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Harlequin Presents...

**ANNE
WEALE**

wedding of the year



WEDDING OF THE YEAR

Anne Weale

"Don't encourage him," her mother told her

But the advice had come too late. Savanna Bancroft was already committed to the devastating and wealthy Jago Kindersley. Seeing her face on a fashion magazine, he had followed her to the Caribbean island and determinedly wooed and won her. Savanna never had a chance.

The bewitched Savanna, head over heels in love with him, had needed little persuasion. Yet, deep down, she knew that her mother's instinct was right.

It was all too perfect. There just had to be a flaw somewhere!

CHAPTER ONE

IN the scurrying crowd of commuters who streamed off the eight-thirty train when it drew into one of London's mainline stations on a frosty morning in February, Savanna Bancroft caught the eye because, even in flat- heeled shoes, she was as tall as most of the men around her; taller than some of them.

When she was wearing high heels, a man had to be ! exceptionally big to look down at her. Her father had stood six foot in his socks, and all his children had inherited his long bones and wheat-coloured hair. In the case of the four Bancroft boys, to be lanky was no disadvantage. For Savanna, in her early teens, to have legs like a colt and no bosom worthy of even the smallest bra had been a cause of deep depression.

Now, nineteen and no longer flat-chested, she was still on the thin side of slim, partly because, except when she was actually in bed, she was almost always on the go.

It wasn't that she was restless by nature. As the only girl in the family, with her mother disabled by arthritis, she had too much to do in the house to have time to relax.

All day she rushed about London from one appointment to the next. All evening she bustled about at home, doing the jobs which her mother couldn't manage.

Up to now, Savanna thought, she must be the least- dated girl in southern England. Until she was eighteen she had been totally absorbed in her studies. For the past year her evenings had been fully occupied in other ways.

Apart from the fact that most of the men she en countered in her working life were not interested in . women, she had to have eight hours' sleep at night. Who wanted to wine and dine a girl who had to be in bed by eleven o'clock in order to rise with bright eyes at seven next morning?

Showing her season ticket to the dark-skinned ticket collector at the barrier reminded her that, in a few days' time, she would be where his parents or grandparents had come from—the West Indies.

It would be her first assignment in a glamorous part of the world, and she couldn't help looking forward to it, even though her agent had warned her that she would be lucky to have any time for swimming in the warm sea, or sunbathing on the white beaches.

Apart from her height, there was nothing, at that hour of the morning, to make any of the male commuters give her a second glance. Dressed in trousers and a full-length raincoat, with her hair concealed by a knitted hat and her eyes by dark glasses, she looked very different from the girl on the cover of the new issue of *Vogue* which the man at the station bookstall was putting on display as she hurried past.

She had been in *Vogue* several times, although never before on the cover. But even if she had remembered that the magazine came out that morning, she would not have had time to stop and look at herself.

On the cover she was not wearing glasses, and her large, dark-lashed topazine eyes were made up to emphasise their jewel-like brilliance. Her lips, too, were outlined and shaded to make the most of their sensitive shape. With soft tendrils of silky blonde hair half hiding her forehead, and her chin snuggled into the collar of a fabulous fur, she looked ravishingly feminine and alluring.

And they say the camera can't lie! All done by mirrors and make-up—had been some of the teasing comments made by her brothers when they had seen the first *Vogue* photographs of her.

She had felt it was true. The camera, skilfully handled, could perpetrate fantastic lies; and almost anyone, taught to paint her face by an expert as Savanna had been, could create an illusion of beauty.

Really, she wasn't beautiful at all. It was merely a heaven-sent stroke of luck—for her family if not for herself—that Gerald O'Connor, a leading fashion photographer, had happened to be looking for a tall girl with a long

neck, long legs, no hips, and an unblemished skin, and had spotted her before any of the thousands of other girls with the same basic qualifications.

If, at the time of her father's death, it had been suggested to her that she should surrender her burning desire to go to university for the trivial career of a fashion model, she would have dismissed it out of hand.

She had been only seventeen then. A year later her outlook had changed. The chance to make money had seemed like a gift from the gods; and her personal ambitions had become unimportant compared with the needs of her family.

The daughter of a couple who had adored each other, and planned every one of their five children, Savanna had grown up in the warmest kind of family circle. For her parents, or any of her brothers, no sacrifice was too great.

The disappointing thing was that, although Gerald was rapidly fulfilling his promise to make her England's top model, she was not earning nearly as much as she had hoped. Or rather she was making a lot of money but without being able to spend it on her family's needs. Too large a slice of her impressive income was whittled away by taxes.

So it was with several worries on her mind that she took her place in the queue for taxis, unaware that, as *Vogue's* newest cover girl, she would excite much envy among her own sex; or that, later that day, on a Concorde flight to New York, a man would catch sight of her face and the course of her life would be changed for the third time.

Her flight from Heathrow Airport took off in the middle of the morning and lasted for eight hours.

She had been too excited to sleep much the night before. While most of her travelling companions were watching the movie, she slept. She slept not only through the film but while afternoon tea was being served, not stirring until Gerald nudged her. By the time she had stretched and was

fully alert, the great aircraft was only a few thousand feet from the island which was their destination.

To anyone watching it from the ground, the time was early afternoon. But although they had put back their watches, according to the passengers' body clocks it was now six o'clock in the evening. For some days they would suffer from jet lag or, in medical terms, the disturbance of their Circadian Rhythms.

With Gerald O'Connor and all but one member of his party, the first sign of this came before dinner when they began to smother yawns, their drowsiness increased by the rum in their pre-dinner drinks.

Only Savanna, who had slept for much of the flight and who never drank spirits, ate her meal with her usual healthy appetite and showed no sign of drooping even when, far away in London, it was long past her usual bedtime.

'I can't keep my eyes open. I'm going to turn in,' announced Janey, one of the fashion assistants, after pecking unenthusiastically at her main course and refusing a pudding.

The others felt similarly weary. They were all planning to take a sleeping pill to prevent themselves waking up between three and four in the morning. But, although she had followed Gerald's instructions and asked the Bancrofts' family doctor to prescribe some mild tablets for her, Savanna was reluctant to use them except as a last resort.

While the others retired to their rooms, she went for a stroll through the lantern-lit gardens between the low buildings of the hotel and the sea in which they had swum within an hour of their arrival.

At this hour the beach was deserted. She had it all to herself; half a mile of powder-fine coral sand lapped by water clearer and warmer than any she had ever bathed in.

Remembering happy family holidays on the west coast I of Scotland, in Guernsey and, one memorable summer, in Brittany, she stood watching the

sea, lost in thought until she was brought back to the present by a deep voice saying quietly, 'Good evening, Miss Bancroft.'

Startled, she turned to find the tall figure of a man standing near her.

'Good evening,' she answered uncertainly.

That he knew who she was suggested that he was on the staff of the hotel. But all the non-executive male staff wore a uniform consisting of white pants and boldly-patterned overshirts. It didn't seem likely that the manager or his assistant would be wearing jeans as this man was. Yet if he were a guest, how did he know her name?

He introduced himself. 'Jago Kindersley. How do you do?' He moved closer and held out his hand.

'How do you do?' Savanna echoed.

His unusual first name rang a bell. She felt sure she had heard it before. She put her hand into his, liking the strength of his fingers and the dryness of his palm.

The next thing he said was very odd. 'Good. I can't stand a feeble handshake in a man or a woman".'

It was a dislike which she shared, but it still seemed a strange thing to say, especially the 'Good.'

'Apart from ourselves, most of the people who arrived today seem to have gone to bed,' he remarked, as their hands drew apart. 'How is it that you aren't tired, Miss Bancroft?'

'I had a long nap on the plane.'

'You find air travel boring?'

In spite of the brilliance of the moonlight, it was difficult to see his face clearly because of the shifting shadows of the palm fronds rusding overhead.

She had an impression of dark skin stretched tautly over a bone structure very different in shape from that of the islanders. Their skulls and their features were rounded. His was an angular head, and a face chiselled rather than thumbd. High cheekbones. An aquiline nose. A chin aggressively square.

'On the contrary, I find it very exciting. So much so that I was tossing and turning most of last night,' she confessed. 'How is it that *you* aren't tired, Mr Kindersley?'

'Flying in from New York, I haven't suffered as much time displacement as you have. Also I have the knack of being able to sleep at will. In a mobile life, the ability to make up one's eight hours piecemeal is as useful as plastic money.'

'Goodness, yes, it must be invaluable. I wish I could train myself to do it.'

'It's a question of relaxation. Most people can learn to relax their bodies, but not always their mental tensions. Shall we take a turn along the beach?'

They were standing near one of the openings in the low wall which prevented the sand from encroaching on the well-kept lawns.

Apparently taking her assent for granted, he put his right foot on the wall and, bending, turned up his jeans. He was wearing French *espadrilles*, and when he took them off she could see that his feet were as brown as his ankles. He must spend a lot of time in the sun to be that dark colour all over—unless it wasn't a tan but his natural pigmentation. By moonlight it was difficult to tell.

'You can leave your sandals here. No one will take them,' he told her, with a glance at her slender feet. 'Did you buy them in Greece?'

'They were bought there, but not by me. They were a present from a friend who went to Rhodes for her holiday. I've hardly been anywhere yet.'

She withdrew a foot from one sandal which consisted of a leather sole held on by two straps, one across the tops of her toes, the second across her arched instep.

It had been her intention, before he had disturbed her reverie, to walk for a while by the sea's edge. But to stroll with a man she didn't know along a shore as sequestered as this one, particularly at its far ends, made her wonder if it would be wiser to return to her room and read herself to sleep.

He seemed to guess what she was thinking. His tone dry, he said, 'Have no qualms, Miss Bancroft. I have nothing in mind but conversation.'

Directed by Gerald, Savanna could look extremely sophisticated. She could also look angelically innocent as, in practice if not theory, she was. In her dealings with men she had a long way to go to catch up with her two closest school friends, Livvy and Clare. Neither of them would have flushed and floundered as she did.

'I didn't . . . that is ... I . . .'

'To be wary is sensible,' he said. 'A beautiful model is as exciting a quarry to some men as a rich man to certain women.'

'How did you know I was a model? Have you something to do with the hotel?'

'Apart from staying in it—nothing. A woman on my flight to New York had a magazine with your face on the cover. When you came into the restaurant this evening I recognised you.'

'Really? You must have an exceptionally good memory for faces.'

'You have an exceptionally memorable face, Miss Bancroft.'

'Thank you, but I still think it was clever of you to place me. I was much more made up for that cover than I am at the moment. How did you find out my name?'

'It wasn't difficult. If you had noticed me in the restaurant, and had you been sufficiently interested, you could have found out mine. But you were intent on your meal. For a slim girl you have a surprisingly hearty appetite.'

'I didn't have much breakfast or lunch. Are you here on holiday, Mr Kindersley?'

By this time they were moving briskly along the expanse of tide-washed firm sand between the crystalline sea and the soft beach where pale, nervous crabs scuttled back to the mouths of their holes as the two tall humans approached.

Glancing at her companion, who was walking on the seaward side of her, Savanna estimated that he was at least a couple of inches taller than her father and much wider across the shoulders.

Peter Bancroft had been a very thin man to whose gangling frame his wife had never succeeded in adding an ounce of extra flesh. Jago Kindersley was lean rather than thin, and there was plenty of muscle cladding his broad back and deep chest. He looked as if, like Benjy, her third eldest brother, he could take a lot of pummelling in the region of his belt buckle without being hurt by it, and his close-fitting jeans showed long muscular thighs. He walked from the hips, moderating his loose-limbed stride to match her shorter step, although not as much as with a girl of average height.

By moonlight his hair and eyebrows looked Indian- black, but beneath the strongly marked brows his eyes were not the dark brown she had half expected. They , were a much lighter colour, but whether blue or grey she could not tell.

In answer to her question, he said, 'No, I wouldn't call it a holiday, just a short break. I may not stay more than a day or two. It depends.'

'What do you do for a living?' she asked.

Having admitted to making enquiries about her, he could scarcely object to a little reciprocal curiosity.

'I'm an entrepreneur,' was his answer. 'If you know what that is,' he added.

'It means someone who brings together the components of an important commercial undertaking. In spite of my hair and my occupation, I'm not totally dumb, Mr Kindersley,' Savanna said coolly.

'I was hoping you wouldn't be.'

She stopped dead.

Two paces on, he checked and turned. 'What's the matter?'

'Why were you hoping I wouldn't be?'

He folded his arms across his chest, his left hand grasping his right elbow, the other hand covering his biceps. Exposed by his rolled up shirt sleeves, his forearms were hard and sinewy, lightly covered with dark hair which thinned out between his wrists and his knuckles. In relation to the rest of him, his hands were not large, although the long brown fingers looked as if they might fold into punishing fists if the need arose. There was a digital watch on his wrist, but he wore no rings, and no chains glinted inside the open collar of his dark-coloured shirt.

'However beautiful a woman is, she still needs a modicum of intelligence.'

The wind caught and tossed her hair. As she put up her hands to control it and her lifted arms tightened her thin shirt, she saw his glance shift to her breasts.

Forgetting that only instants before she had been appraising parts of him, Savanna felt a flash of annoyance.

She said, 'If, while I was concentrating on my dinner, you were picking me out as a possible diversion for your leisure moments, I think I should tell you that I shall be working non-stop. And even if I had time to spare, I shouldn't be interested in . . . in what you have in mind.'

She saw a flash of white teeth.

'You don't know what I have in mind,' was his bland response.

'Nothing intellectual, if you didn't even credit me with knowing what an entrepreneur is,' she said crisply, turning away to retrace her footsteps.

That patronising rider had touched her on a raw spot. It was one thing to give up her career plans in order to expedite the operation which might cure her mother's disablement and keep Joey, her youngest brother, at his expensive special school. That she could bear, and willingly. But to be taken for a pretty nincompoop ... a feather-brained clothes horse ... a sex object . . . *that* she could not bear. It made her hands clench with resentment.

Margaret, her agent, had warned her there would be men who would see her as a plaything or a status symbol, and it seemed that this man was one of them. His desirous appraisal of her body did not tally with his earlier assurance that he had nothing in mind but conversation.

On the strength of a few minutes' acquaintance, knowing nothing about her, he wanted her.

She half expected him to follow her, but he didn't.

When she reached the place where her sandals were beside his *espadrilles*, she saw that after she had left him he had gone to the extreme end of the beach and now was returning at a slow jog.

Perhaps he exercised the same way he slept, piecemeal, when and where he could. For a moment or two she watched him loping along the curving shoreline. At that distance he could have been mistaken for a man in his twenties but, close to him, she had judged him to be at least thirty, perhaps

thirty-five. Certainly a lot older than herself, and probably married or divorced as most men were by that age.

Walking quickly and quietly to her bedroom, Savanna felt sorry for a wife whose husband, away from home, looked with desire at other women.

Livvy and Clare, with whom she still had discussions and arguments about life and love, thought that her ideas were old-fashioned. Their parents' marriages had broken up long ago, and neither of them expected to find a man with whom they could live happily ever after. According to them, that was fairy-tale stuff: not real life.

But Savanna was the product of a marriage between two people whose occasional disagreements had only ruffled the surface of their long and exclusive love affair.

She knew with absolute certainty that her father had never been unfaithful to her mother, or she to him. From their first meeting during their teens to the day of her father's sudden death, soon after his forty-fifth birthday, Peter and Mary Bancroft had supplied all each other's needs. They had been friends as well as lovers, setting a standard for their children which Savanna intended to cling to through thick and thin.

She woke up at seven, local time, and, having half an hour to spare before the call from the switchboard arranged by Gerald the night before, decided to swim before breakfast.

Apart from two youths raking the sand and re-grouping the reclining chairs, there was no one about on the beach.

The early sun was gentle on her bare skin as she took off her wrap. In preparation for this assignment, she had taken a course of artificial sunbathing at a Knightsbridge solarium, and her body was golden, not white. Even so she would have to be careful not to burn when the sun rose higher.

To be wearing a bikini in February, and to be deliriously warm in the kind of setting she had often looked at with longing on the covers of the travel brochures, filled her with a joie de vivre which she expressed by running along the beach and turning a couple of cartwheels before leaping into the invitingly clear jade-tinted shallows.

Unaware that her high spirits had been witnessed by someone other than the two West Indians, she duck-dived under the surface and swam as far as she could until her breath gave out and she had to surface, her long hair clinging to her shoulders like spun sugar.

She had been enjoying her solitary sea-frolic for some minutes before she realised she had an audience. Immediately, her unselfconscious pleasure in the Caribbean morning gave place to the discomfiture of being caught off guard by a man whose society she had hoped to avoid for the rest of his stay.

'Good morning. How did you sleep?' he called, dropping the towel which had been slung over his shoulder on to the sand beside hers.

'Good morning. Very well, thank you.'

Deliberately, she turned away and began to swim into deeper water. She knew it was a futile manoeuvre should he choose to follow her, but she hoped he would take the hint that she wasn't in a companionable mood—or not as far as he was concerned.

Yet even as she swam away from him, she knew the reason she had been annoyed with him last night was not only because she had recognised his desire for her, but because she had felt the same way.

His fine physique, and the virile assurance of his bearing, had excited a reaction she had never felt before—and did not want to feel again except for a man she knew and liked and-respected.

To have been aroused by a stranger made her feel disgusted with herself. It offended the idealist in her, the romantic, the dreamer.

It wasn't that she was a prude. She had always liked poetry, and the erotic verses of the Golden Age of the English love lyric made her long to experience the raptures so graphically described by Cavalier poets such as Thomas Carew and Richard Lovelace. But it seemed a far cry from their descriptions of lovemaking to the shortlived sexual adventures which she saw going on all around her.

She swam well, having learned very young and thereafter competed with her brothers. But her crawl, although better than most girls', was no match for a powerful man's strokes. Jago Kindersley soon overhauled her, making it pointless to continue to exert herself.

She changed to a breast-stroke, and he to a leisurely back-stroke so that they were facing each other. Seen in sunlight, his eyes were an unusual true grey with no hint of blue in it. Cold eyes, in spite of the laughter lines at the corners of them. Hard eyes, matched by a mouth at once hard and sensual.

'Obviously you enjoy the sea. Do you snorkel?' he asked.

'No, and this will probably be my only chance to swim today. We start work immediately after breakfast.'

'Shall you object to my watching you do your thing?'

'Our photographer will,' she said crisply. 'Gerald doesn't encourage spectators.'

However, when Gerald O'Connor arrived at the beach a few minutes later and saw his protegee coming out of the sea, dwarfed by a tall, tanned man whose dark looks were the perfect foil for Savanna's bloneness, the photographer saw at once that the guy who had picked her up was as macho as she was feminine. If he could be persuaded to pose with her, the result could be some great pictures.

To Savanna, Gerald's arrival was a relief. She introduced them and went off to shampoo and shower, confident that he would know how to brush off Jago much more effectively than she could.

Although it was the first time she had been abroad with Gerald, she had worked on several outdoor locations with him. It was part of his style to involve passers-by in his pictures. Traffic wardens, street sweepers, postmen, office cleaners and many others had been seconded as background figures on previous assignments.

Last night he had spoken of using some of the hotel's waiters and maids, or possibly some of the countrywomen they had seen on the drive from the airport.

Contrast was what Gerald liked to achieve. The juxtaposition of a willowy model in expensive resort clothes with an outsize West Indian matron in a home-made dress and cotton headtie would be contrast at its most extreme.

When she joined the others for breakfast, and learned that Gerald had changed his mind and enlisted Jago as the principal member of her supporting cast, Savanna was horrified; the more so when she discovered that he was going to play the bridegroom to her bride in a honeymoon sequence.

'But he's not a professional. He'll be useless,' she protested.

'All he has to do is to look amorous, and he'll do that a hell of a lot more convincingly than most professionals,' said Gerald.

With this she was unable to argue, but it made her see that, if she couldn't deflect him from carrying out his new idea, she might be able to dissuade Jago from lending himself to it.

Making an excuse to return to her room, she went to the desk and asked for Mr Kindersley's number.

Her tap on his door was answered by a clear, 'Come in.'

She raised her voice. 'It's Savanna Bancroft. May I speak to you for a moment?'

The door opened. He must have come out of the shower only minutes before she had knocked. A towel was wrapped round his hips, the whiteness of the fleecy Turkish pile accentuating the bronze sheen of his torso.

Although, unlike Clare and Liwy, she was still a virgin, the male body held no mysteries for her. Growing up in a one-bathroom house with four brothers ranging in age from twenty-four to sixteen, inevitably there had been many occasions when she had seen all four without clothes on. The boys had been brought up to respect her modesty, and not to barge into her bedroom without warning; but her parents had seen no reason to curb their sons' casual attitude to their own nudity.

So why was it that, when the sight of a naked man would not ordinarily have startled or embarrassed her, Jago Kindersley in a bath towel made her draw back and feel uneasy?

He, for a different reason, also stepped back a pace. 'Won't you come in?'

'No, thank you. I—I just wanted to say that perhaps you haven't considered all the possible repercussions of this idea of Gerald's.'

He folded his arms in the same way he had the night before. It seemed to be a characteristic posture with him.

'What repercussions?' he enquired.

'I know it's only make-believe, but your wife may not like you pretending to be someone else's husband. She may feel people will laugh at her.'

'I'm not married.'

'Oh . . . aren't you?' Did he mean he was not married at present, or had never been married? 'Well ... in that I case, perhaps you haven't realised that it will take more than a day or two to photograph all the clothes we've brought out. We're here for a week.'

'I'm my own master. I can spend a week here if I want to.'

'But why should you want to? They won't pay you, you know—or not much. You won't get the professional rate.'

'I'm receiving a strong impression that you aren't at all keen on my taking part in this assignment,' he said dryly. 'I wonder why that is?'

She felt herself flushing at the mockery in his eyes. Clearly he was aware of his effect on her.

'If you knew more about most male models, I don't think you'd be keen either. They're nearly all homosexuals.'

'So I believe; but I don't think anyone is likely to jump to that conclusion about me. You asked why I had agreed to O'Connor's suggestion. The answer is simple; I want to get to know you better.'

She decided to be blunt. 'You mean you want to have an affair with me?'

'No, I never have affairs with girls of your age. You're a beautiful creature, Savanna, but don't overrate your desirability. You'll be twice as attractive at thirty, and certain women of forty, and possibly fifty, can give a man just as much pleasure as a smooth-skinned young thing like yourself.'

His mouth curled in a sardonic half-smile. 'The sexual instinct is inborn, but making love is an art which I think you have yet to learn.'

Her colour deepened. Baffled, she hurried away. If he didn't want to go to bed with her, why did he want to know her better? It didn't make sense, or none that she could understand.

It was a difficult day. Jago, the amateur, did all that was required of him with unruffled aplomb, but Savanna felt as stiff and unsure of herself as she had on her very first day in front of the camera.

She had gone to bed early, but was still sitting up with the light on, when her bedside telephone rang.

She expected it to be Jago, but it was Gerald. He wanted to come and talk to her for a few minutes.

The photographer's private life supported Jago's statement that some middle-aged women might have little to fear from pretty girls. Gerald was thirty-six. His second wife, Lolly, was at least forty, perhaps more, with a huge bust and hips to match, and a wild shock of hennaed hair. An inspired cook and genial hostess, she must also have other talents. In spite of her unfashionable size, Gerald had never been known to make a pass at any of his models.

So it was with no qualms about his intentions that Savanna admitted him to her room, and climbed back into bed to hear what he wanted to say to her.

'You were off form today, Anny-lovey.' He rarely called her Savanna. 'What's up? More troubles at home?'

She shook her head. 'I suppose I'm still tired from the journey. I'll be better tomorrow,' she promised.

'I hope so. This fellow's a natural. The two of you look great together. He's some kind of tycoon, I've found out, ; so it's sporting of him to play ball. It must be that he fancies you.'

'I don't fancy him,' she said shortly.

'I don't why not, for God's sake. The other girls do'— this being a reference to the magazine staff who were supervising the fashion side of the of the assignment. 'You ' could do a lot worse for yourself. You have too many worries, and not enough fun. It's time there was a man in your life. Why not this one who's loaded and can make things easier for you?'

'It's just not my style,' she said quietly.

Her hair was tied back with a ribbon, and her nightdress of flowered Liberty cotton had a shirred top and tiny puffed sleeves. Without make-up, with her slender arms clasped round her updrawn knees, she looked very young and unworldly.

'Maybe not,' Gerald agreed. 'But you'll have to take the plunge some time, and I don't want you falling for a lopal lad who'll resent your career and expect you to wash his shirts and cook his supper. Between him and your family, you'd be run ragged.'

'Don't worry. I have no intention of adding to my problems.'

'A rich boy-friend could relieve you of most of them. You have to be practical in this life. Take it from me, romance is highly overrated. As some wise man said, "The voyage of love is all the sweeter for an outside stateroom and a seat at the captain's table".'

'You're a cynic, Gerald.'

'Yes: I see things as they are, not as they ought to be. When I was your age, life wasn't as free and easy as it is now. The first girl I fell in love with wouldn't live with me—it was marriage or nothing. So we married, and spent five years finding out it was a big mistake. A trial run would have saved us that bad experience. People are like clothes, you have to shop around and try on before you find out what suits you.'

Savanna shook her head in disagreement. 'Maybe your first wife was immature for her age. My parents married very young, and they *were* right for each other. Anyway, having a rich boy-friend wouldn't help me to find the right husband. Quite the reverse, I should imagine. The kind of man I want to marry wouldn't want his wife to have been around too much.'

'That's your mother talking,' said Gerald sagely. 'Ask your brothers what they think about it. My bet is they couldn't care less. They'll have been to bed with a few girls before they settle down, that's for sure.' He stood up. 'See you tomorrow.'

After he had gone, Savanna switched out the light and opened the curtains. The bedroom was air-conditioned, with a sheet of plate glass and a glass door between it and the balcony overlooking the gardens and the sea.

As she stood for a moment, watching the shimmering moon-glade between the shore and the reef, which was marked by a line of white breakers, the

figure of a man appeared beyond the tall trunks of the palms segmenting the view.

It was Jago, loping along the shore as he had the night before.

Was it possible that, in spite of his denial this afternoon, he did want to have an affair with her? Gerald thought so, and he was much wiser than she in the ways of rich men of the world.

Although sometimes, working in a studio, he liked to devise elaborate set-pieces using bizarre accessories, on location O'Connor's technique was much like that of a film director.

He would suggest a series of actions for his model to perform, then leave it to her to improvise variations on his theme while he darted about using yards of film to achieve a single brilliant action shot.

It was a method which made life more difficult for the fashion staff as it meant they could not pin and peg the clothes to look good from one angle only. But it was a way of working which suited Savanna.

Hitherto, even with onlookers, she had had no difficulty in carrying out his instructions to run, jump, dance, spin like a top, or do anything else he had asked of her. But waltzing by the Serpentine with a co-operative Cockney park attendant had been a hundred times easier than playing at honeymooners with Jago.

His attitude to it was that of someone taking part in charades at a party, and doing it to the top of their bent.

When Gerald asked for a light-hearted chase along a beach with no one else on it, Jago chased her, and caught her, and let her go; and did it again and again, making her feel like a mouse being played with by a cat.

Each time he caught her, he did something different; once snatching her up in his arms and striding into the sea as if he meant to drop her in the water;

once making her fall on the sand with him, but on top of his broad brown chest so that there was never any danger of his hurting her; and finally pulling her close to him and looking as if he meant to kiss her.

Through it all, Savanna forced herself to radiate a bride-like enjoyment of these antics. But when he held her against him, and she saw the gleam in his eyes as his dark head bent towards hers, her bright smile faded. She trembled, forgetting it was only a pretence, that he wouldn't really force his mouth on hers, not with Gerald near, full of enthusiasm.

'Great! Marvellous . . . absolutely fabulous!' he was saying, while Jago loomed predatorily over her, using his superior height to sway her backwards, off balance, so that she instinctively clutched at his warm bare shoulders.

He was wearing only white linen shorts; she a sky-blue bikini with the matching Bermudas. The top of the bikini was no more than ordinarily skimpy, but it felt non-existent as his hand on her back pressed her closer to him, crushing her small, soft breasts against the hard wall of his body.

There was more than one swimsuit to model, and for each one her hairstyle was altered while Jago lounged in the sun and chatted to Gerald about his photographic equipment and his rise to the top of his profession.

Considering how different they were in every respect, the two men seemed to get on surprisingly well. Although that might have been because Jago was clever at drawing the other man out while revealing little about himself, thought Savanna, as she listened to their conversation.

When she was ready to model the black bikini which was the last of the swimwear, she went to join them.

'I'm ready when you are.'

Gerald had a cigarette between his lips and was fiddling with his lighter. Jago who, like Savanna, was a non-smoker, let his grey gaze slide slowly over the gentle contours of her body.

'According to my observations, the bikini has been superseded. It's smarter to wear a monokini and a string of beads,' was his casual comment.

She glowered at him. 'We're working for *Vogue*, not *Playboy*.'

'Yes, but he's right,' said Janey, who had overheard. The in thing to do is to knot the top round your leg, Savanna.'

'Although, of course, in real life a bride on this beach would be skinny-dipping,' Jago murmured, with a quizzical glint.

'Yes, but we must show part of the bikini,' said Janey, taking him seriously. 'Eileen, bring the gold rope necklace and the black Dior sun specs, will you? Savanna, take off the top and I'll fix it round your leg.' Savanna glanced furiously at Jago. She had known that, sooner or later, she would be required to model a see-through shirt or a transparent nightgown. To that she had no objection as she felt that Gerald's attitude to her body was as impersonal as that of a doctor, and the photographs which he took of her would be for other women to identify with, not for a lascivious male readership to gloat over.

Once, looking for some Blu-Tack in the large attic bedroom shared by her three elder brothers when they were at home, she had come upon a magazine which she thought had probably been brought into the house by Benjy, the least intelligent of the Bancroft boys.

It had not been carefully concealed, merely put out of sight in a drawer. Rather guiltily, knowing that broad-minded as her parents were they would not approve of that type of periodical, Savanna had looked through it.

What surprised her was that most of the models had looked what her mother called 'nice girls'. No matter how high the fees, how could girls with clear eyes and sweet faces have posed for those degrading photographs? She hadn't understood it then, and she didn't now. No matter how desperately urgent her family's need of money, there were some things she could never bring herself to do, and modelling for pornographic magazines was one of them.

Baring her breasts for the lubricious enjoyment of a stranger was another. But before she could say no, Jago said, 'In that case I'll go for a swim. Shout when it's okay to come ashore, will you?'

As he spoke, he unzipped his shorts to reveal his own brief black stretch-fabric trunks. The shorts discarded, he turned and sprinted into the sea.

'How very Edwardian -of him,' said Janey, watching him take a header. 'Who would have thought he would be so gentlemanly? The way he was looking at you a moment ago, I thought he wanted to see you strip off.'

So had Savanna. As she watched Jago swimming away, her dark golden eyes were puzzled.

'Actually that French-cut bathing slip he's wearing is almost the twin of hers, so maybe he should be in this shot,' said Janey to Gerald.

'No,' Savanna intervened firmly. 'If I have to be topless, I'd rather he wasn't around.'

The older girl stared at her in surprise. 'What difference does it make? We'll all be topless later on when the sun isn't so hot.'

She and the other girls, being white-skinned, were guarding against sunburn by working in loose cheesecloth trousers and flimsy but long-sleeved cover-ups.

'I shan't.'

'Why not? Everyone does now, unless they've got unsightly boobs.'

It was typical of Janey to use fashionable slang in preference to standard English. Her life was governed by what was in and what was out.

'Yes, but my mother's doctor says there are going to be some horribly prune-like bosoms around in ten years' time, so I'm not going to risk it,' said Savanna.

This was something she had invented. On hearing of her trip to the Caribbean, Doctor North had merely advised her to use a reliable sun cream and, every day, to drink a pint of water for every ten degrees of Fahrenheit temperature or, in terms of the metric system, a basic two litres a day plus a litre for every ten degrees of Centigrade temperature.

'Oh, did he? I didn't know that. I thought it was only faces which could become prematurely wrinkled,' said Janey. 'If that's the case, you'd better slap on some more oil for this shot,' she added, as Savanna undipped the bikini top and handed it to her.

By this time Jago was in deep water, too far from the shore to see her in any detail as, presently, she paddled through the shallows, a half naked sylph with her eyes veiled by large smoky lenses as she lifted her face to the sun which was making the gilt tassels shine as they lay between her satiny breasts.

Why had he taken himself off with such unexpected and old-fashioned gallantry? she wondered. And why had she made that excuse not to join in the others' topless sunbathing as long as Jago was around?

What was it about him which made her feel unwontedly shy? More than shy. Nervous of him. Afraid. But perhaps not so much of him as of herself; of the feelings she had felt stirring within her when he had held her in his arms and seemed to be on the point of kissing her.

Before he returned to the beach, she had put on her bark-pleated sun top, and the others were packing up the props to return to the hotel for lunch.

They did not work that afternoon. Arrangements had been made in advance for them to spend the evening at an old plantation house where, its owners not being in residence, Gerald had permission to photograph evening clothes against a background of eighteenth-century elegance combined with twentieth-century luxury.

Fortunately, Jago's luggage included some evening kit which, although not designed for the tropics, was sufficiently light in weight to be wearable there.

Also, Janey had discovered, he had with him a dark brown silk dressing-gown which had caused her to Telex to London for some trousseau underclothes and night things to be despatched to the island by air.

The house, with its high-ceilinged rooms opening on to a terrace on the ground floor and a pillared gallery above, appealed to Savanna's romantic streak. So did the selection of evening dresses made of cool cotton voile or silk chiffon in white and the sorbet pastels which set off a tan.

The evening session involved a good deal of standing about while Gerald and his assistant set up the supplementary lighting. The house had its own generator and was wired to the highest modern standards, but the soft old-world glow of candles and antique oil lamps was the effect which the photographer wanted to achieve.

There was a beautiful Spanish mahogany staircase with gilt-framed ancestral portraits grouped on the wall behind it. The first shots were taken there with Savanna wearing an apricot shoulder-tie dress and high-heeled gold sandals so that, standing two steps above Jago, for once she was looking down at him.

I wonder if these people are genuine ancestors. I can't see much family resemblance, can you?' she said, to deflect his attention from her.

Being scrutinised by him, at such close quarters, was oddly unnerving.

