circumstances, with no time to think, Gwyn knew instinctively what she must do. She pulled open the rear door to the back lawn and, without stepping outside, she slammed it loudly. Then, moving quickly and noiselessly to the can cupboard, she opened that door, stepped into the tiny closet, and pulled the door almost shut again, leaving only a tiny crack through which she could watch the area of the kitchen by the back door.

Almost at once, the swinging door pushed in-ward, and the specter glided across the kitchen floor to the back door, stood there peering out at the empty lawn.

Gwyn held her breath, sure that the lovely demon would turn toward her, smiling, reveal that she had not been fooled at all.

When a moment had passed, however, the ghost shouted, in a rather unghostly manner, "Ben!"

He arrived in the kitchen a few seconds later, spattered with a dark liquid which, in the semi-darkness, was not easily identified as blood.

"She's left the house," the dead girl said.

Gwyn watched from her hiding place in the can cupboard, in shock, as the dead man joined the specter at the back door and, leaning toward the glass, stared intently at the lawn.

"Which way did she go?" Ben asked. He sounded exactly as he had sounded in life.

"I don't know," the dead girl told him. "By the time I got here, she was out of sight."

"You're sure she went out there?"

"I heard the door slam."

He looked around the kitchen, but did not seem to see the cupboard as a hiding place. He said, "Damn!"

"What do we do?"

“Go after her, of course.”

The dead girl was not at all happy about that prospect. She said, “Look, Ben, she's probably gone over the edge already, what with that routine on the stairs. She won't know whether the ghost is real or whether she's imagining everything, but in either case she won't hold onto her sanity. She's probably sitting out there babbling to herself under a tree. We can just wait until Barnaby comes home, go find her, have her examined and committed, and our job is done.”

He thought about it a moment, then said, “No, that won't do.”

“Why won't it?”

He said, “We've got to be sure.”

“I'm already sure.”

Ben said, “But if she catches sight of me, all smeared up like this, after she's just seen me with a broken neck on the stairs, and if I start giving her that spiel about dying so she can be with us, she's bound to flip out. Then we'll *both* be sure the job's done right.”

The dead girl said, “I don't like this whole job. I like it less and less every minute, and I wish we'd never taken it.”

He put his arm around her and said, “There, there, love. You don't mean that.”

“I do mean it.”

“Just hang on a couple of more hours,” he said. “Then we're done, and we only have to sit around and wait for the money to pour in.”

“If he pays us.”

“He has to pay us.”

“Not if he can find some way around it,” she said. “And what can we do if he refuses to pay—go to the Better Business Bureau?” She laughed somewhat bitterly.

In the cupboard, Gwyn shook her head, as if she thought this was all another delusion and that she could rattle it out of the way. It remained, however, unfolding slowly, whether delusion or reality.

Ben said, “Barnaby will pay. Look, he'll be grateful as hell to us when this is done; without you, he'd not have been able to pull it off. Hell, if he hadn't seen you, he wouldn't even have thought of the whole bit. Besides, he's as deep into this as we are. And, baby, what he's giving us is only a lit-tle dribble of the bucketful he'll get his hands on.”

“I guess you're right.”

He kissed her cheek. “I always am. Now come along, love, and let's see where the kid's gotten to.”

She said, “What if she ran for help?”

“The nearest help, by foot, is an hour away,” he said. “And I don't think she's got the strength or the sense of mind to make it. The best thing about the manor is its isolation.”

“But just suppose she does make it,” the dead girl said.

“Playing pessimist tonight, are you?” he asked. “Okay. Even if she reaches help somewhere, they'll need to settle her down before they can get the story out of her. Then, when she's told them about me—and about you—they'll most likely not believe a word of it. If they do, and if they come back here with her, we'll have you tucked away in the attic. I'll have got all the chicken blood cleaned up, and I'll simply explain that the kid has been having—unfortunate emotional problems.” He laughed, coldly. “We just can't lose. If we don't find her in an hour, we come back to the house and clean up and get ready for visitors. But my guess is that she's out there somewhere, completely cracked.”

“I don't know,” the dead girl said. “I wouldn't have fallen for this. It makes me creepy to think she would swallow it so easily.”

“She's been mentally ill before,” he said. “It was natural for her to think she was having a relapse.”

“I guess . . .”

“Come on,” he said, opening the kitchen door.

Together, they went outside, closing the door af-ter themselves.

Slowly, cautiously, Gwyn pushed open the pan-try door, waited in the shadows a moment longer to be certain that they were not going to return, then stepped out into the kitchen, crossed the room to the back door and looked outside. The pair of spec-ters, who were not specters at all, stood on the lawn ten

yards away from the house, still a frightening couple. They were calling her name in that same, eerie voice which she had thought, at one time, was so inhuman: "Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . ." That unsettling vocal effect was merely a gim-mick, a phony pitch that a professional actor might easily employ, though it sounded hollow and supernatural. They were surveying the woods where they thought she might have hidden, and gradually they became more comical and less terri-fying, more human and less unnatural.

As she stood there, Gwyn began to piece together tiny bits of data, previously unremarkable events which now linked into one chain of cause and effect and produced a bracelet of deception . . .

How unnatural it had been, after all these years, for Uncle Will to write the sort of letter that he had, how pat and perfect and too like a wish or a dream.

And, too, how odd that she had suffered no illu-sions of ghosts until she was securely in the manor house, under the watchful eyes of—she now realized—complete strangers. . . .

She realized other things as well: The interest which Elaine and Will had shown in hearing of her previous illness was not innocent, but the interest of a pair of vultures listening to their wounded vic-tim tell them how and when it would die and be available for a feast; Fritz and Grace's air of not belonging in the jobs they held—they too must be in on this scheme; the careful admonitions not to go near Jack Younger, not because he would harm her, but because he might convince her of a bit of the truth which would help her to discover the ruse they planned; the sleeping tablets, not meant to help her get better, but to weaken her, to let her slide back into the patterns of her old illness where she would be an easier target for the horrors they had planned to show her tonight; Jack Younger's assurance that her uncle was a bigot, so far as so-cial stations went, though she had thought he had outgrown that pettiness; all the talk at the begin-ning of her stay in the manor, about the view from her bedroom windows, so silly at the time, but ef-fectively reminding her of Ginny and priming her for the first visit of the ghost; the broom marks which she had seen and which her uncle professed not to be able to pick out . . . The list went on and on, so that Gwyn wondered, now, how she could ever have overlooked so many things, how she could have let them almost get away with this. She *had* been near to madness, after all.

However, even now, so soon after the revelation of the hoax, she could understand, just a little, why she had been ripe for this kind of thing. She had wanted to have a family again, wanted that so desperately, that she had been not only capable of overlooking flaws in Will and Elaine, but had been eager to see only the good in them. She had not wanted to do anything to shatter the hope they had given her, and as a result, she had played right into their hands.

