

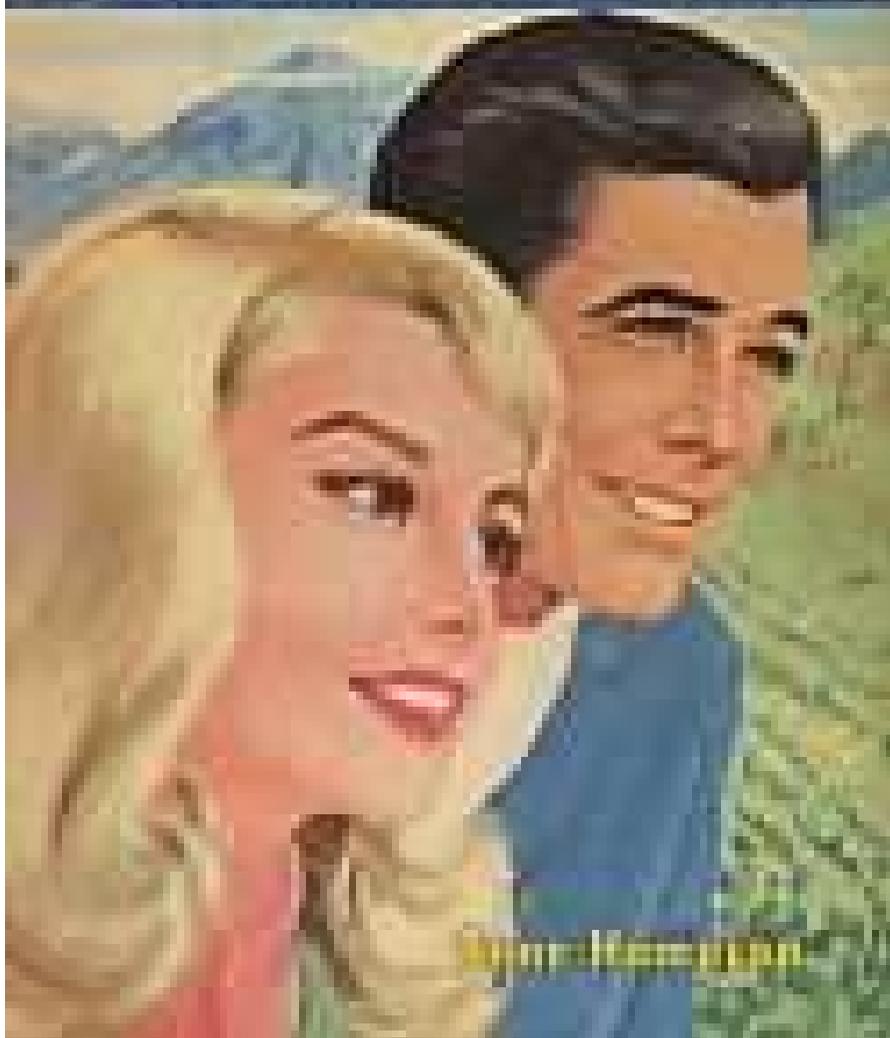


55491

WANT TO READ THIS?

50c

# WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS



WANT TO READ THIS?

# **WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS**

**Anne Hampson**

The feud between the two families of Malvern and Lingard was long standing and bitter, but it looked like coming to an end when Sara Malvern became engaged to Alex Lingard.

Ralph had tricked Sara into marrying him. She was determined to pay him back; he was equally determined to tame her.

With so much ill feeling on both sides, what possible chance was there for the marriage to be a success?

Certainly only love could work such a miracle!

## CHAPTER ONE

THE two girls stood by the ruins of the great abbey of St. Hilda, high above the cliffs of the Whitby coast. Caressed by the slanting rays of the sun as it rose over the sea, Sara's hair gleamed, gold and silver, framing a heart-shaped face - a small face but strong, with firm bone structure and well defined contours. The blue eyes were very dark, large and widely-spaced. They could glint with arrogance or kindle with fury; they could narrow dangerously or sparkle with defiance ... but rarely were they softened by compassion or seen to brim with woman's tears. For although her family had lived in Yorkshire for more than a hundred years, Sara Malvern was descended from the stock of the old Border raiders - a throwback, some said, with a heart as cold as those of her ancestors who had pillaged and burned, and meted out the most hideous reprisals to their enemies and neighbours.

She stood erect now, her head thrown back, her hair flying in the wind, and her slender body swaying slightly as she pointed across the field, indicating some peculiar lines cutting through the grass at regular intervals, lines which could only be discerned when the sun was at certain points in the sky.

'The old demarcation lines - relics of the strip system of farming,' she said, turning to her friend. Valerie was as dark as Sara was fair, and softly feminine in every way. The friendship had developed when they were at school, and continued ever since. Not often were such contrasting natures so in harmony. 'Can you imagine the peasants, tilling and toiling - working half the week for the lord in payment for their poor little parcels of land?' Her proud head went higher and a mouth that could be beautiful became set in a harsh defiant line. 'I'd not have slaved for anyone, just for the privilege of staying alive. I'd have killed myself - just to get the better of the tyrant lord!'

'Well,' her friend returned mildly, 'I fail to see what harm that would have done the lord. There would have been someone else to take your place, and to take over the land, I expect.'

'You're wrong. The population was low and labour was wealth. That was why the peasants came up on top after the Black Death.'

Valerie shrugged. She wasn't particularly interested in history and she neither knew nor cared about the implications of the terrible plague that had occurred so many hundreds of years ago. But Sara knew it all, because of the historical associations of the Malverns, whose ancestors had been one of the two most important families in the whole of the county of Northumberland. One branch of the other family, the Lingards, had also moved down into Yorkshire, having inherited some considerable properties there, and so, in a milder way, the feud had continued.

Glancing at her friend, Valerie could well believe that Sara would have chosen death rather than submit to the authority of another human being. She still would, decided Valerie, smiling at the improbability of the need for such drastic measures.

But her thoughts revived a memory and she spoke without thinking that her remark had no bearing on what her friend had just been saying.

'Paul Verity was telling me he's had a letter from Alex.'

Long dark lashes flickered, sending shadows on to the clear ivory of Sara's cheeks. Her eyes themselves, held no expression as she said tonelessly,

'Is he still in New Zealand?'

'Yes - and he's got a girl-friend, though he didn't say whether or not he's serious about her.'

A smile that was almost a sneer curved Sara's lips. 'Good luck to the girl who takes him on,' she flashed, her eyes now alight with a sort of cynical humour.

A small pause, and then Valerie shot her friend a sideways glance and murmured gently,

'Some girls - most girls in fact - like their husbands to be the master—'

'Rubbish!' snapped Sara. 'That idea went out with our grandmothers - and a good thing too! No man will ever dominate me!' She turned to face the sea and her eyes scanned the dark horizon for a moment before she added,

amusement now in her tones as she sensed her friend's expression, 'I have no regrets about Alex Lingard. I've found myself the type I want - the type I can manage. I'm more than satisfied with Roddy.' Her brow furrowed thoughtfully. Roddy Shane, who, in his blind adoration, would, if she insisted, lie down and allow her to walk all over him. Her voice held elation as she went on to say with confidence that her marriage would survive when those of her friends and acquaintances were well and truly on the rocks. Valerie spoke calmly, and without any hint of censure. Tour formula will suit you, no doubt, but how do you think poor Rod is going to react?'

'Poor Rod?' Protest in her voice now, but almost immediately a laugh echoed across the deserted fields. 'Rod considers himself the most fortunate man in Yorkshire.' She stared at the steamer appearing on the horizon and for a few moments her thoughts went back to Alex. Over a year ago - on her eighteenth birthday, in fact - since she had told him in no uncertain terms that the engagement was at an end. How he had tried to bully her! The arrogance of the man! Her eyes blazed for a second, then glinted with satisfaction. With the evaporation of his fury he had begun to plead, and Sara had listened in exultation, enjoy-ing his hopelessness and despair. He had nothing to live for, he had said, adding,

'This will finish my mother. Such an affront from a Malvern!'

'I shan't ruin my life for the sake of your mother,' had been the unfeeling rejoinder as Sara eyed her rejected lover coldly.

'This, all because I - I...' He wouldn't continue, but Sara had no consideration for his feelings.

'I shan't put it as bluntly as is usual these days; but you tried to have me before marriage. I ... a Malvern, being treated like a - like a— Well, you got more than you bargained for!'

A faint smile appeared at that, despite his misery.

'Your fangs are sharp as those of a wolf - and as venomous as a serpent's, judging by the time the doctor says it will take for my wounds to heal.' And

he added with a sudden blaze of vindictiveness, 'One day you might dig them into something so hard they'll break.'

'Never!' she had flashed, tossing her head.

