

Florence

your surroundings tomorrow. (Starts for door and follows her.) You can wait here.

MRS. SAVAGE. Alone?

MISS WILLIE. Of course.

MRS. SAVAGE. No handcuffs?

MISS WILLIE. We have the honor system. (Unlocks door L. and goes out. MRS. SAVAGE goes up to C. windows and tests iron grill-work.)

MRS. SAVAGE. Honor system, indeed! (Slowly the sliding doors behind her pull apart and the curious faces of HANNIBAL, FAIRY, FLORENCE, MRS. PADDY and JEFF appear. MRS. SAVAGE senses their presence and turns her head to glance behind her. Before she catches sight of her observers, the doors are pushed together with a resounding bang. She crosses C. after a moment, doors slowly part again, and the group enters silently.)

FLORENCE. Miss Willie says the bars are only there to keep the world outside.

FAIRY. Corny—isn't it? (As they cross down C., FAIRY comes face to face with MRS. SAVAGE's teddy bear on sofa. She balts abruptly.) Oh. (She backs away.) It's alive!

FLORENCE. Now, Fairy—you must stop frightening yourself!

MRS. SAVAGE. The poor thing's quite harmless.

FAIRY. It won't bite?

MRS. SAVAGE. It won't shed, lay eggs or bark. And—to the best of my knowledge—it's unvexed by sex. (Crosses down to bear and pats it.) It couldn't be less trouble.

FAIRY. In that case any friend of yours is a friend of mine.

FLORENCE. Perhaps we should introduce ourselves. You must be Mrs. Savage. I'm Florence Williams. (Offers her hand.)

MRS. SAVAGE. How do you do?

FLORENCE. We have been expecting you all afternoon. We're so glad to have you with us. May I introduce Fairy May?

FAIRY. (Fervently.) Say you love me.

MRS. SAVAGE. But—we've just met.

FAIRY. You don't have to mean it. I feel wonderful when people say they love me.

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, I'm sure everyone loves you.

FAIRY. (Gaily, to the others.) You see—I told you she wouldn't

be spoiled. (Then to MRS. SAVAGE.) Welcome to The Cloisters. Climate best by government test.

MRS. SAVAGE. Thank you.

FLORENCE. And this is Hannibal. (He bows.) And this is our Mrs. Paddy.

MRS. SAVAGE. How do you do, Mrs. Paddy? (Extends her hand. MRS. PADDY stares at it without expression.)

MRS. PADDY. I hate everything in the world but most of all I hate lightning, skunk cabbage, custard, mustard, spiders, blisters, girdles, mice, bees, keys, ragweed, chloroform, rhubarb, barnacles, bats, broken glass, eels, crumbs, drunks, tombstones, gallstones, salt and thunder.

MRS. SAVAGE. (Blinks and looks at her a moment.) Why don't you like rhubarb?

HANNIBAL. Mrs. Paddy won't answer you, Mrs. Savage. She'll only recite the things she hates.

FAIRY. Sweet but stubborn.

FLORENCE. Mrs. Paddy stopped talking about twenty years ago.

MRS. SAVAGE. Why?

FAIRY. She got mad.

FLORENCE. Her husband told her to shut up.

FAIRY. And she did.

HANNIBAL. She gave up conversation for life.

FAIRY. But she is only giving up electricity for Lent.

MRS. SAVAGE. (Takes MRS. PADDY's hand and pats it.) You're a woman of wisdom, Mrs. Paddy. There is only one thing wiser than saying very little and that's saying nothing at all. (MRS. PADDY reaches over and timidly strokes bear.) Would you like to hold it? (MRS. PADDY quickly picks it up and scurries across to her easel where she sits quietly—with her arms enfolding the bear and her cheek resting against its fur.)

FAIRY. She likes you.

MRS. SAVAGE. I like her.

FLORENCE. (Looks around and sees JEFF standing in background.)

Oh—you haven't met Jeff. Come here, Jeff.

JEFF. (Puts his R. hand to the side of his face as he comes down to them.) Please excuse my left hand.

MRS. SAVAGE. Certainly. Is it a toothache?

FLORENCE. (Placing her arm around JEFF.) Jeff's face is scarred and he likes to spare people.