There were various bits and pieces of the hoax which she had not yet found satisfac-tory explana-tions for: how the blonde girl could look so very much like her, and like Ginny, her exact double, in fact; how she could have known about the Teckert boy, whom Gwyn had forgotten about a long time ago . . . But, in the end, these were nothing more than technicalities, and they did not change the basic explanation of why she had fallen so com-pletely and so quickly for their deception: she wanted a family; she needed to be loved.

Out on the lawn, still calling her name to the night in those cold and unnatural voices, Ben Groves and the unnamed girl moved out of Gwyn's line of sight as they continued with their fruitless search. There was no kid sitting beneath a tree and babbling . . .

Gwyn turned away from the window.

She was not particularly angry with anyone, not with Will or Elaine or Ben or this unknown woman, not even as—moment by moment—she realized more fully just what they had been trying to do to her, how little they had cared about her, how utterly ruthless they had been. Instead of anger, she felt a deep, welling sorrow. She was de-pressed beyond measure by what had happened. Her love had been met by deception, her trust twisted and used against her. Because she had passed through so much of life without loved ones, she had passed through life alone—and, alone, she had never had the opportunity to learn, first-hand, how duplicitous human nature was, how often peo-ple used false affection to hide an inner hate. Now, having learned this lesson in one sudden sortie, she was literally stunned.

"Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . ." hollow and strange, but no longer frightening.

She shook herself out of her negative reverie, aware that she had no time to waste with her sor-row,

and she tried to decide what she must do next. Because her own belief in the hoax was, after all she had heard, still rather shaky, she felt that she must do some detective work, snoop around and find out as much as she could, to fortify her belief. Besides, though she knew, almost for certain, what hoax had been played and why, she had no proof of it to take to the authorities. Indeed, if she went to them with what she had now, they would humor her and, as her uncle evidently wished, eventually decide that she was quite incompetent.

She wondered why Uncle Will, a millionaire in his own right, would go to such lengths to get his hands on her fortune. Was it sheer malice, grown from dissatisfaction with his dead sister's husband's successes? Or had his own fortune, some-how, been dissipated, until he had nothing left of the Barnaby estate? Was his hoax, his ruthlessness, based on a desperate need rather than on jealousy and hatred?

No matter. She would find that out eventually, when all of the details were brought into the light. Right now, the most important thing was to take advantage of her solitary inhabitation of the manor, to do some unauthorized prying.

Where should she look first?

It was unlikely that anything having to do with the hoax would be left out in the open, or concealed in a room to which she would have unquestioned access. Therefore, the library and the study were out. Her own room, the kitchen, the dining room, just about every place . . . Except Elaine and Will's bedroom—and Ben Groves' room. She already knew who her aunt and uncle were and, to a lesser degree, *what* they were. However, she now realized, Groves was a complete stranger; and it was Groves who seemed to be close to the blonde who had taken the part of the dead girl.

“Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . .”

He had said they could afford to spend an hour out there, looking for her. That left fifty minutes for Gwyn to go through Groves' room. She headed for the main staircase, her heart beating rapidly, but the last of the self-doubts gone.

TWENTY-FOUR

The door to Ben Groves' room was not locked, and there was really no good reason why it should have been, since none of the conspirators in this hoax had any idea that she would be clear-headed enough to tumble onto their secret. She pushed the door open and went inside without turning on any lights.

In the darkness, she crossed to the room's only window and looked out onto the front lawn, where she could hear the "ghosts" calling her name, still: "Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . . Gwyn . . ." In the dim light of the stars and the moon fragment, she saw that they were down by the edge of the woods, their backs to the house, scanning the trees, hoping to scare her out of them. If they intended to inspect the entire perimeter of the forest, they would be down there a long while yet.

Gwyn found the drawcord for the flimsy set of under-drapes, drew those shut, located the second cord and pulled the heavy, velvet main drapes into place. These were backed by a thick, rubberized material that was sure to keep any light from pass-ing through. She inspected the edges of the window and the place where the velvet panels met in the middle of the glass, and she satisfied herself that there was no crack that would betray her to the people on the lawn.

She turned on the lamp by the bed and began her search.

Feeling like a shameless busybody or like a sneak thief, but not about to call it quits already, she opened all of his bureau drawers and went through his clothes, piece by piece. She even un-folded his shirts to see if he had hidden anything in-side of them, papers or photographs, anything at all. She did not know what she might find, and, in the end, she found nothing at all.

Next, she went through the six drawers in the high-boy, through his collection of soaps and col-ognes, through the jewelry box, gloves, socks, beach towels, sweaters—and through a collection of souvenirs of Europe, and an inordinately large number of mementoes of Great Britain. She ex-amin-ed each of these but found nothing worth-while in them, nothing that seemed to be ap-plic-able to her present problem.

She looked behind the bureau and behind the high-boy, finding nothing but dust.

She looked under the bed.

Nothing.

She lifted the edge of the mattress.

Again: nothing.

In the single closet, she took out four suitcases and opened those, found each of them empty.

She removed his suits from the hangers in the closet, and she went through the pockets of each of them.

She found nothing.

However, as she lifted the last suit off the closet rack, she saw the flight of stairs, leading up into pitch darkness, and she knew, without understand-ing how, that they led to what she wanted.

Quickly, she returned to the lamp by the bed, turned it off, went to the window and parted the heavy drapes, to see where Ben Groves and the girl were now. Unfortunately, they were no longer in sight, a development which she should have ex-pected but which nonetheless made her heart race and her hands shake against the soft velvet. Though they had given up on the woods, they might not have given up on the search itself. She hoped that was the case. Most likely, they had decided she wasn't in the trees and had gone down to the beach to look for her; she would have to pray that that was the case.

She drew the drapes shut again, left the room and went out into the upstairs hall. There, she stopped with her back against the wall, very still, and listened for voices and for the stealthy tread of feet on loose floorboards.

The house was quiet.

She was pretty sure that she was still alone.

Moving quickly again, she went to the back stairs and down to the kitchen, where she got a flashlight from the utility drawer near the oven. She paused for an instant by the back door, to see if Groves and the girl had returned to the rear lawn; they had not. Then, she went back upstairs again, without turning the flashlight on, having gotten quite adept at finding her way in the dark.

Back in Groves' room, after checking the drapes for cracks again, she switched on the flashlight and went to the closet, ducked inside and went up the stairs to the attic.

She estimated that she had better than twenty minutes, perhaps as much as half an hour, before Groves and the girl would come back to the house. She planned to make good use of each of those twenty minutes, and she had a premonition that she wouldn't need any longer to get to the bottom of the last few mysteries that surrounded this hoax.