He had resorted to pleas again.

'Don't throw me over, Sara. If I did act in an un- gentlemanly way it was only because you're so desirable—'

'It was because you couldn't bear to accept a refusal.'

'We were being married in only two weeks' time.'

'Then you should have waited until we were married. I still say it was because you couldn't bear to take a refusal - a refusal from a Malvern. Your conduct has opened my eyes, has convinced me that you intended to be dominant - when we were married, that was.'

'A husband should be dominant!' he snapped, and a militant light kindled in Sara's dark eyes.

'An inherent Lingard trait, dominance! Thank heaven I discovered it in time. The Lingards have always been the same. Right down through the ages they've tried to lord it over their neighbours.' She gave him a sweeping glance of contempt. 'But they never subdued the Malverns. My ancestors had yours swinging from the gallows.'

'And mine had the heads of yours floating down the river -by the dozen!'

Yes, mused Sara, bringing her gaze from the steamer and back to her friend, yes, the feud between the two families had been present for hundreds of years and many were the horrors perpetrated on both sides. And yet it seemed that the Malverns and the Lingards of today regretted the conflict, for her engagement to Alex had been received with enthusiasm by both families. But the engagement had been broken, only a fortnight before the wedding date. They weren't suited, was the only explanation Sara had given to Alex's people, and she remained imperturbably indifferent to their angry

assertions that she should have discovered the fact a little sooner. To her own parents she explained that her fiance's conduct had convinced her of his intention of trying to subjugate her - and instantly she had their support, for never would it be said that a Malvern had been obliged to submit to the will of a Lingard. And so the feud continued as of old, with one family completely ignoring the other. But the Lingards had squirmed for a long while under the insult, and in those bygone days of lawlessness a savage reprisal against the Malverns would undoubtedly have been launched, ending in bloody slaughter on both sides.

'Had I married Alex we'd have fought all our lives,' she said, aware that Valerie was expecting some further comments regarding the breaking of the engagement. 'He was determined to be the master - and I'd never have stood for it, never!' Her eyes glinted as she added vehemently, 'The man isn't breathing who could master me!' She didn't want to think any more about Alex, and yet she went on to ask curiously, 'What else did he say in his letter? Is he returning to this country - or does he intend settling over there?'

'He didn't say, but he'll be back eventually, I expect; all the Lingard boys roam, but they return to the nest - all except Ralph, that is. Alex went out there merely to forget, and as he's obviously forgotten he'll probably be back soon - perhaps with a wife.'

'It's a wonder he didn't come home for his mother's funeral; Ralph did.'

'I don't think Alex thought much about his mother. He couldn't have, otherwise he wouldn't have left her when she was so terribly upset about - about—' Valerie broke off, flushing with embarrassment at her lack of tact. Sara said coolly,

'About my having thrown her precious son over? I expect everyone blames me,' she went on in the same cool and indifferent tone. 'Alex did say the shock would finish her.'

'Oh, no, it wasn't that,' Valerie began to protest, when her friend interrupted her.

'His mother was seventy-two; people die when their time comes.'

'It's true what people say about you,' Valerie returned with a laugh. 'You *are* a throwback from that villainous clan who knew no fear of death, who took it for granted.' And fearless she looked now, her head held high, her eyes narrowed against the reflected glare of the sun as it caught the weathered arches and columns of the ancient abbey ruins. 'Ralph adored his mother, or so it's said. That's why he came home for the funeral. He was terribly upset, from all accounts; more upset than any of the other four sons who were there.'

'I can't remember what he looks like,' Sara mused, indifferent to his probable sufferings over the death of his mother. 'He went away when I was quite small; I remember him as being the most formidable of all the Lingard boys—' She broke off, laughing. 'He's another throwback, not only from his vagabond ancestors, but from his Greek ones as well/

'Greek? Has he some Greek in him?'

'All the Lingards have, but in the others you don't notice it. It's very distant. One of the great-great-grandfathers married a Greek woman.' She paused reflectively, trying to bring Ralph Lingard's face into focus, but it was impossible. All she knew was that he was dark, very dark, and that as a little girl she had been a tiny bit afraid of him. For she would often be on the lonely beach, battling against the icy east winds that lashed the shore, and he would be coming towards her from the opposite direction, striding along as if there were no wind at all. And as they passed one another in silence he would seem to glower down at her from a great height, and she would start to run as if half afraid he might pick her up and hurl her with brutal force against the fossil-strewn beds of shale that formed the grey and sombre cliffs. Those moments were the only times in her life when she had known fear and she had been so glad, she recalled, when, on inheriting some considerable properties and olive groves in Greece, he had left England and settled there. The walks along the shore were much more pleasant after that. 'He hasn't gone back yet,' she murmured, speaking her thoughts aloud. 'At least, that's what I've been told. I wonder why he stays here? It's over a month since the funeral.'

'Perhaps he's some clearing up to do - the will, maybe. Is he the eldest?'

'No.' Sara shook her head. 'Colin's the eldest; he must be about forty.' How old was Ralph? she wondered. He had seemed so old, but when you are young all adults seem old. He was - if she had it right - between Melvyn and William...'I think Ralph is about thirty-two.'

'And still single. He'll be the only bachelor when Alex is married.'

'Perhaps no one will have him ... or it might be that he doesn't care for Greek girls.'

'Whereabouts in Greece does he live?'

'Olympia.' A half-sneer touched the proud firm mouth. 'A Lingard should be at home in that ancient abode of the heathen gods!'

'How you Malverns do love your neighbours!'

The breeze began to blow cold and Sara suggested they return to the town, where she had left the car. They had come up to the abbey so that Valerie could take some photographs which she wanted to send to her pen-friend in France. The car was parked by the quay and they stood for a moment looking at the boats.

'That one's come in since we left the car. Isn't she a beauty?' Sara paused for a while in admiration.

'I've seen it here before, several times. I think you must be able to hire it.'

'Hire it?'

'I've seen different people on it. Yes, I'm sure it belongs to someone who hires it out.'

Sara shrugged and took the car keys from her handbag.

'There's no sign of life now - unless the people are down in the cabins.'

Sara drove slowly through the town; it was busy and they talked little, but once having left it behind Valerie broached the subject of Sara's wedding, which was in three weeks' time.

'Why talk about mine?' Sara said after a while. 'Yours comes first. Only a week in which to change your mind,' she added teasingly.

'I shan't change my mind.' Valerie's eyes glowed. 'I shall be happy with all the things you would hate - household chores and nappy washing--'

'And being there just whenever your husband says you must,' put in Sara smoothly. Her eyes sparkled; it was not difficult to read her thoughts, and Valerie said with a laugh,

'Why are you marrying Rod? - or perhaps I should say, why are you thinking of marriage at all?'

'I have several reasons, not least of which is that I like the idea of having a title. We were titled once - that's something we have over the Lingards,' she could not help saying. 'It will be nice to have everyone calling me "my lady" and hurrying here and there to do my bidding.'

'But love, Sara?'

'That, my dear Valerie, is when you begin to be dominated. Love for a woman is fatal; she gives and gives and gives - because she can't help herself. And willingly she becomes subdued. But what does she get in return?' No answer from Valerie, who was smiling placidly, though in some amusement, as she stared at the road ahead. 'I shall tell you; she's enslaved and imprisoned and, as I've said, she must be there just whenever her husband desires her to be.' Firmly she shook her head. 'Not for me, Val. I intend to arrange my life much better than that. So I've found myself a man who'll be docile and easy to handle, and as he has the added attraction of being wealthy, I shan't have to do those boring chores you talk about, nor wash the nappies ... if there are any to wash. As for the other— Well, Rod will come to me when I say he can, and not whenever the fit takes him—'<sup>5</sup>

'Really, Sara, you do say the oddest things,' interrupted Valerie, unable to contain herself a moment longer. 'What sort of marriage is it going to be? Even poor Rod won't tolerate that!'

'Rod will have no choice— As I've just said, I've found myself a man I can manage.'

Valerie walked proudly up the aisle on her father's arm, the flush on her cheeks deepening as she reached her waiting bridegroom. Sara watched Graham's face; a firm face it was, despite the fact of its boyishness. Val would never have much of her own way with him, Sara concluded, her mind wandering to her own marriage in two weeks' time. The year's most fashionable wedding, with everyone of note attending. And then she thought for a moment of the Lingards; they would read about it and discuss it ... and probably wish her all the harm they could! They would love to punish her, never a doubt of that, and for a while she dwelt again on what would assuredly have occurred in days gone by. Down upon the house of Malvern would have swooped the savage hordes of Lingards, wild brigands bent on killing all the males...

