

Ethel

FAIRY. Well . . .

FLORENCE. (Takes MRS. SAVAGE'S hand.) How do you do, Mrs. Savage—we have so looked forward to meeting you.

FAIRY. We're glad you're here at last. Make yourself at home. (FLORENCE starts to follow FAIRY to door, and stops.)

FLORENCE. Oh—I almost forgot. John Thomas asked me to give you something from him. (Comes back and kisses MRS. SAVAGE on the cheek.) He was afraid you'd catch his measles if he delivered it himself. (Starts out again.) Come, Fairy—let's pretend it's Garden Hour. (Goes out.)

FAIRY. Excuse me please—we have to dig weeds. (Smiles.) Take an umbrella—it's raining. (Goes out.)

HANNIBAL. Well, Jeffrey—what did you bring?

JEFF. Just a book. But I hope you enjoy it.

HANNIBAL. What is it, Mrs. Savage?

MRS. SAVAGE. (Takes book, reads title.) "The Life Span of the Ape." (Looks up.) Do you know I've never read it!

JEFF. I was lucky, wasn't I?

MRS. SAVAGE. I'm going to read it tonight. (MRS. PADDY comes running in with something clutched in her fist.)

HANNIBAL. We thought you'd forgotten us, Mrs. Paddy.

JEFF. What did you get, Mrs. Paddy? (MRS. PADDY pushes her fist out. MRS. SAVAGE uneasily allows her to unfold something in her palm.)

MRS. SAVAGE. (Opens palm and looks up, relieved.) Now, how did you know this was just what I needed? (MRS. PADDY beams.)

JEFF. May I see it?

MRS. SAVAGE. A genuine mother-of-pearl button. I'll sew it on at once. (Holds it to her throat. MRS. PADDY nods a furious denial. Goes over, picks up MRS. SAVAGE'S bag and indicates its missing eye.)

JEFF. I think it's intended to make an eye for the bear.

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, bless your angry heart—why, of course. (Goes over to MRS. PADDY and bugs her.) We both thank you. He's hated having only one eye.

MRS. PADDY. I hate everything in the world . . . (Stops and begins again.) I hate everything in the world . . . but . . . (Then finishes with the words tumbling out.) I hate everything in the world but you, and I love you and I wish you wouldn't leave us. (Looks up at MRS. SAVAGE and flees from the room.)

MRS. SAVAGE. (Watches after her a moment, then turns to the two men.) Why—she said she loved me!

HANNIBAL. Well?

MRS. SAVAGE. Aren't you amazed?

JEFF. Why? We knew it all along.

MRS. SAVAGE. Yes, but she spoke.

JEFF. She had to—to say it.

HANNIBAL. Well, Jeff—shall we see what the girls are up to? It's a lovely night and everybody's polite. (Goes to door and stops. Turns and speaks to MRS. SAVAGE.) Watch out—don't break your neck. (Goes out.)

JEFF. (Goes to door and stops.) You have a good seat. (Leaves quickly. MRS. SAVAGE stands alone a moment. MISS WILLIE enters.)

MISS WILLIE. I think I have everything. Here's your eighty-five dollar hat. I told you you'd want it again.

MRS. SAVAGE. My beautiful and foolish hat!

MISS WILLIE. You know, I think you've been wearing it backwards.

MRS. SAVAGE. (Turns it around.) You know—I have. It's good to be straightened out.

MISS WILLIE. Where did everybody go?

MRS. SAVAGE. They gave me going-away presents and then refused to say good-bye.

MISS WILLIE. I'll bet I can guess what they gave you.

MRS. SAVAGE. No, you can't. Mrs. Paddy gave me an eye with which to see myself. Florence a grain of salt to take with what I see.

MISS WILLIE. That's good. And Fairy?

MRS. SAVAGE. A memory of loveliness.

MISS WILLIE. I'm afraid to most people she wouldn't seem a lovely girl.

MRS. SAVAGE. She wears her plainness with great beauty.

MISS WILLIE. And Jeff?

MRS. SAVAGE. (Looks at her book.) The Book of Job.

MISS WILLIE. Nothing from Hannibal?

MRS. SAVAGE. (Pauses.) I'd say he gave me an appreciation of music I never had before!

MISS WILLIE. (Laughs.) Well, I have something to give you, too.