Groves and his wife stood on the night beach, squinting both north and south along the silvered sand, she in a white dress of many layers that was not unlike a funeral shroud, and he spattered with chicken blood that had begun to dry and get sticky.

"I simply can't understand where she's gotten to," he said, more to himself than to Penny.

She said, "Let's go back."

"Not yet."

"Ben, if she'd gone crazy, we'd find her wander-ing around in a daze. She wouldn't be crafty enough to go to ground as she has."

"Don't be too sure about that," he said. "The mad can be terribly clever at times."

"But its all begun to fall apart on us," she said, miserably.

"Shut up, Penny."

"But it *has*."

He grabbed her and shook her, violently, as if he could rip her loose of her growing anxiety, then let her go so suddenly that she almost fell. He said, "Come to your senses, for God's sake! We haven't lost her. It isn't that bad. She wasn't on the lawn, and she wasn't in the woods, so she must be down here on the beach. It's as simple as that."

"Unless we've overlooked her," Penny said, sullen.

"I don't think we have."

"But I do think we have."

He said, "Love, you've got to admit that the beach would be the most likely place for her to come to, more so than the woods. After all, the beach has certain, ah, associations for her."

Penny looked at the sea and hugged herself as it lapped across the beach like a series of huge tongues. She said, "Ben, you don't think that she's drowned herself?"

"Highly unlikely," he said.

"She was very wrought up."

"It's still unlikely."

She said, "Barnaby will kill us if she did."

"Barnaby won't kill anyone," he said.

"But if he doesn't get his money, we're sure not going to get ours, and then all of this has been for nothing."

His voice got ugly, and he snapped, "I told you to shut up! We have not lost her, and she hasn't drowned."

They stood in silence for a moment, listening to the sea, to the wind, hoping to hear a girl crying . . .

At last, he called out, "Gwyn!"

They got no answer.

"Gwyn!"

Penny joined him: "Where are you, Gwyn?"

Groves set off southward along the beach, ex-aminig the deepest shadows close in to the cliff.

Back at the Kettle and Coach, the Barnaby-Aimes party had finished their dinner, finished dessert and the bottle of wine, and they had all returned to the cocktail lounge, which was as crowded and noisy as it had been earlier in the evening. Now, however, neither Will nor Elaine Barnaby enjoyed the hustle and bustle. It seemed to both of them that the second call they'd been expecting was long overdue.

Will looked at his watch: 11:04. If the kid had held up this long, if the Groves hadn't been able to drive her over the brink in two or three hours, then the success of the entire plan might be up in the air.

At quarter past eleven, Mrs. Aimes said, "It's so rowdy in here. Why don't we all go back to our place, for a nightcap?"

Edgar Aimes looked at Barnaby inquiringly.

"I don't know—" Will said. He looked at his watch again and said, "I'm expecting another call here, and I don't want to miss it. It's a rather important—business thing."

"At this hour?" Lydia asked.

Elaine said, "Isn't it ridiculous, Lydia? But I'm sure you have the same problem with Edgar. When you manage to get a man like this to go out for an evening, he simply can't let go of the business reins and really relax."

Lydia sighed and nodded, slipping easily into the role of the proud but beleaguered wife, which Elaine had led her to. She said, "I know only too well what you mean."

Barnaby said, "Well, if you women wouldn't find so many ways to spend what we make, we'd not be turned into business zombies, and we'd be able to relax."

Lydia smiled at Elaine. "He has the same line that Edgar always uses. I just ignore it."

Elaine laughed and said, "I always try to have a comeback, but I think you're right. Let's ignore him."

Edgar Aimes, having picked up on the ample clues that the Barnabys had given him, and far more observant of such things than his wife, called the waiter and ordered another round of drink. He said, "Well, it may be rowdy, but I'm really enjoy-ing myself tonight."

Lydia said, good-naturedly, "If I'd drunk all that you have, so far, I imagine I'd be feeling good too."

Aimes laughed and patted his wife's hand. "I promise you won't have to carry me home, dear."

"If I had to, I wouldn't."

Barnaby looked around the cocktail lounge and said, "You hardly ever see this place full of so much life."

"Full of noise, you mean," Lydia Aimes said.

Barnaby looked at his watch again: 11:24. What in the hell was keeping Groves' call from coming through?

TWENTY-FIVE

The manor attic was extremely dusty, hung thick with cobwebs in all its corners, unused except for a circular area that had been swept clean around four, large steamer trunks. All of these black, oblong, metal boxes were large enough for Gwyn to curl up in, all were latched, though unlocked. She put her flashlight down on the seat of an easy chair that was not dusty and did not seem to belong up here, directing the beam on the trunks. Then she finished throwing open the latches, lifted the four lids, and began to go through the contents.

She found the rest of Ben Groves' personal belongings, a lot of his clothes and a couple of cases of professional stage makeup. She found similar cases of makeup for the girl, a great deal of women's clothing, and nice costume jewelry. She also found four fat, well-maintained scrapbooks bound in leatherette and stuffed with clippings and she was instantly sure that these were the things that she had hoped to find, even though she had not been able to define their existence, beforehand.

She went back to the easy chair, lifted the flashlight out of the way, and she sat down with the books.

For a moment, she could not bring herself to open them, as if this last act would seal the theory of a hoax, as if she were not already sure and could turn back the clock. Then, with the help of the flashlight, she opened the scrapbook which bore the number One, and she began to read . . .

They met back at the stone steps in the cliffside, after he had gone south along the beach and she had walked north, and neither of them was leading the girl.

He said, "No luck?"

"Obviously."

She sounded as weary as Gwyn Keller had been during these last two days, as if she too had been drugged.

He said, "Did you walk in close to the cliff? The shadows there are so damned dense that she could easily hide in them—and there might even be caves to the north, just as there are to the south. She could have found a cave and crawled back into it, out of sight."

"I thought of that," Penny said. She sat down on the stone steps, massaging her neck with both hands. "But there weren't any more caves—just shadows."

He looked out to sea, wiped a hand across his brow to pull off a film of perspiration, and he got a hand slick with re-liquified chicken blood. He wiped that on his trousers and said, "I simply don't buy that other thing."

"Other thing?"

"Suicide. I don't think she drowned herself, yet—"

"Perhaps we drove her too far."

Without responding to her, he walked down to the water's edge, hunkered and dipped his hands in the frothy seawater that washed over his feet, scrubbing the blood from between his fingers. That had been a good trick: the fall down the steps, the blood. He had spent two years as a Hollywood stuntman at one time, and he knew how to make that sort of thing look realer than real. He had practiced the fall a hundred times before Gwyn had arrived at the manor house. The blood had been contained in a small, thin, plastic bag which he had taken out of his pocket when her back was turned, tucked into his cheek. During the fall, he had bitten the bag open and let the blood spill out, as if it were his own. Very real. Neat. The only problem was that, now, even when he'd splashed a lot of water in his face, he could taste the damn blood. He would have given anything, just then, for a glass of only slightly diluted mouthwash . . .