Sara's thoughts came back to the present as she realized the ceremony was in progress. Those promises ... how binding they were meant to be. So serious were the couple making them, and Sara found to her own astonishment that she was fervently hoping it all came right for Valerie and Graham, that neither would ever regret this day, and these most solemn vows they made.

The reception was at the Royal, continuing long after the newly-weds had departed for the airport, until midnight, in fact. Elegant and lovely in her bridesmaid's dress of softest velvet, Sara was as usual in great demand and she enjoyed herself immensely, unhampered by Roddy, who was busy working on his yacht in preparation for tomorrow's race. Her dress was in a subtle shade of blue, contrasting with her eyes while at the same time enhancing the peach-tinted ivory of her skin. At intervals guests would depart, in ones and twos, and so the party broke up gradually, without the usual cluttering up of the entrance when people are chatting together before saying their good-nights. Sara was dancing when someone shouted,

"Your brother's sent word in that he's waiting for you!"

She frowned, glancing at her watch. She had told Barry to call for her at twelve; it was barely eleven. She looked up at her partner apologetically.

'I shall have to go. I didn't expect my brother so soon, but I can't keep him waiting.'

'Your brother's round at the side,' the commissionaire said as she gazed about her vaguely on reaching the entrance, and Sara frowned again. The night air was chilly and she hadn't a coat. Also, it was pitch dark round at the side of the hotel. What was wrong with Barry? Shrugging, she stepped lightly down and made her way to the place indicated. The change from the light to complete blackness caused her to hesitate a moment, so that her eyes could become accustomed to the dark. Presently she discerned the vague shape of the car and made her way towards it.

'What's wrong? I thought you'd have come to the front—'

Without warning her arm was gripped in a vice, and before she could utter the cry that rose to her lips a hand was clapped over her mouth. With an almost savage thrust she was flung into the rear seat and before she could raise herself up the car had begun to move.

For a moment or two she sat on the edge of the seat trying to still the mad racing of her heart and too stunned either to move or speak. She didn't know whether or not she was afraid, but she did know she was seething with anger. To be treated like this ... roughly handled, bundled into the car like a - like a sack of potatoes! Her fists clenched. Who would want to do this to her? Someone who knew her, evidently....

A strange gleam suddenly flashed to her dark eyes as she said softly,

'Who are you?'

'You don't remember me?' The voice was quiet, carrying a hint of scorn. 'Do you still scuttle like a little rat when you see a Lingard approaching?'

'So--' Sara relaxed in her seat, her eyes on the back of a dark head set proudly on broad and arrogant shoulders. She had dealt successfully with his brother and she had no doubts whatever of dealing with him in a similar way should the necessity arise. However, she said, in the same quiet unhurried tones, 'Well, Lochinvar, you can turn this car round and take me back - on the instant.'

A short laugh broke, harsh, yet with a hint of amusement in its depths.

'You have your heroes mixed, and your facts. That abduction concerned the bride, remember? - and took place at the wedding. This one takes place before—' He paused and his next words held a strange significance. 'A fortnight before. Also - though it's a matter of no importance at all - Lochinvar loved the woman he snatched. The opposite applies here.'

'The hatred is mutual. Are you going to turn round?'

'If I don't?'

'I shall open the window and scream for help.'

'You disappoint me,' he drawled, deftly changing gear to obviate the danger of drawing too close to the car in front and perhaps having to slow down to a crawl. 'No, Miss Sara Malvern, I haven't gone to all this trouble just to turn around and take you back. Go ahead and open the window.'

Her fingers groped, moving over the door panel, then stopped. She did not trouble to examine the other door.

'I underrate you. Accept my apologies.'

Another short laugh.

'You're a cool customer! I had to take the precaution of removing all handles, if my plan of revenge were to succeed. You do appreciate that?'

'Absolutely.' She leant forward, over the vacant front seat. 'Turn around, Mr. Lingard, or I shall twist that wheel right out of your hands!'

'That would be disastrous for us both. You don't want to die, do you?'

'I mean what I say.' He passed the car, slid into top gear and increased his speed again, apparently deaf to the threat. A little intake of her breath betrayed her impatience. 'Mr. Lingard, I'm warning you—'

'You can call me Ralph,' he cut in affably. 'We're spending the night together.'

The merest hesitation, then Sara's fingers curled over the rim of the wheel, but before she could give it the vicious jerk intended that vice of a grip enclosed her wrist and a stab of pain shot right up her arm.

'Take your hand off me!' she flashed, angry at her own stupidity. And, when he retained his hold, 'I said let go of me!'

'My, what a vixen you are,' he returned mildly, and released her hand. 'Whatever did my brother see in you?'

She sat back, rubbing her wrist, her eyes blazing. She should by rights be trembling with fear, she mused through the seething chaos of her mind. But she was enveloped in a cloud of black fury and hate to the exclusion of all other emotions. She remained quiet for a space and then,

'This intended revenge, is it the reason why you didn't return to Greece?'

The reason I delayed my return to Greece was so that I could avenge the insult to my family, yes.' They were nearing the car park to the jetty and he began to slow down. 'You will have to explain what you mean by "intended" revenge.'

'Whatever you have in mind is going to misfire,' she replied calmly. 'You may have the impression that I'm a helpless female, but I assure you I can take care of myself.'

'The impression of the helpless female is the last one you give,' he returned with some humour. 'So you think you will be called upon to defend your honour, do you? Well, well....' He concentrated on his driving for a moment

as he turned on to the deserted car park. 'You certainly have an exaggerated opinion of yourself; how inordinately conceited you Malverns are.'

Sara's eyes flickered; what did he mean? Had she mistaken the sort of mischief he intended? Why, then, abduct her at all? The car was brought to a standstill close to the rail by the jetty and despite her calm exterior her heart began to beat unevenly.

'Where - where are you taking me?'

He applied the handbrake and half turned towards her.

'You're spending the night on a boat, with me.' He paused and she could sense the sneering triumph on his lips. But his tones were quiet and almost pleasant as he went on, 'Your fiance will, naturally, cast you off, and you'll know what it feels like to be jilted a fortnight before the wedding; your family will suffer the humiliation which mine have suffered and,' he added, his voice suddenly taking on a harsh and almost cruel tone, 'your aged father will know exactly what my mother went through, for you, I'm told, are his favourite child - just as Alex was my mother's favourite child. He's set his heart on this title for you - its loss will break him, as my mother was broken.' There was black vindictiveness in his heart; Sara shivered, even though she tossed her head in derision.

'You haven't got me on the boat yet!'

'I shall, though; have no illusions about escape.' Sara tried to see his face, but it was just a blur in the darkness, for there were no lights either on the car park or along the jetty. 'It's only a matter of yards to the boat, but you will of course have the opportunity of crying out for help. I think you'll agree help would not be forthcoming, seeing there isn't a soul about; nevertheless, the moment you open your mouth I shall push you into the water.' So calm and pleasant now, that voice, but Sara knew for sure he meant exactly what he said.

'You'd try to drown me?' she gasped. 'We're in the twentieth century!'

'I should immediately fetch you out, but if you do put me to that trouble I can promise you, Miss Sara Malvern, that you'll smart for a very long time to come.' He slid from the car, came round to the back and opened her door with a key. 'Before we go aboard there's something you have to do. As you see, I've parked right against the telephone kiosk—' He had been about to extend an arm to assist her from the car, for there was blackness all around, but with a swift movement Sara brushed it aside and made a run for it. But she had forgotten the length of her dress. Within seconds her foot was caught in the hem and she went forward, automatically throwing out her hands to save her head coming into contact with the ground. Ralph Lin- gard's strong hands caught her, preventing the fall and at the same time whipping her round with an almost vicious jerk, and before she had even gathered her senses she was in the telephone kiosk.

'You're going to ring your father and tell him you're staying with a friend—'

'What a hope!' His body touched hers in the confined space; the warmth of it sickened her. 'The moment I open my mouth it will be to make an urgent cry for help—'

'—and should you decide to say anything different,' he continued, ignoring her interruption, 'I shall immediately cut you short - with a threat - and the receiver will be replaced.' For a moment he paused; she tried to edge away from him, but couldn't. 'You have a reputation for being hard - a reputation you apparently enjoy - but it's widely known that you return your father's love, in fact, you have a deep and abiding love for him. Pity about his heart. I'm sure my meaning is clear.'

Startlingly clear. Her father, hearing her cry for help, then a man's voice, threatening ... and silence. ... The shock could kill him.

'My brother would send for the police,' she murmured, though she knew those were wasted words. There would be no act of defiance on her part. Apparently he knew that, too, for he ignored it, merely saying, in quiet and affable tones,

'I'll have to strike a match while you dial.' His body pressed even closer as he reached into his pocket for the matches. After only a slight hesitation Sara

snatched up the receiver and, in the flickering light from the match, proceeded to dial the number.