'Perhaps they were bought for decorative purposes as some people buy books by the yard when they want an instant library,' he remarked, after glancing briefly at the portraits. 'Would you like to be painted?'

As he spoke, his keen eyes resumed their detailed appraisal, taking in her neck and shoulders, the hollow at the base of her throat, and the deeper hollow revealed by the low-cut décolletage.

'My parents had each of us drawn when we reached our eighth birthday,' she told him, striving not to mind the feeling of being under a microscope. 'My brothers were nice-looking children, but I looked more like a bush baby, all eyes and ears.'

'How many brothers have you?'

'Four. Three older than me, and one younger.'

'So it's probable that when you have children you'll also have more boys than girls.'

'I suppose so—if I have a large family. Most people stick at one or two. I doubt if my parents would have had five of us if they'd foreseen galloping inflation, or that my father would be killed before the boys were independent.'

'Has his death left your mother in straitened circumstances?'

'It has rather. Three of my brothers are very clever, especially the youngest one, Joey. His IQ, is so unusual that any ordinary school would have been useless for him, so he goes to a school for exceptionally gifted children in Switzerland. He's only sixteen, but already he speaks fluent French and German,' she added, with affectionate pride.

'What's your own IQ?'

'Not worth testing,' she said, with a smile. 'Michael and Richard are almost as brilliant as Joey, and Benjy and I are the dullards of the family.'

This was not strictly true, but Savanna had always had a specially soft spot for the brother nearest to her in age, and the only one of the young Bancrofts not to be blessed with a good brain. For this reason, although he had been hopeless in every field of academic endeavour and she only in certain subjects, she had always allied herself with him, bemoaning her failures at school and playing down her successes.

'However, as I'm lucky enough to be photogenic, it doesn't really matter that I was the despair of my maths mistress,' she said, neglecting to mention that in history and geography she had always been close to the top of her class.

'You are more than merely photogenic,' Jago told her dryly. 'I think you're too thin at the moment, but if you put on a few pounds your looks would match your brother's intelligence.'

'Put on weight! Are you mad?' she exclaimed, in mock horror. 'A plump model is an ex-model.'

'I wasn't suggesting you should become too plump. Just a little more curved here and there.' His hand closed on her waist and slid downwards from hip to thigh. 'You're not as undernourished as most of your kind, I agree. But the figure admired by other women isn't the one which turns men on.'

He had taken his hand from her thigh now, but the feel of it lingered, sharpening her awareness of their closeness.

'I'm not employed to turn men on but to show off clothes,' she said stiffly.

He gave her an amused look. 'I think it was Coleridge who said that men desire women and women desire to be desired.'

'By one man—yes. Not by all of them.'

He was smiling openly now. 'I don't think you know much about it yet.'

Before she could answer, Gerald announced that, the lighting being satisfactory, he was ready to shoot.

'Your left hand on Jago's shoulder, and your right on the handrail, please, Anny. With your body turned slightly this way. That's fine except for the facial expression. It's much too aloof for a bride, lovey. Let's see a little roguish smile ... as if, having kept him waiting while you got dressed, you wouldn't mind too much if he took you back upstairs and undressed you.'

'I should be delighted,' said Jago, in an undertone.

He covered her hand where it lay on the smooth wooden rail, and his other hand returned to her waist.

'Roguish smiles went out with silent films, Gerald,' she said, hoping to hide her confusion with an air of nonchalance.

'Okay, a sexy smile, then,' Gerald amended.

'Is my expression satisfactory?' Jago enquired.

While one palm held her hand captive, the other was fondling her waist. His eyes were narrowed and intent.

'It's fine,' the photographer told him.

But the lighting was still not quite perfect, and they had to remain in the pose while his assistant carried out an adjustment.

By summoning all her professionalism, Savanna managed to maintain a provocative half-smile, but inwardly she was seething with mixed sensations, including being intensely conscious of the powerful shoulder beneath the black silk barathean on which her free hand was resting. The conservative cut of his dinner jacket, and the unadorned plainness of his shirt suggested that whatever form his tycoonery took—and she wished she had asked Gerald to elaborate on that disclosure—Jago did not suffer from any nouveau-riche leanings towards ostentation.

In a way she rather wished he did, for then she could have rationalised her wariness of him. But there was nothing about him—apart from his risque aside a few moments earlier, and really Gerald was largely to blame for that—on which to peg her dubiety.

Physically, everything about him from his brushed back raven's wing hair to his well-scrubbed, neatly pared nails was pleasing to her. As close as they were, she could smell very faintly the clean aroma of his shaving soap, but none of the pervasive after-shave lotions used by less discriminating men.

Influenced by her father and brothers, she did not like men to be scented as strongly as women, or to give more time to their hair than was taken by a daily shampoo and a regular haircut. Any man sufficiently preoccupied with his looks to have his hair styled was too vain to be attractive to her.

'Okay, that one's in the bag. You can relax for five minutes while Anny gets changed for the next one.' Gerald was speaking to Jago.

For the next shot she wore a straight tunic of avocado crepe-de-chine with plaited rouleaux straps and a matching girdle. Rhinestone waterfall ear-rings were her only jewellery.

This time, to her relief, they had to pretend to be playing backgammon, and there was no direct contact between them. But when she had put on the white dress, Gerald posed them on a sofa in the drawing-room, she with her feet up and Jago seated beside her, one long hard thigh pressed to hers as he leaned towards her, his forearm stretched along the backrest.

The unselfconscious ease with which he obeyed Gerald's instruction to kiss her hand would have made it clear—had it not already been obvious—that he must be a very smooth operator.

'Won't your business associates be amazed at your lending yourself to this sort of thing?' she asked while, once more, the lighting was being perfected.

'Amazed at my luck, I should imagine,' was his urbane reply. 'This dress is very becoming. You ought to buy it.'

'I should never wear it. I don't lead this kind of life. And even if I did, a dress like this would pay for a whole winter's fuel bills.'

'I suppose so.'

He sounded as if fuel bills meant as little to him as the cost of a ride on the Underground. Not that he was likely to use that crowded and uncomfortable form of transport. Probably he always took taxis, or was even grander and went about London reading the *Financial Times* in the back of a company-owned Rolls-Royce.

'Right: ready when you are,' said Gerald.

She pinned on her smile, and Jago again kissed her hand, his lips warm against her knuckles, making a quiver run through her.

They returned to the hotel in two cars, Savanna riding with Gerald and his assistant, and Jago driving the other girls. She had arranged for a light supper to be left on a tray in her room, and she did not see him again that night.

But she could not put him out of her mind, or dismiss the feeling that his co-operation was more than an unmotivated whim.

It was on their penultimate day on the island, when only one travelling outfit and the honeymoon lingerie remained to be photographed, that Gerald came to her room before dinner.

'Now that you've spent the better part of a week with him, what's your feeling about Jago, Anny?' he asked, after following her out to the balcony where she had been drinking iced water from the vacuum jug which the maids replenished several times a day.

'I'm not sure what you mean. I haven't any special feeling about him,' she answered untruthfully.

'He seems to have taken to you. Tomorrow he wants to take you on a picnic—just the two of you,' the photographer informed her.

'What? B-but he can't! We have work to do. And besides, I don't want to picnic with him.'

'Don't you? Are you sure about that?'

'Absolutely sure,' she said firmly. 'You told him I couldn't, didn't you?'

'Yes, but he isn't the type to take no for an answer if he's set his mind on something.'

'He argued about it? What cheek!'

'No, he didn't argue. I shouldn't think he ever does. He has more effective methods of getting his way,' remarked Gerald. 'To compensate me for the trouble of finding a reason for not being able to work tomorrow, he offered me this.'

He dipped two fingers into the pocket of his shirt and extracted a small folded paper.

Savanna looked at the cheque bearing Jago's bold signature, then raised incredulous eyes to his.

'He must be mad!'

'Or very much richer than I'm ever likely to be. If I want to cash it I have to give him the negatives of those topless shots we took on our second day here,' he added.

'OA/' As the implication sank in, a hot angry flush suffused the gold of her sun-tan.

She would have torn the cheque to shreds, but he anticipated her reaction and whisked it away from her.

'Gerald . . . you couldn't . . . you wouldn't?' she expostulated, in shocked dismay.

'Don't fly off the handle, lovey. Think about it. If this is a tip to me for letting you off work tomorrow and handing over a few negatives, what's in it for you, ask yourself?'

Savanna drew herself up till her spine was a straight as a ramrod. Her soft mouth tightly compressed, she looked at him with icy contempt.

'I don't need to ask myself, Gerald; and I'm sorry you don't know me better than to think that I might, for one second, consider such a sickening suggestion. Keep your "tip". I don't care what you do. But I'm going to tell Mr Kimdersley that he may be able to buy your co-operation, but he can't buy mine—not at any price!'

She sprang to her feet and brushed past him, fending off the arm with which he attempted to stay her.

A few moments later she was striding purposefully through the colourful shrubbery which separated her block from the one in which Jago was accommodated.

A white-haired West Indian gardener with whom, normally, she passed the time of day whenever they saw each other, looked after her in surprise as she marched past a few yards away without even noticing him, her bearing stiff with indignation.

CHAPTER TWO

LAST time, she had tapped at his door. This time she pressed the buzzer, and continued to press until the door opened.

'Hello, Savanna,' Jago said calmly.

There were people passing along the path which ran the full length of the block.

She said, 'Aren't you going to ask me in?'

'By all means.'

He stood aside, and she stalked past him, into a room which she had expected to be the same as her own but which was considerably larger, with a screen wall between the sitting and sleeping areas. The bed was a double one, she noticed.

'Won't you sit down?' he suggested. 'What can I give you to drink?'

'Nothing, thank you,' she said furiously. 'I don't drink with men of your sort. I wouldn't be here, in the same room with you, if I didn't want you to know what I think of you and your kind!' She was shaking with rage, her eyes flashing.

'My kind?' Jago said mildly.

'Your kind,' she repeated, with a snap. 'The kind who thinks everyone has a price . . . that anyone will do anything if they're offered enough money for it . . . that all girls are whores, to be bought and bedded and forgotten. Oh! I can't tell you how you disgust me . . . you, and the hateful men like you. That you're not an old man makes it worse. You . . . you could have women for love.'

He said nothing, looking down at her with an expression she could not read. She had a feeling that her outburst had been a waste of breath; that there was no way she could pierce the thick, insensitive skin of a man who

believed that everything in the world could be bought if one had enough money.

That her fury was all the fiercer for being shot through with disillusionment was a factor she was too worked up to recognise. At that moment all she was conscious of was an overwhelming need to get through to him, to dent the armour of his indifference.

Impelled by a blaze of temper completely foreign to her nature, she took one impetuous step forward and struck him with the flat of her hand.

Even before her palm had connected with his lean dark cheek, she was regretting an action totally at variance with her upbringing, and indeed with her everyday instincts.

Slender as she was, her right arm still had the muscle developed by several years of enthusiastic tennis, not only at school but on the grass court at Clare's house during the holidays. The slap didn't make Jago stagger as it would have done with a smaller man, but it had enough force to swing his head sideways.

The next instant she found herself with both arms pinioned and her spine arched like a bow as he held her helplessly captive, his face now as wrathful as hers had been moments earlier.

But his voice was controlled as he said, 'If you ever do that again, you'll regret it. My hand is much harder than yours, my girl, and don't think I won't hit a woman, because I will . . . here . . . and with interest.'

The single vigorous spank with which he demonstrated this threat made Savanna stifle a yelp. Her buttock smarting, she squirmed unavailingly to free herself. But the hand which was clipping her wrists was as inescapable as a handcuff, and his other arm was round her waist, pinning her to him.

'Let me go!' she demanded, through clenched teeth.

'When you've calmed down enough to listen to what I have to say to you.'

'I don't want to hear what you have to say. I've heard it already from Gerald.'

'What did he tell you?'

Realising she had no hope of escaping until he chose to release her, she forced herself to relax and submit to his hold on her. Striving for calm, she said bitterly, 'He showed me your cheque . . . your bribe to him. I don't know what men usually pay for pictures to gloat over in private, but I'm sure you could have bought several albums of dirty photographs for what you've just paid for a few shots of me in a monokini. Well, they're all you'll get for your money. Gerald may not object to our going on a so-called picnic tomorrow, but I do. I wouldn't "picnic" with you if you were the last man on earth!'

To her astonishment, Jago laughed and released his hold on her.

'Sit down, Savanna, and listen to me. *Sit down!*'—as she glanced towards the door.

The repetition wasn't shouted. If anything the second instruction was spoken more quietly than the first, but on a note of command which she didn't dare flout.

Reluctantly she chose the upright chair by the writing table, and sat down, giving him a mutinous glare as she did so.

'You're right,' said Jago. 'Not everyone has a price. But if you were me you would have learnt a long time ago that, when a man is very rich, a great many people will be nice to him—in every sense of that expression—in the expectation of being handsomely rewarded for their amiability. I didn't think you could be bought, but I wanted to be certain. I guessed the construction which Gerald would put on the cheque I gave him, and I didn't disabuse him of his ideas,' he continued sardonically. 'Evidently he conveyed them to you—or did you jump to those unpleasant and mistaken conclusions off your own bat?'

Ignoring his question, she asked, 'What do you mean— j mistaken conclusions?'

'I offered Gerald money for the negatives in order to destroy them, not to gloat over the prints,' he said dryly.

'To destroy them?' echoed Savanna, mystified.

'I didn't wish them to be published.'

'Why not?'

'I want you to marry me, Savanna. And if you do, I don't want photographs of my wife's breasts appearing in a magazine, not even in *Vogue*.'

Her body sagged with the shock of a statement so incredible that at first she didn't believe she could possibly have heard him correctly.

'T-to marry y-you?' she murmured faintly.

'To marry me,' Jago repeated firmly. 'What you need is a drink,' he added and, turning, opened a cupboard which turned out to be a small refrigerator. She watched him dislodge some ice cubes and tip them into tall glasses. 'I know you don't care for spirits, but a small measure of rum won't hurt you. It will pull you together. This is called a rum float,' he told her, a few minutes later, when he brought one of the glasses to her.

With a hand not perfectly steady, she accepted the drink and sipped it, finding the taste unfamiliar but in no way unpleasant.

'You can't be serious about marrying me,' she murmured, watching his tall frame relax on the chintz-covered two-seater sofa.

'Perfectly serious, I assure you. Don't you remember my saying that I'd seen you on *Vogue* on board Concorde? When I reached New York I had checks made to find out if you were English or American. I came here specifically to meet you. To be recruited by Gerald to play the part of your bridegroom was better luck than I'd anticipated. I'm hoping the past week has been a dress rehearsal for our real honeymoon later this year.'

'But we don't *know* each other,' she protested. 'We only met a few days ago.'

'We have the rest of our lives to find out everything about each other. As soon as I saw your face, I knew it was the one I wanted to look at across the breakfast table for the next forty years,' Jago said quietly.

All at once, in a flash of perception, Savanna understood why Gerald's question *What's in it for you? ask yourself* had caused her to lose her temper and come blazing round here to tell Jago just what she thought of him.

She loved him.

All week she had been falling in love with him. Thus, this mistaken belief that he thought of her as a tart had been the cruellest of shocks.

'Come here.' He put out a hand and beckoned her to him.

Leaving her glass on the writing table, Savanna rose slowly to her feet and obeyed this much gentler command.

In her fury, she had stormed out of her own room without stopping to change the Turkish bathrobe and mules supplied to all guests by the hotel. Her hair was still damp from the shower, and she wore not a scrap of make-up, not even waterproof mascara and lip gloss.

When she came within reach, Jago took her by the hand and drew her down beside him.

'Have I been wrong in thinking that you liked me a little?' he asked quizzically.

'More than a little,' she admitted. 'But I think we ought to know each other for much longer than six days before thinking about marriage.'

'We shall have to be engaged for at least two months, because I have various commitments which will prevent me from taking time off for a honeymoon until early May. It was difficult to fit this trip into my schedule—I lead an erratic life, Savanna. Shall you mind a *mouvemente* existence? Presumably not, or you wouldn't have chosen to be a model.'

'I didn't choose. Gerald chose me.'

'But without any strings, I understand.'

'No—certainly not!' she said vehemently. 'Did you ask him that?—If there was anything between us apart from a professional relationship?'

'Yes. If I want to know something, I ask. Why not?'

'What did he say?'

'That, unlikely as it might seem in this day and age, he believed you to be still a virgin. Was he right?'

She nodded, blushing a little.

'Good. I prefer it that way.'

'Why? So that I shan't be able to compare you—perhaps unfavourably—with my previous lovers?' she asked, for the first time daring to tease him.

'No, I've never suffered from an inferiority complex—in any field,' was his dry response. 'However, as you will discover, one of the penalties of wealth is that it makes it very difficult to keep one's private life private. My marriage to a leading model is bound to attract a good deal of publicity and, inevitably, if there are any skeletons in our cupboards, the gossip writers will find them and rattle them. As you're a virgin, there's nothing they can write which will embarrass you. Nor is there in my case, as far as I'm concerned. But you may read things about me which will upset you.'

'What sort of things?' she asked uncertainly.

'I'm thirty-three. I haven't always lived as discreetly as I shall in future,' he told her. 'Any normal man of my age is bound to have a past, you know. Don't let it concern you.'

'No . . . no, I shan't,' she said gravely. 'As long as there's nothing shady about your business dealings. You don't make money from armaments, or anything of that sort, do you?'

He smiled, and shook his head. 'No, none of my activities is lethal, illegal or in any way dubious.-Now, having demonstrated what a belligerent young woman you can be on occasion, how about a kiss to make it better?'—offering the cheek she had struck less than ten minutes earlier.

Shyly, Savanna put her lips to the taut brown skin between his cheekbone and jaw. As she pursed them in a light kiss, he turned his head and she found herself mouth to mouth with him.

To begin with he was very gentle with her; his lips brushing back and forth on hers which, at first, she kept closed. At this stage she was leaning against him, and he was still holding her hand as he had since drawing her down beside him.

Then, releasing her fingers, he put both his arms firmly round her, and his mouth settled over hers and began to move in a way to which instinctively she responded by parting her lips and sliding her arms round his neck.

The few kisses she had exchanged with friends of her brothers, after parties in her middle teens, were an inadequate preparation for being embraced by a man as experienced as Jago. By the time he raised his head, she was breathless and trembling, her heart pounding wildly against her ribs, her topaz eyes slumbrous beneath her dark silky lashes as she opened them to meet the slightly mocking grey gaze of the man who had induced her excitement.

'Oh . . . goodness!' she exclaimed, in a faint voice.

'Don't tell me you've never been kissed before. That I can't believe,' he remarked, relaxing his hold on her.

'Not very much . . . and *never* like that,' she admitted.

'But you liked it, I gather?'

She buried her face in his shoulder. 'Don't tease me . . . you know I did,' she murmured.

Jago chuckled. 'So did I. It's going to be a pleasure to teach you all the other things you haven't tried yet.'

She felt his hand slide down her back to rest on the place he had spanked with such painful vigour. This time his touch was a caress.

'You could have a long lesson now, if you like,' he said, close to her ear. His voice came from deep in his throat.

Quivering, she drew away. 'Will you be angry if I say No?' Before he could answer, she went on hurriedly, 'It isn't that I think it's wrong if two people really love each other. I want to be absolutely sure before . . . before I go to bed with you. All this has happened so quickly. It . . . it could be an infatuation.'

Anxiously she studied his face for the first sign of his reaction.

'Not in my case it couldn't,' he answered. 'But in yours . . . yes, perhaps it might be.' He paused, his expression enigmatic. 'All right. As I've had the rare luck to find myself an old-fashioned virgin, I'll be an old-fashioned suitor and allow you to set whatever pace you please. If you want to be one of the few brides for whom [a white dress is more than an obsolete convention, so be it. We'll go to bed on our wedding night. I can wait until then—if you can.'

He tacked on the afterthought with a glinting look which suggested that he doubted if she could.

'I—I must go back and dress,' said Savanna, as his I gaze left her face and moved downwards to where, while she was in his arms, the front of the bathrobe had loosened, showing flesh which, although always visible at the beach, somehow seemed more provocative indoors.

As she pulled the robe closer about her, Jago said, 'Yes, it is rather a strain on my good intentions to have you here in my bedroom and, by the feel of it, wearing nothing under that bathrobe. But you may as well finish your drink.'

He stood up and fetched it for her. 'Unless you don't care for it,' he added, not rejoining her on the sofa but moving way to an armchair on the far side of the brass and glass coffee table.

'No, I like it. I've never had rum before. I hope it won't go to my head.'

'I didn't give you very much. What about this picnic tomorrow? Have you changed your mind? Will you come with me?'

'Yes, of course I will, now. But I think I ought to work j tomorrow morning. There's the yellow trouser suit to j photograph, and the underclothes and nightie.'

'I don't object to the trouser suit. But the other things— no,' Jago said decisively. 'From now on, the only person who is going to see you *en deshabelle* is me. Will you mind giving up your career for me?'

'But Jago, I can't—not immediately,' she protested.

'Why not? Because of a contract?'

'No, nothing like that—I'm a freelance. But I need the money I'm earning. My family can't manage without it. I must go on modelling for a few years.'

'No, I don't want a part-time wife. I want you to travel with me. Looking after your mother and brothers will become my responsibility.'

'Oh, no—that's not fair,' she protested. 'I couldn't let you, and they wouldn't feel comfortable being dependent on you.' .

'They'll have to adjust to it,' he said. 'Perhaps I should make it quite clear that, even though you are very young, I'm not, and therefore I want to have children as soon as possible. Does the thought that, a year from now, you could be a mother disturb you?'

'I—I don't really know,' she said hesitantly. 'Wouldn't it be nice to have a little time to ourselves before we start thinking about a family?'

'I've done my thinking already. I want several children, and I want to have them as soon as possible—which, however enthusiastically we make love, will not be this year,' he added. 'In your case, having children doesn't mean that you'll be tied down and hampered by them, as many women are. They'll have a nannie to look after them.'

It seemed to Savanna an oddly down-to-earth conversation to follow so swiftly on a proposal. But she said only, 'Yes, I suppose so,' and sipped the rum float, and tried to feel a sense of reality, instead of the feeling that the whole thing was a dream from which, shortly, she would wake up.

'As soon as we get back to England, I'll come and talk to your mother,' Jago went on. 'Whatever burdens you've been taking on your shoulders will be nothing to me, I assure you. You need have no compunction at transferring them to mine. Both physically and financially, they're much broader than yours are, my dear.'

'Yes, but even so . . .' she said uneasily.. 'Anyway, I certainly don't mean to let Gerald get away with that ridiculously large cheque. To pay for those negatives is silly. He can easily make up some reason to explain why he wasn't able to develop and print them.'

'Let him keep it,' said Jago indifferently. 'It's little enough compensation for losing his beautiful new discovery.'

'To me it seems a small fortune. Just how rich are you, Jago?' she asked him.

'Rich enough to buy you all those dresses you wore at the great house the other night,' he said lightly. 'Why do you frown? My income should make you happy. Most women enjoy spending money.'

'So do I—within reason,' she answered. 'But if you're really *extremely* rich, you must have a life style quite different from ours. I—I'm not sure that I can cope. For instance, what I know about giving large dinner parties is as little as you probably know about pot-luck and making ends meet.'

'If I want to give a dinner party, I have only to ring up one of the many hotels with a private dining-room. At present I live in hotels. You can spend our engagement house-hunting. I'm sure it won't be beyond you to find us a suitable place to live. I could see that you liked that plantation house. Something of a similar order is what I envisage for us.'

'You seem to have thought it all out, yet this time last week you'd never set eyes on me.'

'No, but I've been ready to take a wife for some time. As soon as I saw you on *Vogue*, I felt I had found the girl for me.'

'On the strength of a magazine cover?'

'Why not? Seeing you on a cover enabled me to study your face much more thoroughly than if our first meeting had been at some social occasion.'

But a person's face is such a small part of the whole of them. There are so many other elements—their voice, their hands, their likes and dislikes, their sense of humour... so many things. To come all this way to meet me, merely because my face had caught your eye, seems such a gamble,' she answered.

'What had I to lose?' he said carelessly. 'The extra air fare, and the couple of days which would have been wasted if the rest of you hadn't matched up to the promise of your lovely face. Not much to stake against the possibility of finding the woman I've been looking for.'

'Perhaps not.' She finished her drink and got up to go.

Jago rose to open the door for her. Before doing so, he put his hand under her chin and repeated the kiss which had played havoc with her senses; if not at such length as before, long enough to quicken her heartbeats and make her reluctant to leave him.

'Off you go. Be ready at seven. This evening we'll dine by ourselves,' he said, as he opened the door and propelled her gently over the threshold.

Savanna walked back to her room in a trance, once again oblivious to the gardener, who was still busy pruning a bush.

To her surprise and displeasure, Gerard was still on her balcony. She wanted to be on her own, to start getting used to the fact that, instead of returning to England with the uncharted future she had had on the day she left home, she would be going back as the prospective bride of a man who had swept into her life with the irresistible force of a West Indian hurricane.

'As you left your room key behind, I thought I'd better hang on for a bit,' said Gerald. 'What happened? How did he take it?'

'You misunderstood him,' she said coldly. 'You shouldn't impute your own base motives to other people. Nor should I have believed you could be right. May I have that cheque, please?'—holding out her hand for it.

'Why? What do you want it for?'

'To give it back to him. For you to cash it would put you on a par with a blackmailer, and I'm sure you don't want to be thought of in that light.'

'I didn't put any pressure on him. He gave me the cheque voluntarily.'

'As a romantic gesture of quite unnecessary extravagance, considering how small a favour he wanted from you. I'm sure if he rings up the Editor and explains the position, there'll be no question of them using the shots he objects to. And you'll make far more money if I let you have the exclusive rights to photograph my real life trousseau for *Hola* and *Paris Match*, and all the other magazines which thrive on features of that sort.'

'What are you talking about . . . your real life trousseau?' the photographer asked her perplexedly.

'Jago has asked me to marry him. That's why I was so upset when you gave me the impression that he had something else in mind. I've fallen in love with him, Gerald, and it seems he feels the same way.'

For some moments he looked as stunned as she had been earlier. Then he said, 'So I was right—he did have his eye on you.'

'Yes, but not in the way you implied. I told you you were too cynical. He's not that sort of person at all. Or not now. He may have been once, but not any more.'

Suddenly, in the same way that it had been a little while before she had felt the kick of the alcohol in the rum float, Savanna was beginning to feel an upsurge of happiness such as she had never experienced before.

Until his astonishing proposal of marriage, Jago's powerful physical attraction had been more worrying than enjoyable. She had seen it as a threat to her peace of mind; a force which might throw her off balance and make her act unwisely.

But now, in the context of an engagement, it no longer worried her. As the protagonists in a licit love affair, they were entitled to be violently attracted to each other. It was right and proper that they should be. From now on, whenever he looked desirously at her, she need not be nervous of his intentions. They could not be more honourable.

She felt so relieved and joyful that, when Gerald produced the cheque and handed it over to her, she forgot how angry she had been with him.

She said, 'Jago and I are going to have dinner *a deux* tonight, which is bound to make the others talk. But I'd rather you didn't tell them what I've just told you until I've asked him when he wants our engagement to be made public. Tomorrow I can pose in the yellow trouser suit, but not in the other things—he doesn't approve. And we can rely on you to get rid of the monokini negatives, can't we, Gerald?'

'Sure. As you say, I stand to make a lot more out of your whirlwind romance with England's answer to Onassis.'

'Is Jago on *that* level?'

'I don't know. Maybe not quite. But how old is he, for God's sake?'

'Thirty-three.'

'Give him time, lovey. He may end up richer than Onassis. According to the men I heard talking about him in the bar, soon after we arrived here, he's some kind of financial genius who's made most of his fortune simply by changing currencies at the right moment. Pretty risky, I should have thought, but then I don't know a stock from a share. But it might be as well if you're taking him for better *or* worse.'

'But of course. I love him, not his money,' Savanna said simply.

And she meant it.

Jago's wealth meant nothing to her personally, although she would be glad if it meant that her mother's operation could be expedited, and her brothers' futures made secure.

For herself, she would have been even happier to be marrying a man of ordinary means. The prospect of being mistress of a house which needed a large staff to run it was not alluring.

After Gerald had left her, she thought how much better it would have been, at least from her own point of view, if Jago had had the kind of income which would have allowed them to afford a country cottage and a tiny *pied-a-terre* in London, both of which she could have run single-handed.

To have too much money had always seemed to her to be as fraught with problems as having too little.

She wondered how Clare and Livvy would react to her news. They had both been inclined to mock her belief in a life-long relationship with one man as the best way to live.

When Jago came for her at seven, she was waiting for him in a dress she had bought in a Summer Sale, and carrying a shawl knitted for her by her mother in exactly the same shade of emerald, a colour which tended to look garish in the soft light in England, but which came into its own in the tropics.

He took her to dine at a hotel not much different from where they were staying, except that nobody knew them and they could sit and talk undisturbed.

'Do you realise I know nothing at all about your family . . . your parents, and your brothers and sisters?' she said, when they had chosen what to eat and he had finished studying the wine list.

'My parents are dead, so you'll have no problems with a mother-in-law. Not that you would have done anyway. My mother was a charming woman. I've only one younger sister, whose marriage has taken her to Cheshire. Her name is Susan, and her husband, Edward, is a surgeon—a nice chap, I like him. As they very rarely come to London, I sometimes fly up to Manchester and spend a weekend with them. Susan has strong family feelings. She had a close relationship with my mother, whom she still misses. She'll be delighted to have a sister-in-law.'

'What is she like? What are her interests?'

'Her husband, her children, and her house; although before she met Edward she was doing research for a well-known biographer. Now she has a pair of two-year-old twins to occupy most of her time, but she's a history graduate and she talks of a career later on, when the kids are at school. You needn't be daunted by her degree. No one ever takes her for an egghead—rather the reverse.'

Savanna was reminded of their first encounter, when he had put her back up by suggesting that she might not know the meaning of entrepreneur. Did he still think she wasn't too bright? Brainless enough to be nervous of people cleverer than herself?

'What about me, after I've produced your quiverful? Will you mind if I take up my career then?'

'I doubt if you'll want to by that time. If you have eight babies at two-year intervals, you'll be in the second half of your thirties before the last one is born.'

'Eight babies!' she exclaimed, taken aback. 'But not even the Queen has *eight* children! I—oh; Jago, you're teasing again'—as she realised that although he wasn't smiling, there was a gleam of amusement lurking in his steady grey eyes.

He reached across the table for her hand. 'All right: if you think eight too many, I'll settle for four. I don't think we're likely to hatch any twins. That strain is from Edward's side of the family.'

'Supposing I couldn't have any children? Have you considered that possibility?

'An unlikely contingency,' he answered, adding, after a pause, 'You've never had any illnesses which might affect you in that way, have you?'

'No, I've always been extremely healthy.'

'I think it's a sensible precaution for people to have a check-up before they marry,' he went on. 'I have one every year, as a matter of routine, so I know I'm in good general health. I can't actually vouch for my ability to father children, but I have no reason to doubt it.'

For the second time that day it struck Savanna as somewhat prosaic for a couple so newly engaged to be talking about parenthood. But then Jago began to stroke the palm of her hand with his thumb, accompanying the caress with such an intent, ardent look that she became conscious of nothing but the excitement singing along her nerves.

Later a steel band played, and they danced on an open- air terrace lit by moonlight and coloured lanterns.

At first he held her very close to him. Unlike the night at the great house, when the feel of his shoulder inside his dinner jacket had been more disturbing than pleasurable, tonight she was able to enjoy the contact with his strong body.

However, after a short time, he loosened his hold, but not before she had realised that dancing with her had rekindled the desire she had seen in his eyes at the beginning of dinner.

As he put a little space between them, she found herself wondering when was the last time he had made love, and with whom. Not very long ago, probably. But that was his past, and nothing to do with her. Their future together was what mattered. Could she hold him against all the women who, as Jago himself had remarked, saw him as an exciting quarry? And not" only because he was rich, she thought, but because he was also a tall macho male with finely-articulated hands with which to caress them, and a mouth at once stern and sensual with which to kiss them.

It was not late when they drove back to their own hotel in the hired car. Where the road ran close to a beach, Jago slowed and drove off the macadam on to a stretch of firm turf which bordered the sand.

'It's so beautiful here,' murmured Savanna. 'I do think it's a shame that these islands haven't enough jobs to support all the people who were born in them. If I belonged here, I should hate being forced to go to England or America to find work. None of us wants to go back to London tomorrow. How must West Indians living there feel? Coming out here has made me realise how wretchedly homesick many of them must be.'

Jago said, 'The older ones—yes, I expect so. But don't forget that many people of West Indian origin are actually born and bred Cockneys or Liverpudlians. A beautiful environment is desirable, but it's not the most important thing in life.'

She had been gazing at the sea, but now she turned to look at him, the light being almost as bright as daylight, and the car an open one.

'What is the most important thing?'

His arm was along the backrest. He was playing with her moon-silvered hair which was loose on her shoulders, winding a strand round his forefinger. At her question, he shifted closer along the bench seat. His hand delved through the thick tresses to find the nape of her neck.

'At the moment, for us, this is,' he told her huskily, before he kissed her.

Very soon she knew he was right. Her whole body throbbed with excitement as he taught her many kinds of kisses; soft feather-light kisses on her eyelids,, little nibbling kisses round her ears, and long, lingering, burning kisses— like brands on the skin of her throat—as he tilted her head back and traced a slow path down her neck to the top of her dress.

Her eyes closed, her mind in a whirl, her whole being engrossed by these new and lovely sensations, Savanna gave no thought to the outcome. She was incapable of thought. Only feelings governed her now; feelings which made her heart race, and her breathing rapid and uneven.

Even when she felt him beginning to unfasten her buttons, she seemed to be powerless to stop him. Her slim hands fluttered on his shoulders, but her body remained lax and yielding as his sure fingers opened her dress, and she waited to feel the heat of his lips on her breasts.

But Jago's ears, sharper than hers, had caught the drone of a motor. Not ungently, he released her and straightened. 'There's a car coming.'

Before its headlights swept the place where they were parked, he was once more behind the steering wheel, with a decorous space between them. As soon as the car had gone past, he switched on his engine and followed it.

Savanna, whose trembling fingers had been quite incapable of refastening her buttons quickly, and who had been holding her dress together, now began-to do it up.