Though he couldn't have that, he felt much better when his face was clean, and the cool water seemed to have cleared his mind as well. He thought again about the possibility that Gwyn was floating, dead, in this same sea, perhaps quite near-by, but he rejected it at once. And, simultaneously, he realized there was another possibility . . .

He went back to Penny and said, "Let's go back to the house. She might have avoided us in the woods, somehow, and then gone back into the house when she saw us come down here."

"I don't think we're ever going to find her," Penny said. "At least, not in time."

He pulled her to her feet and kissed her once, quickly. "Cheer up, love. We'll find the little bitch. And we'll win this yet."

The first scrapbook recounted—through dozens of newspaper clippings from their hometown newspapers, tiny snippets of gossip columns in which they had been mentioned, letters from fans, reviews of their work, souvenir casting lists of shows they'd been accepted for, ads for motion pictures in which they'd had bit parts, publicity type sheets, theater programs and hundreds of photographs of them with their actor friends—their individual careers before they had met each other. He had been Ben Groves, then as now, and she had been Penny Nashe, which she still was, at least in her career. He had started out as a stuntman in Hollywood—which explained how he could have made that spectacular fall down the stairs without really hurting himself—and she had been an understudy for a famous Broadway actress, in a hit musical. All of this memorabilia gave Gwyn a picture of two bright, stage-struck, at least minimally talented, eager and ambitious young people, who had the looks and the desire to make it big in show business. But there was nothing here that explained how these two were capable of driving a young girl mad, sheerly for profit.

Oddly, in these pictures, Penny was not the exact double for Gwyn that she was now. In the past, there had been a terribly strong resemblance between them, of course, an uncanny likeness that anyone would have seen in a moment. They could have been taken for sisters—but never for identical twins. How had the likeness increased? How had Penny Nashe become her exact double?

The second scrapbook opened with about fifty wedding pictures, all in color: Ben and Penny, both attractive and snappily dressed, the happy couple, standing before the altar, having rice thrown at them, being driven off in a limousine; later, the reception, feeding each other cake, dancing, laughing with guests, caught up in a whirlwind of love . . .

Gwyn looked away from the scrapbook, wondering how such a pair, so much in love, could end up—just a few short years later—to be mixed up in a hateful thing like this hoax. But, she knew, there was nothing to be gained from such speculation, because they were mixed up in it, and facts were facts.

Then, as she leafed through the rest of that book, and quickly through the next, she had some idea of what had driven them to this, to working for Will Barnaby. The tone of the scrapbook changed, from one that promised big success just around the corner, to a sad and sorry account of repeated failures: parts in shows that quickly folded on Broadway, smaller and smaller bit roles in films, and those in films that always seemed to lose money, a lot of benefit performances to stay in practice, then a round of the cheaper summer stock, another descension to work at various year-around New England barn theaters, the move to Britain, the failures there as well . . .

She closed the books, not wanting to know any more of the details, and she returned them to the trunk. She closed the lid on that box and slid the latches in place, and began to paw through the final mound of stuff, though she thought she'd found enough.

All the way up the long flight of stone steps, with a chill wind sweeping down over them, Penny Nashe-Groves tried to think of some way to convince Ben that it was time for them to get out, to call it quits and admit that this job with Barnaby had been just another failure. If they didn't leave now, tonight, she was sure that they were going to get caught in their own trap. Perhaps this was an irrational fear, but it was a very real one to her. She didn't think they were going to achieve what they'd been hired to do; they weren't going to be able to drive the kid crazy. Several times during the past few days, she had been surprised by Gwyn's ability to face up to sessions with the "ghost" and still hold onto her sanity. She had seemed tougher and more resistant to a breakdown than Barnaby had said she would be. There was a

special strength in the girl, perhaps a strength that she didn't even know she had, which came from a long time of sorrow, a strength built upon disaster, a dogged determination not to be crushed altogether. It was the kind of strength neither she nor Ben had proved to have; when times had gotten rough for them, they had given in, taken the easy ways to money, doing things she no longer liked to think about—and finally agreeing to participate in this charade with Will Barnaby. Because they lacked this strength, while Gwyn had it, there was no way they could defeat her.

But how was she to get this across to Ben? She loved him, but she had to, admit that he was bullheaded. He'd set his mind on taking the money Barnaby had offered them, and he would die trying for it, if he must. Nothing she could say would change his mind. Therefore, since she could not leave him, they were both doomed.

Her gloom must have been evident in the way she moved, for he put an arm around her slender shoulders when they reached the top of the steps, and he gave her a quick peck on the cheek. He said, "Chin up, love. This is our first big chance in a long time, and you know it. Our luck can't run bad forever, and this is where it changes. Believe me. This is where—this has to be where—it changes."

"I hope you're right."

"I am."

She knew, however, that he was wrong.

Nothing had gone right for them in longer than she liked to think about. She realized now that their bad luck was the result, not of Fate, but of their own character weaknesses. Each of them, even before they had met, was over-reaching, trying for a stardom he didn't deserve. Together they had continued to over-reach, feeding each other's egos instead of helping each other get their feet back on the ground. Though they had wanted so much, they hadn't had the stamina, the will power, or the fanatical dedication to go after it and get it. And because they lacked that strength, they would fail here too.

She was still thinking about this when, halfway across the lawn toward the manor house, she looked up and caught sight of something that made her grab Ben's arm.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I thought that I saw—"

"Yes?"

He was looking eagerly around the lawn, this way and that, certain that she had spotted the girl, unaware that the situation might be far more serious than that, unable to accept the fact that everything, as she had warned him that it might, had fallen through. This was their one big chance. Their luck was turning. He could only imagine that she'd seen the girl and that they could pick up where they'd left off.

"Penny?" he repeated.

She stood close to him, but she was still feeling terribly lonely. She watched the third floor of the house, but she did not want to say anything, for she could not be sure if she had seen what she thought she had. She didn't want him to think she was foolish. If they were to lose all else this night, at least they should keep their self-respect and their respect for each other.

But then she saw it again, longer this time, and she cried out: "There it is again!" She pointed toward the attic window and said. "Up there, a moving light—maybe a flashlight. Do you see it, Ben?"

"The attic!" he said, his spirits sinking in the instant, staring at the one small window which Gwyn had never noticed.

"Oh, God!"

He said, "If she's gotten to the trunks—"

"She knows who we are," Penny said, miserably, leaning into him for support. "She knows every-thing about us."