Her father was unperturbed by her news; he was used to his daughter's ways and this was by no means the first time she had telephoned him with a similar message. She asked if her brother had left, though she knew before the negative reply came that it was much too early for him to have started out.

On leaving the box Sara speculated for a second or two on the possibility of escape should she decide to make another dash for it - remembering this time to hold up her dress. If only she could get to the corner, and turn it, there would be lights, and surely one or two cars. It was only this part of the town, down by the jetty, that was always so deserted. Before she could come to a decision, however, her arm was seized and she found herself being propelled, struggling violently, before him, and within the space of less than half a minute she was on the boat and going down the steps.

^"Take your hands off me!" she snapped. Her order was ignored and as she went down, gingerly feeling for each step before putting her weight on it, she knew that, should she have slipped, Ralph Lingard's hold would have saved her from falling.

## CHAPTER TWO

ONLY when they were in the saloon did he put on a light, Sara stood by the table, pallid now but still unafraid. He was staring down at her and she found herself momentarily forgetting her dangerous position as she examined him closely. He had the Lingards' dark hair and widow's peak; he also had the prominent cheekbones which gave the impression of the cheeks themselves being slightly sunken. And in addition to the inherent harshness peculiar to all the Lingard men, his face also revealed the fact of his Greek ancestry in that the skin was dark and the features possessed all the inflexible qualities of something etched in stone while at the same time conversely betraying the fire that burns beneath the cool exterior of all the peoples of Greece.

A frown came to Sara's brow and lingered there. Would this man be as easy to handle as his brother? Against her will she recalled her fear of him ... and anger burned alongside that fear as for a fleeting moment it touched her heart again. And then her head came up and a dauntless light kindled her eyes. She was afraid of no man!

'Do tell me about this complex plan of operation which you've devised,' she invited, taking a seat on the couch and laying her evening bag on the table. 'Or is it to come as a surprise to me?'

'By no means.' He perched himself on the corner of the table, crossing his legs, and although he regarded her speculatively for a while he evinced no surprise at her calm acceptance of the situation. 'As for its being complex - nothing could be more simple. The simplest plan is often the most effective, don't you think?' She said nothing, but inclined her head in agreement. 'You will remain here with me tonight; in the morning your young titled lover will come and find you. Result; no wedding in two weeks' time.' A newspaper lay on the table; idly he flicked it round and began to scan it cursorily, giving the impression of having lost interest both in Sara and the reason for her being here.

Sara also crossed her legs, lifting her skirt so that one slim and dainty ankle was revealed.

'My - er - titled lover ... how is he to know where I am?'

'Again I chose the simplest way. You will of course have noticed that I moored the *Ocean Belle* next to your fiance's yacht. Like all the other competitors in the race tomorrow he'll be aboard early, making preparations—' He shrugged. 'There's no need for me to tell you what goes on.'

No. ... By six o'clock the following morning the jetty would be a hive of activity; it was every Sunday, whether there were a race or not, for most people had only the weekends and holidays in which to indulge in their hobby. It was always a friendly, free-and-easy atmosphere, with the owners inviting one another into their boats or yachts for coffee, or something stronger - and even for breakfast.

'You've obviously met Roddy,' she commented, with a glimmer of perception in her gaze.

'We met casually a couple of days ago—'

'Casually?' Her brows lifted and he smiled.

'As you have guessed, I waited for him. We chatted for a while, about boats of course, and then I invited him to breakfast - tomorrow morning.'

'Does he know your name?' she asked curiously.

'Oh, yes, I gave it to him.' A small pause. 'He didn't seem to know of that previous engagement, to my brother?' It was a question, but Sara did not trouble to reply. She had not mentioned her engagement to Roddy simply because she considered it had nothing to do with him. Ralph was still waiting, and so she did remark, casually, that Roddy's family had only recently moved to Whitby.

'So you have not known him very long?'

'Three months,' she replied briefly.

'A whirlwind courtship.' A quizzical lift of his eyebrows and then, 'So romantic. Pity it's all to be spoiled.' He gave his attention to the paper once more, opening it out on the table.

Sara moved into a more relaxed position on the couch, but crossed her legs again and stared down at her little silver shoe in thoughtful silence for a while before saying curiously,

'I assume he is to be presented with proof of my having spent the night on this boat.'

'Your assumption is correct.'

'What form is this proof to take?'

'That, I'm afraid, will have to be kept as a surprise.' Rather less good-humour in his voice now; he meant what he said and Sara did not waste time pursuing the subject. Instead, she informed him, quite casually, that she would only have to tell Roddy about the abduction and he would believe her.

'Not he. The jealous lover acts first and thinks afterwards.'

'He will believe me,' she insisted. 'And he'll go straight to the police - if I tell him to.'

'You won't tell him to, though.' He stifled a yawn and glanced round at the clock.

Thoughtfully she played with the clasp of her bag, her eyes flickering oddly as she considered his words.

'For what reason should you be so confident that I wouldn't want my fiance to go to the police?' she inquired, casting him a glance from under her lashes.

'The same reason which prevented you from upsetting your father a few moments ago. This one soft spot you have was my weapon. Your father's health is far more important to you than any revenge you might desire to have on me.'

'You're so astute, Mr. Lingard,' she returned with the hint of sarcasm in her voice. 'My father does mean more to me than any revenge I would like to have on you.'

'Allow me to say that I admire you for that admission. I rather thought you might dissemble there.' Interest entered the dark eyes as, glancing up, he added unexpectedly, 'I wonder if you're so tough as you like to make out. What lies at the core of that block of ice which you would have people believe is your heart?' He was smiling in amusement and a responding smile flickered, but, unlike his, Sara's smile was totally devoid of humour.

'Granite probably, like yours,' she responded, and his smile deepened almost to laughter. A few moments of silence elapsed and then she asked a question that had been puzzling her from the first. 'Tell me, Mr. Lingard, why have you waited a year for this revenge?'

He slid from the table and stood up, regarding her from a great height, and despite an angry effort to throw off the memory, Sara found herself involved in that childhood imagination when, unable to cast off her trepidation at his approach, she would have to run, although even at that age she was profoundly aware that her action savoured of cowardice.

'I didn't at first intend punishing you - after all we are, as you say, living in the twentieth century; also I was living a long way from here and I didn't think it was worth all the trouble. But as time went on and I heard from my relatives that Mother was unable to get over the shock, that she was in fact completely broken because of the way Alex had been hurt—'

'He couldn't have been that badly hurt,' she interrupted rather hotly, 'because he has someone else already.'

'You didn't expect him to continue eating out his heart for a girl like you?' His eyes flicked over her insultingly. 'In fact I expect he now knows what he's escaped.'

So do I, said Sara, though silently. Aloud she murmured,

'You blame me for your mother's death?'

He shook his head, clearly surprised by her question.

'People die when their time comes,' he said, 'whether they be eighteen or eighty.' So they agreed about one thing, she thought, waiting for him to continue. 'No, I don't blame you for her death. But I do blame you for that year of unhappiness - the last year of her life,' he emphasized. 'And gradually I began to contemplate revenge, though in what form I hadn't even considered. However, when on returning to this country I was told of your forthcoming marriage I decided a little of your own medicine would do you good.'

She looked up at him, holding his gaze for a while and recalling what she had jokingly said about his being a throwback, both from the wild Border brigands and also from his pagan Greek ancestors. She had to smile at her own musings; he could scarcely be a throwback from the latter, for the Greeks had been a devout people for a very long time. Still, he might have been from another age, she thought, wondering what his home in Greece was like, wondering how he lived and worked, and whether there were women in his life.

'This punishment,' she began at last. 'It's for what your mother suffered, you say. But if my action did affect her, then it was her pride that suffered - only her pride, I firmly believe that.'

'Are you pleading for mercy?' he inquired softly, and instantly her eyes flashed fire.

'I would never plead for mercy from any man!' she declared fiercely, 'and least of all from a Lingard!'

'That's as well,' he murmured, unaffected by her outburst, and his lip curved in a half smile of amusement.

'You should be grateful we're in the twentieth century, for there's something about you that sorely tempts me to curb that wild spirit. Had we encountered one another in those bygone days you'd not have received such kid glove treatment, I can assure you.'

Kid glove treatment! The way she had been tossed into the car! She would repay him for that, with interest, if ever the opportunity arose. However, before she could voice her retort he was speaking again, humour in his dark eyes -- but something much less pleasant, too. 'I'm not altogether certain I wouldn't enjoy it now—' He stopped while his eyes swept over her in an all-embracing glance which was half insulting, half contemptuous. Too boring, though.' He paused again and shook his head in a gesture of faint puzzlement. 'What did my brother see in you, I wonder?'