Stealing a sideways glance at Jago, she wondered what he was thinking, and why he had decided not to resume his interrupted caresses.

To be seen making love in a car—even if it was only a glimpse which the other driver would have had—was certainly rather offputting; but not to the extent of quenching her excitement. If she still felt all stirred up, presumably he did as well.

In the hotel car park, he pocketed the ignition key and came round to open her door for her. Neither of them had spoken during the second phase of the drive back, and his silence was beginning to make her feel ashamed of her abandonment while they were parked.

'Would you care for a nightcap?' he asked, as they walked towards the main block to pick up their room keys.

'I don't think so, thank you. Gerald says that night flights across the Atlantic are usually fairly uncomfortable. I think I'll try to make up some sleep.'

'Sleep can't be stored in advance. It can only be made good afterwards. Did you come over in the Economy Glass?'

'Yes.'

'You'll be going back First Class with me. It's a good deal more comfortable.'

'Thank you, but I would rather go back the way I came—with the others. It wouldn't be nice to separate from them at this stage; especially as they don't know about us.'

'They will tomorrow, and I see no reason for you to consider their feelings in preference to mine. There's not enough leg room in the Economy Class for me. Everyone finds it cramped, and for someone of my height it's purgatory. You'll travel with me,' Jago said firmly, as they came to the porter's desk.

'Very well. If you insist.' She knew her tone was absurdly formal.

He took both their keys from the porter, and escorted her to the door of her room.

Having unlocked it for her, he handed her the key, saying, 'I won't come in to say goodnight. If I do, I'll be tempted to stay. I'm used to taking what I want when I want it, Savanna. It's a long time since I had anything to do with a young and inexperienced girl. I think it wouldn't be too difficult for

me to sweep you off your feet. Earlier today I told you you could set the pace of our relationship. In future, don't rely on me to call a halt as I did tonight. Between now and May, there'll be many times when it will be up to you to control how far things go between us.'

He put his hands on her shoulders, and dropped a quick kiss on her forehead.

'Goodnight, my lovely. Sleep well.'

Then he was gone; his tall figure striding away through the shrubbery until, soon, he was out of sight, and she turned to enter her room.

A couple of hours later, remembering his injunction to her to sleep well, she wondered if he was asleep now. Imagining him sprawled in the wide bed, she moved restlessly in the twin bed which she was occupying.

Until tonight she had been only dimly aware of the overwhelming power of passion; and of the voluptuousness of her own nature. She could still feel his lips on her throat, and the aching longing to surrender herself to him utterly.

Although he, with his wider experience, seemed sure that it was not an infatuation on his side, how could she, with no experience at all, be equally certain of the nature of her feelings?

In that respect, an engagement of only two months seemed a short time in which to test the strength of their day-to-day compatibility. But when she remembered his kisses, it seemed a long time to wait before they could spend their nights together.

After the flight back to England, the First Class passengers left the aircraft before the rest; but all of them waited together for their baggage to appear on the carousel.

Savanna and the other girls, none of whom ran a car, had arrived at the airport by Underground, and it didn't occur to her that she wouldn't be concluding her journey home in the same way.

However, when Jago had retrieved all the girls' baggage for them, piled it on a trolley and pushed it through the Green side of the Customs hall, it turned out that he had a chauffeur-driven car waiting for him.

'If any of you live near Savanna, we can give you a lift,' he offered pleasantly.

But none of them lived in the same part of Kent as she did. The party broke up: Gerald and his assistant heading for the car park, and the fashion girls-taking over the trolley to push their cases to the Underground, while the driver carried Jago's case and hers to the waiting Rolls- Royce.

When they were ensconced in the back of it, being sped through the outskirts of London in a typical early March sleet shower, she said, 'Would you mind if I introduced you to my mother just as a . . . a friend, to begin with? I'd rather not spring our engagement on her without any warning.'

'By all means. Whatever you wish. I'll just make a call to my secretary and see what's been happening in my absence. Excuse me.'

He lifted a section of the wide, padded armrest between them, and revealed a telephone receiver. Pressing a button, he waited for a moment before saying, 'Good morning, Elizabeth. I'm giving someone a lift home, but I'll be in the office after lunch. Has anything urgent come up since I spoke to you yesterday?'

Savanna looked out of the window at the sleet-lashed outer suburbs. They were cruising along a clearway flanked by semi-detached houses with all their windows closed. This could be because of the weather, because of the noise of passing traffic, or because there was no one at home, the wives in such houses being obliged to go out to work to help pay the mortgage and the bills.

Until recently, in spite of the glamour of her job, she had belonged to that world of mortgaged houses, small economical cars, and burdensome money worries.

Now, lapped in the spacious comfort of the Rolls-Royce with its thick Wilton carpet, pale grey leather upholstery and controlled temperature, she felt as if she were in transit between that world and Jago's very different one; just as, during the night, she had travelled from the balmy starlight of the Caribbean to this wet, dreary morning in England.

When he had finished talking to his secretary, she said, 'I haven't told you that my mother can't walk very well. In fact she can hardly walk at all.'

'Why is that?'

Briefly, Savanna explained her mother's condition.

'But you needn't worry that you're landing yourself with a crotchety invalid mother-in-law. She's incredibly brave and cheerful about it. I know she has a great deal of pain, but she never gives way to self-pity. She's a very positive person. When my father was killed, she was shattered ... we all were. But now, instead of being miserable at having been widowed quite young, she thinks of herself as lucky to have had twenty-six years of happiness. If she weren't disabled, I expect she would marry again. I think some people have a talent for loving like others have a gift for music or painting. It seems a great waste of Mummy's gift for making a happy home for her to be left on her own when we all leave the nest.'

'She has domestic help presumably?'

'No, she does as much as she can, and I do the rest in the evening. Except for Benjy, the boys are only at home during the vacations, and not always then. But we've got them all very well trained. Why don't you come to supper tonight? By then I'll have broken the news to her, and you can meet Benjy and sample my cooking. It's not bad.'

'I should have liked to, but unfortunately I have an engagement which I can't break. I'm speaking at a dinner given by one of the livery companies,' he

explained. 'As you probably know, most of them derive from the mediaeval guilds of the City of London which used to impose standards of quality and honesty on various crafts and trades. Nowadays the companies make generous grants to education, charity and research. I accepted the invitation a year ago, and I can't back out at the last moment.'

'Of course not. I wish I could hear your speech. What's your subject?'

'High finance—very dull,' was his answer. 'When we're married, I'm afraid you'll often have to sit through my speeches. You'll find it a great deal more boring than holding a pose while Gerald gets the lighting right,' he added dryly.

'Why?—Are you a particularly dull speaker?' she asked, slightly vexed by his assumption that his subject would be over her head.

'I hope not, but most wives are bored by their husbands' pet subjects. I've seen the glazed look in their eyes, and the concealed yawns.'

'Perhaps that's because they're bored not so much by the speeches as by their husbands *in toto*. I've noticed that, as a rule, people who go in for speechmaking do tend to be puffed up types, very pleased with themselves. Do you speak in public a great deal?'

While referring to bored wives, Jago had unfolded the morning paper which had been lying on his side when they entered the car, and begun to skim the front page.

Now he lowered the paper to look at her. 'Not often. Once or twice a year. Were you needling me, Savanna?' he added, with a narrowed glance.

'Yes, because you'd needled me, although unintentionally, no doubt.'

'Really? How did I do that?'

'By implying that, if I were present tonight, I wouldn't be able to understand you. Perhaps it will be too abstruse, but I find myself able to follow the

speeches I hear on television . . . and sometimes to recognise them for the gobbledygook they are,' she added.

His lean cheeks creased with amusement. Keeping hold of the paper with one hand, he slid the other behind her and pulled her towards him.

'Come down from that high horse and kiss me,' he murmured, his eyes on her mouth.

The kiss would have gone on much longer, but Savanna, conscious that the driver must be able to see them in his mirror, pulled free.

Guessing the cause of her discomfiture, Jago said, 'Marsh is very well trained. With a girl in the back, he drives on his wing mirrors.'

It was meant as a joke—she knew that. But somehow it didn't amuse her.

She said shortly, 'And I suppose it doesn't matter what the hoi-polloi in the streets see. Who cares about them?'

His smiling mouth hardened. His gaze cooled.

'Cracks of that sort I like substantiated.'

She had already regretted the jibe which she knew to have been quite unjustified. He had never said or done anything to suggest that he looked down on people less affluent than himself.

'I'm sorry. It wasn't fair. It must be jet lag which is making me tetchy.'

'Could be. Have an early night.' Jago returned his attention to the paper.

Savanna recognised the snub, and knew it was not undeserved. Twice, in quick succession, she had been deliberately unpleasant, whereas neither of the remarks which had offended her had been intended to annoy.

Another girl, faced with Jago's withdrawal, might have reacted by pouting and removing herself to her corner, there to make matters worse by sulking.

But until two years before, she had lived with parents whose marriage had not been entirely a matter of luck. The Bancrofts, like all happy couples, had known how to stop minor tiffs from becoming major quarrels; and, by example rather than precept, had taught the technique to their children.

So it was because she had often seen her mother, and her father, eating humble pie with a good grace, that she laid both hands on his arm and, with a warmly repentant smile said, 'I *am* sorry—truly. It was horrid of me to say that to you when it's not half an hour since you demonstrated what nice instincts you have.'

His expression remained aloof, but he raised an eyebrow and said, 'Really?'

'By staying to hoist the others' luggage off the conveyor belt for them. Some men with a car waiting outside would have left them to manage by themselves. I thought it was very sweet of you.'

I should call it the normal behaviour of any man in a baggage room where several of the women are known to him.'

'I shouldn't. Chivalrous manners are rare enough to be very much appreciated.'

'Not always. You'd be surprised at how often I've held a shop door open for one woman, only to have six march through it, none of them even bothering to smile at me.'

'That happens to everyone, and it's maddening.'

Not realising it could be pushed out of the way, Savanna moved round the armrest and perched on the edge of his side of the seat.

'If Marsh really never looks, can we kiss and make up?'

His charming smile appeared. 'With pleasure.'

He removed the rest, making more room for her to snuggle against him and offer her lips.

She was still in the circle of his arm, and they were both reading the book reviews, when she realised they had passed through the green belt and were nearing the town where she lived.

'Had I better give Marsh some directions?' she asked.

'No need. I gave your address to my secretary yesterday. She will have relayed it to him, and he will have found out the way there. It's part of his job.'

'But how did you know my address?'

'It was one of the facts I had checked when I wanted to know who you were.'

'What other facts do you know?'

'Your birth date. Your height. Your weight. Your vital statistics. Your telephone number.'

'Where did you get all that information?'

'I don't know the source—probably your agent. I merely rang up a friend -who works for American *Vogue*, and left it to them to do the detective work.'

'I'm not sure I like the idea of those details being so easily available. You might have been some horrible old lecher plotting to seduce me.'

*I am plotting to seduce you—but in the most respectable way, in a bridal suite somewhere, with a marriage certificate in our luggage. Where would you like to go for your honeymoon?'

'Anywhere you choose to take me.'

He nuzzled her ear, his arm tightening round her waist. 'Just stay as beautiful and biddable as you are at this moment, and we'll be on a permanent honeymoon.'

'I hope so.' Savanna gave a sigh of contentment, the friction between them forgotten as she nestled against his strong shoulder.

'One thing is certain anyway,' she murmured, a few moments later. 'Although she's bound to be startled when I tell her about our engagement, my mother is sure to like you.'

But strangely, although she was usually the most welcoming of parents to any of her children's friends, Mary Bancroft's manner towards Jago was courteous but markedly reserved.

Probably he did not realise that she was not her normal friendly self, but Savanna sensed it immediately. Thinking that, in spite of her mother's assurance that all had gone well in her absence, some problem must have arisen, she cut his visit to a minimum.

'Thank you for bringing me home. I expect you want to get back to London if you're going into your office this afternoon,' she said, when the three of them had spent about a quarter of an hour making polite small talk.

'Yes, there's bound to be a good deal of work waiting after a fortnight out of the country, although I have a very able secretary who can take care of most things when I'm abroad,' he answered. He rose. 'Goodbye, Mrs Bancroft.' He bent to shake hands with her.

Watching them, Savanna saw the contrast between his tan and his fitness with her mother's pallor, and her drawn look, with an ache of compassion.

Leaving Mrs Bancroft in her chair by the sitting-room window, she went into the hall with him.

'You have our number, but I have no way of contacting you. Do you really live in a hotel?'

'Yes, and this is the number.' He wrote it on the pad beside the telephone on the table by the foot of the staircase. 'But I'll call you later, after I've had a look at my desk diary and know how much free time I shall have in the next few days.'

Savanna's nod was somewhat abstracted. It was not that she wanted to say goodbye to him, but she was concerned to know what was behind her mother's manner.

Jago took both her hands in his and kissed them, one after the other.

'Goodbye for the moment.'

He released her hands, opened the door and went down the steps to the path which led past their plain front garden to the wooden gate.

At the back of the house there was a long narrow garden with a garage at its far end. The front garden was simply a space between the house and the roadway, and her father had grassed over the flower-beds inherited from his predecessor to save himself labour which he had felt was better applied to the garden at the rear.

The house itself was Edwardian, built of dark red brick with the many ornamental embellishments which had been fashionable at that period. It had a semi-basement kitchen with three floors above it, and it had been modernised to the extent of putting in central heating.

When she rejoined her mother, the Rolls-Royce was pulling away, and Mrs Bancroft was watching it with a troubled expression which cleared as she looked up at her long-legged daughter and said, 'So you enjoyed yourself, darling? The Caribbean really is as beautiful as it's made out to be?'

'More beautiful, if anything. The colour of the sea is indescribable, and it's as warm as bath water. Bliss!' Savanna was watching the departing car. As it moved out of sight, she said, 'But enough of my trip. What's been happening at home? Is everything *really* all right. Mother?'

'Yes, perfectly. Why do you ask?'

'I thought you seemed rather on edge while Jago was here . . . , as if you'd be glad when he'd gone and we could talk privately.'

'I am glad he's gone,' her mother admitted. 'Does he want to see you again, Savanna?'

'Yes. He's going to ring up later on.'

'Oh, dear!' Her mother's worried look returned. 'I can see that it's tremendous fun to be whisked about in a Rolls, darling; and I haven't forgotten that you're nearly twenty and quite old enough and sensible enough to run your life without interference from me. So please don't be cross if, this once, I say, "Don't encourage him".'

Savanna's heart sank, but her tone remained light as she answered, 'When am I ever cross with you, dearest?'— stooping to give Mrs Bancroft a hug. 'But why don't you want me to see him again?'

'He's years too old for you, my dear. Presumably you know he isn't married, or you wouldn't think of going out with him. But a man who's not married at his age is usually single because he prefers it that way—especially if he has money, and is tall and good-looking. You may be sure plenty of girls have tried to catch him, but he's eluded them. I should hate to see you involved with a philanderer.'

Before Savanna could say that, whatever Jago might have done in the past, he was not philandering with her, her mother continued, 'Even if he were several years younger, and more our kind of person, I should have reservations about him, darling. He has a charming manner, I admit, but underneath it I suspect he's a hard, ruthless man who rides roughshod to get what he wants. I didn't like him at all.'

CHAPTER THREE

LATER in the day Jago telephoned to say there were more matters requiring his attention than he had anticipated. It might not be possible for them to see each other again until the following Sunday, when he would like to give a luncheon party for her mother and her three elder brothers.

'Have you broken the news to your mother yet?' he asked.

'Not yet. I'll probably tell her this evening, about the time you'll be making your speech. I hope it goes well.'

'Thank you. Are you working tomorrow?'

'In the morning. The afternoon is free, so I shall be able to catch up with various household things which had to be neglected last week.'

'In a couple of months all that housework will be a thing of the past,' he told her. 'That's something we have to discuss—how to ensure your mother's comfort after you've left home permanently. I'll call you again as soon as I can. Goodnight, Savanna.'

She wished he had said, *Goodnight, darling*. The Bancrofts were a demonstrative family, free with hugs and kisses and loving words. But Jago had yet to call her by any endearment stronger than 'my lovely', which somehow had a different connotation.

As she replaced the receiver, she heard Benjy entering the house by the back door, and went through to the lobby where they hung up their raincoats to greet him. It was he, not her mother, who was the first to hear her news.

A couple of hours after supper, when Mrs Bancroft had turned on the television to watch a play, Savanna, whose real life problem made it difficult to concentrate on those of the characters in a drama, went down to the kitchen to make her mother a pot of tea. She found Benjy there, the parts of a dismantled typewriter spread on the table, and a can of beer at his elbow. When not out with a girl, Benjy was always fixing something, either to save his mother money, or to make some for himself.

Outsiders regarded Benjamin Bancroft as a misfit, and a worry to his family. Although he had been to the same famous, fee-paying school as his scholastically brilliant elder brothers, he had done abysmally badly in all his exams and, since leaving, had been employed in a number of ways which the more conventional of Mrs Bancroft's friends thought unsuitable for a young man with his background.

At present he was working as a labourer on the site of a new public health centre. It was an unskilled job with no prospects, but it paid a high wage, part of which he contributed to household expenses, most of which he banked in his travel fund. As soon as he reached his target, he was setting out to see the world.

'Benjy, I need some advice,' Savanna said, sitting down on the opposite side of the table.

Her brother glanced questioningly at her. He had his father's blue eyes. His features were blunter than those of his brothers. Both Michael and Richard had a flair for making amusing ripostes which Benjy, less quick-witted, lacked. But he had his own sense of humour which, if slower, was also more gentle, more on her wavelength.

'What about?'

'I- I met a man while I was away, and he asked me to marry him.'

He whistled. 'That was quick work, wasn't it?'

'Yes, but that's how it happens sometimes. He's not an ordinary kind of man. He was flying to America, by Concorde, and he saw my face on the cover of *Vogue*, and made a special detour from New York to the Caribbean to meet me.'

'Some detour! Who is this guy? A millionaire?'

'He may be. He's very rich.'

'How old is he?'

'Thirty-three.'

'How many ex-wives has he?'

'None.'

'My advice is . . . grab him,' said Benjy.

Savanna couldn't help smiling. But then, swiftly serious again, she said, 'I want to . . . and it has nothing to do with his money. I've fallen in love with him. The trouble is Mother took an instant dislike to him when he brought me home from the airport this morning. She thinks he's too old, and a womaniser.'

'Aren't we all, given half a chance!' Benjy stopped work and drank some beer, reminding Savanna of her intention to put on the kettle.

As she rose to remedy her forgetfulness, he said, 'Obviously you haven't told her he wants to marry you, or she would have been talking of nothing else.'

'No, I haven't—not yet. I'd intended to tell her this afternoon, but after her criticisms of him I felt it might be better to wait. I didn't want to have an argument on my first day back.'

'If there's going to be trouble sooner or later, putting it off" only makes matters worse,' said her brother. 'What's he like, apart from being loaded?'

'Very tall. Very dark. Very fit. His name is Jago Kindersley.'

'Jago? J . . . A . . . G . . . O?'

'Yes. It's an old Cornish name. His mother was born in Cornwall, and I shouldn't be surprised if her forebears included a Spanish castaway from the Armada. It would account for his black hair and the darkness of his tan. Perhaps for the name Jago, too. It may derive from the Spanish Iago.'

She glanced at the kitchen clock, wondering if Jago was on his feet now, giving his speech; or if, the dinner still being in progress, he was eating and making conversation with the women seated on either side of him.

As they were wives of the dignitaries of a livery company, it seemed unlikely that they would be notably attractive, although he would probably make them feel it— unless they responded to his charm with suspicion, as her mother had done.

'If he's fallen for you heavily enough to propose within a week of meeting you, how come he's not here this evening? Or is he tackling his mother, who's going to be equally hostile to you?' Benjy asked.

'His mother is dead.' Savanna went on to explain Jago's absence, and to mention the lunch party on Sunday.

'You can't ring up Richard and Mike until you've broken it to Mother.'

'No, I know I can't,' she agreed worriedly. 'Oh, Benjy, do you think she'll come round? The one thing I didn't bargain for was Mother taking against him.'

'She may come round right away when you tell her he wants to marry you. Probably she thinks he only wants to go to bed with you. She's still a bit uptight about Mike and Catriona, although she doesn't let them know it,' said Benjy.

This was a reference to his eldest brother's love affair with a fellow medical student who had announced, in front of Mrs Bancroft, that she had no intention of getting married because it would conflict with her career plans.

For anyone like Mary Bancroft who had never had a career, and whose entire adult life had centred round her husband and children, it was very hard to understand Catriona's determination to specialise in plastic surgery, or the young woman's clear-sighted acceptance that, to achieve her ambition, she would have to sacrifice much that was important to Mrs Bancroft.

'Perhaps you're right. I'll tell her tomorrow. I'll be at home in the afternoon.'

'Tell her now . . . tonight,' Benjy urged. 'Otherwise you'll spend half the night worrying, and wake up with bags under your eyes. You know you always look like hell if you don't have a proper night's rest,' he added, with brotherly candour.

He cocked an ear towards the ceiling. 'She's turned off the TV. It must have been the kind of play she doesn't like—brass beds and four-letter words. Make the tea, and I'll come up and give you moral support.'

So it was that a few minutes later, when Benjy had carried the tea tray up to the sitting-room, and sat down to have a cup with them, Savanna mustered the courage to say, in rather a rush, 'I—I hope Mike and Richard are free this weekend. Jago wants them and us to have lunch with him. It's to be a celebration party.' Without pausing for breath, she went on, 'He's asked me to marry him, Mother. I would have told you right away, only you seemed not to like him. But I'm sure you will when you get to know him.'

It was to be expected that Mrs Bancroft's reaction would be much the same stupefaction which Savanna herself had experienced when Jago had first mentioned marriage.

Benjy's handling of the situation was not unlike that of his future brother-in-law. He said, 'What you need is a stiff sherry. Mother.'

He went to the corner cupboard where the drinks were kept, and came back with two glasses of Bristol Cream, one for her and one for his sister.

'I—I don't know what to say. I can hardly believe you mean this seriously,' said Mary Bancroft. 'To agree to marry a man whom you've only known for a few days . . . and who's so unsuitable for you ... I can't take it in yet, Savanna. It's so extraordinarily unlike you. You've never been the giddy type of girl. I just can't think what's come over you.'

'Love has come over me, Mother.'

'In a week or less? Don't be absurd, dear. Love is something which grows with knowing. All you know about him at present is that you find him attractive. If in six months, or even three months, you both still feel the same way, one will begin to take it seriously. But as for a celebration party, or any kind of public announcement . . . that I cannot go along with, my dear.'

Ever since her mother's animadversions about him, immediately after his departure, Savanna had been worried that this would be her attitude to their news. Now, torn by divided loyalties, she sat silent and downcast, wondering how he would react to being told he was unacceptable.

'Can I put my oar in here?' asked Benjy. 'If this chap Jago is thirty-three, he at least ought to know *his* own mind; and there are other things he could have proposed which you would have liked a lot less, Mother.'

Mrs Bancroft's thin, pale face flushed. 'I'm aware of that, Benjy, and certainly it's something in his favour. But I've met Mr Kindersley. You haven't, and--'

'For a few minutes, Mother,' Savanna broke in. 'For a quarter of an hour at the most. Not for long enough to make a definite judgment.'

'Anyway, whatever we think of him, it's Savanna who's going to marry him,' said Benjy. 'I think a filthy-rich brother-in-law is exactly what this family needs. With Richard and Mike and Joey still being expensive passengers, and only Savanna and me supporting ourselves and contributing, we're barely keeping afloat.'

'To encourage your sister to marry in reckless haste merely because the man is wealthy shows a very immature outlook, Benjy. We're passing through a difficult period— yes. But it won't last for ever. Savanna's marriage will, I hope, last her whole life, as mine would have done if it hadn't been for Daddy's accident. It's at times like this I miss him so much. He would have taken the same view, and you would have listened to him, Savanna. You always took your problems to him, and acted on his advice.'

'But I was a schoolgirl then, Mother. I'm grown up now. I h^ave to deal with my problems by myself—and I don't see why this has to be one. Benjy is right, darling. No one else can decide who is the right husband for me.'

'I'm not trying to decide for you, my dear. I'm merely asking you to wait. You're not twenty yet. How can you think of committing the rest of your life to a man who is virtually a stranger? Mostly, when marriages break down, it's because of a score of minor pinpricks which, cumulatively, make one or both partners' lives intolerable.

These are things which one doesn't discover in the first flush of love, Savanna. They only reveal themselves gradually. Please . . . *please* ... be sensible about this. Wait a while, that's all I'm asking of you.'

'I don't think Jago will wait—or not very long. He's a man who, having made a decision, acts on it,' said Savanna.

'If he loves you, and you insist on a reasonable interval between your meeting and an engagement, he will have to abide by *your* decision. Marriage is essentially a give- and-take relationship. He can't expect to rule the roost completely.'

'Why not?—If I don't mind his doing so?'

'This pot of tea will be stone cold if someone doesn't pour it out,' said Benjy, reaching for it. 'I think we should all go to this lunch party, and enjoy a sample of the lifestyle he's offering Savanna, and then you should argue it out with him, Mother.'

'Don't be frivolous, Benjy. This is no laughing matter.'

'I'm not laughing, and nor is Savanna. She looks more like crying,' he said, with a sympathetic glance at her. 'I hope when I bring home a girl I'm serious about, you won't be like this about her. It's pretty deflating to anyone who's just fallen in love to have all the snags pointed out, Mum.'

'I do wish you wouldn't call--'

'Sorry. It slipped out, *Mother*,' he amended, with a trace of impatience.

He was too fond a son ever to irk her deliberately, although it amused him to outrage some of their neighbours, as on the occasion when, strolling in the town at lunch time, wearing cement-dusty overalls and carrying a carton from a fish and chip stall, he had encountered one particularly snobbish woman and invited her to try a hot chip.

One of Benjy's assets was his ability to adapt to any environment, and to be accepted by all kinds of people as one of themselves. He liked or disliked men and women for their fundamental human qualities, and was as happy in the company of some of his present workmates as with the friends of his schooldays.

For that reason Savanna was curious to see what he made of Jago. Although he might joke about the usefulness of Jago's wealth, of all her brothers Benjy would be the least influenced by it in forming his opinion of the man.

Seeing that there was little point in continuing the discussion tonight, yet relieved that, on his advice, she had at least aired the subject, she said, 'In spite of coming back First Class, I didn't get too much sleep last night. I think I'd better go to bed early.'

'Yes, I should if I were you, dear. We can talk things over again tomorrow,' said Mrs Bancroft.

Climbing the stairs being a difficult undertaking for her, she had made the former dining-room into a bedroom, with a prefabricated shower unit in one corner. Fortunately the house had already had a downstairs lavatory, but the basement kitchen was a great inconvenience. What was needed was a small lift, but the difficulty of installing one made the cost prohibitive.

Being worn out, Savanna slept well. However, when she took in her mother's early tea, she saw signs of a restless night in the circles under Mary Bancroft's eyes and the pinched look about her mouth. Pain frequently kept her awake, but last night, Savanna guessed, it had been worry which had done that. This was confirmed when she said, 'I've been thinking things over. Instead of the five of us being Mr Kindersley's guests on Sunday, I

should prefer to receive him here. It will be less of a strain. You know what an effort it is for me to climb in and out of Michael's car these days; not to mention the double journey being a waste of his petrol.'

Savanna forbore to reply that she felt sure Jago would willingly send his more comfortable car for them. Nor did she point out that planning, shopping for and cooking a special lunch for six people at home involved a lot of extra work which she could have done without when her life was already very full. Seven people, if Mike brought Catriona.

But the last thing she wanted was to launch another argument, so she said only, 'Very well, darling, if you'd rather we had him here, I'll ring him up later this morning. I don't want to call him too early and risk waking him up.'

'What time does he normally get up? Or is that one of the many things you have yet to find out?'

'On the island he was a very early riser. But after attending a public dinner last night, and perhaps going to bed in the small hours, he could be forgiven for deciding to lie in this morning,' Savanna said mildly.

Later, on the train to London, she sat looking out at the bleak winter countryside, and wondering what she would do if her mother continued to find Jago an unacceptable son-in-law and he, in turn, was unwilling to meet Mrs Bancroft halfway.

When Savanna herself had told him that she thought they ought to know each other for much longer before thinking about marriage, he had seemed to feel that a two-month engagement was an adequate delay. He had conceded, she remembered, that, in her case, it could be an infatuation; but not in his own.

How could he be so sure?

Because, in spite of numerous affairs, he had never before felt the way he did about her?

She would have liked to believe this explanation of his statement, but somehow she couldn't convince herself that, at not quite twenty, she was capable of enslaving an experienced man of the world so that never again would he look with desire at anyone else.

You're a beautiful creature, but don't overrate your desirability. You'll be twice as attractive at thirty, and certain women of forty and possibly fifty can give a man just as much pleasure as a smooth-skinned young thing like yourself.

She had a clear recollection of Jago's negligent answer when she had accused him of wanting to have an affair with her, and he had said she was too young.

On the same occasion he had told her that making love was an art which he thought she had yet to learn. Later he had found out he was right; she was the most virginal of virgins, inexperienced even in kissing.

Remembering those first thrilling kisses, she felt an upsurge of longing to be locked in his arms, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot'.

As soon as she arrived in London, she dialled the number he had given her, and was answered by a girl on the switchboard of one of the most famous hotels.

'Who's calling?' the operator enquired, when Savanna had asked for Jago.

'Miss Bancroft.'

'Hold on, please.'

A few moments later, to Savanna's surprise, a man's voice said courteously, 'Good morning, Miss Bancroft. This is Matthews, Mr Kindersley's valet, speaking. He's out and about this morning, so I'm afraid I can't tell you where to reach him before lunch. May I take a message for you?'

'Oh, yes, thank you—if you would. He was going to give a lunch party for me and my family this weekend, but my mother would like him to spend the

day with us. Do you happen to know if he has already made the arrangements he had in mind?'

'Mr Kindersley hasn't mentioned booking the room where he usually gives his private parties, but I can find out if he's done so, and ask the person in charge to await confirmation. Perhaps there is somewhere he can telephone you?'

The call gave her a further insight into the smooth-running luxury of Jago's life. Why hadn't he chosen a girl from that world to marry? There was no shortage of pretty faces among the daughters of the rich and influential.

As soon as I saw your face, I knew it was the one I wanted to look at across the breakfast table for the next forty years.

It wouldn't do for him to see me now, she thought ruefully, catching sight of her reflection in the window of one of the station kiosks, a wool cap pulled down to her eyebrows, her chin buried deep in a muffler because the cold seemed more piercing after a week in the sun.

I shall have to start looking glamorous all the time from now on, she reflected, as a taxi took her to her first appointment.

The ironic thing was that although she spent her working hours in furs, silks, cashmeres and luxurious evening dresses, the rest of the time she wore clothes chosen for cheapness and practicality.

Nowadays, her second brother Richard was the only well-dressed member of the family. He was at Oxford, hoping to achieve an honours degree in P.P.E., the university's name for the final examination in philosophy, politics and economics.

Clever, charming, and more than a little self-centred, Richard had a small income from funds left to him by one of his grandmothers, whose favourite he had been.

He spent it partly on others, and his unexpected gifts were always thoughtfully chosen, but mostly on presents to himself—old books, old

prints, and good clothes, which he said lasted longer than cheap ones. He was probably right about this, but his sister, the only one of the Bancrofts who had any idea what his clothes cost, felt it wouldn't have hurt him to wait a few years for bespoke shirts and silk pyjamas.

Savanna returned home that afternoon to find that Jago had telephoned her mother to say he would be delighted to lunch with them; and the local florist, a member of Interflora, had delivered a box of three dozen long-stemmed red roses which did not have a card with them, but could only be from him.

Having divided them between two tall vases, one for the sitting-room and one for her own room upstairs, she rang up to thank him. As she waited for the number to answer, she found she could hardly wait to hear his deep voice. But when the switchboard connected her to his suite, once again it was Matthews who answered.

Jago was not there. He was spending the night in Paris, staying at the Plaza-Athenee.

'The number is 359 . . . 85 . . . 23, Miss Bancroft. Shall I repeat that?' asked Matthews. 'No, I have it, thank you. Goodbye.'

Savanna rang off, and sat down on the stairs, disappointed. She had wanted so much to talk to Jago. But to call him in Paris was out of the question. He might not be there. If he were, a few minutes' chat would cost pounds which they couldn't afford.

It seemed an eternity till Sunday. Knowing that an elaborate meal was not going to cut any ice with a man accustomed to the finest cuisine wherever he went, Savanna had settled for inexpensive and homely fare. For the first course, buckling, a cheaper alternative to smoked trout. For the main dish, a pot roast. For the pudding, apple tart and cream, always a favourite with her father and brothers and, it seemed likely, with all men.

Jago, not Marsh, was at the wheel of the Rolls when it drew up outside the Bancrofts' house at a quarter to one on Sunday.

'Impressive!' was Richard's comment, looking over his sister's shoulder as she stood by the window, awaiting Jago's arrival with mingled impatience and trepidation.

'I'll go and let him in.'

Conscious of an almost tangible feeling of expectancy as her family and Catriona waited to meet her rich suitor, she hurried from the room.

He was not at the gate, as she expected, when she opened the front door. On the point of running down the path to meet him, she checked, not wishing their greetings to be seen by anyone watching from the sitting-room.

Although Jago was hidden from view by the thickness of the beech hedge which retained its dead leaves through the winter, she could hear the expensive sound of the driver's door closing. A few moments later he appeared at the gate, one arm full of parcels.

He walked up the path, smiling at her, taking in the way she was dressed, which was the way he was dressed— casually, in trousers with a jersey and shirt. Hers were camel-coloured with a black shirt which emphasised the bloneness of her hair.

Jago's shirt and trousers were grey, like the car and his shrewd mid-grey eyes. His plain V-necked sweater was cashmere. A silk scarf was folded inside the open collar of his shirt. Reaccustomed now to looking at pale faces, Savanna saw his brown face and hands as strikingly bronzed.

'Hello. Have you missed me?' he asked, as he mounted the steps.

She nodded. She had meant, very swiftly, to break it to him that, as far as her mother was concerned, their engagement was not a *fait accompli*. But when he stepped over the threshold and bent his tall head towards her, the kiss he pressed on her lips put everything out of her mind but her gladness at seeing him again.