"Maybe not anything to do with the hoax."

"She must know," Penny said. "If she was curious enough to go prowling around, then she must have had some idea even before she got to the attic." She tried to hold him tight with one arm, and she said, "Ben, let's leave now. Let's not even go back in there to get our things."

"That's impossible," he said.

"No, it isn't. We could—"

But he had broken free of her and was running toward the front door of the manor house. She could do nothing but follow him.

TWENTY-SIX

Gwyn found nothing more important in the last steamer trunk than the four scrapbooks, so she left the trunk's contents jumbled, closed the lid and slid the latches into place. It didn't much matter that she'd found nothing more, for she already had everything that she needed. She knew the nature of the mystery into which she'd fallen, knew the actors who had played in it, and she knew what she would have to do to extract herself from it, to ring down the final curtain.

Her Uncle Will had not outgrown his childish prejudices, but had reinforced them, if anything. He still hated her father, and he still cursed her mother for the marriage she'd made. It followed, too, that he hated her, Gwyn, as much or more than anyone, looked on her as a line of tainted blood in the Barnaby family. No wonder, then, that he could set up a plan to drive her mad, with little or no worry to his conscience.

When Ben and Penny returned to the manor, she'd be waiting for them, and she would confront them with everything that she knew and suspected, see if they filled in the last couple of holes for her. Then, she would pack and put her things in the car. If Will and Elaine had gotten home by then, she'd give them a brief but pungent going-away speech to let them know what she thought of them. If they were still out, she would go away without so much as a goodbye.

She supposed she could press charges against them, but she didn't want all the hassle that would involve. She had survived them. That was sufficient.

She went carefully down the attic steps, out through the closet and into Ben Groves' room. There, she turned on all of the lights, as she intended to turn on others throughout the great house. So far as she could see, there was no good reason to maintain secrecy as to her whereabouts. The lights would draw Ben and his wife back to the manor much faster; and the sooner she had an opportunity to talk with them, to tell them what she knew, the better.

She stepped into the hall, illuminated by the yellow wash of lamplight that spilled out of the room behind her, and she was brought up short as Ben shouted at her from no more than ten steps down the hall.

"You! Stop!"

She whirled and shone the flashlight into his face, momentarily blinding him.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"What are you doing here?"

"You appear healthy for a dead man," she said.

He stopped, unable to find a response.

She said, "I know all about you."

Behind Ben, Penny moaned softly.

"The show's over," Gwyn said.

"You had no right to go snooping," Ben said.

She laughed at him and said, "Look who has suddenly turned into a moralist!"

He took another step toward her, his expression more menacing than subdued.

Quickly, backing against the door frame and keeping the beam of the flashlight centered on Groves' face, she said, "I know enough to have both of you tossed into jail, if I want to see that. I know that you're actors, that you were hired by my uncle to make me think that I'm losing my mind."

"Ben, let's get out of here," Penny said.

"Shut up," he told her.

"Ben—"

“Shut up!”

Gwyn said, “I know that the whole thing was a set-up in order to put me over the edge and get me declared incompetent by a court. Uncle Will needs money, and my inheritance runs past ten million dollars. When I turn twenty-one, in a few months, I should take over its management; but if I’m committed to a mental hospital, someone will have to be appointed guardian and manager of the estate. Who else but Uncle Will?”

“Ben?” Penny called.

He ignored her altogether now, and he took another couple of steps toward Gwyn. His expression was not at all that of a chastened man, but full of bitterness and a dark determination.

“It’s over with, don’t you understand?” she asked.

“You can’t hurt us if you’re dead,” Ben Groves said. He was very nearly on top of her now.

“You wouldn’t hurt me.”

“Wouldn’t I?”

“Ben, don’t do it, please don’t,” Penny said, following after him, pleading.

Gwyn said, “Don’t you see that if you kill me, you’d just be making things worse for yourself? You’d be liable for murder, then, not merely for conspiracy to drive me mad, or to defraud me or whatever. Besides, my death wouldn’t help you at all.” She was amazed at her own intense calm, the way the words spilled out of her as if she were just talking about the weather and not about her life, which hung in the balance. She said, “My estate would be tied up in court for years. If the state didn’t take every last penny of it, and if by some far-out chance Uncle Will ended up with the left-overs, inheritance taxes would have reduced it by more than half, by as much as sixty percent.”

“So what?” Groves asked. “As far as I’m concerned, five million is as good as ten.”

Beginning to see that he might not be bluffing, that he might mean the threat, she said, “You stay away from me, do you hear? I’m warning you!”

He laughed, his face an ugly mask in the beam of the flashlight. He might be acting, trying to frighten her again, but she did not think that he was.

“Ben, what are you going to do?” Penny asked, sounding all alone and desperate.

“He’s going to kill me,” Gwyn said. She realized that the wife was a potential ally now. “He’s going to get you both sent to prison.”

“Ben—”

As much to himself as to his wife, Ben Groves said, “If she was to fall down the stairs and break her neck, no one would have to know that it was murder.” As he spoke, he did not remove his eyes from Gwyn, and he took another step in her direction; in a few moments, he would be close enough to grab hold of her . . . He said, “It would be a nice, clean accident, a very sad thing to have happened, but something that could be in no way construed as an accident. I could even say that she’d been screaming about seeing a ghost and being visited by her dead sister just before she fell, and then all of this charade we’ve been through wouldn’t go unrewarded. Dr. Cotter could testify that she’d had some hallucinations; since he’s not in on this, he’d make a very good, very reliable, very convincing witness. There’d be no risk to us . . .”

“Don’t touch me,” Gwyn said.

“You can’t hurt her,” Penny said. She had been willing to drive the girl mad. However, the idea of spilling blood repulsed her. Madness was a quiet illness, an invisible one that could be forgotten in short order by those who had caused it; a broken neck, on the other hand, was the kind of thing nightmares were made of.

“Stop him, Penny,” Gwyn said.

“Stay out of this, Penny!” Groves said.

“You’ll go to prison, both of you, no matter who throws me down the steps,” Gwyn warned.

In that instant, Groves leaped forward, grabbed her, and pulled her out into the hall.

The flashlight slipped out of her hand as, too late, she realized it might have made a good weapon to use against him. It dropped to the floor and rolled lazily against the far wall, making no noise at all on the carpet, but casting huge and eerie shadows all around them, making this the haunted house they’d tried to

convince her that it was.

Gwyn felt his hands go for her throat.

She tucked her chin down.

He forced her head up and got a grip on her neck, just the same.

She wrestled furiously, trying to break free, but she found that he was even stronger than he looked, all muscles that were more than a match for her, even with her special strength that fear gave her.

She kicked his shins, hard.