MRS. SAVAGE. You behave yourself.

MISS WILLIE. (Hands her a small package.) It isn't much.

MRS. SAVAGE. It better not be. (*Opens package.*) My bonds — (*Looks up.*)

MISS WILLIE. Except for a corner of one that I had to burn with the newspapers to make it look convincing.

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh, dear. Where did you find them?

MISS WILLIE. I didn't find them. I stole them when the lights went out.

MRS. SAVAGE. Why?

MISS WILLIE. I'm not sure.

MRS. SAVAGE. Don't tell me you're a kleptomaniac!

MISS WILLIE. (*Laughs.*) It was too quick to think. What bothers me is that after I took them, I toyed with the idea of keeping them.

MRS. SAVAGE. That's a normal impulse. What stopped you?

MISS WILLIE. What Jeff might think.

MRS. SAVAGE. You should get away from here, my dear. That kind of thinking isn't good for you.

MISS WILLIE. But you knew Jeff was my husband, didn't you?

MRS. SAVAGE. I certainly did not.

MISS WILLIE. Well, he is. I want to be here when he recovers. And do you know why I wouldn't keep any of that money? Pure selfishness. I want to do everything for him myself. Surely you understand that?

MRS. SAVAGE. The only thing I don't understand is how I could ever have felt so sorry for myself. Isn't there something about no fool like a you-know-what?

MISS WILLIE. Something. But I don't think it applies to you.

MRS. SAVAGE. (*Looks down at bonds.*) Does anyone else know about these?

MISS WILLIE. I told Dr. Emmett.

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, whether you want it or not, you're both going to hear from my Memorial Fund. (*DR. EMMETT enters.*)

DR. EMMETT. I talked to the Medical Examiner.

MRS. SAVAGE. Yes?

DR. EMMETT. The station wagon is outside ready to take you whenever you want to go. (*Turns to MISS WILLIE.*) Will you take Mrs. Savage's bag out to the car?

MISS WILLIE. Yes, Doctor. (*She picks up bag and goes out.*)

DR. EMMETT. I've a few papers for you to sign, Mrs. Savage—then you're free to go.

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh, I must be out of my mind, really. I don't want to go!

DR. EMMETT. You mean you'd prefer to leave tomorrow?

MRS. SAVAGE. I don't think I want to leave at all.

DR. EMMETT. Why do you want to stay?

MRS. SAVAGE. Suddenly—I'm weary. I would like to rest—I would like to be relieved of decision. I would like to be protected against uncertainty and accident. I would like to close my eyes at night and know that there are walls to guard my sleep.

DR. EMMETT. But the peace you find here is the moon reflected on a dark lake. Strike the surface and you destroy it. Is that the kind of peace you want?

MRS. SAVAGE. I want what everyone wants—to want nothing. These people have found contentment.

DR. EMMETT. How do you know?

MRS. SAVAGE. I have eyes to see.

DR. EMMETT. So has Jeffrey—but he sees only what he wants to see—an excuse for not facing the future. Does Florence see that her child was taken from her? Does Fairy see what the mirror should tell her? No. They've found refuge in an egg-shell world where you don't belong. For you see yourself clearly, I'm sure.

MRS. SAVAGE. Then where do I belong?

~~DR. EMMETT. (*Discs.*) In the world you can best serve. The impulse to live your life with courage was right. Go ahead with your Memorial. (*Starts for door.*) And don't be betrayed by the illusion of contentment. (*Stops at door.*) The door is open for you. Take your peace with loneliness. (*Goes out.* For a moment, MRS. SAVAGE stands looking about the room. Slowly she picks up bonds and ties box. HANNIBAL returns from hall, breathless, carrying his violin.)~~

~~HANNIBAL. Oh—I'm glad you're still here. (*Comes over to her.*) I just thought of what I can give you.~~

~~MRS. SAVAGE. Hannibal—not your violin!~~

~~HANNIBAL. Oh, no, you couldn't play it! But I can give you a song you can take anywhere you go. Here is your song. (*Lifts his violin and begins to play. The same two hard notes jar the nerves again.* MRS. SAVAGE listens with patience as he saws away. It is ugly and discordant. MRS. PADDY comes into the room behind MRS. SAVAGE. She lowers her head like a charging bull, and makes for the light switch. The room is plunged into darkness. For a~~