Prevented as he was by the parcels from embracing her with both arms, his one-armed hug and quick kiss were affectionate rather than passionate.

'I gather you've telephoned several times. I'm sorry I haven't been there, but I've been exceptionally busy. I'm not always as inaccessible as I've been for the past few days.'

'It doesn't matter,' Savanna assured him. 'Thank you for the gorgeous roses. I read the report of your speech.'

'Did you indeed? Very dutiful of you to scour the papers for it.' He moved towards the sitting-room door. 'Are your brothers here today? I'm looking forward to meeting them.'

Had the situation been reversed, and it had been she who was about to enter a room full of his relatives, she would have been twitching with nervousness. But obviously Jago was completely at ease.

She opened the door and re-entered the room, a step ahead of him.

'My mother you've already met. Let me introduce the rest of the family. Mike first, as he's the eldest . . . and this is his friend, Catriona, who is also reading medicine.'

After bowing and smiling at Mrs Bancroft, who was seated beside the log fire which they lit on special occasions, Jago had deposited his parcels on the upright chair by the door. Now he shook hands with Michael Bancroft and the dark-haired, sturdily built Scots girl.

Next, Savanna introduced Richard and, finally, Benjy who, having wrung Jago's hand with a grip which made most people flinch, but not his prospective brother-in-law, asked, 'What can I get you to drink, sir?' as if he were addressing someone many years his senior..

The Bancroft men were drinking lager, the women sherry, as Jago noted before he answered, 'I'll also have beer, if I may.'

'What very exciting-looking parcels,' remarked Catriona, in the pause which followed.

'They're one or two things I picked up in Paris, Savanna,' said Jago.

'For me?'

'For you.'

'How kind of you. Thank you.'

'Aren't you going to open them?' said Catriona, when the other girl made no move towards them.

'Oh . . . yes . . . yes, of course,' Savanna said hastily.

But when she would have returned to the chair where the parcels were lying, he stopped her, saying, 'No, they can wait, but this can't.'

Before she realised what he was about, he had taken a small leather box from his pocket, opened it, removed something sparkling, put the box away and possessed himself of her left hand. A moment later he had slipped the ring to the base of her third finger, and was lifting her hand to his lips.

The whole thing was done very swiftly and unobtrusively so that, had they not been the centre of attention already, it might have passed unnoticed, except for the kiss"on her knuckles. Over that, he lingered a little.

For Savanna, as he let go her hand and she had a clear view of the jewel now adorning it, it was a moment at once wonderful and terrible.

Clearly it had never crossed Jago's mind that her family wouldn't welcome the engagement. How would her mother react to this turn of events?

Her pleasure shot through with the fear of an embarrassing scene, she gazed at the diamonds which symbolised the bond between them. Not an unbreakable bond, but not one to be set aside lightly.

'It's beautiful, Jago,' she murmured, raising her eyes to his face. Then, mustering her courage, she turned to show it to her mother. 'Isn't it, Mother? Isn't it lovely?'

DON'T BE ANGRY. DON'T SPOIL IT, HER TAWNY EYES PLEADED.

Mrs Bancroft took her daughter's outstretched hand to study the ring more closely.

'Yes, very beautiful,' she agreed.

For an instant, Savanna thought it was going to be all right: that her mother was going to accept this development without fuss, at least for the moment.

'However, I should have appreciated the courtesy of being consulted beforehand,' Mrs Bancroft went on, turning an unsmiling gaze on Jago.

'You mean you haven't told your family about us?' he asked, flashing an interrogative glance at her daughter, one black eyebrow arched in surprise.

'Yes . . . yes, but . . . you see . . . ' she faltered.

'But *you* have not conferred with us, Mr Kindersley,' her mother put in. 'As you are a stranger to us, I think it would have shown a greater degree of consideration had you made yourself known to us properly before taking this precipitate step.'

'You mean you would have liked me to ask permission to marry Savanna?'

'It would have been more gracious.'

'You've used the word precipitate, Mrs Bancroft. It suggests that, had I been gracious, I might have been graciously sent packing,' was his dry response.

'I should certainly have counselled caution. Savanna is very young, and--'

'But of age, and no longer in need of parental consent to her marriage. As for myself, had I felt there was anything about me which Savanna's family

might object to, probably I should have consulted you. But as I have neither a previous marriage, uncertain prospects or anything else to make me ineligible, I assumed that, if Savanna was happy, you would be too.'

'Many people would consider your age to be a disadvantage,' said Mary Bancroft. 'Thirteen years is a considerable gap,' she added, ignoring her daughter's imploring, 'Oh, Mother, *please*--''

'But one offset by the fact that, unlike a much younger man, I'm in a position to provide her with every comfort, including the clothes and jewels which her beauty deserves.' Half turning away from his hostess, Jago said, 'You're her eldest brother, what is your view of our engagement, Michael?'

Earlier, Michael had been inclined to agree with his mother that for Savanna to return from a week in the Caribbean committed to marry a man whom none of them knew, was an act of impetuosity which she would almost certainly regret.

Now, however, after flashing a troubled glance at his mother, he said uncomfortably, 'Surely the purpose of an engagement is for people to test whether they're right for each other. As long as you aren't intending to rush into marriage too quickly, I—I have no objection.'

Mrs Bancroft looked angrily at him, but before she could speak her second son intervened.

'My opinion,' said Richard smoothly, 'is that we should defer this conversation until later. Wherever her future may lie, at this moment Savanna's place is in the kitchen attending to our lunch.'

'Oh, heavens—the roast potatoes!' she exclaimed.

With a look of apology at Jago for deserting him, she fled to the basement to check that the potatoes she had left in the oven were not becoming too well browned.

She was followed, some minutes later, by Catriona.

'Anything I can do to help?'

'No, it's all under control, thanks. What's happening upstairs now?'

'Richard is chatting to Jago, and Mike and Benjy are smoothing your mother's ruffled feathers. I must say I can't understand why she should be put out. Except that it's happened very suddenly, your Jago seems to personify everything most mothers hope for in a son-in-law. Can I feast my eyes on that gorgeous ring for a minute?'

Rather than hold out her hand, Savanna slipped the ring off and offered it for the other girl to take from her.

'It must be worth . . . goodness knows what? If it were mine, I should be terrified of losing it, or having it pinched. Anyway, I haven't the hands, or the nails, to set it off,' said Catriona, comparing her stubby fingers and short, unvarnished nails with Savanna's elegant hands.

Lunch was served in the conservatory at the side of the house. Warmed by a radiator and with sea-grass matting on the floor, it made a pleasant place to eat now that the indoor dining-room was no longer available.

It was a successful meal. The food was well cooked and complemented by three bottles of claret provided by Richard, who considered himself to be something of a connoisseur. The conversation flowed smoothly and, by the time they were eating biscuits and cheese, Savanna could see that her mother was mellowing towards Jago.

Having crossed swords with her earlier, he had been at pains to be charming; and his charm, when he chose to exert it, was a force which a woman of arty age would find it hard to resist.

Afterwards everyone except her mother, and Richard who usually managed to slide out-of any domestic duties, helped to clear the table.

'In a family of this size, I'm surprised you haven't a dish-washer,' said Jago, seeing Benjy, in a plastic apron, beginning to wash up by hand.

'We have two—me and Savanna,' quipped her brother. 'You're excused today,' he said to her. 'Mike and Cat will dry for me. Why don't you two go for a walk?' He looked at Jago. 'It will give us a chance to discuss you, and you to discuss us,' he said, with a grin.

The older man laughed. 'A sound idea, Ben. Better get your mac, Savanna. Mine's in the car.'

'Did Benjy tell you he doesn't really like being called that except by the family, and to say Ben when I introduced him?' she asked, as they set out down the road. 'No, It was a guess on my part. He's a nice chap, your brother Ben. I like the way he takes some, of the weight off your shoulders without being asked. Would your mother be affronted if I arranged for a dish-washer to be installed?' Jago added. 'There's plenty of room for it, and it's something which every large family needs. In the States, you wouldn't find a prosperous family without one.'

'We aren't a very prosperous family. Even when my father was alive, we had problems making ends meet. The thing is that when we were born, his income seemed equal to sending his sons to his old school. You might have foreseen' what was coming, had you been his age. But Dad didn't. Inflation hit us like a hurricane, and then he was killed and . . . well, you can imagine. But that's no reason to batten on you.'

'Allowing me to give you a dish-washer hardly comes into the category of battenning. Why is your mother opposed to our marriage?' he asked.

'For the reasons she gave you—the age gap, and the suddenness of it. I'm sorry she was so quelling when you first arrived. I should have warned you about her attitude, but already I think she's coming round. And if the boys like you, as they obviously do, that will bring her round more. She's not really a martinet. She has a lot of pain and worry, and it makes her appear more severe than she ever used to be. Don't write her off because of that scene before lunch.'

'I'm hardly likely to write off my future mother-in-law,' he said dryly. 'It's natural for her to be concerned for your happiness. Do you like that ring? If it's not what you'd set your heart on, it can be exchanged.'

'I hadn't set my heart on anything because I hadn't thought about it. I adore this ring,' she said, spreading her hand to admire it. 'It's gorgeous. I only pray I never lose it.'

'If you do, it doesn't matter. It's insured.'

Savanna stopped short, her topaz eyes shocked. '*Jago!* How can you say that? This isn't just *any* ring. If you'd bought it at Woolworth's it would still be irreplaceable to me.'

He tilted an eyebrow. 'Would it?'

'Of course.'

'But you wouldn't be equally afraid of losing a Woolworth's ring, my dear,' he said cynically.

'No, because if I left this somewhere, the chances are it would be stolen. A Woolworth's ring I might get back. Anyway I'm going to take very good care not to lose it.'

She glanced up and down the street, saw no one about, and stood on tiptoe to brush a kiss on his cheek. At once his strong arms closed round her, and her kiss was returned—on her mouth.

He had not kissed her properly, like this, since their last day in the West Indies. And her long lashes fluttered to rest, she felt a tremor of pleasure at being held so firmly and possessively. Jago made her feel small and fragile, and enjoyably helpless.

'Mm . . . like Baked Alaska,' she murmured, when he raised his head.

'Baked Alaska?' He was still holding her close.

'That pudding with ice cream inside hot meringue. Don't you see the connection? Cold cheeks but warm mouths . . . nice.'

He looked at her soft, smiling mouth, and something fierce flared in his eyes.

'Delicious!' he agreed huskily, and kissed her again, at greater length.

The sound of a child's bicycle bell brought Savanna back to earth. As she and Jago broke apart, she turned dazed eyes towards the small, woolly-hatted figure who was pedalling energetically along the pavement in advance of a man with a push-chair and a woman leading a toddler.

She was still not fully recovered when they and the couple passed each other.

The man nodded. 'Afternoon.'

Both he and his wife looked over-fed and sedate, as if it were a long time since they had kissed in the street and longed to be in bed with each other, thought Savanna.

For that was how Jago's persuasive kisses had made her feel. If the onus for keeping their relationship on a footing acceptable to her mother rested on her, as he had said it would, it was not going to be safe to kiss him anywhere *but* in public.

By the time they returned to the house it was just beginning to drizzle, and the lamps were alight in the sitting-room, making it look very cosy as Jago opened the gate for her.

In the hall, he helped her to take off her raincoat before removing his own light-coloured windcheater. She had pulled a comb through her hair and was putting on lipstick at the mirror above the telephone table, when she saw his reflection behind hers.

Watching her over the top of her head, he slid his arms round her, his brown hands stroking her breasts, finding the shape of them through her loose-fitting sweater.

Savanna stopped using the lipstick, her own hand suddenly shaking as his strong gentle fingers rekindled the feelings damped down by their brisk two-hour tramp.

Although conscious that at any moment someone might come out of the sitting-room, she found herself leaning against him, mesmerised by the gleam in his eyes and the slow caress of his hands.

Jago . . . don't!' she gasped, twisting to face him and burying her face in his shoulder.

His fingers searched for her chin, and he tilted her face up.

'You don't like my touching you like that?'

'I like it too much,' she admitted. 'Oh, darling, what is it you do to me?' Her arms crept round his neck. She clung to him. 'I love you. I can't wait to be your wife.'

'In two months from now you will be. I want you, too,' he said softly. 'Now I think we'd better join the others.'

That night, preparing for bed in the pale blue silk- lined cashmere robe which had been one of Jago's presents, with another—an enchanting artificial lemon tree, nine inches tall including the miniature Versailles pot— standing on her dressing-table, Savanna felt a good deal easier in her mind than she had before his visit.

He had stayed to have tea by the fire. After he had gone, none of her brothers had had any faults to find with him, and even her mother had admitted that a second encounter had made her amend if not revise her original opinion.

Even so, as she turned out the light and lay down on her side to gaze at her engagement ring in its open box on the night table, the diamonds shining in the glow from the street lamp outside their garden, she still felt a certain unease. A feeling that it was all too good to be true. There had to be a flaw

somewhere. There *was* one: she could feel it in her bones. Yet somehow she couldn't pin it down.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE announcement of their engagement in the *Forthcoming Marriages* column of a reputable national newspaper was quickly picked up by the sensational press. One morning, on the train, Savanna saw a number of people immersed in the *Full Story on Page 3* behind the front page headline *Model to Wed Millionaire Playboy*.

When the train reached London, she bought a copy of the paper and read it in the taxi taking her to her first appointment. Since no one had been in touch with her, or with Jago as far as she knew, the so-called report had been concocted from information from other sources and from the reporter's imagination. Savanna felt as if she were reading about a stranger. She hoped the description of Jago as a rakish member of the jet set had equally little verisimilitude. If Mrs Bancroft read it, which it was to be hoped she would not, it would confirm her worst fears.

With him, the reporter had had more to work on. Clearly he had featured in the paper's columns on previous occasions when his name had been linked with other women. There were photographs of three who had failed to hold him permanently, with potted accounts of their relationships. With one of them, an actress, he was said to have been inseparable for nearly two years.

Although, on the island, Jago had warned her that this dredging up of his past was inevitable, she could not help being wounded by the public exposure of his amorous past for the gloating delight of readers who would probably absorb it as gospel.

During the day she was in contact with Margaret, who said she was under pressure to reveal Savanna's address.

And if they don't get it from me, they'll find it out somehow—they always do. There's just no escape from the Press. My advice is to give them what they want and get it over,' said her agent.

'But why should I have to be interviewed against my will?' Savanna protested. 'I don't want all the details of my home life laid out for public

inspection. My family will hate it, especially my eldest brother. Pictures of me in the scandal rags will embarrass him horribly.'

'I don't know why. If he doesn't read them, presumably his friends don't either. Don't let it get you down, my dear. The worst that can happen is that they will hang about outside your house until you've given them the answers they want. They won't actually force their way in and badger your mother. With any luck, it will be a nine days' wonder; not even that if something more sensational—hold on a moment, will you?'

There was a pause, after which she came back on the line to say, 'My secretary has just put her head round the door to tell me someone else wants to know where to find you. Don't worry—not a Press hound: your boy-friend. I'll ring off and give him your number. Call me back, would you?'

Savanna replaced the receiver, wondering what was so urgent that Jago needed to speak to her during working hours. He had taken her and her mother to the theatre the night before, booking a box so that Mrs Bancroft, who found it difficult to sit still for long periods, would be able to change her position during the performance.

Tomorrow night they were dining together. Tonight he was entertaining some business associates from Germany.

The telephone rang. When she answered it, Jago said, 'The Press has latched on to our engagement. I think you may be subjected to a certain amount of harassment in the next few days. As I can't be with you all the time, and I don't want you to be put through too much third degree stuff, I've arranged for someone else to look after you.'

'Is that necessary? Will it be as bad as that?'

'Maybe not, but I'm taking no chances. Politicians and show business types can cope with the limelight. They love it.'

Was he thinking of his 'close friend', the actress?

'But although the cameras won't upset you, the questions may not be so easy to handle,' he continued. 'It takes a tough cookie to survive a barrage of personal questions, and you're not the type to stay cool under that kind of pressure.'

Was that a criticism? she wondered.

Aloud, she said, 'Who is going to look after me?'

'Miles Masters. He's the younger brother of a man I shared a study with at school. Recently Miles has spent some time guarding the children of an Italian manufacturer who was worried about them being kidnapped. But I gather there's a girl in England whom he wants to see more of, so he's come back to this country, and at present he's free to protect you from being hounded by the Press. What time are you finishing work today?'

It was arranged that Miles should collect Savanna from the salon where she was having her hair cut.

When Jago had rung off, she re-dialled Margaret's number and told her it no longer mattered if her address was released because now she had someone to protect her if any Pressmen became too pressing.

Her first sight of Miles was from her seat under a dryer hood her hair was too long and thick to be blown dry— when he walked into the reception area and spoke to the girl behind the desk.

She indicated that he should take a seat, which he did, but not until he had paused by the short flight of steps leading down to the hairdressing area and scanned the faces of the clients.

To Savanna's surprise he recognised her, and smiled. She smiled back. Until then she had thought he was calling for someone else. He wasn't the burly, rugger-playing type she had expected, but a lightly-built man in his late twenties, of medium height, with medium brown hair, and medium looks—neither noticeably attractive yet not unattractive. She judged that when she was wearing flat heels as she was at the moment, he might top her by an inch. In high heels, she would be the taller.

He chose a chair from which they could still see each other, but he didn't look at her again. She watched him glancing through a copy of *Harpers & Queen* and evidently finding an article which interested him, because after a bit he stopped flicking over the pages and began to read. She wondered how he had landed the job in Italy. He was not at all her idea of a bodyguard.

The Italian who always did her hair knew that, when she came for a cut, she didn't want elaborate styling. He took out the clips which had held it in large loose curls under the dryer, then gave it a vigorous brushing with two bristle brushes.

He had already remarked on her engagement, asked when the wedding was to be, and hoped she would want him to dress her hair for it. Now, passing the brushes to his assistant, he used his fingers to pull a soft airy fringe across her forehead, and loosen the rest into an artfully tumbled mane of pale gold silk.

'Thank you, Luigi.' She slipped some coins into his pocket, and followed the assistant to the coats rail to exchange her pink cotton wrapper for a black quilted jacket.

Her guardian was on his feet when, having dealt with the bill with her bank card, she turned to join him.

'Miles Masters, at your service, Miss Bancroft,' he said, holding out his hand. Although lacking Jago's height and breadth of shoulders, he had latent strength in his handshake. His eyes were hazel. There was a scar across his right cheekbone.

'Hello. How did you recognise me, sitting down under a dryer?' she asked.

A model had to be exceptionally famous for her face to be known to the opposite sex.

'Jago described you.'

'What did he say?' she asked, as he opened the door for her.

'That I should look for the most beautiful girl, and she would be you.'

Her face lit up. 'Really? What a nice thing for him to say—but not very helpful. We all look terrible with our heads in a dryer, and you might not like my kind of face. Thank you'—this as he pushed open the outer door.

'The car is round the corner,' he told her. 'I was lucky to get a free meter. I should think there are Very few men who wouldn't like your face, Miss Bancroft,' he added pleasantly, but as a statement of fact rather than a compliment.

Savanna gave a smiling shrug. 'My brothers aren't greatly impressed by it, and I haven't got used to the fact that Jago seems to be. For how long has he asked you to look after me, Mr Masters?'

'For as long as is necessary. As I'm supposed to be a friend of the family, rather than a hired watchdog, I think we should use each other's first names. Mine, as you may know, is Miles.'

She nodded. 'Your elder brother and Jago were at school together, I believe?'

'Yes, their last year was my first year.'

So he must be either twenty-seven or twenty-eight, she calculated.

'My brother was head boy of his house, and Jago was head of the school, which made him, in my eyes, as awe-inspiring as the Headmaster,' Miles continued. 'On Speech Day, at the end of my first year, his short speech of thanks to the long-winded and boring Distinguished Guest was received with terrific applause. I remember my parents discussing it afterwards, and prophesying a brilliant future for him. That was fifteen years ago. My brother thinks now that, given another ten years, Jago will be one of the most influential men in the country.'

It was a statement which made Savanna conscious of how little she knew about the man she was in love with. If his gifts were so highly thought of by those who did know him, would she be able to live up to him? Being much

younger than he was, and having had her education cut short by Gerald's discovery of her at a time when money seemed of paramount importance, would she ever be able to keep pace with a brilliant husband and the clever men and women who were his friends?

The car was a small saloon belonging, she noticed, to a car hire firm. Miles put her into the passenger seat before going round to unlock the driver's door. Before he reached it, she had leaned across to unlock it and push it open for him.

'Thank you.' He slid behind the wheel. 'Would you put your seat-belt on, please.'

She obeyed, but needed his assistance to extract it fully from the reel and then to adjust it to fit her.

'Don't you usually wear a belt?' he asked.

'I don't often travel by car. There's a good train service from where we live, and oh working trips outside London, I'm usually in the back of the car.'

'What about going out in the evening?—Before you met Jago?'

'I didn't,' she answered succinctly. 'You may find it odd, but I led a very sheltered life until I met him,' she added, with a smile. 'The only man I know who roars around in a fairly fast car is my brother Michael, and as he and his girl-friend are medical students, they always use belts, having seen the results when people don't.'

'Yes, so have I—pretty horrific. And, with a face like yours, worse than madness to chance windscreen cuts.'

He didn't refer to his own scar, so presumably he had come by that in some other way.

'You've been working in Italy, I believe? How did that come about? I mean how does one become a bodyguard?' Savanna asked, as they followed a taxi

which was cutting through the side streets of Belgravia to avoid the heavy traffic in the main thoroughfares.

'I was in the Services for a while,' was all he said. Obviously he didn't want to talk about it.

She tried another tack. 'What did you think of Italy? It's a country I long to visit. All the nicest things in London seem to be made there. I should think the shops must be marvellous.'

'Yes, the Italians are very strong on good design. I liked Italy, but my job there—keeping an eye on a couple of children—wasn't really up my street. It paid well. I saved some money, and learnt to speak passable Italian, so it wasn't entirely a waste of time.'

'What are you thinking of doing next?—When you've finished looking after me?'

'Ah, that's the problem. I came back to England to look up a girl who I hoped might have missed me more than she expected to when we said goodbye. She hadn't; and, seeing her again, I realised she'd been right to send me packing. We weren't right for each other. So now I'm in the market for whatever adventure offers itself.'

His openness about the girl surprised her in view of his evasive reply to her earlier question. Could it be that he'd left the Services under a cloud? Been cashiered?

No: because if that were the case Jago would know about it, and would not have entrusted her to him.

By road, at that hour of the day, the journey home took considerably longer than by rail, but it didn't seem tedious to her. She found Miles a pleasant companion.

Outside the Bancrofts' gate was a car from which, as they pulled in beside it, two men emerged.

'Brace yourself. Those are newshounds,' said Miles.

Savanna stayed where she was while he went round to open her door. She heard him say, 'Good evening, gentlemen,' and ask which paper they represented.

It was the one which had already printed a largely cock-and-bull story, and which never mentioned a woman without giving her age, the colour of her hair and, unless she was old, her measurements.

One of the men was a photographer. Accustomed to facing bright lights, and prepared for the flare of his flashbulb, she neither blinked nor flinched when he snapped her stepping out of the car.

But without Miles' reassuring presence, she might have been flustered by the questions which the other man fired at her. Some she answered; some Miles expertly parried. When asked who he was, he said, 'A friend of the family.'

They wanted to come into the house and photograph her there, with her mother, but Miles wouldn't have it.

'I'm sorry, but Miss Bancroft has had a busy day and needs to relax now. I have Mr Kindersley's authority to say that if you want to take pictures of them together, you can do so at seven tomorrow evening, at his hotel, before they go out to dinner.'

'That's fine, but we also want some pictures of Savanna at home,' the photographer persisted.

'Sorry, Miss Bancroft is tired. Goodnight, gentlemen,' was Miles' firm reply, as he shepherded her through the gate and latched it behind them.

Walking up the path, she heard one of them say, his voice carrying in the quietness of the tree-lined road, 'That bloke is no friend of the family. He's a strong-arm man hired by the boy-friend.'

'That's what I think,' agreed the other. 'Can't say. I blame him. She's not the type I expected. Seems a nice girl, not one of the go-getters.'

'Thank you,' Savanna murmured sotto voce, and saw Miles grin.

But moments earlier there had been something in his manner which made her understand why the two men hadn't gone on arguing with him. Jago had used the expression 'a tough cookie' during his telephone talk with her, and she had a feeling it was an apt description of the man who had brought her home tonight. Easy-going and mild-looking normally, but, when occasion demanded, a very tough cookie indeed.

Miles' arrival came as no surprise to Mrs Bancroft. She, too, had had a call from Jago. When it emerged that Miles had instructions to stay at the house all evening and spend the night at the nearest hotel, she surprised her daughter by insisting that he should make use of Joey's room.

Next morning he drove her to London, and for the rest of the day he was always somewhere near at hand until, at six, he saw her to the door of Jago's suite.

Meeting Matthews for the first time, she found him to be a middle-aged man with grey hair and a kindly warmth in his eyes which reminded her of her father.

Jago had not yet returned from his day's activities, and the valet showed her where she could change her clothes. Having no glamorous evening things, and feeling that tonight it would be wiser to veer towards dignity rather than glamour, she had rushed out during the day—, accompanied by an unembarrassed Miles—and bought a long, narrow skirt of black wool crepe, and a shirt of black silk. Linked by a soft black kid belt, the combination of these classically plain and undating separates had a simple elegance which she hoped would please her future husband and act as a visual counterbalance to any exaggerated text which might accompany the photographs he had agreed to have taken.

'Mr Kindersley returned while you were dressing, Miss Bancroft. He won't be long changing. Would you care for a glass of sherry while you're

waiting for him?' Matthews enquired, when he found her wandering round the sitting- room.

Savanna shook her head. 'You don't happen to have any unsweetened orange juice, do you? It would steady my nerves much better than sherry.'

She was sipping the refreshingly cold fruit juice when Jago appeared and made her heart leap with pleasure at the sight of his tall, lithe figure striding into the room, making the atmosphere zing with the vital force of his energy. Not for him the late-day fatigue of the tired businessman. Fresh from the shower—she could see that his hair was still damp—he looked as if the day was just beginning.

'May I kiss you, or will it ruin your make-up?' he asked, removing the glass from her hand and putting it aside.

Coming towards her, he had already scanned her appearance, taking in what she was wearing, and the way her pale hair was brushed back and clasped at the nape of her neck to make her look older and more poised. Her only jewellery was his ring, and the pearl beads which went with the gold pins she had worn since having her ears pierced.

Savanna shook her head. She was wearing make-up, but most of it was round her eyes.

'Does that mean I can't kiss you, or- that it won't hurt your make-up?'

He was teasing her. He was going to kiss her whatever she said. He was looking at her mouth with an anticipatory gleam which made her quiver inside. She drew in her breath, her lips parting, her lashes flickering with the shyness revived by the interval since their last time alone together.

Jago bent, his mouth alighting on hers feather-gently, their lips barely touching, but the warmth of his breath intermingling with her own quickened, uneven breathing.

His hands came to rest on her hips, but so lightly she scarcely felt them until they moved up to her waist, then behind her to spread on her back, warm

and firm through the thin black silk. But he didn't draw her against him. There were still several inches between them.

When he touched her lips with his tongue, her body recoiled like a gun from the sudden sharp shock of excitement which raced down her spine and made her slender thighs tremble.

Minutes later, when he straightened and moved back a pace, she was uncrushed and undishevelled, only her inner self disturbed.

'There you are: every hair in place.'

His grey eyes gleamed with amusement. She could see that he knew what he had done to her; that, without even pressing her to him, he had made the blood burn in her veins, and all her nerves tingle with longing for more of that soft, sensuous kissing which no one had shown her before him.

'I saw this today. It's on approval, so don't be afraid to say if it isn't your style,' he said, taking out of his pocket a rope of unusual beads and handing them to her.

'Oh, but it is!' she exclaimed. 'What sort of beads are they, Jago?'

'Cloisonne and pink jade, carved. I was buying a net- suke for myself, and they caught my eye. They're old, but the tassel is new, of course.'

Savanna examined the beads more closely. The ones he had called cloisonne were decorated with enamel in many colours, with fine lines of metal in their design. Alternating with them were the semi-translucent rose-coloured jade beads, spaced by knots of thick silk, the rope finished with a handsome tassel.

'Put it on. Let me see how it looks,' Jago commanded.

She obeyed him.

'Yes, I like it on you. It looks well with black. You must keep it.'

'Thank you, I'd love to . . . but . . . but I haven't given you anything,' she said regretfully.

'On the contrary, you give me pleasure every time I look at you—and even more when I touch you. Come here.'

He had moved a few paces away to appraise the beads from a distance. Now, almost reluctantly, she went towards him, half dreading, half longing to feel him savouring her lips again.

Before she reached him, his manservant entered. 'The representatives of the Press have arrived, sir.'

'Then you'd better show them in, Matthews.'

In the brief interval between the valet's withdrawal and their visitors' entrance, Jago looked at her with an expression in which she read irritation at being interrupted, a resigned acceptance that the coming interview was a tedious necessity, and the promise that when it was over he would again demonstrate his power over her senses.

The interview went smoothly, because he dominated the Pressmen as easily as he dominated her. As they had on the island, they posed together for photographs. When urged to kiss her, he did so—on the back of her hand. They sat side by side on a sofa, their fingers interlaced, her face lifted attentively to his as he answered their questions, or ignored them, as he chose, never as they chose.

Afterwards he took her out to dinner, feeding her on delicious things she had never tasted before; gulls' eggs with rock salt and very thin brown bread and butter;

breasts of chicken cooked in sherry and cream and sprinkled with finely chopped truffles; praline ices with kissel, a hot fruity blackcurrant sauce.

'How are you getting on with Miles?' he enquired, during dinner. 'I haven't seen him for some time.'

'I like him. So do Mother and Benjy. He's a very . . . comfortable person.'

'Not always,' Jago said dryly. 'They're a tough lot, the S.A.S.'

'He was in the Special Air Service?' she asked, with quickened interest.

She remembered watching, on live television, the famous rescue by the men of the Special Air Service of twenty people held hostage by terrorists in the Iranian Embassy in Prince's Gate, a terrace of tall, dignified houses overlooking Hyde Park.

Occasionally Savanna went there to buy her mother embroidery wools from the house occupied by the Royal School of Needlework, not far from the burnt-out ruin of the former Embassy.

Everyone who had seen the programme had felt proud of the brilliantly executed rescue of fifteen men and five women whom the terrorists had threatened to murder at half-hourly intervals. The operation ranked with the Israeli rescue raid on Entebbe, and had focussed the attention of the nation on a crack force of daring men who would have preferred to avoid the ensuing publicity for their Regiment.

To discover that Miles had belonged to this military elite showed him in a new light, and explained his evasive reference to it, and also the instinctive recognition by the reporter and photographer who had been waiting for her outside her house that he was not someone to tangle with.

'I wonder why he left it?' she pondered.

'To please the girl he wants, I believe. Foolish of him!' was Jago's rider.

'Why do you say that?'

'Because girls should take men as they find them—and vice versa. Nothing is more unwise than to try to change people. If a man has a bent for that kind of soldiering, he can't be converted into a desk-bound commuter, or whatever it is she wants him to be.'

'She doesn't want him—nor he her now.'

'He told you that?'

'Yes, last night, driving me home.'

'Unusually forthcoming of him. According to Guy—his brother—Miles keeps his cards close to his chest, and rarely confides in his family or anyone else. I wonder why he's made an exception of you,' he said thoughtfully.

'I asked him what he was going to do next.'

'Which didn't oblige him to discuss his love life with you. I hope he's not going to be even more foolish and fall in love with you now.'

'Of course not! I'm engaged to you.'

'That doesn't stop other men wanting you. Even our marriage won't do that.'

'It stops me wanting them,' she said gently.

'Nevertheless I shouldn't have engaged him to look after you had I known the affair was over.'

Prompted by a sudden longing to hear Jago say something as gallant as his description of her to Miles, she gave him an impish smile. 'Am I really so irresistible?'

Instead of the ardent assurance she had hoped for, he said merely, 'A man on the rebound is peculiarly susceptible.'

'I don't think he is on the rebound. It sounded as if the fire had burned out on both sides.' She decided to change the subject. 'You told me you saw these beads while buying something for yourself. A netski . . . was that the word?'

'That's how it's pronounced. It's spelt n-e-t-s-u-k-e.'

'What exactly is it?'

He put his hand in his pocket and produced a small object which he placed on the white damask cloth near her wine glass. It was a piece of ivory, carved to represent two mice on a cob of maize. Savanna picked it up and turned it between her fingers, examining the exquisite detail of the animals' beady eyes and hair-fine whiskers.

'It's enchanting. But why these holes?'

'Because netsuke were used to fasten pouches to belts, or to fix the ends of a sash. I began to buy them as an investment, and now do it for pleasure as well. I have rather a fine collection, although not to compare with the one in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The next time I go to look at it, I'll take you with me. Perhaps, somewhere else in the museum, you'll see something which you'd like to collect. I should like my wife to be able to enjoy my resources with more discrimination than the woman whose only interest is in clothes.'

'Sometimes clothes can be an investment,' she said. 'Fortuny dresses, for instance. Christie's auctioned a Delphos, which is a long gown of pleated silk, and it fetched three and a half thousand dollars. And it was his most popular design, in production for over forty years, so examples aren't particularly rare.'

'Yes, I've heard of Fortuny,' he answered. 'Perhaps, if his things appeal to you, we might find you a well-preserved white dress in which to be married. But possibly you would rather have your wedding dress specially designed?'

'I haven't thought as far ahead as that.'

'Only ten weeks ahead. We're going to be married on the ninth of May. But you needn't worry about the arrangements. They'll all be taken care of. You and your mother have only to make certain choices. All the practical side will be handled by members of my staff.'

'Is it going to be a very large wedding?' she asked.

In occasional daydreams about her future, before she had met Jago, Savanna had vaguely visualised having a quiet, informal, close-family-only kind of marriage; the honeymoon being more important than an elaborate and costly ceremony.

'As far as I'm concerned, a register office with you and the necessary witnesses would satisfy me. But I should think that your mother, as you're her only daughter, would prefer to see you married in the traditional way,' said Jago, turning to cast his eye over the selection of cigars in a humidor which had been wheeled to his elbow.

'I didn't know you smoked cigars,' she commented, when he had decided he didn't wish for one.