He growled, and his face was contorted with pain; but he did not let go of her, nor did his grasp slacken.

“Ben, don't hurt her!”

Listen to her, Gwyn pleaded.

His hands clutched her with a more brutal determination than Penny's hands had shown when the actress had been playing Ginny's ghost earlier in the evening. Gwyn felt dizzy and nauseous, and she didn't know how soon she would black out and be at his mercy.

She kicked at his shins again.

“Damn you!” he snarled.

She twisted, bucked, tried to wriggle away from him.

Frustrated with her, he pulled her around, rushed her backward and slammed her up against the corridor wall, effectively cutting down her freedom of movement.

Then, miraculously, Penny was there beside them, pulling at his right arm, trying to make him give up a useless battle, trying to give Gwyn an opportunity to break away.

Groves was beside himself now, and he was in no mood to be dissuaded, not even by Penny. He said, “Get away from me, damn you.”

“I won't let you hurt her!”

“Get away, damn you, you bitch!”

Though she was clearly stunned by the ex-pletive, she did not let go of him, but continued scratching his arm with her long nails, cutting bright red streaks in his thick biceps.

Suddenly, he let go of Gwyn with one hand, swung that hand and struck his wife across the face.

She fell down.

Now that he was holding her against the wall with only his left hand, Gwyn realized that this was her last best chance of escape, and she put out a burst of effort, kicking and clawing and even biting him, until she suddenly broke from his grasp and ran.

“Hey!” he shouted.

She made for the back steps.

“Ben, let her go!” Penny shouted.

But he came after her.

She felt his hands grasping at her pajama blouse.

She leaped sideways, ran on, reached the steps and went down them, fast, so fast that she thought she'd surely fall and kill herself, just as he had pre-tended to do on the main steps.

At the bottom of the dark steps, as Groves started down from the top, Gwyn made use of the pantry again, as she had before when she'd made them think she'd gone out of the house, when she heard them talking together by the back door. She hoped that this similar ruse would work; if it did not, she was finished.

TWENTY-SEVEN

Just as Gwyn pulled the pantry door shut, leaving only a tiny crack to see out of, Ben Groves came off the stairs and into the kitchen, standing directly in front of her, breathing hard. His back was to her, and he was studying the shadows in the main room, to see if she were cowering in any of them. He seemed to have forgotten about the food cupboard in the wall behind him.

She hoped his bad memory didn't get any better.

"Ben, where are you?" Penny said, as she came out of the stairwell after him. She saw him, went to him and took hold of his arm. She said, "Won't you please let her go?"

He said, "I can't."

"Of course you can."

"I've got to find her."

"Ben, listen to reason."

He said, "You're the one who's unreasonable. If that kid gets away, we not only lose any chance at the money, but she can identify us, and we'll both end up in jail."

"Maybe she won't press charges."

"Like hell."

"Even if she does press charges," Penny argued, "they won't give us more than a year or so. That's not long."

"That's forever," he disagreed,

"With good behavior—"

"I'd go insane in a prison," he said.

Gwyn thought, from her hidden perch inside the pantry, that prison, then, would be ironically just punishment for him, after he had spent so much time to make her think she was losing *her* mind.

"You're just overwrought now—" Penny began.

He said, "You've also forgotten what it's going to be like to face Barnaby if that girl escapes."

"He'll have to suffer with the rest of us."

"That's hardly likely," Groves informed her. "He's too powerful a man, for one thing. And, for another, don't you remember the story of him hir-ing that guy to burn down that house, so he could force a man to sell the land?"

"So?"

"You seriously believe that a man like Barnaby, a man who has resorted to that kind of force in the past, would take what was coming to him? Of course he wouldn't. He'd cover his tracks so fast that we wouldn't have a chance."

"You mean he'd hurt us?"

He laughed bitterly. "Hell, love, I wouldn't be surprised if he took it in his mind to kill us."

"Oh, God, what a mess," Penny said.

"And my way is the only way out of it," he said.

"Killing her."

Groves said, "Yes."

"I didn't think it would come to this."

"But it has." He patted her shoulder and said, "Don't worry, love. I can handle it so that it'll look like an accident. We're going to come out of this smelling like roses."

Reluctantly, but finally convinced, Penny said, "Okay, kill her. But I don't want to have anything to do with this; I don't want to have nightmares about it for the rest of my life. I don't want any of the

responsibility, and I don't want to have to watch you when you—when you kill her.”

Gwyn would have laughed at this hypocrisy if her laughter wouldn't have given her away.

Groves said, “I've got to call Barnaby—”

“Why?” New fear replaced the note of resignation in Penny's voice.

He said, “He should be home to handle the aftermath of all of this. He'll be better prepared to take care of the cleaning up than I will, because he has more contacts. Don't worry, I'm not going to tell him what's gone wrong. With a little bit of luck, I'll catch the kid and have this over with before he gets here.”

“What can I do, anything?” Penny asked.

Gwyn knew, now, that there was no chance of using Penny as an ally in the future.

“Come along with me, to the study,” Groves said. “You can stay there when I'm done with Barnaby, and you can make sure she doesn't use the study phone. She's probably already been on the house phone, somewhere, and found that doesn't work. She'll think of the study line soon.”

Groves and his wife left the kitchen and entered the corridor, the swinging door squeaking shut behind them.

Gwyn waited where she was, wondering if he might be playing a trick, if he suspected she was nearby and intended to come back through that door without warning.

A minute passed.

Then another.

At last, feeling somewhat safer, she came out of the pantry and went to the back door, opened that and stepped outside, closed the door behind her, all without making a sound.

When she had heard Groves say that the main house telephones were out of order, her spirits had sunk to a new low, for she had intended to get to an extension and dial the police the moment she was free to leave the pantry. Now, that course of action was lost to her, and she had a bad moment as she thought that they were too clever for her, that they had thought of absolutely everything.

But that wasn't true.

They hadn't thought of the pantry.

Her spirits boosted again. And, she hoped, they hadn't thought of the three cars in the garage, either. They had expected her to lose her senses tonight, to totter over the brink, beyond help, beyond reason. Perhaps it had not occurred to them to bother disabling the cars; who, after all, would expect a madwoman to proceed rationally to the garage, pull up the door, look for the keys on the ledge where they were kept, and be off . . . ?

No one would.

She hoped.

She stepped off the rear patio, then thought better of exposing herself on the open lawn; she recalled how clearly Ben and Penny had stood out against the dark grass when she had been inside watching them. She went back to the wall, and began to circle the house, staying flat against it, crouching to crawl beneath any window that rose up in her path. In a few minutes, she reached the first study window, where warm yellow light spilled out onto the grass, and she felt a curious temptation to peer inside, to spy on her enemies once more.