Points of blue flint sparkled in her eyes, but a smile of serenity hovered on her lips.

'Your repeated insults regarding my physical attractions -or rather, my lack of them - leave me cold. In any case, I should hate to appear attractive to a man like you.'

'You'd be in a sorry plight at present if you did,' came the swift response.

'That's what you think. As I've said, I'm quite capable of taking care of myself.'

'You think so? I don't.' He grinned good-humouredly as his eyes roved over her again. 'Maybe I was mistaken. ... I'm not sure that I wouldn't enjoy carrying you off with me to Greece and taming you there. Yes ... I do believe I would enjoy it. Pity it isn't possible. The wild Arcadian Mountains are admirably suited to your character.'

'On the contrary, as I love all the refinements of civilization, I should be quite out of my element in your primitive mountains of Olympia.'

'Olympia itself isn't mountainous,' he hastened to correct, 'though Kronion rises above it. The aspect is in fact one of gentleness. ...' He seemed not to be with her, and her eyes glinted strangely as she watched him, apparently lost in thought. Was it imagination, or had his dark eyes softened a shade as he spoke of the place he had now made his home? The silence continued and Sara broke it at last, realizing with a touch of astonishment that the antagonism between them was for the moment pushed into the background.

'Do you actually live in the village of Olympia?'

'I live on a hillside, above the village, but the mountains of Arcadia are not far distant.' He looked down at her and added in a tone of mock regret, 'Yes, I think it would be both amusing and diverting to tame you - though in truth I must repeat, your physical attractions leave much to be desired. And in any case, unlike my brother, I'm rather particular.'

The colour rose in Sara's cheeks, and one small fist clenched tightly on the clasp of her bag.

'If you've quite finished insulting me perhaps you'll show me where I must sleep. Your presence nauseates me.'

'You're a cool one,' he remarked suavely. 'Damn me if I don't admire your courage. Don't you care that your marriage is off? - that the coveted title will never be yours?'

'What makes you so confident my marriage is off?' she inquired pleasantly, picking up her bag and rising from her seat.

'I should imagine any marriage would be off if the bride-to-be admitted to having spent the night with another man ... willingly.'

'Willingly?'

'You can't very well say you were abducted.'

'Certainly I can,' she asserted, and he merely shrugged.

'You say you want to go to bed. Perhaps you would care for a drink first?'

Sara shook her head and he led the way out of the saloon into a narrow passage off which were several doors. The boat was bigger than she had thought; later she learned that it contained seven berths.

'Here you are.' He opened the door at the end of the passage, and stood aside for her to enter. 'I hope you'll be comfortable. The bathroom is just next

door. There's a calor gas water heater; you'll have to turn it on if you want a bath.'

'Til not take advantage of your hospitality to that extent,' she returned pleasantly, and slipped past him into the cabin.

'Good night, Sara,' he said, smiling. 'I hope you sleep well.'

The cabin was spotlessly clean; the bed looked comfortable. On the dressing-table fixed to the wall was a new sponge bag and beside it all the toilet requisites she would need. Hanging behind the door was a pink quilted dressing-gown, also new, and on the floor by the bed was a new pair of slippers. There seemed something quite incongruous about the slippers lying there, though Sara could not have said why. However, the sight of them reminded her that her feet ached and, kicking off her high-heeled sandals, she put on the slippers. They were too large, but it was a relief to be able to discard her dancing shoes. She sat down, wondering whether or not to go to bed. Her glance automatically strayed to the door. There was a lock but no key. The key must be lost, she concluded, for just above the lock was a small brass bolt, which seemed to have been newly fixed. Her eyes flickered as, instinctively, she knew the bolt had been fixed by Ralph Lingard. What a strange man he was! He had done everything which he considered necessary for her to have as comfortable a night as possible under the circumstances, yet had not gone to the extremes of providing her with a nightdress.

After some consideration she decided there was nothing to be gained by sitting up all night and, putting what she needed into the sponge bag, she went into the bathroom. There was a pilot light under the heater and Sara turned it up. Soon she had hot water running into the basin, and after washing she returned to the cabin, making sure to fix the bolt, even though she knew the precaution was unnecessary. She used her slip as a nightdress - it had been specially made to go under her bridesmaid's gown, and might almost have been a nightdress, a rather glamorous one, she thought, for several rows of filmy lace hung from the hem.

The following morning she awoke early, as could be expected. Five-thirty. Sara frowned as she glanced at the little travelling clock that had been thoughtfully placed on the dressing-table. For a while she lay there,

restlessly tossing now and then and, to her surprise, feeling faintly tensed and uneasy. What had she to worry about? Roddy adored her; he would believe anything she told him, believe it implicitly. She must impress upon him, though, the necessity for silence. Her father must never know she had spent the night with a Lingard, had in fact been forced to do so. That last thought brought a dark frown to her brow. She, a Malvern, being subjected to this indignity. Perhaps, after all, she should have fought him, let him feel her teeth as his brother had felt them. ... The frown deepened as she was forced to admit the truth. Ralph Lingard was a very different proposition from his brother Alex. That ducking he threatened would assuredly have come about had she so much as made one move to defy him.

Impatient both with her thoughts and the uneasiness she experienced, she felt the necessity for action. The idea of escape did for a moment enter her head, but she dismissed it. Her captor had not gone to all this trouble only to leave the way open for escape at this late stage. If she made one move to go up those stairs she knew he would be right behind her. And so, resignedly, she slipped out of bed, put on the dressing-gown, and went into the bathroom. The bath was rather small, but inviting all the same, and again Sara turned up the light under the heater.

After the bath she felt refreshed, and prepared for anything. Let Ralph Lingard do his worst! The tables would be turned on him when she explained everything to Roddy and when he saw how implicitly Roddy believed in, and trusted her. Yes, she thought again, let Ralph Lingard do his worst; she was quite ready for him.

But she was not ready for the shock that awaited her on trying the handle of her cabin door. She had left the door open, but somehow it must have swung to and now it was well and truly jammed.

'Can I help you?' Almost jumping at the voice, she spun round. Ralph Lingard, in a black and red dressing-gown, was leaning carelessly against the jamb of his own cabin door, his arms folded, regarding her in some amusement. Flushing as his eyes slowly travelled over her, Sara quickly began to button up the front of her own dressing-gown.

'The door's jammed,' she explained. 'I can't think how; it was all right when I opened it this morning. ...' Slowly her voice trailed away. Her dark eyes narrowed, though not enough to cover the glint of fire in their depths. 'Open that door,' she said softly. 'Unlock it immediately.'

'My dear Sara, what do you think I locked it for? Unlock it now? Do use your sense. No, your fiance's going to see you like this. And you can hardly say you haven't stayed here willingly, can you? You'll certainly look ridiculous if you do.'

Sara glared at him, but ignored his remarks completely.

'If you don't unlock that door I'll scream so loudly I'll be heard all over the town!'

'Open your mouth - just open it,' he warned softly, no amusement in his gaze now. 'And by heaven you'll wish you hadn't!'

What a fool! Sara was furious with herself. To underestimate this man, to go sublimely into that bathroom without even considering the possibility of an act such as this! How simple she had made it for him. At that she glanced up in puzzlement and inquired how he would have gone on had she not so conveniently left her cabin - and her clothes.

'I expected you to act this way,' was the calm reply. 'It was the most natural. On the other hand, you might have decided not to undress. In that event I should, reluctantly, have been forced to make you.'

Haughtily she eyed him up and down.

'How, may I ask?'

'By threatening to do it myself,' he smiled. 'You'd have wasted no time in obeying me then.' He unfolded his arms and thrust them into his pockets. 'Much simpler this way, don't you agree? No arguments.' And then, as she made no answer, 'You must forgive me, Sara; I'm afraid I've forgotten my duties as a host. I should have offered you morning tea. However, it's too late now, for our visitor will be here quite soon. Would you care to assist me with

the breakfast? I think I remembered to get everything in, but I'm not sure about my capabilities as a cook.'

She glared at him, white with fury. For the first time in her life she had nothing to say - or rather, she could think of plenty to say, but somehow she knew that any violent outburst on her part would only result in humiliation, for this man would not only laugh at her, but would also derive extreme satisfaction from seeing her lose control of her emotions. Well, he would be disappointed, she decided, and said calmly,

'I suppose you're waiting for me to lose my temper? You'd like to make me do that, wouldn't you ?'

'No, Sara,' he said coolly. 'I'd sooner make you cry.'

'It would take a strong-willed man to make me do that,' she declared, throwing back her head and laughing in his face.

A pause, and then, softly.

There are strong-willed men about, Sara.'