'Sometimes I smoke Davidoff cigarillos or, if I want to switch off for an hour or two, I'll have one of their No. 1 Havanas. But there are other ways of relaxing, and I'll give up the few I do smoke if you find it objectionable.'

'I don't mind the smell of cigar smoke. It's like the smell of good cooking. Cigarette smoke is what I can't bear.'

'You may not like cigar-scented kisses,' said Jago quizzically.

They were seated opposite each other, and he moved his leg under the table, rubbing his knee against hers and his calf against her calf.

She tried to look serenely unruffled both by the pressure of his leg and his expression, but it wasn't easy when he fixed her with that glint of devilment, and talked of kisses with a blithe disregard for anyone listening.

'To ... to get back to the wedding. I do think a register office is rather soulless. A quiet church wedding is what I should prefer.'

'Unfortunately that presents difficulties. I don't want to invite half my friends and offend the other half. It's better to have all or none, and not only is your parish church too small to accommodate my guests, there's no local hotel which can put on a suitable reception. With a lot of people flying in

from Europe, it'll be easier to have it in London; the service at St Margaret's, Westminster, and the reception at my hotel.'

Savanne quailed. St Margaret's was the setting for many of the largest and most fashionable London weddings. She had never seen herself being married there, and did not relish the prospect. But if that was what Jago wanted, she could only acquiesce.

'Don't worry,' he said, 'you'll enjoy it. I shall keep a watching brief on the preparations and make sure you don't become frazzled. Have you any idea where you'd like to go for our honeymoon?'

'No, none. I—I'll leave it to you.'

'Very well, it shall be a surprise. A few weeks of peaceful seclusion in which to adjust to your new role as the beautiful Mrs Jago Kindersley.'

There was no mistaking the possessive satisfaction with which he was looking at her. Remembering Miles' remarks about windscreen injuries, Savanna found herself wondering how Jago would react if she were to be badly cut about, her looks spoiled by ugly lacerations.

Naturally her face, which had attracted him to her in the first place, must be an important element in his feelings towards her; just as his own dynamic features were part of the reason she loved him.

If he were to be terribly scarred, she knew it would not alter her love. But would his for her diminish if he could not show her off proudly?

He said, 'If you're free this Saturday and Sunday, we'll fly up to see my sister. She's impatient to meet you, but she can't come south at the moment.'

The weather being milder that evening and, as they had come from his hotel to the restaurant in a taxi, not in the Rolls, Savanna suggested walking back.

Jago agreed. 'I often take a walk at this hour,' he told her. 'But are your shoes suitable for walking?'

She nodded, lifting her skirt to show him a black-stockinged ankle and a lowish-heeled black patent lace-up with a ribbon in place of a shoelace.

'Hm, reasonably sensible—but I think you could do with a fur in place of that light cloak,' he said, referring to the velvet opera cloak of pre-World War One vintage which was her only evening wrap.

'Perhaps Father Christmas will bring me one,' she said lightly, thinking that when next Christmas came she would like to be able to give him a very unusual netsuke.

'You could do with one before that, my dear. The spring isn't here yet, and may not start till late April. Have you any free time tomorrow? I'll take you to Maxwell Croft and--'

'No, no—please, Jago, no!' she protested. 'I loved your presents from Paris, and these beautiful beads which you've given me. But I don't want any more presents— not until we're married. If my father had been alive, he would have insisted on contributing as much as he could towards the wedding. As things are, it will all fall on you. The fact that you can afford it is neither here nor there. I was brought up to give as well as take. Too much taking makes me uncomfortable.'

'You're over-sensitive,' he told her. 'Your family's financial difficulties make you see these things out of perspective. For me to give you a fur is no more than for you to give your mother a bunch of daffodils.'

Their end of the street was deserted. Jago put his arm round her shoulders and drew her against him.

'You will give—have no doubts on that score. And I shall take you, my lovely. Often, and with a pleasure which, as you know nothing about it, you can't yet weigh against other pleasures.'

In the light of the street lamps his features looked harsh and remorseless, but his deep voice was quiet and caressing as he murmured, 'Even sable isn't as strokable as a woman's skin. Food and wine are very enjoyable, but not to be compared with making love.' He gave a soft, mocking laugh. 'And you're so

refreshingly innocent that you don't even know that I'm making love to you now.' He put his lips close to her ear. 'Trying to make you as impatient for May the ninth as I am.'

'But I am impatient,' she whispered, trembling. 'I love you. I want to be yours in every possible way.'

She hoped that he might stop walking and put both his arms round her. There was no one about to see him embrace her, and she longed to be held close and kissed.

But he walked on, making her wonder if admissions such as she had just made were better left unspoken. Perhaps, in spite of his claim, too much eagerness didn't please him as much as a measure of reserve. But it wasn't in her nature to hold back, to dissimulate.

When they entered the foyer of his hotel, she was surprised to see Miles there, reading. She had not expected to see him again before tomorrow.

Jago explained, 'I'm flying to Munich in the morning, and I want to be up at five-thirty, so I asked Miles to run you home tonight.' He beckoned the younger man to them. 'Hello, Miles. How are you? Come upstairs and have a nightcap with us.'

'Thank you, but I won't if you don't mind. I've already had a couple of beers this evening, and I'm quite happy to wait. This is a very good book'—displaying the cover of a recent best-seller.

'I applaud your good sense with regard to drinking and driving,' said Jago, 'but your tact is unnecessary. I want to talk to you. Savanna and I have also had our quota of alcohol. We'll drink coffee,' and he swept them both into the lift.

Evidently Matthews was off duty as he used a key to open the door of his suite.

As he took her cloak, Savanna said, 'I feel a bit windblown. Is there somewhere I could tidy my hair?'

'Use my bedroom. I'll show you.'

He crossed the room to the door he had emerged from earlier. It opened into a lobby with built-in cupboards on either side, and an inner door leading into a spacious bedroom.

'The bathroom's through there,' he said, indicating another door. 'I prefer your hair loose as you usually wear it.' He withdrew.

Savanna looked around her. The most striking feature of his bedroom was its view. One whole wall was a floor- to-ceiling window, the curtains left open to reveal a wide view of London by night.

Facing this scintillating prospect was a large double bed, its cover removed, the top sheet neatly turned down on one side, but no pyjamas in evidence.

The colour scheme was restfully neutral, ranging from the milky coffee of the twisted wool pile of the carpet to the natural linen covers of the armchairs. An indoor tree, its container concealed in a huge wicker basket, stood in one corner. A nude statue, its -head and arms missing, stood on a plinth in another, dramatically lit from below.

It looked Greek: the art of a time when harmonious proportions mattered more than size. Savanna concluded that, like the several fine oil paintings, it was Jago's personal property. If it represented his ideal of the female body, her only resemblance to the statue was in her height.

Undoing the clasp which had held her hair back, but for one silky tendril blown loose by a gust of night wind, she shook it free, then quickly combed it.

When she rejoined the men, Jago was already pouring out coffee from a glass jug of the kind which attached to a gadget which made proper coffee very quickly. The tray, with its jug of cream, and a dish of *petits fours* and handmade chocolates, must have been left ready by his valet.

They both rose to their feet as she came back, and she saw them looking at her hair.

'I wore it the other way to look less "dumb blonde" for the Pressmen,' she said explanatorily.

'I shouldn't have thought that was necessary. You haven't a dumb blonde's face,' said Miles with a smile.

She smiled back. 'I hope I haven't.'

'If you had, we shouldn't be getting married,' Jago said crisply. 'A pretty face is no compensation for an empty head.'

Something in his tone made her say, 'Did you have my school records checked as well?'

'No. As Miles says, you look intelligent.'

'Appearances can be deceptive.'

'A few hours in your company was enough to prove otherwise. Try one of these'—offering her the dish of sweetmeats.

Savanna took a black chocolate which, guessing it had a liqueur filling, she did not risk biting into.

'I didn't think models ate these,' commented Miles, as he chose one for himself.

'I eat everything that's offered to me.'

'You missed lunch,' he reminded her.

'Yes, but think of the huge breakfast we had.'

'We?' Jago queried, raising an eyebrow.

'Mrs Bancroft invited me to make use of her youngest son's room while I'm keeping an eye on Savanna,' the young man explained.

'I see.' Jago turned to her. 'Why did you miss lunch?'

'I had some shopping to do.'

'Very foolish of you to skip meals. Don't allow her to do it again while she's in your charge, Miles. You were also dragged round the stores and made to miss your lunch, presumably?'

'I've been on more exacting exercises. We only went to two shops. Judging by what I know of my mother's and sister's shopping habits, I should say Savanna was an exceptionally fast, decisive shopper. More like a man in that respect.'

'And what higher praise could there be than that?' she retorted impishly.

Miles gave his rare, lopsided grin, as Benjy might have grinned at her after some brotherly badinage. Yet she sensed that Jago was not pleased by their banter. She remembered what he had said about Miles during dinner. Was he going to turn out to be jealous?—Irrationally jealous of men who, in her eyes, could not be compared with him?

Yet there was nothing of the jealous lover in his manner when, about twenty minutes later, he rose to fetch her cloak for her, thereby indicating that it was time they went on their way.

'I thought there was something you wanted to talk to me about,' said Miles.

'Nothing specific—merely to renew our acquaintance. Savanna and I are spending the weekend with my sister, after which it may not be necessary to continue your surveillance. But I'll let you know about that.'

He walked with them to the lift which connected the suites on the top floor with the underground garage where Miles had been able to park the hired car. In the other man's presence, Jago's goodnight embrace was confined to a hand on her shoulder, and, a light kiss on her cheek.

'Marsh will collect you at eight on Saturday morning. Pack what you're wearing tonight, and some flat shoes for walking on Sunday. Goodnight.'

'Thank you for a lovely evening. Goodnight.'

Savanna went down in the lift with Miles, wishing it was Jago who was taking her home. But if he had to be up at five-thirty, it was understandable that he wanted to be in bed by midnight.

Thinking of his bed, and its wonderful vista of lights, she found herself half regretting that theirs was not the usual relationship between people with marriage in view. If it had been, she could have stayed with him.

Not that she would have liked deceiving her mother by pretending to be spending the night with Clare and Liwy in the flat they were sharing in Hampstead; nor would she have liked Matthews knowing that she and Jago were sleeping together.

How many women had shared that great bed with him? she wondered. The thought did not trouble her greatly. It was only the future which caused her a peculiar unease. Was it all too good to be true? Must something happen to spoil it?

They were crossing the Thames before she realised she had not said a word to Miles since leaving the hotel.

Seeking a subject for conversation, she said, 'Jago tells me you used to be in the S.A.S.'

'For a time, yes, was his offhand answer.

'Is it something you're not allowed to talk about?'

'No, but for security reasons the Regiment is inclined to keep itself to itself. Most of the people who are or have been in it tend to prefer action to talk.' He glanced at her. 'But I'll tell you anything you want to know if you'll gratify my curiosity about something you said to him this evening.'

She hesitated. 'What was it?'

'You asked if he had had your school records checked as well. As well as what?'

She gave a soft laugh. 'As well as my address and telephone number, and various other checkable facts.'

Curious to know his reaction, she explained how she and Jago had met.

'Does it sound crazy?' she asked.

'For two ordinary mortals—yes, insane,' was his candid comment. 'But perhaps not for people like you two.'

'We are ordinary mortals ... or I am.'

'You behave like one, I agree. For a girl with your looks, you're the least spoilt stunner I've ever met,' he told her, with another sideways glance. 'All the same, one wouldn't expect you to fall for an average sort of man, and Jago isn't.'

'No, he isn't,' she agreed, in a thoughtful tone.

Nor was Miles himself, and yet somehow, for all his reserve, she found him less daunting than Jago. She fell silent, fingering the beads he had given her, and remembering the way he had kissed her, deliberately exciting her senses while appearing to remain in full control of his own emotions. Would she ever be able to stir him as wildly as he had stirred her? Somehow she couldn't visualise him losing control of himself.

To her surprise, Jago flew the plane himself on their journey to the north of England.

'I learnt in a Beagle Pup when I was nineteen, and I had an American Cessna for ten years before I bought this French plane. There's no need to be nervous,' he assured her, as they reached his aircraft.

It was an Avion Robin HR 100, painted blue and white, with the wings below the cabin rather than above it as they were on the nearby Cessna which he pointed out to her.

They had to climb over the wing to enter the cabin. But as Savanna was wearing trousers and low-heeled shoes this presented no problem. Having checked that she was properly strapped in her seat, Jago then gave all his attention to the business of take-off. Watching his long brown fingers moving confidently over the switches of the Robin's instrument panel, she had no doubt that he was a skilled and careful pilot.

When they were airborne, he said, 'The disadvantage of this plane is that it needs almost twice as much runway as the Cessna. One of the reasons for the Cessna's popularity is its short field performance. You can get it off the ground almost anywhere, but the Robin needs half a mile to clear fifty feet.'

'So you don't like it as much as your last plane?'

'I think it has a number of drawbacks. As you may have noticed, the way the whole side of the cabin slides forward when one wants to get in and out is not good design for wet weather. But, having said that, it's a marvellous aeroplane to fly—a pilot's plane rather than a businessman's. When we land, you'll see what an excellent view of the airfield we'll have, and the low wing configuration makes for a much softer landing. Also, of course, the Robin has a higher ceiling and a faster cruising speed than the Cessna. On balance, I'm very happy with it.'

'How much does it cost to run a private plane?' she asked, more to satisfy Benjy's curiosity than her own.

'About a tenth of one per cent of the cost of the aeroplane per hour,' said Jago. 'Which means that a Cessna bought for twenty-five thousand would cost about twenty- five pounds an hour. This plane costs roughly fifty pounds an hour, not including hangarage. It's an expensive way to travel, but I enjoy it and can afford it, so why not? After we're married you can learn, if you like.'

He paused to take a large vacuum flask out of the canvas carrier he had brought on board and put on the floor by his seat. Handing it to her, he said, 'Time for coffee. There are mugs*and biscuits in the carrier.'

As Savanna poured out the coffee, she said, 'I feel I should learn to drive before I think about flying— although it's nice to know you think I'm capable of it.'

'Women are capable of a good deal more than they're given credit for. The last time I was in America, I read a report of a woman who was out for an afternoon flip in a light aircraft with her husband when he collapsed at the controls. She didn't know how to fly, but somehow she managed to keep the plane airborne. She must have been almost demented with shock and fear, but she kept a grip on herself.'

'What happened?'

'A flying instructor at an airfield heard her calling frantically for help, and he took off and found her, and flew alongside giving directions. She got the plane down in one piece. That's a test of nerve which a lot of men would fail.'

'What an appalling experience!'

'Yes, and perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it until we're on the ground again. But I had a check-up quite recently, and it's very unlikely that I'm going to collapse on you,' he said, with a smile.

'I've had a check-up, too. You'll be pleased to hear there's no reason why I shouldn't produce little Kindersleys as efficiently as a battery hen lays eggs,' Savanna replied, with an edge in her voice.

If he heard it, he chose to ignore it. 'Splendid. Who did you see? Your family G.P.?

'Yes. He was surprised. Most girls go to see him for the opposite reason—they don't want to have children immediately.'

'Or, if they do, they can't afford to,' he answered dryly. 'Women have gained a lot of new options recently, but that one's been lost—the right to be a full-time wife and mother.'

His sister Susan, who met them at Manchester, turned out to be a warm, direct, easy-going personality, bearing little physical resemblance to her brother except in her height and colouring. Her features were softer than his, and she had brown eyes which held no critical reserve as she greeted her future sister-in-law.

'I feel I know you already,' she told Savanna. 'When I saw your face on the cover of *Vogue*, I thought you had that special something which takes a model to the top— little guessing that my brother was going to snap you up first,' was her greeting, as she held Savanna's hand in hers. 'It's about time he settled down. I was beginning to wonder if he'd ever find the right girl.'

'I don't know why. I'm five years younger than Edward was when he married you,' remarked Jago.

'He hadn't tried and rejected dozens before me,' said his sister. Then she hastily changed the subject, obviously feeling that she had made a gaffe.

At her suggestion, Savanna sat in the front of the small car during the half an hour's drive which it took to reach Susan's house on the outskirts of a pretty village in Cheshire.

This gave Jago the whole of the back seat to accommodate his broad shoulders and long legs, and allowed Susan to talk to his bride-to-be while keeping most of her attention on the other traffic.

By the time they turned into the drive of a large detached family house with a double garage, the well- kept but labour-saving grounds screened from the adjoining properties by tall evergreen hedges, Savanna knew she was not going to have any difficulty in establishing a comfortable relationship with her sister-in-law.

The twin babies, William and Emily, were at home in the care of Susan's part-time housekeeper. With their round cheeks and button noses, Savanna

found them enchanting. But although Jago petted them briefly, it was clear that he wasn't much interested in them. There was, however, no doubting his affection and respect for his brother-in-law when that evening Edward came home after a long day in the operating theatre.

The age gap between him and his wife was even wider than between Jago and Savanna, which she would have found reassuring had it not been for the realisation that although Susan did not advertise her intellectual powers, she was a graduate and therefore in much better mental shape than Savanna felt herself to be.

Explaining that he was playing golf early the next day, Edward went to bed at ten.

'No need for you to come up yet, my dear,' he remarked to his wife, when she would have accompanied him.

'I'm an owl married to a lark,' she explained to their guest, when her husband had left the room. 'Jago burns the candles at both ends. How about you, Savanna?'

'As a rule I'm a lark.'

'Off you go, then. We'll see you in the morning,' said Jago.

She was about to protest that, tomorrow not being a working day, it wasn't necessary for her to go to bed as early as this, when it struck her that he might wish to talk to his sister privately.

'Well ... if you won't think it rude of me?' she said to Susan.

'Not a bit. I want you to feel completely at home. As you may have noticed, there's a kettle in your room if you want to make early tea or coffee.'

Savanna stood up. 'So I saw. What a good idea. Goodnight, Susan. Goodnight'—this to Jago, who was in the act of rising.

He went with her to the door which he opened. The hall was in darkness, Edward having turned off the lights.

'Wait a moment.' Jago left the room ahead of her.

As he touched the switches which illuminated the upper and half landings, she followed him into the dimness of the hall, out of sight of the chair occupied by his sister.

She expected and hoped that he would take the opportunity to kiss her goodnight with greater ardour than he could have done in front of Susan. He did kiss her, but not with his arms round her, and not with any suggestion that he would have liked to be going to bed with her.

His mouth brushed hers, lightly and briefly. 'Goodnight. Sleep well.' His tone was matter-of-fact.

He did not linger by the newel post as reluctantly, disappointedly, Savanna mounted the staircase. Before she had reached the turn, he had returned to the sitting-room and closed the door.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN Savanna woke up the next morning under a fern- patterned duvet on one of the twin beds in Susan's green and white guest room, she was startled to see from the small quartz clock on the night table that it was long past her usual waking up time.

Then she remembered that it had been well after midnight before she had put out her light. After that she had remained awake for a long time. The book she had been reading had not succeeded in taking her mind off her disappointment at the tepidity of Jago's goodnight kiss.

It had been about half past eleven when she had heard some faint sounds which indicated that he and his sister were retiring for the night. She knew, because Susan had mentioned it, that he had been given the visitors' room with the double bed because it was better suited to his size than a single bed.

Now, at ten past nine in the morning, he would be up and about, as would the rest of the household. What a nuisance Susan must think her, still to be upstairs at this hour.

Jumping out of bed, she padded across the thick ivory carpet to the vanitory unit to brush her teeth. Her usual sleepwear was a gaily striped knee-length nightshirt, but for this \jisit she had brought with her a pair of peach-coloured silky pyjamas which had been a present from Richard. They were edged with pale blue piping, with a mandarin collar and fastenings in the Chinese style. The silk being synthetic, not real like that of her brother's pyjamas, they had survived her restless night without crumpling.

She had just finished using a mint-flavoured mouthwash when there was a tap on the door. Thinking it must be her hostess, Savanna called 'Come in' and turned.

But the apology she was about to make died unuttered at the sight of Jago opening the door with one hand, a tray balanced on the other.

'Good morning.' He closed the door behind him. 'I thought you might still be asleep. For a professed early riser, you were giving a good imitation of a dormouse when I looked in half an hour ago.'

'I know . . . it's disgraceful. I'm sorry. I hardly ever oversleep. It must be because I was reading late.'

'It doesn't matter. It does people good to ignore the clock from time to time. I always do when I stay here. Edward is on the golf course,' he went on, 'and Susan and the twins are out. We have no one to please but ourselves, so hop back into bed and have breakfast there for a change. I had kidneys and bacon myself, but Susan seemed to think you would prefer something lighter. We're having roast lamb for lunch.'

Savanna climbed back into bed and pulled the quilt over her legs. She had yet to brush her long hair, which now she raked back with her fingers in an attempt to make it look less tousled.

The tray was the kind with short legs, but instead of placing it across her lap, Jago put it on the chest next to the night table, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

'First, a good morning kiss,' he said, smiling. 'I have shaved, if you notice.' He reached out for one of her hands and held it against his hard cheek for a moment before turning his lips into her palm.

Her fingers fluttered against the taut brown skin of his jaw. She swayed towards him, her free hand going to his shoulder, feeling the hard bone and muscle under the chestnut brown velour of his bath-robe. He was wearing pyjama trousers but not, apparently, a jacket. Where the robe gaped, his chest was bare, the bronzed skin inviting her touch. But as yet she had not the confidence to slip her hand inside the cloth and search for his heartbeat.

His arm slid round her waist, drawing her closer to him. He kissed her lips. This time there was nothing perfunctory about the pressure of his mouth. It was warm and lingering—the kiss she had wanted last night but which he had withheld, leaving her restless with longing.

When he let her go she was trembling. Opening dazed eyes, she watched him lean across the space between the beds to get hold of the second pillow which she had removed from her bed before lying down the night before. Before she could protest that it was wasteful, he had taken the two pillows from the other twin bed and piled all three behind her in addition to the one she had slept on. Pressing her back against this luxurious mound of feathers and down, he began to kiss her again, his fingertips softly caressing the long smooth lines of her throat and the delicate skin behind her ears.

As one kiss merged with another, Savanna lost all track of time. The persuasive movements of Jago's mouth worked like a drug, dulling her normal reactions while arousing strange new responses.

He made her feel like a candle melting in the sun . . . like a tree with all its leaves quivering in a gust of wind . . . like a swimmer floating in a warm sea.

When at last he took his mouth away, she gave a soft murmur of protest, not wanting the long kiss to end, and those lovely sensations to stop.

For some moments she lay with closed lids, her breathing shallow and rapid, unwilling to open her eyes and break the spell he had put on her.

When she felt the brush of his fingers and realised that he was releasing the blue silk toggles from their loops, her breathing ceased altogether. For long seconds she lay like a statue while he undid the top of her pyjamas and laid bare her small untouched breasts.

When he kissed the warm hollow between them, she gasped and a shudder ran through her.

'No, Jago, you mustn't . . . oh, please . . .'

'Why not?'

His deep voice vibrated through her as he kept his lips where they were.

She looked down and saw his dark hair, and felt a primeval instinct to delve her hands into its thickness, and press his head to her body.

Instead, she said faintly, 'You promised . . .'

He raised his head.

'What did I promise?'

His eyes were amused as he ran the tip of his forefinger around the still visible outline of the left half of her bikini top.

'You . . . you promised not to do this until ... we were married.' Her voice came out a hoarse whisper.

'I promised not to seduce you. I didn't say I wouldn't touch you at all.'

As his finger moved in slowly diminishing circles Savanna shrank back against the pillows, not because she objected to his touch or found it distasteful, but because she was afraid of her own reaction when he reached the centre of the circle.

'Yes, but . . . but one thing leads to another,' she murmured, through dry lips.

His smile mocked her rosy-cheeked confusion.

'Very true. But not in this case.'

'W-why not in this case?'

'Because you may lose your head, but I shan't lose mine,' he said dryly. 'Nor is there time to do more than play with you a little. My sister will be back in half an hour, and it will take longer than that to give you your first lesson in love.'

Her colour deepened. 'How do you know you won't lose your head? How can anyone say that for certain?'

'At your age they can't. At mine one has learnt self- control.'

It irked her to feel herself acutely responsive while Jago remained calm and unmoved. She wanted to see his hard grey eyes become bright with desire, and his fingers shake as they touched her.

'Are you sure?' Recklessly she reared up from the pillows, locking her arms round his neck, pressing herself to his chest, offering her parted lips.

This time he kissed her more fiercely, his hands sliding round behind her to caress her bare back under the jacket. When he ran his short, well-kept nails up and down both sides of her spine, it sent shivers of delight along her nerves.

As far as she was concerned, the embrace could have gone on for ever; but after a while he removed her arms from round his neck and pressed her down on to the pillows.

She saw that, although he was breathing slightly faster than usual, he was far from being carried away. His fingers were steady as he covered her and dealt with the fastenings of her jacket, while she lay there with heaving breasts and limbs which felt limp and trembly, as if she had run too fast and too far.

'Your coffee will be getting cold,' he said, as he slipped the knot on the collar through its loop.

'It d-doesn't matter. I don't like it too hot,' she murmured, half relieved and half sorry to be modestly covered once more.

Not that her breasts were now invisible. The thin stuff clung to their contours, and she saw Jago looking at the signs of how deeply his kisses had stirred her.

Smiling slightly, he put his hands on her shoulders, pinning her to the pillows. He bent his head, not to her mouth but lower, to the bud-like shapes outlined by the silky fabric.

She gasped, instinctively resisting a caress which suddenly she felt to be more a test of her reactions than a passionate urge on his part. Yet when his

mouth touched her, her momentary struggle changed into a spasm of pleasure \which made her gasp with the shock of it.

A few moments later Jago rose from the bedside and placed the tray across her legs. Then he walked away to the window which overlooked the grounds behind the house.

Watching him as he stood looking out at the garden, his hands thrust into the pockets of his robe, Savanna wondered if his control was not as complete as he had vaunted.

She herself was trembling so violently that she dared not pour out any coffee for fear of spilling it on the pretty. pale green linen place mat which had a pocket at one end containing a matching napkin.

With an unsteady hand she took up a spoon and forced herself to start eating a melange of chilled grapefruit segments with orange and melon arranged in a shallow glass bowl.

She had calmed down a little by the time Jago turned from the window, his expression impassive and all sign of any interior disturbance which he might have felt erased from his dark compelling features.

'W-where has your sister gone this morning?' she asked.

'To see an old lady who has no one else to keep an eye on her. Susan doesn't go to church, but she takes the Ten Commandments a good deal more seriously than many who do. She has a much nicer nature than I have,' he added sardonically.

A few minutes later he left her to finish her breakfast and get dressed.

The bedroom had an adjoining shower where Savanna had a hot shower followed by a cold one. Having dried herself, she returned to the bedroom to lie down again for five minutes to allow her deodorant to dry completely before she put on her clothes.

Before she stretched out, she locked the door. She could imagine what would happen if Jago decided to come back for the tray and found her lying totally naked.

Thinking about what had happened earlier, she felt her insides contract with rekindling excitement. Her breathing quickened, and she found herself longing for the moment when he would make love to her properly instead of, to use his own phrase, merely playing with her a little.

She wasn't sure that she liked that expression. It made her sound like a toy; a diversion merely, not the person of supreme importance to him, as a truly beloved wife should be.

For the first time, it struck her sharply that Jago had never actually *said* he loved her.

Suddenly she had an overwhelming need to hear him say those three simple words—I love you.

When she went downstairs, Jago was in the kitchen, reading one of the Sunday newspapers.

'Have you already washed up your breakfast dishes?' she asked, seeing no sign of them on the drainer.

'No, they're in the dishwasher. Susan waits till there's a full load before she turns it on,' he answered, without raising his glance from whatever he was reading.

Savanna added her breakfast things to those already in the machine. Jago continued to read, a slight frown contracting his well-marked dark eyebrows. She could see now that it was an article on the leader page which was engaging his attention. She moved to his side to read the headline.

She hoped he would look up and smile at her, or perhaps put his arm round her hips. But evidently he was too absorbed in the views of the paper's political columnist to feel any affectionate impulses.

She read the first couple of paragraphs before her attention wandered to the crispness of Jago's dark hair, the strong brown column of his neck, and the high hard slant of his cheekbone as he leaned over the outspread paper.

When she laid a hand on his shoulder, he seemed unaware of her touch. He was still in his dark chestnut robe, and the velvety feel of the fabric seemed somehow to accentuate the masculinity and power of the body beneath it.

Sooner than she expected, he finished reading and switched his attention to her. Turning away from the table, he spread his legs and drew her down to perch on one of his thighs.

'Sorry . . . was I neglecting you, my lovely?'

For the second time that morning something in the way he expressed himself struck a jarring note.

'Not at all. I don't expect you to concentrate on me every minute of the day,' she said coolly.

'No, that I shall not do,' he stated. 'In general, during the day you will have to make your own amusements. I shall only be able to concentrate on you at night.'

The gleam in his eyes made her blush. She would have sprung up, but he held her firmly where she was.

'Kiss me, Savanna.'

Softly-spoken, it was still a command, and one he would make her obey if she tried to refuse him. Not that she had any wish to refuse him. It was only . . . she pushed the unease out of her mind, and pressed her lips lightly against his half-smiling, sensual mouth.

He had made her initiate the kiss, but it wasn't long before he took it over, holding her head between his hands so that she could not escape the warm, hungry pressure of his lips.

When he let her go she was trembling again; bemused by the surging emotions he could so easily arouse in her.

'Oh, Jago, I love you ... I love you so much,' she whispered passionately.

It was a spontaneous expression of her deepest feelings. She had said it without any thought of hearing him echo her admission. But when, without saying a word, he would have kissed her again, she was conscious of something lacking.

Jerking her head back, she murmured, 'You . . . you haven't said that you love me.'

'Do you need to be told?' he asked huskily. 'Can't you tell the effect you have on me?'

Bright colour flared in her cheeks as, deliberately, he made her aware of his readiness to make love to her.

'Th-that isn't what I meant,' she stammered. 'Yes, I *do* need to be told, Jago. All women do.'

A curiously shuttered look came over his face, blanking out the amorous mockery which had been in his eyes seconds earlier, hardening the curve of his mouth into a stern, disciplined line.

She knew then, before he spoke, that her sense of unease had been justified. There *was* something wrong with their relationship.

He pushed her gently off his lap, and stood up and moved away, ostensibly to pour some more coffee from the jug keeping warm on the hotplate of his sister's automatic coffee maker.

Savanna watched him with a sinking sense of panic; knowing that in a few moments he was going to tell her something which would dissolve the bright haze of her happiness like a strong wind.

'Do you believe in astrology, Savanna?' he asked her abruptly.

The question baffled her. What had astrology to do with their feelings for each other?

'No ... no, I don't, actually.'

'Nor do I. Nor am I superstitious. If I spill salt, I don't throw a pinch of it over my shoulder. If I break a mirror, I don't expect seven years' bad luck. I'm an educated twentieth century man, and I don't believe in any of that nonsense—including the idea that being "in love", as it's called, is the proper basis for a marriage. All the evidence is that it's not.'

There was a silence while she digested this statement.

'Wh-what do you consider the proper basis for marriage, then?' she asked at last.

Before he could answer, there was the sound of a car entering the garage which was connected to the kitchen by a small utility room.

'Susan's back,' he said. 'We shall have to continue this conversation later.'

'But I--' Savanna's protest that she couldn't wait until later died on her lips as she realised the impossibility of discussing this thunderbolt he had lobbed at her until they had the certainty of privacy.

Meanwhile she had to have a few minutes alone to pull herself together. If Susan were to see her now, she would know at once that something was wrong. Any woman, coming into the kitchen at this moment, would sense the tension in the atmosphere.

'I—I'm going up to make my bed,' she muttered.

She had made it before coming downstairs, but neither Jago nor Susan were to know that.

On reaching her room she walked across to the window, standing almost on the spot where, less than an hour ago, Jago had stood while she lay in bed, still quivering from the ecstasy of his kisses.

Now all that tremulous excitement had been doused by his arbitrary announcement that love, as she understood it, had no meaning for him. It was merely superstitious nonsense.

She remembered how, the day he had asked her to marry him, he had said, *As soon as I saw your face, I knew it was the one I wanted to look at across the breakfast table for the next forty years.*

And she, foolishly, had chosen to take it as a way of saying he had fallen headlong in love with her. Yet down in the depths of her being, at the level between subconscious and conscious thought, she had suspected that he was too experienced, too worldly, too cynical to share her own outlook on life.

Young men fell in love. Sometimes much older men developed intense infatuations which made them behave impetuously, and often foolishly. But not men in their early thirties; especially not rich, attractive men who could have all the women they wanted.

She should have known that. She *had* known it, and chosen to ignore it.

The sound of the door opening made her hurriedly compose her face into an untroubled mask before turning to face her hostess. But Susan would have knocked before entering, she realised a second or two later, watching Jago shut the door behind him.

'I came up here to be private. What do you want?' she asked stiffly.

'I don't want to have you working yourself into a state for no good reason,' was his brisk reply. 'I'd hoped this issue wouldn't arise, but since it has, it had better be tackled immediately. You won't enjoy your lunch if you're upset.'

'Are you surprised that I'm upset? What girl would not be, after being told by her fiance that he doesn't love her?' she enquired, in a voice which shook.

'Ask yourself which you would prefer: a bridegroom so besottedly in love that he thinks you're the perfect woman, and consequently is certain to be

disappointed; or one who's chosen you while still "of sound mind", as they say?'

Before she could answer, he went on, 'A lasting marriage has to be built on solid foundations, not romantic illusions, Savanna. I'm prepared to cut my losses in my business life from time to time, but not in my private life. We'll marry, and we'll stay married. Divorce is not my style.'

'Your style? What about my style? Have you only seen it from your side? Hasn't it occurred to you that I might not want a husband who didn't love me?'

He came closer and laid both his hands heavily on her slim shoulders. 'I like you. In the long run—and marriage is a long run—that's the most important thing. Girls of your age are brainwashed into thinking that being in love is the be-all and end-all of existence. Liberated they may be, but not from that particular delusion. Not yet.'

Suddenly, to her consternation, she began to cry, her soft mouth working uncontrollably, hot tears brimming over her eyelids and trickling down her cheeks. It was ages since last she had wept; not since having to give up her ambition to go to university.