That would be foolish, she told herself. She might rise up to look inside—and come face-to-face with Penny or Groves, who would be looking out for her . . .

But the temptation to be one up on them was too great to resist. She edged up to the window and cautiously lifted her head to peek in over the sill.

No one was looking her way.

Ben was standing beside the desk, holding the phone to his ear and talking animatedly. Apparently, he had her dear Uncle William on the line right now.

Penny sat in the swivel chair behind the desk, staring straight ahead at the bookshelves, as if she were mesmerized.

Gwyn realized, watching Penny, that though these people had come frightfully close to driving her out of her mind, and though Ben had nearly killed her, they were not professionals at this sort of thing, as they were on the stage.

The odds were not, she saw, so heavily weighted in favor of the Groves. Indeed, because her life depended on her success in getting away, and because they were not fighting for their lives, the odds actually might favor her.

Smiling for the first time in a long time, she ducked down again, crept under the window, and went on toward the garage.

TWENTY-EIGHT

At ten minutes past midnight, William Barnaby tipped the waiter another dollar for leading him to the proper phone again, then slid into the booth, closed the door, glanced around to make sure no one was lingering close at hand, and picked up the receiver.

"Hello?"

"You've got to come home."

"Groves?"

"It's me."

"What are you saying?"

"Come home straightaway."

Barnaby bristled at the implication of disaster, and he said, "What has gone wrong out there?"

"It's not so bad as you think."

"How do you know what I think?" Barnaby roared.

"Look, I think you should be here."

"What about Gwyn?"

"That's why I called."

"Did everything go all right?"

"Almost."

"Almost?" Barnaby asked, incredulous. "This wasn't the sort of situation where it could be 'al-most' right. It was work or fail!"

"Just come on home," Groves said.

"I won't—"

"And be fast!"

He hung up on Barnaby.

"Hello?"

The empty line hissed at him.

"Groves?"

But Groves, of course, was not there to answer.

Barnaby slammed the receiver down in its cradle and sat there in the booth for a moment longer, trembling, thinking furiously. The trick was to get home as soon as he could, but to do it without making either Edgar or Lydia Aimes curious. Edgar was not a strictly honest businessman. He would tolerate the use of a man like Paul Morby, in special cases, if there were enough money to be made to justify violence—but he would never tolerate something like what they'd intended to do to Gwyn . . . He must never know about it. And, of course, Lydia would tolerate neither Morby nor what had been done to Gwyn, making this a touchy situation.

Two minutes passed before he got up out of the booth and went back into the crowded cocktail lounge. All night, Lydia had wanted to leave, and only his and Elaine's insistence kept them there. She was going to think it strange indeed that he presented such an about-face, without warning and on the heels of another phone call.

By the time he reached their table, however, he thought he knew how to bring it off. He sat down and picked up his drink, took a sip of it and said to Elaine, "It was just Ben. Seems Gwyn wasn't able to eat, and now she can't sleep."

She picked it up beautifully. "Is she having any more of her—hallucinations?"

"Not really," he said. "But Ben's worried about her not being able to sleep. She just tosses and turns,

he says.”

“I think we ought to go home,” Elaine said.

“She’ll be all right,” Barnaby said.

“She’s been a fairly sick young girl.”

“There’s no need to break up the evening,” he said.

Lydia, seeing an end to the night and anxious for it, said, “I think Elaine’s right. From what she’s told me about Gwyn, the girl might be on the verge of a relapse.”

“She was fine all day.”

“But you can’t tell about these things,” Aimes said. His concern was not part of his wife’s, for he had also seen through Barnaby’s deception, and he realized there was some crisis brewing. He probably thought it had something to do with Morby. But whatever the cause of it, he was anxious to give Barnaby a chance to leave.

“Well, it looks like you’re all against me.” He tossed off the rest of his drink and said, “Let’s call it a night.”

They paid the check and went to the lounge where the men separated to get the women’s coats,

At the coat rack, Edgar said, “Morby?”

“Not exactly.”

“Don’t lock me out. This could mean my neck as much as yours.”

“You’re not involved,” Barnaby said. Then he took Elaine her coat, waited to walk to the parking lot with the Aimeses. Both couples had brought their cars, and they separated, at last, to board them.

“What is it?” Elaine said, when they got into her sportscar.

“Whatever it is, it’s bad,” he told her. “Let’s not waste any time getting home.”

TWENTY-NINE

Gwyn rolled up the first garage door, where the Rolls Royce was kept, stepped inside, walked to the tool cabinet bolted against the lefthand wall, and felt along the top of it for the keys, where she had learned that everyone in the house kept them.

There were no keys there.

Confused, she ran her hand back again, but still found nothing.

"We're one step ahead of you, dear," Ben Groves said, from the open garage door.

She whirled in time to see him step over the threshold toward her, his big body blocking all escape along that side of the car.

She turned, ran, rounded the nose of the Rolls and stopped to see what he was doing.

"A game of tag, is it?" he asked.

He had not rounded the front of the car after her, but stood across from her, the hood between them. He was smiling, as the safety light in the wire fixture overhead showed her.

"I won't prosecute you," she said.

"You say that now."

"I never intended to. I was just going to tell you that I knew what had been done, then I was going to pack and go away."

"What a story," he said, shaking his head and grinning. "Didn't anyone ever tell you not to lie?"

"I'm not lying."

"Of course." But he clearly did not believe her.

She turned and ran toward the open garage door, aware that he was running too, on the other side of the car.

She came out into open air, felt him take hold of her, screamed, wrenched herself loose and ran.

"Bitch!" he cried.

She ran toward the fountain, darted around it, put the four marble cherubs between her and Groves.

He came up on the other side, no longer smiling, his face set in a hard mask, his eyes hooded, his big hands flexing and unflexing and flexing again. He seemed to have decided that there had been too much chasing and that the time for the final catch was now.

"You getting tired, are you?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"You will, shortly."

She said nothing.

"I think it'll be over the cliff with you."

She shuddered.

"That ought to be quick and neat. Well, quick anyway. And it'll look like an accident, which is the most important thing."

"You'll never get away with it."

"Don't start that old song again," he said.

"It's the truth."

"There is no truth."

"I think you're the one who's mad, now," Gwyn said, watching him carefully, ready to circle the fountain if he should start around it in her direction.

"Not mad, just canny," he said. "There's a vast difference between wisdom and insanity, though the two often look alike."

Without warning, he leaped into the reflecting pool of the fountain and took three splashing steps straight for her before she realized what he was doing.

Again, she ran, harder this time, aware that he was right behind her and that, if she stumbled or hesitated for even a moment, he would be onto her and he would finish her.