'Meaning yourself for one?' The sneer of derision was evident and dark colour fused his cheeks. It was the first time he had shown any strong emotional reaction to anything she had said. He leant forward, bending his head and bringing his face close to hers. He merely meant to make some scathing comment on what she had said, Sara realized later, on giving the matter some thought. But as his face came closer she felt he was going to kiss her and she swiftly stepped aside, her eyes blazing.

'Don't you dare to kiss me!' she flashed. 'If you so much as touch me I'll slap your face!'

'Kiss you?' His eyes travelled over her in disdain and a sneer matching her own curved his lips. 'I said last night I'm particular - and I meant it.'

She seethed at his words. Despite her fiery nature she was all woman, and although she would have found the touch of his lips loathsome, she was at

the same time piqued by the knowledge that he didn't have the least desire to kiss her.

'Are you going to help me with the breakfast?' he inquired again, all politeness now, and smiling.

'I am not,' she returned, and went into the saloon.

The smell of bacon cooking reached her a little while later; he was also making coffee and toast. He entered the saloon to spread the cloth and set the table. Broodingly she watched him, recalling again her fear of him, so long ago. Never had she dreamed the day would come when this man would get the better of her. For he had got the better of her, she was forced to admit that, galling as the admission was, and hurtful as it was to her pride.

He left the saloon again, returning this time with the toast and coffee.

'Our guest should be here any time,' he told her amicably. 'I said seven, and it's almost that now.'

Another five minutes elapsed; Sara sat on the couch by the table, gazing down distastefully at the slippers which were too large for her, and at the same time noticing her 'nightdress' was longer than the dressing-gown, so that the lace frills showed beneath it.

'You're very calm,' Ralph commented, watching her as they both waited for the sound of their visitor's footsteps on the deck above. 'You don't love him, that's evident, but I should have thought you'd have been more upset than this at the idea of losing that title.'

'There are other men with titles,' she returned indifferently. To get this over and done with was her only wish.

'Perhaps your third attempt at marriage will be more successful than the previous two,' he said, not without a hint of humour. 'I expect some misguided fool will take you on—' He stopped and their eyes met as the footsteps sounded above.

'Can I come down?' Roddy's voice. In spite of her outward calm Sara felt a disturbing thudding of her heart. But relief was present too. In a few minutes it would be all over. Poor Roddy, coming for breakfast ... so unsuspecting. Breakfast? He'd be that broken-hearted he wouldn't eat for a month!

'By all means - yes, you couldn't have timed it better. The breakfast's ready to be served.' He smiled with satisfaction at Sara, then turned his head as Roddy came into the saloon.

Sara didn't know what to expect as, looking up, she saw her fiance standing there, in the doorway, literally gaping at her in speechless amazement.

He must become violently angry in a moment, she thought, as she saw his eyes taking in her attire, then moving to Ralph, who was standing there in his dressing-gown, feigning surprise at the attitude of his visitor.

'Is anything wrong?' he inquired with apparent concern. 'You look as if you've seen a ghost, my friend.'

Sara tried to speak, but what was there to say? Ralph Lingard was right, she would look foolish if she so much as mentioned abduction, for here she was, in her night clothes, looking as if she had just got out of bed, no doubt, for she hadn't been able to comb her hair since having her bath.

'A g-ghost ...? Sara, what's going on? Why are you here?' Roddy's voice was high-pitched, his face grey and somewhat drawn about the mouth. This is my fiancee,' he informed Ralph, dragging his eyes from Sara and turning to Ralph in the manner of one almost completely dazed.

Still Sara remained silent; her expression changing from one of surprise to puzzlement. Why was Rod so calm? Was it that his trust in her was such that he felt sure there was some feasible explanation for all this? Hope rose within her. Dear Rod, he was *so* easily managed. Had she looked around for years she couldn't have found anyone more suited to her own particular nature.

'Your—?' Ralph was speaking, and at the same time a half-guilty expression entered his dark eyes. 'Sara? No, she can't be!'

For a moment Roddy could only stare, apparently still very dazed by what he saw.

'She *is* my fiancée— Sara, you haven't answered my question. What are you doing here? You - you look as if you've been here all night.'

'I have, Roddy,' she confessed, a curious note entering her voice. Without any movement of her head she sent a flickering glance to the man responsible for all this. His eyes met hers, fleetingly. He was thinking exactly the same as she. 'I've slept on the boat.'

'But - but—' he spluttered, and fizzled out. His colour changed from grey to sickly pink. Sara's eyes rested on his for a space, then moved to meet again those of the man towering above her. Amusement hovered for a second in his glance and then he became darkly censorious and stern.

'Sara, you naughty girl,' he admonished. 'Why didn't you tell me?' He looked at Roddy, and although his manner was all apology and regret his expression was one of undisguised contempt. 'I'd no idea. I mean. ...' He stopped and shrugged. 'Oh, well, no matter; it's the fashion these days.' He smiled and added pleasantly, 'No ill-feeling, I hope? Come, let's eat, or everything will spoil.'

Roddy came out of his stupor at that, and he ignored the reference to breakfast as a tiny flame of anger rose.

'The fashion! Perhaps for men like you, but not in my circle!'

'Our betters?' The words, spoken with a sneer on Ralph's lips, were directed at Sara. 'You'll have to mend your ways, my dear, when you marry into the gentry.'

'She will! By God, Sara, I hope you're not going to carry on like this when we're married! What excuse have you? Did you have too much to drink at the wedding?'

An incredulous exclamation left Ralph's lips; Sara glanced swiftly at him, but his dark face was impassive. She turned her attention to Roddy. The spark of anger had died and a pained expression took its place.

'You believe I've spent the night here—?'

'It's obvious you have!'

'What I meant to say was, you believe that - er - Ralph and I ...?' She became aware of the sardonic twist of Ralph's lips at her difficulty in framing her words.

'Shy?' His eyes laughed mockingly at her. 'You weren't last night. Of course Roddy thinks we spent the night together; he's no fool. Surely you're not going to try and persuade him we slept in separate cabins?' Her eyes sparkled and a hint of colour rose, but her voice remained as calm as ever when she spoke.

'You believe this, Roddy, and you're willing to overlook it?'

'What alternative have I?' he asked on a sudden note of complaint. 'You've let me down badly, Sara. I know everything's very lax these days, but somehow I felt that you were different.'

'And now that you've discovered I'm not different you're still willing to marry me?' Was Ralph Lingard disappointed at the way things were going? she wondered, noticing that he was waiting, with an odd expression in his eyes, for Roddy's answer to her question.

'What alternative have I?' he complained again. 'The wedding's in two weeks' time. Besides, I care too much about you. I can't lose you.'

Absently Sara leant back on the couch, her fair hair sprawling over the dark cushions that formed part of the head-rest, her eyes on Roddy. What had she expected? she wondered. Certainly something far different from this. No violent outburst, no threats, just that pained expression in Roddy's eyes, and a sort of dull resignation.

Transferring her gaze to Ralph, she had no difficulty in visualizing his reaction under similar circumstances, and despite the fact of her safety a shudder swept through her.

'Well, well... the so forgiving lover,' Ralph murmured, his brows raised quizzically. 'It would seem that my plan has gone all awry. You did suggest it might misfire, and you were right. The much coveted title is yours, after all my trouble.'

'What do you mean by that?' Roddy wanted to know, looking from one to the other. 'I don't understand—' The boat swayed in a sudden gust of wind and he put out a hand to the door to steady himself; a thin white hand, immaculately kept. ...

Frowning darkly, Sara spoke to Ralph.

'Your plan has misfired,' she agreed, 'but not quite in the way you think.'

'No?' quizzically. He knew what she was about to say, she felt, although he waited in an attitude of interest for her reply.

'As you say, the title is mine.' She stopped frowning and smiled sweetly up at him. 'How fickle woman is! I've just discovered I don't want it. So you see, Mr. Ralph Lingard, you haven't punished me at all.'

Ralph Lingard returned her smile, but made no comment, merely acknowledging defeat with a slight inclination of his head.

## CHAPTER THREE

MR. MALVERN lay on the bed, his face haggard, his lips blue. From the pillow he stared up at his daughter, his pale eyes misted with moisture which could have been tears.

'How could you do this to me?' he said weakly, then stopped to recover his breath. 'To spend the night with a Lingard - and on a boat! You've often given us anxiety with your escapades, but all the others are innocent compared with this. You've disgraced the whole family - my daughter whom I love - disgraced us for ever.' He stopped again for breath and then went on, 'Thrown over - cast off - a fortnight before the wedding. All the guests invited—'

'That's the story Roddy's told, but *I* jilted *him*, if that's any consolation to you.'

'You can stand there and lie to us like this?' her father asked incredulously. 'Do you really expect anyone is going to believe that?' He shook his head and went on to condemn her again for bringing this disgrace on the family.