Jago gave vent to a sound which she couldn't interpret. Perhaps it signified exasperation. At the same time he pulled her into his arms and held her against him.

'There's no need for this, silly child.'

He held her close to him with one arm, while his other hand fopddled her head, smoothing her thick silky hair and caressing the nape of her neck with light, gentle fingertips.

Savanna strove to control herself. Even in her shock and misery, she was still aware of the latent power in the tall, strong body close to hers.

Presently the hand at the back of her head slid round to tip up her chin. When she tried to resist the upward pressure, not wanting him to see her

with moist eyes and blurred mascara, he used such force as was necessary to tilt her head back so that he could kiss her wet cheeks.

Her breathing, already irregular from the bout of tears, became even more uneven as she felt him tasting her tears with his lips and tongue. Before long she had forgotten everything but the longing to feel his mouth on hers.

Her hands which, a few moments earlier, had attempted to push him away, now crept up his chest to his shoulders, circling the collar of his robe until they met behind his neck. Her body no longer needed the iron grip of his left arm to keep her pressed tightly against him.

Her outraged feelings had evaporated; swept away by the powerful narcotic of his overwhelming physical power over her. It was impossible to think clear-headedly—to think at all!—while his mouth roved over her face, exploring her eyebrows and eyelids, the short straight bridge of her nose, the delicate texture of her cheeks and the smooth young sweep of her jaw. Time and again he came close to her parted lips, only to move his mouth away again until she was crazy with longing.

'Kiss me . . . please kiss me,' she whispered, when she couldn't stand it any longer.

'With pleasure.'

Softly he covered her mouth with his, tasting her lips in the same way he had tasted her tears.

His gentleness ended abruptly when, impelled by blind instinct, she tried the same caress on him. The diffident touch with her tongue-tip seemed to electrify him. She felt all his muscles harden, and the speeded-up beat of his heart. His kiss became wild and devouring. It was as if she had touched a secret spring, releasing a fierce primal force. His hands, which had been at her waist, moved possessively over her hips and then to her neat trousered bottom, where his fingers spread, pressing her to him.

Neither of them heard the tap on the door. It was only when it opened and his sister walked in that Jago jerked up his head and glared at her.

'Oh . . . I'm frightfully sorry,' she apologised. 'You said Savanna was making her bed, and I thought you'd come up to dress.'

Already he had recovered himself. 'I did, and I'd better get on with it.'

He released his hold on Savanna, and walked past his sister, out of the room.

'I'm sorry I burst in like that. I assumed you were alone,' said Susan.

'It doesn't matter. I . . . we . . .'

 Savanna broke off in confusion. She felt acutely embarrassed at being caught in such an abandoned embrace.

'I thought you might be interested to see our bedroom,' Susan explained. 'It's just been re-done with paper and curtains which I bought in America. Edward's parents spend every winter in Florida because the climate is so much better, and they can play golf more often than they could here. This year we spent Christmas there with them, and I fell in love with the way Floridian houses are decorated. Come and see what I mean.'

Hardly able to make sense of what she was saying, but obedient to her beckoning gesture, Savanna followed her out on to the landing. As the other woman led her to the master bedroom, she seized the chance to snatch a tissue from her pocket and quickly blot her mouth and eyes. An anxious glance in a mirror as she passed it reassured her that her eye make-up had survived the emotional storm fairly well.

When Susan opened the door of the room she shared with her husband, Savanna saw at once why she was so proud and pleased about her new decor. Although it was an overcast morning, the room seemed to be full of sunshine; an illusion of summer created by the design of lime green leaves and vivid lemon-coloured flowers on the puffy white quilt, and on the wall of the alcove behind the bed.

'In America this is called a comforter,' said Susan. 'This one is an outline comforter because it's quilted round the outline of the pattern.' She lifted a corner of it to show the thick but featherweight filling between the cotton and the backing.

She crossed to one side of a large window and pulled the cord which controlled floor-length curtains which matched the design of the comforter but were made of a type of stiffened voile which combined semi-transparency with a crisply pleated heading.

'These give privacy without shutting out the light during the day, and at night I draw these white lining curtains behind them,' Susan explained.

'They're lovely.' Savanna forced herself to look and sound enthusiastic as indeed, at any other time, she would have been.

'When you're decorating your house, you should make Jago take you to America before you make any decisions,' the other woman continued. 'I used to think the French and the English produced the best furnishing fabrics, and the Italians were the tops for clothes and shoes. But now I think American soft furnishings are probably the best, and as for their towels and bedlinens—you've never seen such gorgeous colours. I could have filled several suitcases!'

She chattered on at some length, giving Savanna more time to compose herself.

Suddenly Susan stopped talking about bathroom accessories, and said, in quite a different tone, 'Perhaps I should mind my own business, but it seemed to me that you and Jago might have been making up a lovers' quarrel when I barged in on you just now.'

Savanna shifted uneasily. 'I ... it wasn't exactly a quarrel. Just an argument.'

'But he'd made you cry—I could see that. Don't let him bully you, Savanna,' Susan said earnestly. 'I'm very fond of my brother, but that doesn't blind me to his faults. He's an exceptional man, with all the defects of his qualities. He's a leader—and sometimes a tyrant, if people don't stand up for themselves. You're much gentler and less sophisticated than we'd expected you to be. You mustn't let Jago bully you.'

'He doesn't,' Savanna protested. 'He's been wonderfully kind and generous to me. My only concern is that I'm not up to his weight. As you say, he's an

exceptional man. Apart from being photogenic, I'm just an ordinary girl. Can I make him happy? I -ask myself.'

'You underrate yourself, my dear. It was obvious from your conversation at dinner last night that you're very intelligent as well as very beautiful. I think you'll make him extremely happy—provided you stand up to him when necessary. Now I'd better go down and attend to the lunch. You could lay the table for me, if you would. Edward should be back before long.'

Before Jago reappeared, his brother-in-law had returned from the golf course. For the next two hours it was as if nothing had happened to disturb the calm surface of the engaged couple's visit to the north.

Savanna's appetite for the excellent lunch which Susan had prepared was less hearty than usual. But no one noticed this because she and Jago had not eaten many meals together, and her host and hostess probably thought that, being a model, she never ate very much.

While he was helping himself to the Stilton which followed the home-made apple pie, Edward announced that, having exercised all morning, he was going to spend the afternoon by the fire with the Sunday papers.

'We're going for a tramp,' said Jago. 'What about you, Sue? Will you join us?'

His sister shook her head. 'I've taken up jogging—did I tell you? I've been doing it for nearly a month now. Every weekday, but not on Sunday. While you two are flying back to London tomorrow morning, I'll be out in my track suit, jogging around the park and back. Do you exercise regularly?'—this to Savanna.

'No, but I don't sit down much normally.'

'She needs plumping up, not fining down,' remarked Jago, appraising as much as he could see of her above the level of the dining-table.

Was that remark an indication that he was disappointed with what he had seen of her figure in the bedroom that morning? she wondered unhappily.

But from the very beginning, in the Caribbean, when he had seen her in various bikinis, he had known she was on the slender side, as she had to be for her work. Some of her fellow models were almost completely flat-chested, and had to wear fibre-filled bras to give them any curves at all. At least she could fill a 34C.

But if Jago didn't see her with the redeeming eyes of love, was by temperament a perfectionist, and his preference was for more voluptuous feminine flesh, what hope had she of holding him?

In order to walk in the real country, rather than in a nearby public park where his sister did her daily aerobics, Jago borrowed her car to drive them a few miles from the house to an area of fields and woods.

They did not talk much on the way; and after he had parked the car and they had begun their walk, his remarks concerned the weather and the countryside rather than the subject which weighed so heavily on Savanna.

At last, unable to ignore it any longer, she said, 'This morning you called me "silly child". Is that how you think of me?—As a child?'

He slanted a faintly amused glance at her. 'Did it rankle?'

'I wouldn't say that exactly. But although I was very fond of my father, and I've missed him a lot since he died, I'm not looking for a father-figure husband,' she answered evenly.

Jago received this statement with a reflective silence. At length, he said, 'The difference in our ages makes it inevitable that, in certain respects, you seem very young to me—younger than most girls of your age. By the time you're twenty-five, the gap will have closed. I consider a ten-year gap to be an advantage.'

'Why?'

'Because when two very young people marry, neither of their characters has stabilised. By the time they've both matured, they may find themselves seriously incompatible. People change as much between the ages of twenty

and twenty-five as they do between fifteen and twenty. Did you know that, technically, physical adolescence is defined as from fourteen to twenty-five in males, and from twelve to twenty-one in females? I'd say mental immaturity lasts several years longer. My character is set for life. Yours is still malleable. In other words, I can bend you to my will,' he finished, on a note of raillery.

Savanna was not amused. 'What if I resisted the bending process?'

I don't think you would.'

'I don't think you know very much about me. I may be young, but--'

'I know things about you which you don't know yourself,' Jago interjected dryly.

'What do you mean?'

'This, for instance.'

Before she realised what he was about, he pulled her into his arms and brought his mouth hard down on hers, resuming the kiss which Susan had interrupted.

She tried to resist, to pull free, to wrench her face aside. Her efforts were futile. His powerful arms held her fast, and his lips were equally inescapable. Nor did her resistance last long.

Within a few seconds she no longer wanted to break away. It was as much as she could do to remain passive. Even that became impossible as the kiss continued, reanimating the warm, pliant, eager response he had made her feel earlier.

Once she opened her eyes for a second, fearing that he might be watching her, might be kissing her merely as an exercise. But his lids were closed, his dark lashes fanned on his cheeks.

Against her will, her body surrendered to him. When it ended, her arms were round his neck. If he had removed them and released her, she would have staggered and fallen. Dazedly, totally disorientated, she stayed in the circle of his arms, her face hidden against his shoulder.

Jago said, 'Before we met, you didn't know you could feel like that, did you? I did. Your eyes, your mouth, your reactions to me were all clear indications that there was a fire waiting to be lit inside that virginal exterior.' He spoke into her hair, his voice deep and slightly husky. 'You're a lovely girl now, but not as beautiful as you'll be when we've spent a night making love, and that fire is really well alight.'

He felt her chin, and tilted her face up to his. 'It's only smouldering at the moment. You may think otherwise. But how you feel now is nothing to how you will feel when . . .' a pause to nibble the lobe of her ear, sending frissons of pleasure down her neck, '. . . you're in bed with me.'

She had no doubt that he was right but, closing her mind against the vision of their naked bodies entwined, she managed to push herself free, although only because Jago allowed her to.

'I . . . I'm not sure now that I'm ever going to be in bed with you,' she said, in an unsteady voice. 'If you're not in love with me ... I'm not sure I want to be your wife.'

'It's too late to back out now, my dear,' he answered lazily. 'You've passed the point of no return.'

'It's never too late to back out if one has any serious doubts—not even halfway up the aisle,' was her angry retort. Seeing the scepticism in his eyes, she went on, 'I— I suppose you're thinking that, if our engagement was broken, no one would believe that / had broken it? They would think it must be you who had changed your mind: I wouldn't care about that. Marriage is too important to allow oneself to be influenced by other people's opinions.'

'That was not what I meant.'

They were standing a yard apart now, and his fists were tucked into the vertical slit pockets of the showerproof windcheater he was wearing, unzipped, over his sweater.

'You love me—or so you've said. Are you sure you can kill that feeling? If you can't, how will you feel in a year's time; knowing that you could have been my wife, enjoying all the best things in life? Because I shan't be waiting for YOU to change your mind, Savanna. I intend to marry this year. It may take a little time to find someone else who suits me as well as you do, but it won't be impossible.'

She drew in an uneven breath, her nails digging into her palms.

'Don't you think it would have been fairer to tell me this was your attitude *before* our engagement?'

'If I had, we shouldn't be here. I wanted you. I knew I could make you happy. I acted for the best—our best.'

His arrogant conviction that he was right made her furious.

'And how long do you intend being faithful to me? Until I'm pregnant with your son and heir, I suppose,' she exclaimed, on a bitter note.

'As long as you never refuse me—or not without a very good reason—I shall never be anything but faithful,' he told her steadily. 'Naturally there have been women in my life before you—it couldn't be otherwise at my age. But there's never been more than one at a time, and most of them were, within limits, lasting relationships. I'm not an inveterate womaniser. A willing wife is all I shall need from now on, and I think you'll be more than willing.'

The mocking gleam with which he tagged on this last remark made Savanna's cheeks glow with sudden colour.

It—it seems to me you only want a wife as a ... a sex object,' she said stiffly.

'If you mean that I want my wife to give me what many men receive only from their mistresses—pleasure and amusement—yes, you're right. What

kind of wife would you rather be? A housekeeper-wife? A career-wife, struggling to crowd two lives into one?"

He moved closer and, taking her by the hand, began to stride on^along the secluded woodland path, not so fast that she had to hurry to keep up with him, but with a leisurely swing.

'A hundred years ago you would have had little or no say in the matter of marriage,' he went on. 'Your suitors would have applied to your parents, and the one they considered most eligible would have been selected on your behalf. Not all those marriages were unhappy.' He glanced down at her. 'Think of yourself as a Victorian girl. Would you be in despair if your parents had chosen me to be your husband? Would you hell! You'd be thanking your lucky stars for a man who wasn't old enough to be your father; who would give you unlimited pin money and a life of considerable luxury; and who didn't make you dread the mysterious "duty" which your mother hadn't fully explained.'

'Yes, that's probably true,' she conceded. 'But I'm not a Victorian girl, Jago. I've been brought up completely differently. It isn't possible for me to think in those terms.'

She gave him a searching upwards glance. 'If you knew how I felt, why couldn't you at least have pretended to ... to be in love with me? Why spring the truth On me now?'

'I wouldn't have done so if you hadn't forced the issue. I never lie in answer to a direct question.'

'I think you've behaved abominably,' she said, in a low, angry voice. 'You must have known how deeply unhappy this would make me, but you obviously didn't give a damn as long as you got what you wanted. My mother was right to oppose our engagement. I should have listened to her.'

'You're making a fuss about nothing, but only time will prove it to you,' was his even reply. 'Twenty-five years from now, when the first of our children are grown-up, and you're still a beautiful woman because you've been well taken care of, you'll wonder why you were upset. I can give you everything

you want—houses all over the world, clothes by your favourite designers, jewels, flowers, books, fine wines, a chef, a nannie, good seats at first nights, any car which takes your fancy. If you consider all that, plus what promises to be a highly satisfactory pleasure bond, to be unequal to the blind hopes and reckless promises on which most marriages are based, you're not using your intelligence.'

'What do you mean ... a pleasure bond?'

'It's a term coined by Masters and Johnson, who are well-known American researchers, to refer to a good sexual relationship. Our pleasure bond isn't forged yet, but the auguries are good, wouldn't you say?'

As he spoke he swung her hand upwards, pressing his lips to the soft, veined inside of her wrist.

'Don't try to deny that I know how to excite you, Savanna.'

She jerked her wrist free. 'That's only one aspect of marriage.'

'It's the keystone of marriage,' Jago answered incisively.

CHAPTER SIX

BECAUSE there was nowhere at the Bancrofts' house to hang it—the skirt was far too voluminous to fit inside a normal wardrobe—Savanna's bridal dress was kept at the designer's workroom until the morning of her wedding.

She had chosen who she wished to design it but, before she and the couturier had discussed the dress in any detail, Jago had made several stipulations concerning her appearance on the day. He wanted the dress to have a full skirt and a train, and he wanted the headdress to incorporate an antique diamond fillet which had been in his possession for some time, having been bought as an investment and kept in his bank ever since.

His insistence on a spectacular train and the costly diadem had raised no objections from the designer, but Savanna had been thinking in terms of a simple dress and a coronet of country flowers.

She gave way with a good grace because she knew she had no alternative. If Jago had made up his mind about something—anything!—that was how it was going to be, and as he was paying the piper he had every right to call the tune.

That, if he had been in love with her, he would not have cared what she wore as she walked up the aisle, was a thought to be pushed to the back of her mind.

In the end, however, she had to concede that although it was far more elaborate than the one she had had in mind, the dress was extremely beautiful. She had seen it many times before it arrived at the house. It had required half a dozen fittings, including an extra one because since being measured for it she had lost several pounds in weight, making her already slender waist even narrower. • At ten on the morning of the wedding, her hairdresser, Luigi, came to the house to do her hair in the style devised by Savanna and her couturier.

Probably Jago would expect his fillet to be worn in the manner of an Alice band, with a cloud of tulle floating from it. But after studying Savanna's face with its broad, high, intelligent forehead—usually concealed by a soft

fringe—and the long graceful lines of her neck, the designer had decided that the fillet ought to be worn as such, round her forehead, an inch above her eyebrows.

It had been her suggestion that the band of diamonds should be entwined with a length of the smallest and freshest of real ivy leaves, and he who had agreed and added that the leaves should also be incorporated into the thick plait which would show off her neck and her small shapely ears.

Tests had been made to ensure that ivy could be used in this way-without wilting before the ceremonies were over, and had proved successful. But what Jago would think of his diamonds being combined with ivy, and of a long trailing bouquet of lilies, ivy, honeysuckle and cow parsley, remained to be seen.

'You don't seem to be at all nervous,' Luigi remarked, as he applied a pair of bristle brushes to the heavy swathes of her shining clean hair.

'I'm not at the moment. Probably I shall be later.'

'Perhaps not. You're used to being stared at while you're working. It's my Maria who is nervous. She's never been to a grand wedding before,' he told her, with a grin. 'It was kind of you to ask us both. It's helped her to get over the depression after losing the baby.'

Not all Luigi's clients were privy to the circumstances leading up to his own marriage, or the reason for his wife's recent melancholy. He was more inclined to listen to customers prattling than to disclose the facts of his private life.

But Savanna was not one of the self-absorbed women who made up the majority of his clientele, and she knew a good deal about him. Not long after the beginning of her career as a model, Luigi, the son of Italian parents but himself a born and bred Londoner, had gone to Italy for a holiday. While there, he had looked up some cousins of his mother's, and had fallen in love with their daughter, a shy country girl as different from the girls with whom he worked as it was possible to be.

Savanna's quick intuition had made her sense his exuberance after that holiday, and his impatience during the time before he could return and marry Maria. She had been equally quick to detect that all was not well when one of her appointments with him had been on the day after Maria's miscarriage.

Learning that his wife was going to be in hospital for several days, and knowing that she was too shy to have made many friends since coming to England, Savanna had made a point of going to visit her.

It had not been an easy visit because Maria's English was still limited, and she had been heartbroken over the loss of her child, and fearful that it might happen again and deprive Luigi of the sons she wanted desperately to bear for him.

To learn from Savanna how lovingly he had sung her praises since returning from his Italian holiday had seemed to comfort her a little.

When the time had come to make a list of Bancroft wedding guests, it had been natural to include the Lascaris, as well as all the other people who had played a part in her short-lived career.

Even so the bride's guest list was far shorter than that of the bridegroom, who had friends from all over the world coming to see him married, and who, last night, had given a lavish dinner party for all his overseas guests.

Savanna had not been present. They would not meet her until today, at the reception. But that was some hours ahead, and meanwhile she was feeling strangely calm and detached.

After Luigi had finished doing her hair, he went home to put on his hired morning dress, leaving Savanna to apply her make-up. This could have been done for her by a professional cosmetician, but she preferred to put on her face by herself. When anyone else made her up, no matter how skilfully, she felt they tended to overdo it. There were occasions when she liked to do dramatic things with her eyes, but not on her wedding day. Today she wanted to look as natural as possible.

Having made up, she took off the robe which she had been wearing since she got up, and began to put on the underpinnings for the dress which was due to arrive within the next quarter of an hour.

First a white lace bra. Then a suspender belt to hold up sheer white silk stockings. Then, after putting on gloves to avoid any possibility of snagging them, the stockings themselves. Then a pair of white satin French knickers trimmed with handmade white lace. Then a full-length white organdie underskirt, specially made to support the wedding dress.

At Jago's insistence, her shoes had been made by Clive Shilton, the designer of the beautiful silk slippers, with hand-painted soles, worn by Lady Diana Spencer for her wedding to the Prince of Wales.

Because the Royal bride had been almost as tall as her bridegroom, her slippers had had half-inch Louis heels. Savanna was equally tall, but not by comparison with Jago, so the heels of her wedding shoes were higher.

They were made of glove-soft white kid, with rosettes of embroidered tulle on the toes, and a design painted in silver on the instep part of the white leather soles. Like the Princess of Wales' bridal slippers, which had the gold initials C and D on either side of a tiny heart, Savanna's shoes had her initials and Jago's, and the date of their wedding, painted close to the heel.

As she slipped her narrow feet into them, she wondered if they would ever be worn again, by her daughter or, years hence, her granddaughter. They were the first pair of handmade shoes she had ever possessed and, as she took a few turns about the room, she might have been barefoot on grass, so comfortable were they.

For her 'something old' and 'something borrowed' she had a small silver-beaded purse just large enough to contain a lawn handkerchief and a lipstick. It had been lent to her by Clare, who had a collection of 1920s evening purses. It would be left in the car during the wedding service.

Her 'something blue' was a pale blue silk garter made by her grandmother for Mrs Bancroft's wedding. Her mother, who had had plump legs as a

young woman, had worn it above her knee. On Savanna's long slender legs it could be worn at mid-thigh.

As she lifted the underskirt and rested her foot on the dressing stool to slide the garter carefully over her silk stocking, she heard a vehicle draw up outside the house, and going to her window, she saw the couturier's delivery van.

Fortunately, it was a perfect May morning, and the fitter who had come to dress her—and who also would be at the wedding—was able, assisted by the van driver, to carry the tissue-swathed dress from the van to the house without risk to the delicate fabric from rain or gusts of wind. No doubt, had the weather looked doubtful, the dress would have been protected by plastic as well as by clouds of tissue, thought Savanna.

She heard them admitted to the house by Catriona, who had spent the night there in order to help Mrs Bancroft to dress.

Michael was giving Savanna away. Richard and Benjy would soon be on duty as ushers, while Joey, the youngest of her brothers, was assigned to look after his mother in her new wheelchair.

Savanna's friends, Livvy and Clare, were her bridesmaids. But she would not see how they looked in their apricot dresses and chaplets of honeysuckle until she arrived at the church.

'Here we are, Miss Bancroft. Were you worried we might be late?' asked the fitter as, with her robe thrown over her shoulders, Savanna met them at the door of her room.

'Good morning, Mrs Harris. No, I felt sure you'd arrive on the dot—as you have. Good morning'—this second greeting being for the driver.

'Morning, miss. Lovely morning for your big day,' He was carrying the train of the dress while Mrs Harris held a hanger aloft in one hand and supported the skirt with her other arm.

When the whole thing had been carefully laid down on Savanna's bed, the driver withdrew. Mrs Harris took off her hat and the jacket which matched her pale blue dress before beginning the task of removing all the plastic clips which held the long sheets of tissue in place.

As she worked, she chatted about other brides and their dresses. She did not say so, but Savanna guessed that it was not usual for the couturier's clients to live in comparatively modest houses in the outer suburbs.

Before Mrs Harris had finished unwrapping the dress, Jago's Rolls-Royce arrived to deliver the diadem and the bouquet, and then to take Richard and Benjy to the church before returning for the bride. Her mother, Catriona and Joey were being transported by hired car.

Every detail of the arrangements had been worked out by Jago's secretary in consultation with him; and if there were any hitches it would not be for want of careful organisation beforehand.

Jago's chauffeur had been instructed to deliver the diadem to Michael. Her brother brought it upstairs himself, accompanied by the florist who had designed and made the bouquet, and who was going to add the ivy to the diadem and to Savanna's thick ash-blonde plait.

As well as the case containing the diadem, Michael had been given a smaller box. This, when she opened it, proved *tar* contain an exquisite pair of diamond drop earrings, probably of the same period as the fillet, judging by their colour and style.

'Oh, Miss Bancroft, what gorgeous ear-rings! Aren't you the lucky one!' was the fitter's exclamation when she saw them.

'Aren't I?' Savanna agreed.

She wondered if Mrs Harris and the florist thought Jago's wealth was part of his attraction for her. If only they knew how much happier today would have been for her had he been a poor man who loved her..

Half an hour later she was ready; the dress of embroidered cream tulle moulded tightly over breasts and waist before falling in tiers to her feet. The bodice was lined with cream silk, but the long fitted sleeves were transparent, showing off the delicate embroidery. The neckline was low but decorous. Her veil was a circle of double tulle, only embroidered at the edges, flung over her head and secured by a single pin so that it could be swiftly removed during the signing of the register, leaving her completely unveiled for the return down the aisle on her husband's arm.

She went down the stairs very slowly and carefully, for the silk tulle was as fragile as gossamer.

When she joined her brother, who was waiting for her in the hall, he exclaimed, 'You look fabulous, Savanna! Jago's a damned lucky fellow. There's just time for a glass of champagne, and then we must be on our way.'

They did not talk much on the drive into central London.

Once Michael reached for her hand, and squeezed it, and said, 'It's a shame Father isn't here today. He'd have been enormously proud of you—as Mother will be when she sees you. Are you as calm as you look?'

'At the moment, yes. I feel it may all be a dream. When I realise it's not, I may start quaking like a jelly,' Savanna confessed.

'I expect Jago's the one who is nervous. It must be quite an ordeal, hanging about in front of several hundred guests, waiting for one's bride to arrive.'

'It won't worry him,' she said with certainty. 'Anyway, he won't be there yet. Probably he's still in his suite, chatting to Christopher, or even attending to last-minute business matters.'

Jago's best man, whom she and Michael had met at the wedding rehearsal, was Miles Masters' elder brother. Miles himself would not be present. He was on a walking tour in France.

Although the wedding had- received a great deal of advance publicity, she was not prepared for the size of the crowd awaiting her arrival at the church.

As Michael stepped down from the car, she saw Clare and Liwy hurry forward to deal with her train. Policemen were preventing photographers and craning onlookers from stepping on to the wide piece of red carpet which led from the kerb to the porch. Inside the porch she could see her couturier hovering, waiting to make the final adjustments to her veil and train.

'Isn't she a picture, bless her!' a female voice exclaimed loudly, as Savanna emerged from the Rolls-Royce.

The momentary blaze of the photographers' flashbulbs was accompanied by a concerted murmur of oohs and aahs, and one or two cries of 'Good luck, dear!'

As she paused while her friends spread her train, she saw, peering through the gap between two policemen, the face of a small, elderly woman, her eyes full of sentimental tears at the sight of a bride.

Would her mother be in tears? she wondered. Why *did* women weep at weddings? For 'remembrance of things past'? For pity, because the bride's bright dreams might soon give place to disillusionment? That couldn't happen in her case. She was already disillusioned. When Jago promised to love her, it would be a form of words merely.

As they entered the porch she could see, through the arched inner doorway, the crowded interior of the church and a profusion of hats in all the fashionable spring colours. Of her bridegroom there was no sign. He must be just out of sight at the far end of the aisle.

Her brother tucked her arm through his. 'Ready?' he murmured.

Savanna nDded, and as she did so, her calm disintegrated. Suddenly she felt utterly panic-stricken.

As the organ boomed out the chords which were their cue to advance, she saw women close to the aisle half- turning to catch the first possible glimpse of her dress.

With her head high, she pinned on a smile and walked slowly, gracefully forward. No one, least of all her own family, must guess that she longed to turn tail and run.

At the measured pace—approximately one step a second—they had practised at the rehearsal, they moved up the aisle. Conscious of the many eyes upon her, she fixed her own gaze on on the glittering gold threads of the altar frontal, specially made at the Royal School of Needlework for use at weddings.

Then, as they approached the chancel steps, a tall figure stepped into view, and Savanna's breath caught in her throat at the sight of Jago preparing to take his place beside her.

He looked superb in evening kit; even more so in morning clothes. She knew that these were not hired because she had heard him mention to Michael that his life involved enough functions to justify owning his own morning coat.

She had thought it would be black, with a light- coloured waistcoat. But in fact his coat was light grey, and the quality of the cloth and its impeccable tailoring, combined with his splendid physique, made him look extraordinarily distinguished. A pearl grey silk tie, and a white carnation in his buttonhole, served to emphasise the darkness of his colouring except for his steady grey eyes which, exactly as she had anticipated, showed no sign that he felt anything but his habitual calm self- confidence.

Savanna surrendered her bouquet to Liwy before the four of them—herself and Jago, flanked by Michael and Christopher Masters—moved into position for the service.

'Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church . . .'

As the Bishop who was taking the service began the preamble, she had to take several deep breaths to stop herself starting to shake.

Something of the terror inside her must have communicated itself to Michael on. whose right arm her hand was still resting. He put his left hand over hers, and kept it there while the Bishop said:

'I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it.'

Thinking about the secret in her own heart, she was only dimly aware of the Bishop turning to her bridegroom.

'Wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?'

'I will.' Jago's answer came swiftly and firmly.

As the Bishop turned to Savanna and repeated the promise, her mouth was so dry she was afraid that when she tried to speak no sound would come.

Probably the pause before she answered was only a fraction of a second, but to her it seemed an eternity before her lips framed an almost inaudible, 'I will.'

'Who giveth this Woman to be married to this Man?'

Michael took her hand from his arm and stepped slightly to one side, leaving her nearer to Jago.

At a sign from the Bishop, he took her right hand in his. She could feel him watching her as he said, 'I Jago take thee Savanna to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for

poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.'

Strangely, the firm clasp of his hand steadied her more than her brother's gesture of encouragement.

She was able to make her vows to him in a steadier voice, if still a low one.

As he slipped the ring on her finger, she stole a swift upwards glance through the filmy meshes of her veil, and felt her heart lurch with love for the strong-featured face at that instant intent on the ring.

They did not kneel for the prayer, but stood with bent heads while the Bishop appealed for God's blessing before, re-joining their hands, he said solemnly:

'Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. For as much as Jago and Savanna have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a Ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be Man and Wife together. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

For Savanna, the rest of the service had little meaning. She only half-heard the hymns and the Bishop's very brief address. All she could think of was that she and the tall man beside her were now inseparably bound for the rest of their lives.

Presently, in the vestry, for the last time she used the signature *Savanna Bancroft*. From now on she was Savanna Kindersley . . . Mrs Jago Kindersley.

'What about your veil?' murmured Livvy.

'Oh, yes ... I almost forgot.' She felt for the pin which secured it.

Jago was speaking to Michael while her mother, wheeled there by Joey, was signing the register.

Liwy took charge of the veil and handed back the bouquet. Then it was time to return for the walk down the aisle.

Smiling, Jago offered her his arm. As they left the vestry, he said, 'You make a ravishing bride.'

He pressed her arm to his side, his eyes taking in the details—her brushed back blonde hair and bared forehead encircled by his band of diamonds and the tendril of tiny green leaves.

She could see the pride in his eyes; but pride of possession was not the same thing as love.

Going-down the aisle, trying to look as joyous as the music he had chosen for their wedding march, the first person she recognised was her new sister-in-law. Susan was looking very attractive in a primrose suit and a hat made of massed silk primroses.

Savanna smiled at her, and at Edward, before turning to look at the other side of the nave where the most noticeable of her own guests was Gerald O'Connor's wife Lolly, her ample curves swathed in royal blue chiffon. Gerald was not beside her. He had been given a place on the aisle so that, during the signing of the register, he could leave his seat and go to the porch from which he intended to take the first photographs of the bridal pair.

Among others whom Savanna noticed were Margaret, until recently her agent, and Janey, one of the fashion assistants who had been on the fateful trip to the Caribbean a few months earlier.

But there wasn't time to recognise more than a few faces, and most of those at whom she smiled were Jago's guests and strangers to her.

It was the time of day when office and shop workers, after taking advantage of the fine weather to have lunch out of doors in the many oases of greenery which that part of London offered, were on their way back to work. It

looked as if some of them would be late. The crowd outside the church seemed to have doubled, and now there was a mounted policeman in attendance as well as those keeping the red carpet clear.

A cheer went up from the onlookers as she and Jago stepped from the subdued lighting of the church into the early afternoon sunlight made more dazzling by the flashes from many cameras. There was even a shoulder-held television camera trained on them. At the same moment, the bells of the church began to chime the news of the happy occasion to everyone within earshot.

Instead of leading her straight to the waiting car, Jago stopped, and again she saw the gleam of possessive satisfaction in his eyes as he gave the photographers time to take their pictures.

'Give the bride a kiss!' one of them shouted.

Her husband lifted her hand from his forearm and kissed the back of her fingers. Ignoring the suggestion that he should kiss her more demonstratively, he urged her towards the car, climbing in first to give her the nearside seat and make it easier for her bridesmaids to gather up the yards of her train and arrange it round her feet.

This done, the door of the car was closed, the Rolls glided forward and, apart from Marsh on the other side of the glass partition and the onlookers on the pavement, they were alone.

'Feeling better now that it's over?' Jago asked quietly.

She nodded. 'I'm afraid I made some mistakes. I should have let go of Michael's arm as soon as we reached you.'

'I doubt if anyone noticed. A bride is expected to be nervous.'

'Weren't you . . . just a little bit . . . inwardly?'

'I wasn't the star of the occasion—you were. Everyone in the church, including me, was dazzled as you came up the aisle.' He reached for her

hand, holding it lightly in his, feasting his eyes on her as he had coming out of the vestry.

She remembered the ear-rings she was wearing. Letting go of her bouquet, she put up her free hand to touch one.

'Thank you for these. They're beautiful.'

Her wedding present to him had been a Japanese boxwood netsuke in the form of a hare, bought from a specialist dealer who had assured her it was of excellent quality.

She had-hoped that Jago would be pleased with it, but had not expected that he would have it with him in an inside pocket of his morning coat.

Taking it out, he said, 'I was surprised that you'd remembered my interest in these little things. This is a very good example. Nothing could have pleased me more.' For the second time he lifted her hand and kissed it.

For a moment she could almost believe they were like all the normal newly-married couples who loved each other and expected to live happily ever after.

In some ways the reception ,was more of a strain than the service. With such a large number of guests, it would have been impractical for the bride's widowed mother to welcome everyone, or for the bride and groom to receive the congratulations of all those present.

Instead, it had been arranged that they should mingle informally, with Mrs Bancroft's three eldest sons acting as subsidiary hosts.

For about three-quarters of an hour, Jago and Savanna circulated, speaking briefly to his closest friends and the guests from abroad, merely smiling at others.

Then it was time for the best man to propose a toast to their health in a very brief speech, to which Jago replied equally briefly before helping her to cut the first slice of the many-tiered wedding cake.