She could hear his heaving breath and the pounding of his feet as he came up closer behind her. She ran back toward the garage, turned the corner and saw Penny coming out of the front door. She veered away from the woman and put her head down, trying to run even faster. Without thinking, in the darkness, she almost ran over the edge of the cliff; it loomed up, marked only by a few rocks which had been daubed with white paint, and she stopped just in time.

Whirling, she found that Groves had stopped a dozen steps away, and that he had her trapped. No matter whether she ran north or south, she would be paralleling the cliff and could easily be pushed off. She did not kid herself that she could run at him and squeeze by. He was too alert for that, now.

“Dead end, isn't it?” he said.

Abruptly, the sound of a racing automobile engine cut through the still night air, and the twin headlamps of a small car appeared on the drive, heading toward the house.

“You can't kill me now,” Gwyn said.

“Oh?”

“Someone's coming. They'll see!”

He smiled again, and he said, “It's only your favorite uncle, my dear. And surely you know that if I don't heave you over, he'll do the job himself.”

She turned to the right and then the left, looking desperately for some escape, when there was no escape, when all her options had been used up. It was then she felt him rushing toward her . . .

She fell flat and cried out to be saved.

As if in answer to her cry, the big man lost his balance, lunging for her where she no longer was. Then the air was rent with his own longdrawn, hideous scream, and he pitched out into emptiness, past the edge of the cliff, tumbling all the long way down to the rocks and the sand below.

Dazed by how quickly all of this was happening, Gwyn pushed up to her knees, then to her feet, and walked clumsily away from the brink. She saw Penny standing by the garage, her hands raised to her face to stifle her own screams, which she was not managing to do. She also saw Elaine and Will getting out of the sportscar, and by the expression on her uncle's face, she knew that she could not return to the house.

She turned and ran for the steps that led to the beach, ignoring whatever Elaine called out to her.

At the top of the steps, she risked a glance backward, then wished that she had not, for she saw that Will Barnaby was dangerously close and that he would most likely catch her before she had gotten a third of the way down the steps. If he did, then with one hard shove . . .

She turned and started down, just in time to col-lide with Jack Younger, the elder, and the couple of dozen fishermen who were on the steps behind him.

The big man grabbed her and steadied her. “What in the name of God is happening up here?” he asked, having just witnessed, from the beach, Ben Groves' deadly fall.

She tried to speak.

She couldn't.

Instead, she fell against him, hugging him as if he'd been close to her all her life, and she sobbed so hard that her stomach began to ache and her tears soaked his shirt.

She woke from a nightmare and sat straight up in bed, gasping for breath and calling for help in a tiny voice. Her fear was not abated when she realized that it had all been a dream, for she was in a strange place and could not remember how she'd gotten there.

Then, Louis Plunkett's pretty young wife opened the door and came in, looking worried, and Gwyn recalled the entire thing: the horror of the previous night, Ben Groves' death, being rescued by the fishermen, the police, the sheriff, the kind offer to stay here through the following few days . . . She had refused Plunkett at first, but had given in when she realized she could not bear to stay in Barnaby Manor,

and that she would have to stick around at least until formal charges had been placed against Elaine, Will, and Penny Nashe-Groves. They had gotten here quite late, after four in the morning, and she'd not been asleep until about five, near dawn.

"What time is it?" she asked Ellen Plunkett.

"You slept through lunch, and it's nearly sup-pertime, a quarter past five," the slight, freckled woman told her. "But you needed every minute of it."

"I guess I did."

Ellen sat down on the edge of her bed and said, "I heard you cry out. Are you okay?"

"I was having a nightmare."

"Those will fade away," the slim woman said. "Also, I thought you might want to know what your uncle's admitted to."

She nodded.

"It seems he met Ben and Penny Groves in Lon-don, when he and Elaine were there on vacation, saw her in a new stage show. The show, he says, was rotten, but the girl looked so like you that he got the idea for this hoax. Anyway, he'd known about your parents' deaths from the start, and he'd also known about your bout with emotional illness, about your Dr. Recard and everything."

"How?" Gwyn asked, amazed.

"He read about your parents deaths in the newspapers, despite what he told you," Mrs. Plunkett said. "And from that time on, he had you followed by a private detective agency. At least, Louis says it was that way."

"That's absurd!"

"Not particularly," the slim woman said. "Remember, you had a fortune coming to you, and he was your last living relative. Naturally, the situation gave him ideas, though he couldn't pinpoint a plan of action—not until he saw Penny Nashe. He talked to the Groves, found they were down on their luck, and talked them into taking on the job. Mrs. Groves underwent limited plastic surgery on her face, to make her look even more like you, and then your uncle wrote you that let-ter."

"Weren't Fritz and Grace in on it?" Gwyn asked.

"Yes. They're friends of the Groves. I believe Grace is Penny's aunt, or something like that."

"One other thing," Gwyn said. "Penny knew things about my childhood that even I'd forgot-ten." She explained about the Teckert boy.

"That's easily explained," Ellen said. "When Mr. Barnaby knew you were having emotional problems, he paid his detectives to raid Dr. Recard's files. They found a copy of your diary there, which you'd given the doctor for study, and they copied it. Penny could have used a wealth of information that you'd written years ago, but which you'd forgotten yourself."

"But why go to all this trouble?" Gwyn asked.

"Your fortune, as I understand it, would be enough to make a lot of people go to even more trouble. And your uncle was in very bad financial straights, both from high living and bad invest-ments."

"So it's over now," Gwyn said, sighing.

"Yes, it is," Ellen Plunkett said. "But there's a third reason I've come upstairs to see you." She smiled mischievously. "There's a boy downstairs who wants to talk to you. He says he's treated you rather poorly and that he wants to apologize. But I think he's here for more than that, because he men-tioned something about you and him going into Calder to take in a movie."

"Jack Younger?" she asked.

"That's right."

"I've got to shower and dress," Gwyn said. "He probably won't want to wait. I'll need an hour or—" She kicked back the covers and got up so suddenly she startled Ellen Plunkett. "Tell him I'll shower and dress fast and be down in fifteen minutes. If there's one thing I could use now, it's a good movie. I sure hope it's a funny one."

**TOPS IN
GOTHIC FICTION
from
LANCER BOOKS**

By ANGELA GRAY

75-197 **THE ASHES OF FALCONWYK** 95¢
75-203 **THE GOLDEN PACKET** 95¢
75-239 **THE GHOST DANCERS** 95¢

By DAOMA WINSTON

74-771 **THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER** 75¢
75-220 **THE DEVIL'S PRINCESS** 95¢
75-267 **THE MAYERONI MYTH** 95¢
75-296 **LOVE OF LUCIFER** 95¢

If these books are not available at your local book-seller, mail the coupon below along with the price indicated plus 10[^] to cover mailing costs to: LANCER BOOKS, 1560 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10036.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____