Sara's face was white; she listened as her mother, almost weeping as she held her husband's hand, supported his words and then went on to add, 'A daughter of this house, consorting with a Lingard—'

'I was going to marry one,' Sara had to remind her. 'You didn't complain then.'

'And you threw him over because he made advances - and he did mean marriage,' her father said. 'What change has come over you, child, that you can now act with such lack of control?'

'"Marriage is different, it's honourable,' her mother said, ignoring the interruption. 'But this. ... He's besmirched us through you, and the Lingards must be gloating, considering it a great victory.' Mrs. Malvern brought out a handkerchief and wiped away the tears that fell. 'Oh, Sara, how could you bring such disgrace upon us! Look at your poor father. You're entirely to blame for this....'

Sara turned away, to stand by the window staring out over the vast park that surrounded the house. Never would she have believed Roddy could have gone around spreading the story of her supposed escapade on the boat. She would have thought, for his own sake, and for the sake of his family's good name, that he would have kept silent. But he was highly-strung, she knew that now, and he lacked the ability to preserve a calm and dignified front in face of this event that had touched both his pride and his heart. For he loved her, no doubt of that - but how deep did his love go? - and would it have endured? Sara shrugged away her thoughts, They were worthless now, and in any case she had more serious matters to occupy her mind. On hearing the news of his daughter's escapade from a friend her father had promptly collapsed, and this heart attack, the doctor said, was the worst one yet. In fact, he would be lucky if he recovered sufficiently to get about again.

Should she tell them the whole? No, that would be worse than anything. Bad enough that they believed she had gone willingly, but if her father ever learned the truth, discovered that his daughter, a Malvern, had been treated so ignominiously by a Lingard— 'It will kill him altogether,' she said, almost aloud. Why had Roddy been so vindictive? She would never have thought it of him; he had always been so easily managed. Not once since she met him had she experienced difficulty in making him do as she wished. But on learning of her intention of breaking the engagement his whole manner changed. He became sulky and vengeful, declaring he would drag her name into the mud. Looking back now, Sara felt that a plea would have succeeded in winning him over. A plea.... Her head tilted unconsciously. She would never plead with any man!

Her mother was talking again, to her father.

'It's time for your pills, dear. I'll get you some water.'

'I don't think I want any more pills,' came the feeble rejoinder. 'No, I won't take another one; I'm finished with them.'

'Not—?' Mrs. Malvern stopped, and Sara spun round\* the last remnants of colour draining from her face as she came back to the bed.

'You must take them,' she said, trying to keep her voice steady. 'You *must!*'

'To keep myself alive?' The old man's lips moved convulsively as he looked up at her, and Sara's own lips trembled. Always he had doted on her, adored her, forgiving all her wantonness as a child, declaring it to be hereditary - but this he could not forgive, for promiscuity had never been a Malvern trait. 'I'm no coward, but I'll not face up to this disgrace - it would have been bad enough had it been anyone else, but a Lingard! How they must be gloating!'

'Darling, if you don't take your pills ...' His wife turned with anguish to her daughter. 'He must be made to take them!'

Sara ignored that for the present.

'Tell me what I must do, and I'll do it,' she said half impatiently, and yet with an urgent note of desperation in her voice. 'Believe me, if I could stop them gloating I'd do anything.'

'There is a way,' said her father significantly at last.

'There is?' frowningly. 'But how? I'll do anything you say.'

'If he married you,' he said slowly, 'that would stop them gloating. It would also stop the gossip. And if he has an ounce of honour in him,' her father added, 'he will agree to marry you.'

'M-marry!' Sara choked. 'You'd have me marry Ralph Lingard? Why, we hate each other!' Too late, she realized her mistake, and looked away, unable to bear the glance that passed between her father and mother.

'You ... hate each other?' Her father seemed to have gained strength momentarily, for he managed to lift his head from the pillow. 'You spent the night with a man you hate? But you were being married in two weeks' time. Surely you could have waited—'

'You couldn't have hated him,' interposed her mother, horrified by the admission. 'No child of mine could be so abandoned as that.'

'Did you do it for a lark?' her father wanted to know. 'Young people do that sort of thing nowadays, but my daughter...' Exhausted, he dropped back on

to the pillow, and his hand reached out for his wife's again, as if he would have her comfort and support.

Hatred for Ralph Lingard burned so fiercely that Sara felt it would scorch her very veins. If her father died it would be his fault, not hers. Her brow furrowed as she tried to recall what he had said about her father. He had wanted to hurt him, as a reprisal for what his mother had suffered - but Sara somehow knew he wouldn't want her father to die. She glanced down at him again, and found to her surprise that her love for him was stronger even than her hatred for Ralph Lingard. Perhaps, she mused vaguely, her love for her father had this great strength because it was the only love of her life. In other words, he had all the love that was hers to give. He must not die before his time ... he must not!

'No, Father,' she said, answering his question at last, 'I didn't do it for a lark. As Mother says, I'm not quite so abandoned as that.'

A slight clearing of his face, and his voice seemed stronger when he spoke.

'This hate you mention - that too was idle talk?' To her relief he did not wait for an answer but went on to say she should go and see Ralph Lingard and come to some arrangement about marriage. Obviously he believed there was some feeling of affection between them - which was only natural, she thought, seeing that they had spent a night together, or so her father believed.

'Are you going to take your pills now?' she murmured gently when he had finished speaking. 'Shall I bring you the water?'

'Are you seeing this man about the possibility of marriage?' he asked, and it was plainly an ultimatum. Sara swallowed hard and said through whitened lips,

'I'm sorry, Father, but I can't marry Ralph Lingard.'

He looked up at her and his eyes were glazed.

'In that case,' he said, and although his voice was weak his determination was strong, 'I shall not make any effort to prolong my life.'

'Oh, my dear....' Mrs. Malvern burst into a fit of weeping and Sara put her hands to her face, trying to shut out this tragic scene. But though the ice that was her heart was melting rapidly, her whole being was enveloped in a cold fury. If only she could make Ralph Lingard suffer for this! But how could she make him suffer? Always she had been strong - now she felt weak and helpless and the sensation only increased her fury.

'You must marry him, Sara,' her mother cried in desperation. 'How can you let your father die?'

'Mother,' she returned, dropping her hands to her sides and looking straight at her, 'there's no question of marriage. Even if I wanted to marry him, Ralph Lingard would never marry me.'

'So you did spend the night with each other just for a lark, for something to do - to relieve your boredom, perhaps?' Her father's tones were even weaker than before, and he turned his face into the pillow, as if he never wanted to look on his daughter's face again.

The doctor came later, and spoke to Sara on his way out.

'I'm afraid you must prepare yourself for the worst,' he said, picking up his hat from the stand. 'He refuses to take the pills, and without them he can't possibly live. As you know, like many other people with this heart ailment, your father has depended on pills for years. We periodically change them and make them stronger, and the time comes, naturally, when we can't do any more. With your father, however, that time is not yet, not by any means. With care he could live for a number of years - and he's always been keen to live—' He broke off, shaking his head. 'I don't know what's happened to bring about this change, but as I've said, he can't live for very long without the pills.'

'H-how long?' she whispered.

'Not more than a couple of weeks, and probably much less.' He cast her an odd glance and as Sara closed the door behind him she wondered if he, too, had heard of her 'scandalous' behaviour. She supposed he had, for Roddy

had made sure that the news was circulated among all the people who knew her.

Frustrated by her helplessness, and fuming at her inability to punish Ralph Lingard, Sara wandered about the gardens for over an hour. Her father was going to die, his life cut short simply because of Ralph Lingard's desire for revenge - revenge for something which she had been within her rights to do. She reached the fountain and stood watching the water cascading over the artificial rockery before it entered the lily pond. And suddenly she recalled once more Ralph Lingard's assertion that he wanted to make her father suffer, as his mother had suffered. And again Sara felt convinced he hadn't visualized a result such as this. Did he possess a conscience? she wondered, an odd light entering her eyes. If he did she could make *him* suffer. Her mouth tightened; it was worth a try. If her father was going to die then that man should live with the knowledge that he alone was responsible for it.

To her bitter disappointment the boat was gone, hired out to someone else, she concluded. The man she so desperately wanted to see had left the country ... or had he? The boat had obviously been hired for a specific purpose. Ralph Lingard would scarcely keep it on after its purpose had been served.

She entered the telephone box from which she had rung her father on that never-to-be-forgotten night. Her legs seemed to be dragging her down as she waited in a fever of suspense for the receiver to be picked up at the other end of the line. A servant answered; Sara asked for Ralph ..., and within about half a minute he was speaking.

'Ralph Lingard here.'

With a tremendous effort Sara forced herself to sound calm.

'Sara Malvern speaking. I would like to see you. It's very urgent.'