At this point in the proceedings Savanna was able to swallow a little champagne and to eat one smoked salmon sandwich and a small, delicious *bouchee a la reine* of fragile, buttery puff pastry filled with a curled anchovy.

She needed the brief refreshment to sustain her through another half an hour of-maintaining an appropriately brilliant smile and trying not to sound mechanical as she thanked people for their good wishes, and answered their enquiries about the honeymoon by explaining that its location was a secret to which even she was not privy.

At last the customary hour and a half of mingling was over, and it was time to slip away and, with the help-of her attendants, to extricate herself from her finery.

As both Liwy and Clare had pierced ears, Jago's presents to them had been classic diamond stud ear-rings which would never go out of fashion. He had suggested these himself, and Savanna had agreed that they would be most acceptable mementoes.

'What about your diamonds, Savanna?' asked Clare, as they helped her to undress. 'Are you taking them away with you?'

'No, Marsh is going to take charge of them, either to take them to Jago's bank, or perhaps they're going to be put in the safe at the hotel. Although I don't know where we're going, I'm sure it will be somewhere quiet, not a place where I'll need any jewels.'

When she had asked Jago what sort of clothes she would need, he had said a bikini, a few casual cotton separates, and something to dance in would be ample.

Her going-away clothes were a suit of pale topaz silk with a pleated skirt and short sleeves, and a saucer of fine cinnamon straw tilted forward over her forehead and secured by a matching ribbon slipped under her plait, from which Clare had very carefully removed all the ivy leaves. A lizardskin clutch bag matched her sandals.

Her bouquet was going to be placed on her father's grave; her dress and veil packed in a large box. Considering how prolonged and complex the preparations for this day had been, Savanna found it hard to realise the wedding was now almost over.

Jago had changed into a suit when she rejoined him. It only remained to say brief farewells to their close relations before stepping into another car. The Rolls in which they had arrived was taking her mother and brothers home.

As they drove away from the reception, Savanna wondered how long it would take them to reach their secret destination. She felt exhausted; every fibre of her being drained of vitality by the weeks of emotional strain culminating in the gala performance which had just ended—at least as far as the two principals were concerned.

Now what she longed for more than anything was a pot of tea, and the freedom to crawl into bed and sleep for twelve hours, if not longer. Instead of which she had to muster the energy for the journey to wherever they were going, and then be suitably appreciative of the special dinner which Jago would have arranged.

When that was over he would expect her to be a cooperative partner in her first experience of lovemaking. At the moment, bone-tired as she was, the thought of so much still to come made her feel like bursting into tears.

To her relief, Jago seemed equally disinclined to talk as the car slid through the moderate afternoon traffic.

'Your mother looked very nice today. I approved of her hat. There were one or two shockers—did you notice?' was his first remark, after they had been driving for three or four minutes.

'The purple feather thing, do you mean? Who was that woman?'

'The wife of one of my executives.'

They relapsed into silence. Savanna wondered if Jago were tired, too. He didn't look it. She was limp. He was merely relaxed.

She looked at her hand, her left hand, now bearing the unusual ring he had chosen for her. It was designed as a plait of three precious metals, platinum and two shades of gold. Unlike a single metal wedding ring, it would look well with all kinds of other rings.

Her eyes were still on the ring when she felt the car swoop down an incline and thought they were entering an underpass. When she glanced up, she saw that it was an underground garage.

'Where is this?' she asked, in surprise, having assumed they were on their way to an airport, or to one of the main railway terminals.

'You'll see.'

As the car drew to a halt, Jago sprang out and turned to help her alight. Leaving the driver to close the door, he said, 'Thanks very much,' and slipped something into the man's hand.

'Thank you, sir.'

The driver touched the peak of his cap and smiled at Savanna before Jago took her by the elbow and steered her towards a door with an illuminated sign above it— LIFT.

It wasn't until they stepped into the lift that she recognised the carpet and realised that she had been in the lift before. They were underneath Jago's hotel.

'Why have we come here?' she asked him.

He pressed the button which would take them straight up to his suite.

'We're spending the night here. The place I've chosen for our honeymoon is several hours' journey from London. I think you've had enough for one day. You need some rest now.' He paused. 'Disappointed?'

'Oh, no . . . relieved,' she admitted. 'I do feel rather done in—but I'm sure I'll perk up in a little while,' she added hastily.

'Coffee and a sandwich will make you feel better. You've had almost nothing to eat. Nor have I, and I'm hungry,' he remarked.

'A pot of tea is what I really fancy. I don't very often drink it, but somehow I feel like it now. Is that very prosaic of me?' she asked, trying to inject some lightness into her voice.

'Not at all. Have whatever you feel like.'

The lift door slid open. They stepped out into the lobby, and walked to the door of the suite.

Jago opened it with a key. 'We shall be alone here,' he told her. 'Matthews is taking a holiday. He has a sister in Ireland. He was at the service, but not at the reception. He should be in Dublin by now.'

As they entered the suite, he went on, 'I asked him to leave some snacks for us. Later on, we'll have dinner sent up from the restaurant. While I'm making the tea, why don't you have a hot tub? It's the best relaxer I know of.'

'That would be lovely,' she agreed.

'I'll show you the bathroom. This way.'

He went ahead of her, leading her into the bedroom where once she had tidied her hair and seen the nightscape of London, and the statue of a naked woman. Now the view was of misty green tree-tops, their newly opened leaves still unblemished by the fumes from the traffic below.

She thought by referring to a hot tub Jago had meant an ordinary hot bath. But when she walked into the bathroom, she saw that instead of the conventional rectangular bath there was a large circular pool sunk into a carpeted dais. The pool was already full of water and, when Jago touched a switch, the still surface began to swirl and bubble, activated by several jets in the sides.

'Ten minutes in there and you'll feel a new woman,' he told her. 'I'll go and attend to the tea.'

He pressed another button, and quiet, soothing background music mingled with the sound of the moving water.

When he had left her on her own, she began to undress, hanging her going-away dress on one of the hangers in an alcove between two of the seven or eight panels of floor- to-ceiling mirror in which she could see herself reflected from many different angles.

There was also a large recessed shower cabinet in which to cool off after a hot tub, and an abundance of towels, from all-enveloping bath-sheets to matching face-cloths.

The tub, the shelves and the towel rails were all made of a material like dark tortoiseshell, and the carpet and towels were the dark apricot colour called tiger lily. The faint drone of an air extractor accounted for the fact that, although the bathroom had no windows, the steam from the eddying water was not condensing on the mirrors.

It took her only a few moments to remove her few scanty undergarments and drape them on a cushioned bench. Having stepped out of her shoes, and peeled down her gossamer stockings, her last task was to take off her jewellery.

Then she stepped on to the dais and dipped one foot in the water which, as far as she could judge, was heated to about ninety degrees. Moments later she was sitting on the ledge which formed a seat round the pool, the water almost up to her collarbones, and her legs stretched out towards the centre.

She had, read about the craze for jacuzzis, hydrotherapy pools and spas which had swept America and now had caught on in Europe. But this was her first experience of being lapped by warm, gentle crosscurrents. She noticed a waterproof bath pillow lying on the dais and stood up to reach for it. With the pillow tucked behind her head, she was even more comfortable—totally comfortable. It was bliss to be alone and at rest. She felt grateful to Jago for his consideration in bringing her here for the first difficult night of their marriage. For it was a difficult situation; being the inexperienced bride of a man who had slept with many women before her, and who she knew did not love her.

She sighed, closing her eyes for a moment, the better to enjoy the swirling movements of the water and the lulling sound of the music.

'Your tea, madam.'

She opened her eyes to find Jago setting down a tray.

'Have two or three of these sandwiches,' he advised, pouring tea from a silver pot into a porcelain cup. 'They're smoked salmon, turkey, and cream cheese with cucumber. Want a towel to dry your hands? I'll get you one.'

Having supplied her with tea, something to eat, and one of the fluffy-piled towels, he left her alone again.

Savanna drank the hot tea, ate two brown bread and salmon sandwiches, and began to feel less like a rag, although still unbridally drowsy. She remembered reading that Bernard Levin, the well-known London newspaper columnist, made a habit of cat-napping in his bath before going out for the evening. Perhaps if she dozed for a few minutes . . .

The next thing she knew was that Jago was saying her name, and this time he wasn't bending over the dais, fully dressed. He was in the pool with her, facing her, his elbows propped on the rim as he watched her wake up and blink at him.

'I don't think you should stay in too much longer. I keep this tub cooler than many of them, but even so it can be enervating to stay in too long,' he remarked.

The water was no longer swirling. He must have turned off the jets.

'How long was I dozing?' she asked him.

'Not long. Only two or three minutes.'

His foot touched hers under the water, and it wasn't an accidental contact. The soft pads of his toes moved gently over her instep, and he watched her reaction, smiling slightly.

'Does it make you shy to get out of the water in front of me?'

'I suppose it does a little.'

'It's something you'll have to get used to.'

'I know.' But she didn't move.

She had a feeling that the moment she stood up he would grab her and take her in his arms, and she wasn't ready for that yet. She had thought it wouldn't happen until later . . . tonight, after dinner . . . with the lights out.

'Doesn't it ruin the carpet to drip water on it?' she asked.

'It's a synthetic carpet, so a certain amount of water does no harm. But, if you notice, I put out a bath mat. There's also a towel ready for you.' He indicated the mat he had spread on the dais, and the several towels folded beside it.

'Oh, so I see . . . thank you.' But still she hesitated.

Now that the water was quiescent, Jago must be able to see a good deal of her already. As she could of him—if she looked. But she was being careful not to look.

'Perhaps I should get out first. I'm not shy,' he said, on a teasing note.

He stood up and sprang out of the tub. She had a brief glimpse of his long thighs and muscular buttocks before he wrapped a towel round his hips, using another to dry himself.

His body was still almost as brown as it had been in the Caribbean. Only his backside was paler, although not as white as her white parts because of his much darker skin tone.

Growing up outnumbered by brothers, Savanna had seen male backsides before. But none of the Bancrofts' three sons was as tall or as well-built as Jago. Seeing his sinewy thighs for the first time since the West Indies, and

the masculine lines of his backside, so different from her soft behind, sent a shiver of apprehension through her. He was so big and strong. Would he hurt her? Without love to make him tender, would the first time be miserably painful?

'Out you come, Savanna.'

He was holding up a large bath-sheet, ready to envelop her in it. Instinctively taking a deep breath to steady her nerves, she stood up and stepped on to the ledge, the water streaming from her body. She saw his grey eyes sweep over her in a single comprehensive glance, and then she was wrapped in the towel.

As if he knew what she'd been thinking, he said quietly, his voice slightly husky, 'Don't be nervous—I'm not going to hurt you.' Then, still holding the towel in place for her, he kissed her softly on the mouth.

If anything could have reassured her that, even without being in love with her, he was prepared to make allowances for her inexperience, it was that first restrained kiss—their first kiss in private as man and wife.

'Poor little tired, nervous bride,' he murmured, his lips to her cheek. 'But there's nothing to be afraid of, I promise you.'

'I'm not . . . not really,' she murmured. 'Well . . . perhaps a little . . . *oh!*'

The last exclamation was caused by being suddenly swung up in his arms.

He carried her out of the bathroom, through the dressing room, into the bedroom.

'This hairstyle is very attractive, but I like you better with it loose. Why don't you undo it?' he suggested, as he carried her to the wide bed which had had its cover removed, and the clean sheets turned down on one side.

He put her down in a sitting position on the side of the bed.

'It's too bright in here. I'll draw the curtains.' He walked away.

Quickly Savanna rearranged the towel into a sarong, and raised her arms to feel for the pins which secured the perfect French pleat her stylist had put up that morning.

The curtains were controlled by switches. At the touch of a button they swished across the wall of glass, to be stopped by Jago a foot before they met in the middle.

The room became restfully shadowy, just one narrow bar of sunlight falling across the expanse of thick carpet.

Savanna put the handful of pins on the night table, and shook her head from side to side, trying very hard to remain calm as Jago came back to join her.

Naked but for the small towel which covered him from hip to mid-thigh, his tanned skin as smooth as brown silk, he looked very different from the man who had stood beside her at the reception, clad in immaculate morning clothes, making urbane replies to the people congratulating him.

He sat down beside her, close to her. As her trembling hands fell to her lap, he stroked the loose swathes of her hair, looking at it, feeling its texture, still smiling faintly.

With his left hand, he picked up her left hand and looked at the gleaming new ring. The sapphire was still with her ear-rings and pearls in the bathroom.

'Do you like this?' he asked.

'It's beautiful, Jago. You have excellent taste.'

'I think so, too—whenever I look at you. Did you hear the murmur of admiration which went through the church when people saw you coming down the aisle?'

She gave a mute shake of the head. Her throat and her lips were dry, and she didn't seem able to breathe properly.

He began to kiss her knuckles and fingers, while his other hand slid through her hair to find the nape of her neck and gently caress it. Presently he stopped playfully toying with her fingers, and drew her closer to start kissing games with her mouth. His lips were not dry as hers were, from the pension coiling inside her. His were warm and supple and persuasive, so that after a little she found herself starting to respond instead of being passively submissive.

'Put your arms round my neck,' he told her softly.

Her eyes closed, Savanna obeyed him, linking her hands behind his head and feeling him press her softness against the hard wall of his chest.

He kissed her for a long time, sometimes freeing her mouth to explore the delicate skin of her eyelids, or to nibble the lobes of her ears.

It was all very slow and unhurried, with none of the firece impatience she had imagined and dreaded. She became more and more relaxed, all the tension melting away, and excitement beginning; the excitement which, in the past, she had always fought to control, but now need not fight any more.

She felt Jago loosen the towel until it slid down to her waist, exposing her small ivory breasts. But he did not immediately touch them. His hands returned to her back, and his fingertips slid down her spine, making her give an involuntary purr of pleasure.

'You like that . . mm?' he asked lazily.

When she murmured assent, he did it again.

Her cheek resting on his shoulder, and her lips very close to his throat, she inhaled the faint scent of his aftershave and the warm, clean smell of his skin.

When, taking her wrists, he loosened her hold on his neck and made her lean back on his arm, she did not resist, although a fresh wave of shyness swept her as she felt him unwrap the towel from her hips and thighs.

Lightly, his hand brushed her knee and slid slowly up her slim thigh. Her eyes almost closed, her hair cascading over his supporting arm, she saw him appraising every line and curve of her body, first with his eyes and then with his palms and fingertips.

Her skin, still warm from the hot tub, was acutely sensitive to his touch as his hand reached her hip and paused there. When he half-clenched his fingers and drew his nails lightly across the soft golden plain of her belly, just below her navel, she had to smother a gasp at the strong, almost painful response which the action induced.

When he did it again, in the opposite direction, she gave a convulsive shudder and her hands gripped the discarded towel, half wanting to clutch it around her but knowing he would not allow it.

Jago's palm passed over her waist and moved slowly upwards to fondle her quivering breasts. Her breathing quickened and she began to shiver uncontrollably. Beads of moisture broke out on her forehead and upper lip. When she felt the warmth of his lips directly over the spot where her heart was thudding like a trip hammer, her shivering intensified.

Moments later a gasp did escape her when his lips reached the tip of her breast and sent shooting-stars of pleasure along every sensitised nerve.

When, a little while later, he lifted her further on to the bed, and pulled all the pillows together to make a soft mound behind her and have both his hands free, Savanna opened her eyes and whispered, 'What's the matter with me? I ... I can't stop this shivering.'

'It doesn't matter. Forget it.' His voice had a slightly ragged edge, but his hands remained steady and gentle as he resumed his caresses, kissing her throat, breaking down her inhibitions with the irresistible delight induced by the things he was doing to her.

Very soon it wasn't enough for her to lie still. She found herself impelled to touch him, to plunge her fingers into the thickness of his dark hair, to feel his strong neck and shoulders.

His skin was as smooth as her own, yet subtly different; like fine polished leather stretched over a hard under- surface of strong bone and springy muscle. Her own flesh was softer, more plastic. Did it please him as much as the feel of his taut skin pleased her?

She was filled with a strange, feverish impulse to make her spine bend like a bow, arching and stretching her body as if it might ease the increased violence of her tremors, Jago's mouth came down hard over hers in a long, hungry, sensual kiss to which she responded eagerly, all shyness forgotten.

Later, she woke up to find him wearing a dressing- gown and opening a bottle of champagne. He had unpacked her night things for her. She wore the virginal white nightgown to eat a delicious light supper for which, refreshed by her sleep, she was unexpectedly hungry'.

Eating caviare, and listening to a recording of Debussy's *Nocturnes*, she wondered if, before they went to sleep for the night, Jago would make love to her again. She found herself hoping he would.

Whatever else was lacking in their marriage, she had nothing to complain of in the tender expertise with which he had introduced her to physical love.

By the following evening they were installed in a white- walled, white-shuttered villa on a hill between Vale de Lobo and Alhufeira on the south coast of Portugal, in the region known as the Algarve, the name deriving from the Arabic words for the south—Al Gharb.

A short drive from Faro airport, the villa had been lent to them by friends of Jago who used it themselves for only a few weeks each year. Luxuriously furnished, and serviced by a Portuguese maid who came in for four hours each day, the house offered a choice of beaches not far from its own large garden and swimming pool.

From the spacious, airy master bedroom occupying the whole of the upper floor, they looked across pinewoods to the ocean. The bedroom had its own walled terrace where they could sunbathe in privacy without any clothes on.

At first Savanna was shy of lying on a towel-covered air-bed without her bikini, but when she jibbed at removing it, Jago laughed and kissed her, successfully distracting her attention while he untied the strings of both parts. Then he insisted on applying her sun cream for her, which led to his making love to her. After which she was shy no longer, and abandoned herself to the golden warmth beaming down from the cornflower sky as freely as he had just made her abandon herself to him.

At night he would watch her swim, naked, in the illuminated pool while he sat on the deck with a long drink. That, too, was a lovely sensation. When she came out he would wrap an enormous towel round her, and they would stroll back to the house through the lantern-lit garden to dine by the light of two candles and the innumerable stars in the now black and velvety sky.

The heat, the beauty of the place, the wine which they drank at all hours, the delicious seafood and salads prepared for them by Maria, all conspired to lull Savanna's doubts about the future.

She lived entirely in the present, and a great deal of the present was spent in her husband's arms, an- experience which swiftly became the most intensely pleasurable of all the sensual delights the Portuguese villa had to offer.

Sometimes they walked through the pinewoods to bathe in the sea. The water was clear, and still cold enough to be invigorating.

Once, on a breezy day when the surface was a little choppy and Jago swam a long way out—to him the confines of the pool were like a small exercise yard to a big dog—Savanna lost sight of him. There were windsurfers and water-skiers skimming back and forth. For a few minutes she was terrified that one or other might have hit him.

She was on the brink of panic when she saw his distinctive arm strokes. She felt a wash of relief. The incident gave her a glimpse of what she would feel if she lost him.

But how much would he care if she were killed?

An echo of the conversation they had had while staying with his sister came back to her.

I intend to marry this year. It may take a little time to find someone else who suits me as well as you do, but it won't be impossible.

About a month after their return to London, Jago had to go to America. It was to be a gruelling coast-to-coast trip, leaving no time for relaxing or sightseeing.

'I won't take you with me this time. Why not spend a few days with your mother?' he suggested.

Mrs Bancroft and her two youngest sons were now in the competent hands of a living-out housekeeper who ran the house with great efficiency and also did most of the cooking.

Savanna went to the airport to see Jago off. As he had made love to her before breakfast, perhaps it was unreasonable to feel disappointed because his farewell embrace was somewhat perfunctory.

That night, when she went to her room, it seemed very small and cluttered compared with the luxurious spaciousness to which she had already become accustomed.

The bed in which, at one time, she had seldom remained awake for more than two or three minutes because she had always been tired by the end of those long days of working at her job and at home, now seemed crampingly narrow.

Although it was summer, the weather was cool enough for her to have switched on the electric underblanket. It made the bed warm, but it was a poor substitute for the living warmth of Jago's chest against her back, his long legs behind her legs and his hand enclosing one of her breasts, which was the way they usually slept.

In New York it would be early evening. Jago would be having dinner, talking business; not thinking of her, not missing her.

The days of his absence seemed endless. It was on her last day at home, after she had been out shopping and was unpacking a pot plant which the florist had put in a carton and supported with crumpled newspaper, that Savanna caught sight of her husband's face.

She spread and smoothed the sheet of paper. It was a page from one of the popular dailies aimed at readers more interested in scandal and sensation than in a responsible presentation of serious news and events of genuine importance. It was not a paper she ever saw except on the news stands. The page which carried Jago's picture was the paper's gossip column, composed of short, spicy paragraphs about film and pop stars, television personalities and the more colourful politicians.

The text accompanying the photograph hinted that, although recently married, he had already resumed a relationship with the actress who had been his close friend several years earlier. It was all done by innuendo; carefully avoiding anything libellous.

Twice in the space of ten days he had been seen leaving the expensive West End apartments where the actress had a flat. Perhaps he had other friends living there, the columnist conceded.

But if he and his former love should meet in the lobby or the lifts, it must cause her some pangs, if not him. According to the writer, her name had not been linked with anyone else's since the end of her association with Jago. Friends said she had been madly in love with him, and had never got over the break between them.

Savanna read and re-read it, feeling shocked and sick. This was what she had feared, but much sooner than she had expected.

Her first reaction was to tear the page into small shreds, drop them in the waste bin, and try to forget she had seen the malicious paragraph. For what

motive other than malice could a man have for writing such cruel exposures of the frailties of the rich and famous? How he must envy and resent them to make his living by spying on them, or paying equally unpleasant people to supply him with snippets of gossip, half of it probably having little or no foundation.

However, try as she would to dismiss what he had written about Jago as spiteful rubbish, she found it impossible not to credit the story with some truth.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JAGO was expected home for dinner. By four o'clock Savanna was back in central London, having her hair done. She had had the appointment with the intention of looking her best to welcome him home, but now she was dreading the reunion.

Should she tell him what she had read, and see how he reacted? No: what was to be gained by bringing her fears into the open? Better by far to behave as if nothing had happened—if she could.

At six o'clock she was ready and waiting for his arrival in an outfit by Giorgio Armani. He and Gianni Versace had long been her favourite designers, and now she could afford to buy their clothes. The Armani outfit consisted of a cream silk blouse with a pair of knickerbockers gathered into a band at the knee, and patterned with dark blue and cream leaves on a coffee-coloured ground. With the pants Savanna was wearing opaque blue stockings and low-heeled pumps. There was also a band-collared, seven-buttoned light wool jacket to wear over the blouse out of doors.

It had cost a great deal of money and the pants would go out of fashion. But the blouse and the jacket were classics which would be wearable for years. Long before they grew shabby, their cost per wear would be less than that of cheaper but less enduring garments.

Cost per wear was an attitude to clothes expounded to Savanna by an American model, and one she would have liked to adopt earlier, but the drains of her income had made it impossible.

Now, as Mrs Jago Kindersley, she could have succumbed to the attractions of all the most transitory vogues without overspending her dress allowance. But her time as a model had made her resistant to most of the extremes of fashion. However, the knickerbockers were fun and very feminine, and at the time of buying the outfit she had thought they would amuse her husband.

In that supposition, she had been right. When Jago walked into the sitting-room and saw her standing by the window, her hands in the vertical

pockets of the new Italian pants, his grey eyes lit up with smiling appreciation of the casual chic of her appearance.

'Hello. Did you have a good trip?' she enquired, with a cool little smile.

He came swiftly to where she was standing.

'Excellent, but five days is too long without this'— taking her in his arms, and pressing his mouth over hers.

Savanna tried to pull back, but his embrace was too firm for her resistance to be noticeable, and once his lips were on hers it was futile to deny that for her, too, five days had seemed a long time to forgo the strong clasp of his arms, and the sweet surrender to his kiss.

Her eyes closed. For those first few moments in his arms, nothing mattered but being pressed against him, his hands roving over her back, his mouth moving hungrily on hers, as if it were weeks rather than days since the last time they had held each other.

At last he raised his head. 'Let's go to bed,' he said huskily.

Savanna shook her head, partly in rejection of the suggestion, partly to clear it of the drug-like effect of the long, passionate kiss.

'Matthews will be unpacking your cases.'

'I told him to leave it till later.'

'You didn't!' she exclaimed in dismay. 'Oh, really . . . - what must he think?'

'That I want to be alone with my wife—a very natural desire in the circumstances.'

He had slackened his hold sufficiently for her to free herself. 'I've only just dressed . . . and I had my hair done this afternoon,' she said awkwardly. 'We're going out tonight. Had you forgotten?'

'No, but I see no reason not to go to bed on that account. We have two hours in hand—ample time. Your hair will survive.'

He took her by the hand and began to lead her towards their bedroom.

With an open show of reluctance, Savanna allowed herself to be taken there. As they crossed the threshold, she said, 'But I've only just done my face, Jago . . . and I . . . I'm not in the mood now.'

He closed the door and turned the locking device on the knob. Ignoring her remark, he said, 'I've brought you some presents. One of them is in my suitcase. I expect Matthews has put it in the dressing-room.'

While he went to fetch what he had brought her, Savanna remained in the bedroom, trying to make up her mind what to do when he returned.

She was remembering the day he had told her that as long as she never refused to make love—or not without a very good reason—he would never be anything but faithful to her.

Clearly he didn't consider the fact that she was ready for their evening engagement an adequate reason to deny him the welcome he wanted. If there was no truth in the columnist's allegations—and Savanna clung to the hope that there might not be, or at least not yet—to refuse him would be asking for trouble.

Jago returned with a flat box. As he handed it to her, he said, 'I bought you a teddy. I've no idea why it's called that, and the salesgirl couldn't enlighten me. Perhaps they're obtainable here, but I've never seen you wearing one and it struck me as rather a fetching garment.'

Savanna opened the box and unfolded the leaves of tissue paper to reveal an expanse of oyster satin trimmed with palest dove grey lace. She could see at once that it was silk satin and handmade lace. Jago must have bought it from a shop specialising in the most expensive kind of lingerie.

'Try it on,' he said. 'I'm going to have a quick shower. I shan't be five minutes.'

Alone again, she shook out the teddy. It was styled like a loose one-piece bathing suit with tiny hooks and eyes to fasten the join between the legs. The cups and a panel down the front were of unlined lace with more lace at the hips. The rest was made of the sleek, lustrous satin.

At any other time she would have been delighted to receive such a charming and luxurious piece of underwear, but the seeds of suspicion sown in her mind by the gossip column now were tainting all her reactions.

Unwillingly, she undressed and slipped the teddy over her head. It fitted perfectly, emphasising the fuller contours of her body since she had gained a few pounds. The cobwebby lace clung to her breasts, and the bias-cut satin gave a voluptuous roundness to her hips and buttocks. Ladylike and restrained in its colouring, in cut and design it was deliberately seductive.

Jago returned, wearing a bathrobe and vigorously rubbing his wet hair. He walked round her—prowled was the word which came into her head—his hard eyes glinting appreciatively.

'I'm beginning to see a connection between this kind of teddy and the other. It makes you look very cuddlesome.' He flung the hand towel on the carpet, and reached out a long arm to pull her to him. 'I have something else for you, but that can wait until later.'

Savanna had been house-hunting for two months, and was beginning to wonder if she would ever find a place which complied with Jago's requirements and which also appealed to her, when she decided to try another estate agency, one less well known than those which advertised in the glossy magazines.

It was an impulsive decision inspired by a small advertisement in one of the Sunday newspapers. On Monday she called at the office and talked to the owner of the agency, who turned out to be an American married to an Englishman. Her name was Nancy Southworth, and her business had sprung from her successful efforts to track down attractive apartments for friends

from her country who needed to live in Europe for periods from several months to two or three years.

She had been a professional agent for a little more than a year but, after half an hour's talk with her, Savanna felt she might turn out to be more helpful than some of the established agencies which, in spite of her clear-cut requirements, were inclined to send her to see places which were completely unsuitable.

Not that such time-wasting mattered, when she had so much time on her hands; but it was a rather pointless exercise to look at houses which, had she been given the details in advance, she could have ruled out unseen. Most of the agents seemed to think her incapable of reading a floor plan or digesting a written description. Obviously they knew she was the wife of a very rich man, and were more concerned to sell her one of their most expensive properties than to pay attention to her reasons for not liking many of the houses they had on their books.

If Nancy recognised her new client, and was mentally rubbing her hands in anticipation of a large commission, she concealed it better than some of the others.

'At the moment I've only two places which come close to fitting your bill,' she said, after making a list of the factors which Jago considered essential. 'The snags are that one is three or four miles farther out of London than the distance you've stipulated, and the other is a super house but it needs a lot of modernisation and redecoration. You couldn't move in in less than six months, I would say. But it really is a gorgeous old place, with terrific potential. As a matter of fact I'd love to have it myself, but my husband won't hear of it. He insists on living in London, and I guess he's right. Neither of us has time in our lives for several hours' travel every day. But if we were younger, and planning a family, I'd want them to grow up at Merryhill.'

'I don't think a distance of under five miles is too important. Where are these houses?' asked Savanna.

'They're both in Buckinghamshire, and within a dozen miles of each other. If you like to suggest a convenient time, I'd be happy to run you out there—they might be a little difficult to find if you don't know that area well. If your husband will be looking at them with you, I'd advise going along without me. Frankly, from my own past experience as a buyer, I think having an agent along can be inhibiting. But for a woman to view a large empty house on her own can be a little scary.'

'My husband is too busy to look at houses until I've approved them. I'd be glad of your company, Mrs South worth.'

'Good, then let's fix a date, shall we? Would Friday morning be any good to you? We might not get back until early afternoon, depending how interested you were. If neither place appealed to you at all, we'd be back in London by lunchtime.'

'Friday would be fine.'

As Savanna went on her way, she found herself looking forward to spending some time in Nancy Southworth's company. Marriage was proving a somewhat lonely existence.

This would be remedied as soon as they found another home. But meanwhile, with Matthews taking care of all the domestic arrangements, her mother housebound and none of her former colleagues having any time to spare during the day, she found time hanging rather heavily. Perhaps it was partly by comparison with the rush of her life before marriage that the days seemed three times as long now.

She knew there must be many women who would envy her ample leisure, and the generous allowance which Jago had put at her disposal. She not only had hours free for window-shopping, but the means to buy almost anything which took her fancy. But the life of a rich, idle woman didn't really appeal to her. She longed for more fulfilling activities than beauty treatments and clothes shopping. At present, when she wasn't house-hunting, her most useful occupations were learning to drive and attending an exercise class. She also read a great deal, but somehow had not regained the academic impetus disrupted by her father's death and the consequence of it.

Part of the reason was that it hardly seemed worthwhile to embark on a programme of classes or even a course of self-tuition when she might soon be involved with doing up a house, and very likely pregnant as well.

The frequency with which he made love to her made her feel it could not be long before Jago's wish to start a family was on the way to being fulfilled. She was in his arms much more often than she had expected to be, given the nature of their marriage. There were times when she wondered if it were normal for a husband to continue, after the honeymoon, to be as ardent as he was.

Very often he would kiss her awake and make love to her before breakfast. Sometimes he would come home for lunch, and from time to time while they were eating she would look up from her plate to find him watching her with a fixed intensity which she knew meant that, when lunch was over, he would take her to bed for half an hour.

During these rapturous interludes she surrendered herself to the pleasures of the moment, and each time seemed better than the last. Jago was never selfish in his love-making, although he would leave her soon afterwards, returning to give her a final kiss before, having put on his clothes, he was ready either for breakfast, or to continue his crowded schedule.

It was then, when he had left the bedroom, leaving her to make a more leisurely recovery from the languor which followed the frenzy, that certain disturbing thoughts would creep into her mind. Would his desire for her wane from the day she told him she was expecting a child? How could she hope to hold him when her body became bulky and ungainly? How could she endure the agony of suspecting that he was unfaithful to her?

She knew that each time they made love she became more deeply addicted to the exquisite feelings he gave her, and which she felt sure she would never experience in the arms of anyone else. But she had no confidence at all that making love to her was better for him, if as good, as the times he had spent with the women who had preceded her, and those who might—would!—succeed her.

On the evening of the day of her visit to Nancy Southworth's agency, Jago seemed preoccupied by an impending political crisis which, if not averted, would have serious effects on commerce.

He spent part of the evening watching an hour-long programme in which politicians and union leaders were interviewed and expressed their attitudes to the crisis. Savanna saw his mouth harden with impatience when they made statements of the kind which she knew he found exasperating.

The news bulletin which followed the programme made his jaw muscles clench. Afterwards he disappeared into his study to make a Transatlantic call, and she decided to go to bed early and continue reading a book which, perhaps foolishly, she was keeping in a locked drawer in her dressing-table, out of Matthews' sight as well as Jago's.

For a reason which might have disappointed him, but had been a relief to her, it was some days since Jago had held her tightly in his arms and pressed his mouth hungrily on hers. As she sat up in bed, reading the book, Savanna found herself longing for him to join her. But she thought it would probably be midnight or later before he came to bed.

He needed much less sleep than she did, and if he did retire early he would often read far into the night, using a narrow beam of light which had been specially installed so that his nocturnal habits would not disturb her rest.

Frequently he rose very early to work from perhaps five o'clock until, at six-thirty or seven, he would shower, shave and come to wake her up, his face smooth, the minty tang of his toothpaste flavouring his kisses.

Now, stirred by the book she was reading, she longed to be able to get up, go to his study and entice him to come back to bed with her. But she lacked the confidence to make that kind of approach to him. Theirs was not the sort of relationship in which she could take the initiative, and probably it never would be, she thought, with a sigh.

About ten minutes later the door opened and Jago strolled in. Savanna controlled an impulse to thrust her book under the bedclothes, like a child caught reading after lights out time. Supported by his pillows as well as her

own—he used only one to sleep on, but the bed was made up with two on each side—she was sitting with updrawn knees, her thighs forming a book-rest.

She expected him to go to the dressing-room, and then spend some time in the bathroom, giving her a chance to put the book away and be reading a magazine when he reappeared.

Instead, he walked to the bedside. Usually he changed before dinner and spent the evening in casual clothes, but tonight he was still wearing a suit. As he untied his tie and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt, she was pierced by a thrust of excitement at the thought of the strong, virile body concealed by the well-tailored cloth.