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, you don't need to spare me. I have to look at myself every morning.

JEFF. Doctor Emmett refuses to let me wear a bandage.

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, we have to humor our doctors once in a while.

HANNIBAL. And now you have met everyone. We are a small group in this wing and we hope you find us comfortable to be with.

FAIRY. But Mrs. Savage hasn't met everyone. She hasn't met the Holy Terror.

HANNIBAL. Of course. How stupid of me.

FAIRY. Where is he, Florence?

FLORENCE. Well, he was here a few moments ago. (*Turns and calls:*) John Thomas!

JEFF. He might have gone out into the hall.

FLORENCE. I'll see. (*Dashes into hallway and disappears for a moment.*) John Thomas!

FAIRY. (*Quickly to MRS. SAVAGE.*) You won't hurt her, will you?

MRS. SAVAGE. Gracious! Why should I?

JEFF. You won't object, will you?

MRS. SAVAGE. Well—what is John Thomas?

HANNIBAL. Her son. What did you think?

MRS. SAVAGE. Here?

FAIRY. Oh, yes. He was born here.

FLORENCE. (*Returns.*) I can't . . . (*She stops—smiles—and points behind sofa.*) Oh, look! Asleep on the floor. (*She comes down behind sofa.*) My husband warned me I'd be a bad mother. (*Reaches down behind sofa and picks up a doll dressed in a denim romper.*) Mrs. Savage—this is my son.

FAIRY. (*Quickly.*) You like children, don't you?

MRS. SAVAGE. Everyone's but my own. (*Looking slowly from one to the other before speaking.*) How—old is he?

FLORENCE. Five.

MRS. SAVAGE. He's big for five months.

FLORENCE. No. No. Five years.

MRS. SAVAGE. I meant years.

FLORENCE. Will you excuse me now? I have to put him to bed. (*Walks to door.*) He has measles—I do hope you won't catch them. Excuse me. (*Goes out.*)

~~That was exceedingly kind of you, Mrs. Savage, not to notice anything wrong.~~

FAIRY. There wasn't time to explain. But you were like lightning.

HANNIBAL. Poor Florence isn't well. We pretend for her sake. We hope you will, too.

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh—I will.

HANNIBAL. I think you should understand right away, Mrs. Savage, that, except for Florence, the rest of us are free to leave here any time we want to.

JEFF. But we don't go—because there's no better place to go.

FAIRY. You're a very lucky woman to be accepted, Mrs. Savage, if I do say it myself. And I do. (*A small buzzer rings on wall above door L. It rings insistently. They all turn toward it with varying degrees of disdain.*)

HANNIBAL. Oh, do be quiet.

FAIRY. Tyrant!

MRS. SAVAGE. What is that?

JEFF. That rude noise is the signal for us to go to our rooms.

HANNIBAL. It's the evil of the machine age. Perfect pistons and no manners.

JEFF. Well—"Ours not to reason why ——" (*Stops.*) I wonder why no one ever quotes the first line. It's "Someone blundered." (*Starts out.*)

MRS. SAVAGE. Good night.

JEFF. (*Turns at door.*) I didn't hear you. We never say that. It means there's no more. (*Goes out quickly without explaining.*)

MRS. SAVAGE. (*To FAIRY.*) No more what?

FAIRY. (*Airily.*) Oh—there's no more of so much.

HANNIBAL. Don't let Jeff's manner disturb you. During the war his plane was shot down in flames. He hasn't quite recovered yet.

MRS. SAVAGE. Was his face badly burned?

HANNIBAL. Oh, not at all. Jeff bailed out. But he was the only one. He lost his crew. His scar goes deeper than we can see.

FAIRY. Surely you've guessed by now that Hannibal and I are the only guests here free to leave. We couldn't tell you that in front of the others—we pretend, to save their pride. (*MRS. PADDY rises from behind her easel with an indignant snort. With head held high, she puts bear down and stalks from room. FAIRY rushes ahead to guard light switch.*) I'm sorry, Mrs. Paddy. I'd forgotten you were still here. I didn't mean you, anyhow. (*MRS. PADDY continues baughtily out of room. FAIRY turns to MRS. SAVAGE.*)