He sat down on the side of the bed, just beyond the hump made by her knees. As he pulled the tie free of his collar, his glance flicked from her hair to her shoulders, and then to her gauzy nightgown made of two layers of chiffon, white over peach, with a narrow peach binding and fragile shoulder straps.

'I thought you might be asleep. Good book?' he enquired.

She nodded. 'Are you coming to bed now?'

'That depends. If you want to go on reading, perhaps I'll do some more work.'

She closed the book and put it aside on the night table. 'I can finish it tomorrow. I was only reading because you seemed to be busy.' She smiled at him. 'Can't the work wait?' she suggested, longing for him to kiss her.

'By all means, if you're feeling neglected.'

'Not neglected exactly, but it would be nice to . . . talk.'

His eyes mocked her. 'Talking wasn't what I had in mind.'

Savanna veiled her eyes with her lashes. 'Well then . . . whatever you like.'

Long fingers took hold of her chin and tilted her face. 'Very dutiful, but what would you like, Savanna? And don't tell me that you'd like whatever I'd like, because I don't buy that kind of bromide.'

An urge to tease him for a change made her say demurely, 'But, Jago, it was you who told me to think of myself as a Victorian girl, and be thankful that you weren't an old man who would make me dread . . . that side of marriage.'

'To which you replied, I remember, that since you were a modern girl it wasn't possible for you to think in those terms,' was his dry reply. 'If you want to make love, say so. If not, I'll leave you to read.'

Considering how long they had been married, it was absurd to be shy with him. But words played no part in their physical relationship. They made love in a silence broken only by the small gasps and stifled murmurs which she could not always repress, and later by his laboured breathing. To admit that she wanted him to stay was not easy for her.

Her cheeks hot, she said, in a low voice, 'I—I would like to make love.'

'So would I, but I need a shower. I'll be back in four or five minutes.'

As he rose and took off his coat, his eye fell on the book she had put aside. To her dismay, he picked it up and glanced at the title, his left eyebrow arching as he read it.

'Why are you reading this?' he asked.

'I . . . it caught my eye at the library. I thought . . .'

Her voice died away as he sat down and riffled through the pages, pausing at some which were illustrated.

'Thought what? That you might be missing something?'

'No . . . no, of course not,' she protested. 'I—I wanted to be sure that you weren't.'

'If I were, I should tell you.' He tossed the manual aside and went off to shower.

But would he? Savanna wondered uneasily. Or would he turn to someone else?—An experienced woman of the world, well versed in the arts of love at which she, all too clearly, was still an inhibited beginner.

Late on Thursday night, Nancy Southworth rang up to tell Savanna that she wouldn't be able to take her to see the house in Buckinghamshire the following day.

'My husband's father has been taken ill, and I have to be with my mother-in-law as long as his condition is critical. She has no daughters of her own, and we have a very close relationship. However, I've arranged for someone else to take you to see the houses, and I hope you'll forgive me for letting you down, Mrs Kindersley.'

'There's nothing to forgive. Please don't worry about it. I know how traumatic it can be when illness strikes unexpectedly. We've had the same thing in our family. Don't give our appointment another thought. I'm sure your assistant will be an excellent deputy,' Savanna said sympathetically.

'He's new to the job. But I've briefed him, and he'll do his best. It's good of you to be so understanding.'

'Not at all. How could I not be? Is your father-in-law still at home, or has he been taken to hospital?'

They discussed his illness for a few minutes. Then, with repeated apologies, Mrs Southworth rang off, leaving Savanna to recall the dreadful days when her own father's life had hung in the balance, and she had done all she could to support her mother through the hours of agonised waiting.

It had been arranged that the estate agent's assistant, whose name she had forgotten to mention, would call for Savanna at nine-thirty. She waited for

his arrival with a hopeful feeling that today, at last, she might find the house she was looking for.

In the light of Nancy's remark that they might be out for some hours, she had asked Matthews to make up a lunch basket containing a light meal for two. The weather forecast had promised a hot day, and it was in her mind that they might be able to picnic in the grounds of one of the houses—unless the assistant turned out to be uncongenial, which didn't seem likely in an occupation which called for an outgoing, sociable personality.

Being ready ten minutes beforehand, she told Matthews she would answer the doorbell when it rang.

A minute or two before the hour, her guide signalled his punctual arrival. But when she opened the door, it was not a stranger who confronted her.

'Good morning,' Miles Masters said pleasantly.

'Miles! What are you doing here?'

She had almost forgotten his existence.

'I'm standing in for Nancy Southworth. How are you, Savanna?' He offered his hand.

'I'm fine. How are you?' she responded, as they shook hands.

'Pretty fit, thanks.'

'Come in. I—I didn't know you were in real estate now. It doesn't seem your sort of thing.'

'It isn't, and I'm not—or only temporarily. My sister-in-law is a neighbour and friend of Mrs Southworth's. When she heard that old Mr Southworth had had a stroke, and Nancy was worried about losing an important client, she suggested me as a stopgap. Which I would have been happy to be even if the client had not been someone I knew.'

'I see. What a nice surprise. Shall we set out at once, or would you care for some coffee first?'

'It's not long since I had breakfast. Have you eaten yet?'

'Oh, yes—an hour ago. I'll just fetch a sweater—in case the weather-forecasters are wrong—and then I'll be ready to go.'

'What's this?' Miles enquired, when she returned with a jersey and the lunch hamper.

'A picnic, in case we're still out at lunchtime,' she explained. 'But perhaps you want to get back to London as soon as possible?'

'No, I'm at your disposal all day. A picnic in a country garden sounds much nicer than my usual pub lunch.'

He took charge of the basket, and they left the apartment and took the lift down to the underground garage.

'I thought you would probably have left England by now,' Savanna said, as they stood side by side in the lift. 'I remember you said you were in the market for whatever adventure offered itself. Has nothing come up yet?'

Miles shook his head. 'Not so far. The field is narrower than it used to be. Two or three of the various leads I've followed have turned out to be illegal; and a number of suggestions which have interested me, such as skipping one of the motorised rafts which take parties of sightseers down the rapids in the Grand Canyon, are ruled out by red tape. Most of the countries I'm interested in seeing discourage foreigners from working there. It's an understandable policy, but it makes it hard for a man or a girl to work their way from place to place without running foul of the law.'

'Yes, I suppose you need work permits everywhere except in the Common Market countries?'

'Exactly: and I've already seen as much of Europe as I want to. It's the New World which attracts me now, especially the wilderness areas. But there are

a lot of other people who want to get away from it all. Every time the American National Parks advertise for a warden, they receive about a thousand applications, including quite a number from women. If nothing offers pretty soon, I may spend six months back-packing through some of the wild country over there.'

'All by yourself?' queried Savanna.

'I expect so. Most men of my age are shackled to their career prospects, and I've yet to meet a girl I liked who wanted to live off the land for any length of time.'

'I wouldn't mind doing that—if it was what Jago wanted,' Savanna said thoughtfully. 'I should worry a bit about how I could cope, miles from anywhere, if he broke his leg or had any kind of serious accident. What does happen to people in those circumstances? Are there any facilities for rescuing them if they do get into trouble?'

'I don't know. I shouldn't think so. They take their chances as the original pioneers did. It's good for people to have no one to depend on but themselves. Too much pampering isn't good for individuals, or for nations either,' Miles said briskly.

'That's what Jago says. He doesn't think people should be mollycoddled, but neither does he believe the survivalists who preach that Western civilisation is on the brink of total breakdown.'

'And what do you think?' Miles enquired. 'Or, now that you've lost your independence, do you just go along with his views?'

They had reached the car, and he had opened the passenger door for her. In the act of stepping in, she paused. 'That's a very cutting thing to say, Miles. No, I don't "just go along" with my husband's views. I admire his mind, and I listen to what he has to say. But I still form my own opinions, some of which coincide with his.'

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean it the way it may have sounded.'

Savanna tilted a delicate eyebrow. 'Didn't you?'

He looked a little shamefaced. 'Well . . . maybe I did, but I apologise.'

'Why? Why did you mean it?'

He studied her for a long moment. "'Perhaps because, although it's none of my business, I feel you were very young to give up an interesting career and commit yourself to Jago's life-style. As I see it, the twenties should be flexible years, not in any way predetermined.'

'But I never wanted to be a model. That was forced on me by my father's premature death and the need to earn money,' jhe answered. 'If Father had lived, I expect I should be a history student now, and Jago and I would never have met.'

She climbed into the car, and turned to put her sweater and bag on the back seat. This time Miles didn't have to tell her to fasten the seat-belt as he had the first time they met. Nowadays she did it automatically.

'Anyway,' she went on, as he drove the car up the ramp to street level, 'I don't believe anyone's life is ever completely flexible, however much they try to avoid being pegged down. There are always determining factors, even if they're negative ones such as not being able to get a work permit. As Jago's wife, I'm actually much freer than I was before. I used to have hardly a minute to call my own. Now I have several hours a day. Given a choice between stewing in a hot, stuffy studio and going into the country to look at houses, I know which I'd rather be doing.'

'What kind of house are you looking for?'

'A large family place in a secluded position, but close to a village or a small market town. I've looked at dozens, but none of them has been quite right. Do you know the area we're going to? Mrs Southworth felt they might be difficult to find unless one had been there before.'

'I know the area intimately. It's only a few miles from my parents' place. In fact my mother knew Miss Atkinson, the last owner of Merryhill. I rang her

up last night to ask. Apparently the old girl was nearly ninety when she died, but still fairly active in her garden. She was the kind of woman who's pretty well extinct now: unmarried because she spent half her life dancing attendance on elderly parents. She was middle-aged before they died, and from then on her passion was gardening. According to Mother, she didn't give a damn about the condition of the house, but spent every penny on plants and paying a man to do the heavy work.'

'That tied in with what Mrs Southworth said about the house needing a lot of renovation to make it habitable.'

'Which do you want to see first—Merryhill, or the other place?' asked Miles.

'The other one, please.'

They were silent for a while. It was strange but, although she hadn't seen him for a long time, or thought about him, Savanna felt as if she were in the presence of an old friend. Miles must feel the same towards her, or he would not have been so outspoken in his attitude to her marriage.

Presently he asked if she would mind if he switched on the radio for a programme in a series he had been following.

It turned out to be about great composers, the talk interspersed with passages from the subject's works. Savanna also gave her attention to it, silently surprised by the discovery that Miles had a serious interest in classical music.

Within an hour of setting out they had passed through suburbia to the countryside which today was looking at its best with a clear blue sky overhead, and green vistas of meadow and wood on every side.

The first house they went to look at had been built in the early 1900s to a design by Sir Edwin Lutyens. His houses were enjoying a new vogue as examples of the last period of English architecture when, labour being cheap and incomes not heavily taxed, mansions could still be erected with

solid wood doors and other refinements now beyond the means of private patrons, unless they had Jago's means.

However, one look at the exterior and Savanna knew this was not the house she had in mind. She walked through its empty rooms out of curiosity, but the lavish use of dark oak panelling, and the massive staircase rising from the sitting-room-cum-hall, were not attractions in her eyes.

A long verandah on the south side made the other reception rooms dark even on a hot summer morning. In winter they would be gloomy.

En route from there to Merryhill, they stopped in a village where the cake shop had an old-fashioned tea room adjoining, it. They had coffee and buttered fruit scones, and Savanna bought some free-range eggs and a jar of honey with part of the comb in it.

The late Miss Atkinson's house was close to a similar village a few miles farther on. The drive was barred by a gate secured with a padlock and chain, but Miles had the key to the padlock. Thick shrubberies hid the house from the road, and the first fifty yards of the drive were overhung with branches, making Savanna fear this was going to be another dark house.

Then the drive emerged from deep shade into sunlight, and the thickets of holly and laurel gave place to overgrown lawns surrounding a Regency house with paint peeling from its walls and an air of years of neglect. But the graceful pillars of the portico with, above it, a canopied balcony and a cast-iron railing with a typically Regency lyre motif, made Savanna's heart leap with excitement.

'This is it! I'm sure of it,' she exclaimed.

'Steady on. It may be riddled with dry rot, death watch beetle and God knows what else,' warned Miles, looking amused by her excitement.

She didn't wait for him to walk round and open the door for her, but sprang out and hurried across the weed- tufted remains of a gravelled sweep towards the sun- blistered front door.

Although the house was empty, the ground floor windows were screened by dingy lace curtains which had probably been chosen by Miss Atkinson's mother, and hung there, unwashed, for many years. They were Victorian in taste, and ruined the appearance of the tall Georgian windows.

'Oh, do hurry, Miles,' she urged, as he followed her at a more leisurely pace.

There were several large keys on the ring labelled 'Merryhill', and it took him a minute or two to find the right one for the lock on the front door.

When at last he pushed it open and stood aside for her to enter, Savanna took a deep breath and braced herself for the disappointment of discovering that, in spite of its attractive facade, the interior of the building did not tally with Jago's requirements.

She knew he would not be influenced by the romantic appearance of the place. A man who selected his wife for practical reasons would never buy a house for impractical ones.

The long hall was flooded with sunlight slanting through the dusty panes of a window at the top of the staircase and a glass door with a graceful fanlight at the back of the hall. To the right, the door standing open, was a large room, also full of sunshine. She went in. It was the drawing-room; spoiled by a dark red flocked wallpaper.

In her mind's eye, Savanna saw the walls painted with a soft apricot emulsion, the bare floorboards carpeted, and several Regency mirrors reflecting books, flowers and watercolours.

'It would need completely re-wiring,' was Miles' comment, indicating the room's only socket outlet of an outdated type unsuited to take modern plugs.

'And re-plumbing, I expect,' she agreed.

A quick reconnaissance of the whole house to form an overall impression took about half an hour and confirmed her intuitive certainty that, as far as she was concerned, this was the place they were seeking.

Next they explored the large garden. After a year of neglect the house had not come on the market immediately because Miss Atkinson had left it to a nephew in Canada, who, when eventually he had been traced, had instructed that it be sold—the garden was not as she had left it.

Unweeded, unpruned and showing signs of youthful trespassers who had done a good deal of damage and left some unsightly litter, it needed an imaginative eye to recognise how it had looked, and could look again.

'I'm hungry. Shall we have lunch now, or is it too early for you?' she asked, after touring the grounds.

'I'm peckish too,' Miles agreed. 'Wait here, I'll fetch the hamper.'

They ate on an old stone bench, dappled with patches of lichen, at the end of a lavender walk, the bushes busy with bees.

Pate, wholemeal bread and green salad were accompanied by a flask of Matthews' home-made lemonade, refreshingly cold to their palates. Fresh peaches, and a second flask of coffee, rounded off their open-air meal.

'How about strolling down to the pub for a dram?' Miles suggested afterwards.

'Why don't you go?' she answered. 'I want to look round the house again, and make notes and also take photographs.'

'You won't mind being on your own?'

'Not a bit. In fact I'd prefer it. Then I can take my time without feeling it's-a bore for you.'

'Being with you could never be a bore, Savanna.'

Somewhat abruptly he turned away and walked off.

She watched him go, a little disconcerted by the unexpected compliment. But she didn't think about it for long. The house drove out all other thoughts.

Would Jago like it as much as she did? When would he have time to come and look at it? Would someone else snap it up before he had made a decision?

About an hour later, glancing out of one of the upper windows, she saw that Miles had returned and was lying on his back in the long grass at the front of the house. His eyes were closed, and although she watched him for several minutes, he did not stir. The heat of the summer afternoon, and whatever he had drunk at the pub, had conspired to send him to sleep.

Relieved that he wasn't in a hurry to be off, she used a whole roll of film to snap all the features which gave the place its character and charm.

He was still asleep when she locked up and put her camera and notes in the car. But when she nudged his foot with the toe of her sandal, he woke very quickly, sitting up without using his arms as levers, which she knew was a sign of strong stomach muscles, and looking much more alert than most people did when roused from a nap. Perhaps that instant alertness was a result of his S.A.S. training.

'What did you think of the pub?' she asked.

'It's a free house which hasn't been spoiled by most brewers' mania for red plastic and mind-bending carpet patterns. It still has the original oak settles and Windsor chairs, and the landlord's wife makes the sausage rolls and Scotch eggs. Not that I tried them, having eaten beforehand, but they looked good. The beer is good too.'

'I'm not sure that Jago ever drinks it, but he may on occasion. Perhaps we ought to be getting back . . . although it seems a pity to waste this lovely afternoon,' Savanna added regretfully.

'Let's not waste it, then. Let's walk for a- while. You don't want to go overboard for the house and then find you're down-wind from a broiler house or a pig farm.'

'All right, let's explore for an hour. But I mustn't be later than five.'

'What happens at five?' asked Miles.

'Nothing, but I like to bath and change before Jago comes in about six.'

'It will be much later than six if you move out here,' he pointed out.

'Not really, because he'll come home by helicopter, not by road. That's why a sizeable paddock was one of the vital prerequisites.'

To her delight, her enthusiasm for Merryhill made Jago rearrange his schedule to see the place the next day. He liked it as much as she did and, subject to certain precautions such as having it surveyed, was prepared to buy it.

The day before the house became theirs, Savanna passed her driving test and thereafter was able to drive herself backwards and forwards. Jago wanted the house to be habitable by Christmas.

'By then you may be pregnant and not up to running yourself ragged, as women invariably do when they're choosing furnishings,' he said. 'Even with a decorator to help you, putting the place in order will take up a lot of your time.'

By this time Savanna had reason to believe that she was pregnant. A few days later, unwilling to go to a doctor yet but impatient to know what was happening inside her body, she bought a test kit which was said to be ninety-eight per cent accurate. Two hours after she had carried out the simple instructions, the result was positive.

Although it would be a long time before there was any visible sign of it, the tiny embryo of their first child was in existence; a mysterious little being of unknown sex already dependent on her to supply it with vital nutrients and to avoid everything which might harm it.

As she had never smoked or drunk spirits, and had always eaten plenty of raw vegetables, wholegrains and natural yogurt, the confirmation that she was responsible for someone else's health as well as her own did not call for any marked change in her previous regime.

It seemed unlikely that Jago, with much else on his mind, would have noticed the one clue to her condition. She could keep the baby a secret for some time. Not that it made much difference if he was already being unfaithful to her. But perhaps he wasn't. She kept hoping against hope that he wasn't, and would not be, until the un- gainliness of her figure gave him a better excuse than he had at the moment.

Recently she had read an article in a magazine which had taken the view that women were asking the impossible to expect any man to be an exciting lover and a faithful husband. A virtuoso lover would never be content with only one woman. A man who never looked at anyone but his wife would probably be an unimaginative lover.

Whether or not the article had any force in it, or was merely a provocative piece churned out, tongue in cheek, by a journalist, Savanna felt sure that no man with Jago's sexual appetite would be able to abstain from making love for several weeks, as must be the case towards the end of her pregnancy and for a time afterwards.

If he loved her—yes. With love, all things were possible.

In the weeks which followed she saw a good deal of Miles. The friend whose flat he had been borrowing had returned from abroad, and now Miles was living at home until he took off on the next phase of his life. This meant he was close enough to Merryhill to come over and work in the garden.

Jago had told Savanna to call in one of the leading landscape gardeners. But she was reluctant to do this, preferring—with Miles' help—to reclaim the garden herself.

Once the overgrown lawns had been scythed to a mowable length by an elderly man from the village, and she and Miles had cleared the worst of the undergrowth, it might be that the garden would do very well as it was without any professional redesigning.

Preoccupied with the house, and with thoughts of the baby, she saw no reason to discourage Miles from spending more and more of his time at Merryhill. As far as she was concerned, his assistance was invaluable and

his friendship comfortable. Much of the time they spent in different parts of the grounds, only meeting for a shared picnic lunch.

She did not mention him to Jago because she suspected that her husband would be incapable of a straightforward friendship with a woman unless she was many years older than himself, and would not understand the sisterly affection of her feeling for Miles, or his brotherly attitude to her.

Once it crossed her mind that it was a little strange that his parents—met briefly at the wedding—had not suggested that he should bring her to lunch with them, and to wonder if they were unaware of the time he spent at Merryhill.

She would have expected his mother at least to ring up and express some pleasure in having them as fairly near neighbours. But it might be that Mrs Masters, who had looked rather frail at the reception, was not equal to much entertaining. As Miles rarely mentioned his parents, she didn't know a great deal about them.

When a long hot spell was followed by several days of rain, she busied herself in London, looking for antique furniture and going round all the kitchen and bathroom showrooms.

Although it was wonderful to be free to choose anything she wanted, the habit of being careful with money was too deeply ingrained for her to be carried away by the *carte blanche* which Jago had given her.

One afternoon, she returned from a shopping expedition to be met by his manservant. It seemed that Miles had arrived about half an hour earlier and insisted on waiting for her to return.

'Hello, Miles. What brings you here?' she asked, as she entered the sitting-room.

'I've come to say goodbye, Savanna.'

'Goodbye? When and where are you going?'

'To the States, on the first available stand-by flight. I've delayed too long already. It's time I moved on.'

She wondered what had precipitated his decision.

'I shall miss you,' she told him sincerely.

'I shall miss you, too.' He paused before adding, 'More than I should miss another man's wife. At first, when Jago came to see me, I was furious with him for suggesting there might be more than friendship between us. But afterwards I realised he was right. On my side there *is* more than friendship. Given the smallest encouragement, I would be in love with you, Savanna. But you've never given me that encouragement. I have no idea how you feel about me. I only know that you're not really happy with him.'

She blinked at him, stunned by this revelation of feelings she had not suspected; but most of all by the fact that Jago had been to see him.

'W-when did he come to see you?'

'This morning. He's been having us followed. Obviously he's wildly jealous of every man who looks at you, and I can't say I blame him—although I think he's a fool not to realise that you aren't the kind of person who would ever do anything underhand.'

'We've been followed? I can't believe it. Followed by whom?' she expostulated.

'By a private detective, I suppose. But never mind that at the moment.' He came closer, and laid both his hands lightly on her shoulders. 'Tell me the truth. You're not happy with him, are you? You try to hide it, but sometimes your face gives you away. One day at the house when you didn't know I was watching, your eyes were full of tears. You wanted to cry . . . and I wanted to take you in my arms and comfort you,' he added, in a low tone—a more emotional tone than she had ever heard him use before.

Savanna drew back, deeply disturbed by his revelation of feelings she had not suspected of fermenting beneath his calm, casual friendliness; and even

more shocked by what he had said about Jago having them followed. Shocked, and angrier than she had ever been in her life.

'Miles, you've misunderstood,' she began distractedly/ 'I—I had no idea you had any . . . warm feelings towards me. At least, not warmer than friendship. I thought you were just killing time. If I'd thought ... if I'd guessed--'

'You haven't answered my question. You aren't happy, are you?' he persisted.

She hesitated. 'Not entirely, but--'

'I knew it wasn't working out. Frankly, I never thought it would. You were dazzled by him . . . not seeing straight. But you don't have to stay with him if he's making you miserable.'

'He isn't. You don't understand, Miles. I love Jago. I always shall. The only thing wrong with our marriage is that he ... he doesn't feel quite the same way about me. If he's jealous, it's only possessiveness. It wouldn't wreck him if I left him. He would be very angry, I expect, but he certainly wouldn't be heartbroken.'

'Then why must you stay with him? You deserve more than pride of possession. God knows, you're incredibly ornamental, but it's not your looks which made me love you. It's your gentleness, and —'

She cut him short. 'Please, Miles . . . don't go on. I'm desperately sorry you feel like this, but you must put me out of your mind. You're wrong if you think I regret my marriage. I don't. If I've been a bit . . . moody recently, perhaps it's because I'm expecting a baby.'

She saw him flinch, and knew there would be no further argument.

'I see,' he said heavily.

'And I'm sure, when you get to America, you'll soon feel differently yourself. You've been at a loose end, and lonely . . . oh, Miles dear, forgive me if I've unwittingly hurt you. I didn't mean to—truly I didn't.'

'I know that. It isn't your fault. The fact is that any man who spent much time with you would be bound to love you,' he answered. 'I must go—I shouldn't have come. Goodbye, my dear. Take care of yourself.' Pressing her hands between his palms, he squeezed them for a moment. Then, with a muttered, 'I can find my own way out,' he was gone.

With Miles gone, Savanna could hardly contain her impatience for Jago to come home. She found it almost unbelievable that .he had been having her spied upon while at the same time being unfaithful to her.

They had an engagement to dine with some friends of his that evening, and ordinarily she would have had her bath and probably put on her make-up before he returned. But tonight she had no intention of going anywhere with him. He would have to think of some excuse for her absence, if not for his own. There was no possibility of her putting on a happy bride act when inwardly she was seething with rage and resentment.

As she waited for him, she paced restlessly up and down the length of the sitting-room, her hands clenched into fists and thrust into the pockets of her trousers, every line of her body taut with contained anger.

By the time he arrived her rage was already at boiling point, but, although usually he was quick to notice anything untoward, tonight he seemed unaware of anything strange in her manner.

'What did you do with yourself today?' he asked, after saying hello to her.

'Nothing special,' was her clipped reply. 'A very dull day for your watchdog. As a matter of interest, what does it cost to have me shadowed?'

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN the act of crossing the room, Jago checked and glanced sharply at her. 'What are you talking about?'

'About the man who keeps me under surveillance and reports all my movements to you. Where I go . . . who my friends are . . . my lovers!' Her voice was sharp with angry sarcasm as she flung the last word at him.

There was a brief pause before, with no sign of discomfiture, he said, 'You've been talking to Miles.'

'Yes. He came to say goodbye. He didn't stay long. Your watchdog will tell you exactly how long . . . and whether it was long enough for me to commit a final act of adultery with him,' she tacked on bitterly.

It took Jago three strides to reach her, and grip her by the upper arms.

'Stop this nonsense, Savanna! You know perfectly well I don't suspect you of anything of the sort.'

'Then why have me followed?'

'For the same reason that I've had someone watching me for the past couple of weeks.'

'Watching you?' she echoed blankly.

'I didn't mention it because I didn't want to alarm you unnecessarily. Just over a fortnight ago, someone—probably a harmless crank—threatened to injure me. Abusive letters and telephone calls are not uncommon in the lives of anyone permanently or even temporarily in the public eye. I've received various threats from time to time, particularly after expressing opinions which upset fanatics and extremists. However, the police considered this particular threat might be a serious one, and they advised certain precautions. It seemed possible that if the author of the threat was unable to strike at me, he or she might try to harm you. That's why I had you

shadowed, and that's how it came to my notice that Miles was spending more time with you than I considered good for him.'

The discovery that he had been in danger drove everything else from her mind.

'Why didn't you tell me? I'm your wife, I have a right to know such things!'

'You would have been upset and worried. As your husband I have a right to protect you from needless anxiety, particularly now when, although you've chosen not to mention it, I think you may be expecting our first child. Am I right? Are you pregnant, Savanna?'

'I—I'm not sure yet. I may be.'

'And if so, you're not happy about it?—Or that's my impression,' was his comment.

'It's not being pregnant that I mind,' she said, in a low tone.

'It's not?' Jago sounded surprised. 'What is it, then? I can tell that something is weighing on you. I concluded it must be the baby; that you would have preferred to postpone it. Perhaps I was wrong to impose my wishes on yours. But you won't lose your figure for some time yet, and I've been reliably assured that it need leave no permanent effects. You'll be just as beautiful afterwards.'

'I'm not concerned about my figure ... or about being pregnant. I should be very happy about it, if--'

'If what? Come on, out with it. What's on your mind?'

Savanna knew then that she had to tell him, not merely because she had already admitted to being under pressure, but because she could no longer endure the cruel uncertainty of recent weeks.

'Even though I haven't lost my figure yet, I seem to have lost your . . . undivided attention, Jago. It appears to be common knowledge that you've

resumed a relationship with someone you knew before me. In those circumstances, is it surprising that I'm not overjoyed at the prospect of having a baby?'

His dark brows contracted and his fingers tightened on her arms.

'What crazy nonsense is this? First you jump to the conclusion that I suspect you of infidelity; now you're accusing me of it, which is even more foolish.'

Savanna drew in a long shaky breath, bracing herself to put the question which would either relieve her anguish, or intensify it beyond bearing. Jago might prevaricate, but she did not think he would lie if she had the courage to ask point-blank.

'Are you saying there are no other women . . . n-not even one?'

His hands slipped down her arms to close round her slender wrists. But the denial she longed for did not come. He said only, 'I suppose by "common knowledge" you mean the scurrilous innuendo published in one of the gossip columns? Who drew your attention to it? I might have known someone would.'

'No one. By an unfortunate chance, I happened to see that particular issue of the paper.'

'But it didn't occur to you to ask me if there was any truth in it?' he said irritably.

'What was to be gained by confronting you with it? It was only what I'd always known would happen eventually. I shouldn't have brought it up now if I hadn't been so furious at the idea of you suspecting *me* of being unfaithful.'

'Will you believe me if I tell you that you're the only woman I've made love to, or wanted to make love to, since we met in the Caribbean?'

She raised her eyes to his face, and saw that he was looking down at her with an expression of great gravity. Yet how could that statement be true?

'I should like to believe it, but it's very difficult. Do you deny that you did go to see the actress who used to be your . . . friend?'

'No, I don't deny it—or that I've been to see her regularly since then. But if you'd asked me about it, I should have explained the reason for my visits to her.' 'What was the reason?'

Jago said heavily, 'She's seriously ill . . . dying, in fact.

She knows it, but she doesn't want the world to know it. It seems the least I can do is to give her a little of my time in the short time she has left to her.'

Immediately Savanna was seized with pity for the actress, and regret for her unfounded suspicions.

'How terrible! If only you'd told me. Why did you keep it a secret?'

'The relationships I had before I knew you are something I prefer to forget. If I'd told you that Charmian was merely a friend, it would have been a lie and—knowing how warm-hearted you are—I felt you might want to come with me when I went to see her. To have told you the truth, which is that for a year or two she and I amused ourselves together--'

'The paper said she-was in love with you,' she interrupted. '*Did* she love you?'

His mouth tightened. 'Unfortunately—yes, I believe so. When the time came for us to separate, she would have liked to continue the affair. This was all a long time ago . . . when you were in your early teens. But I've always regretted hurting her, and now she needs friendship very badly. She has no family, and not many close friends. I owe her a few hours a week. It won't be for very much longer.'

It was she who went to him then, putting her hands on his chest and looking up into his face with no guard on her own expression.

'I'm sorry,' she said contritely. 'How rotten of me to - believe that despicable columnist! Only, you see, I can't help being miserably jealous. If you loved me, it would be different. But when it's all on my side . . .'

Jago put his arms round her and pulled her against him. Speaking over the top of her head, he said, in a low voice, 'But it isn't all on your side, Savanna. I've been in love with you for some time; perhaps since before we were married, although I didn't recognise my feelings until one morning quite recently. I woke up and watched you sleeping, and knew just how much you meant to me.'

She stood very still in his arms, hardly daring to believe she had heard him say, in plain words, that he was in love with her.

'Why didn't you tell me?' she murmured, at last.

'I thought it might be too late. It's a long time since you gave any indication that you still felt warmly towards me. It seemed entirely possible that you'd begun to cool off except in bed. But now I want your heart as well as your body. Are you sure I still have it, Savanna?'

'Oh, yes- yes! How can you doubt it?' Her face still hidden against his broad shoulder, she slipped her arms round him and hugged him. 'I could never love anyone but you.'

'I thought I could never love anyone—until you proved me wrong,' he said quietly. 'I wanted to take Miles apart when I found out how often he'd been seeing you. Oh, I knew it was innocent enough—neither of you is the type to do anything underhand. But love, as I'd just discovered, can catch people unawares. With his S.A.S. background, he cuts a much more heroic figure than I do.'

At that she lifted her face. 'Not to me. Never to me. You are my *beau ideal*, and always have been.'

'God knows why, after the way I trod anything but softly on your dreams, my poor little love.'

'But my dreams only began when I met you. Before that I never gave much thought to love. I was more ambitious than romantic. Oh, Jago, say it again—that you love me,' she pleaded softly.

'I love you, and want you, and need you . . . for the rest of my life.'

He bent to kiss her; the first kiss she had ever received with the certainty that he cared for her.

One kiss led to another, and soon they were locked in their bedroom, rapidly shedding their clothes, as impatient to lie down together as lovers united at last after prolonged separation.

Today Jago did not draw the curtains, but today Savanna had nothing to hide when he came to the bed where she was waiting for him with smiling lips and eyes bright with relief and happiness.

'This has always been wonderful, but I was afraid to admit it in case you became bored with me,' she explained, as she melted into his strong arms. 'Darling do you realise I never dared to call you that before?'

'You never looked at me like this before either. It was always as if I were taking you against your will . . . forcing you to respond to me.'

'If only you'd known how I really felt!' She drew his head down and gave him a warm, wanton kiss, the first of its kind she had ever ventured.

Much later, they remembered the dinner party.

'I'll ring up and say you're not well,' Jago decided, reaching for the telephone.

'No, no, Jago, you can't. It's not fair to spoil Eleanor's table plan. Tell them we shall be fifteen minutes late. I can dress as quickly as you can, and put my face on in the car.'

'To hell with Eleanor's table plan. She'll have to manage without us. If you think I can sit through a dinner when I want to be in bed with you--'

His powerful hands held her captive, and she tried in vain to break free from his caressing imprisonment.

'She won't believe you,' she objected. 'If I hadn't been well I'd have rung her up hours ago.'

'Not necessarily. When my sister was pregnant with the twins she had to chuck several engagements at the last minute. Eleanor has a sharp ear for a nuance, and she likes nothing better than to be first with a piece of news.'

While he dialled their hostess's number, Savanna relaxed against him. She felt a little guilty but, like him, she wanted to stay where she was. These first hours of total rapport were too precious to be sacrificed for a social obligation. Even now she could scarcely believe that this dynamic man, with his brilliant brain and foreful character, had actually admitted to loving and needing her.

The call took only a few moments. Then he replaced the receiver and returned his attention to her, smoothing back her tumbled blonde hair, delicately stroking her face with the backs of his knuckles. Suddenly, to her astonished delight, he said softly, *'Western Wind, when wilt thou blow, the small rain down can rain? Christ, if my love were in my arms and I in my bed again!'*

There were lines written long ago in the sixteenth century by an unknown poet; lines Savanna had always found touching and poignant. That he knew them too, and should choose this moment to quote them, set the seal on her new-found happiness. She knew she had been right to give her heart to him.