A small silence and then,

'How urgent? I can't see you until this evening.'

'Very well, that will have to do --'

They arranged to meet at the old abbey ruins; Sara was there first and she stepped into the shelter of a wall forming part of a weathered archway, for a biting east wind swept across the North Sea, lashing her face and legs, and whipping her long gold hair into a state of wild disorder. The sun shone, though, and Sara's eyes were narrowed against its glare as she directed her gaze to a point at the top of the great flight of steps up which Ralph Lingard would come. She had a long time to wait, and she sat down on some fallen masonry nearby. Then she saw him, his dark head first; and then his tall lithe figure was swinging towards her over the grass. A gust of wind from behind her sent her hair flying all over her face; she brushed it away and gave her attention once more to the approaching figure. The pace was leisurely and Sara was unable to quell the anger that rose as she grasped the fact that his lateness was deliberate, and that even now there was no hint of apologetic haste about his approach.

The arrogance of him! How she would love to see him crushed into the ground! That was not possible, she owned with regret, but there was a satisfied, vindictive glint in her eyes as she rose to face him. His glance took in her appearance and a touch of humour brought a curve to his hard, thin mouth.

'Is this what the wild Malvern women looked like in the old days?' he began. 'But you haven't summoned me to your august presence to listen to my flattery,' he added with sarcasm. 'What's this all about?'

'My father is dying,' she answered, wasting neither time nor words. 'And you are wholly responsible.' Sara watched closely to discover the effect of her statement upon him. His face became impassive as he said quietly,

'I don't think I understand.'

'You said you wanted to injure him, and you have - irreparably. The doctor's given him less than a fortnight to live.'

The wind stirred his hair and at the same time the sun brought to light the odd grey strand, changing it to silver so that it contrasted sharply with the

blackness around it. How old was he? She had told Valerie he was about thirty- two, but he could be a little older - thirty-four, perhaps.

'Are you trying to tell me that the shock of your broken engagement is going to be fatal?'

'That's why I asked you to meet me,' she said, ignoring his question. 'I want you to have his death on your conscience for the rest of your life.' Her small fists were clenched and her voice had a hard metallic ring. 'If you have a conscience,' she added, 'and, strangely, I believe you have.'

He moved to support his back against one of the columns of the archway.

'I don't believe the shock of the broken engagement is killing your father. There's more to it than that. I think you'd better explain.'

Sara found herself describing the scene in her father's bedroom, and even before she had finished an angry exclamation broke from his lips.

'This Roddy's spread it round that he's the one who's broken the engagement? Why didn't you refute that?'

She glanced up quickly.

'But that's what you wanted,' she reminded him, diverted. 'Your revenge was based in the conviction that Rod would do the jilting.'

'I'm not concerned any more with my intentions. I'm looking at it from your point of view. My plan misfired. Why, then, didn't you exploit that?'

'I did tell my father that it was I who'd done the jilting, but he wouldn't believe me.'

'I see. ... But your father believes you spent the night with me for a - lark?' That seemed to amuse him, for he stopped a while to gaze mockingly down at her. 'He actually believes you're promiscuous?'

'Wouldn't you, in his place?' Somehow this wasn't going as she intended. For one thing, Ralph Lingard was in no way put out by her accusation that he was to blame for her father's condition.

'Did it not occur to you to tell your father the truth, that you'd been forcibly taken aboard that boat?'

'That I'd been abducted ... by a Lingard ... ?' Sara had no need to say more. He frowned and said brusquely,

'How our families do love one another!' He paused. 'So it's this supposed misdemeanour of yours that's upset him—'

'He's more than upset,' she flashed. 'He absolutely refuses to face the scandal and disgrace. As I've said he won't take any more of these tablets, and that means he can't live.'

'I'd never have suspected a Malvern of cowardice,' he remarked mockingly, though his eyes were serious.

'My father's no coward!' Sara drew herself up to her full height, and her fair head was flung back so that her hair floated away behind her, lifted by the breeze. 'He happens to be old, and very ill. How dare you say such a thing!'

'All right, all right. What a hothead you are! Let's keep calm about this, and think what must be done.'

'There's nothing. And that's why I wanted you to know the position, before you go away. I want you to live with this terrible thing on your conscience—'

'Do be quiet, girl!' he snapped on a note of weariness. 'I've suggested we do something about it; that means careful thought, not the kind of useless ranting you're indulging in. I'm quite aware I've said this before, but I'm saying it again; I don't know what in heaven's name my brother saw in you! Now be quiet and let me think! There must be some way of making your father continue with those tablets.' He became silent and Sara watched his brow furrow in thought. On the boat he had worn rather disreputable denims

and a polo-necked sweater. He looked different today, more formally dressed in newly-creased slacks and a tweed sports coat. But nothing could change the inflexible lines of his face or remove that air of lawlessness that was such an outstanding feature of all the Lingard men. 'Did your father say definitely that he meant to die?'

'Definitely. Make no mistake, he meant what he said.'

The frown deepened.

'I can't believe your father would do this,' he returned, eyeing her sceptically, in spite of her most emphatic assertion. 'I don't think he'd let you have his death on his conscience - not without offering you some sort of option. Did he suggest you try and make this fiance of yours change his mind, and marry you?'

'No.'

'Are you sure?' and when she nodded, 'I know you don't love the fellow, and he doesn't love you, never did—'

'Oh, yes, he did love me,' she flashed, her eyes kindling with indignation. 'His feelings went very deep, and that's why he's so hurt.'

'Nonsense! What kind of love is it that knows no fire at the thought of one's fiancee being possessed by another man?' His face darkened and his mouth became cruel. 'I'd have strangled you ... slowly, so that you'd have suffered long, and cried out for mercy.' In spite of herself Sara shivered, and sent an involuntary glance about her. So lonely up here, with the fields to one side and the cliffs with their sheer drop to the sea the other. . . . Once again she experienced that odd terror that had assailed her as a child whenever she saw this man approaching.

'I think I'd better go now,' she said, wishing she hadn't come, for *her* plan for revenge seemed now to have misfired.

'Go? We haven't done anything about this damned situation yet.' He regarded her sceptically again and said, 'I still can't reconcile this attitude of

finality with a Malvern. I believe you're lying when you say he offered you no option. I'm aware of your distaste for this fellow, but I think your father would be willing to live if you managed to persuade him to marry you. Am I right?'

'No, you're not.' But this mention of an option had brought the soft colour to her cheeks and she turned aside in case Ralph Lingard should wonder at it. He had noticed, however, and Sara felt her chin taken in an almost cruel grip and she was forced to meet his gaze.

'You cheat!' he rasped. 'Blame me, would you - when he did give you an alternative. He'll live if you can persuade this Roddy to marry you, won't he?' Sara twisted away, but his grip was transferred to her arms, and she felt his fingers biting into her flesh.

'Let go of me!' Again she twisted, but her struggles were futile.

'Answer me or I'll shake you till your teeth rattle,' he threatened. 'I must live with his death on my conscience, must I? Answer me, I say! He's told you to get this fellow to marry you, and then he'll take his tablets—'

'No, he hasn't!' she said, her dark eyes flashing. 'If you must know, he's told me to get *you* to marry me and then he'll take his tablets!'

Slowly the pressure on her arms relaxed, until she was free. They stood staring at each other, in the profound silence that followed her outburst, and then Ralph Lingard's laugh rang forth, echoing through the ancient ruins of the abbey.

'Me - marry a wildcat like you? This is the best I've heard in a long while. No, thanks; I like my women to purr, not snarl. I wouldn't marry you if there wasn't another woman left on earth!'

'Very original,' she sneered. 'I haven't asked you to marry me.'

'If you've any sense you won't - or you might get an original answer.'

Sara's colour heightened. Why had she let him force her father's ultimatum from her? She had left herself open to derision, to this man's hateful insults. How she loathed him! She hit back in the only way left to her, though she felt it could have little effect on him now.

'So you see, you are responsible for his death. The option of which you speak doesn't make a scrap of difference. Contrary to your so clever deductions, it doesn't let you out at all. In fact, it only increases your guilt. If you have a conscience then I sincerely hope it troubles you for the rest of your life!' This was all to no avail, she concluded again, yet to her surprise the derision left his face and a heavy frown settled on his brow. Faint colour had touched his dark features too, almost as if he were in fact experiencing some slight feeling of guilt or remorse. Sara mused again on her conviction that he did possess a conscience, and despite the fact that her thoughts were fast returning to her father and the sorrow that would soon come to her family, she couldn't suppress the glow of triumph that entered her eyes. He saw it, and his frown deepened to a scowl. He looked as if he would very much enjoy doing her some bodily harm. When he spoke, however, his voice was low, and lacking its familiar harshness of tone.

'This is the truth? He actually wants you to marry me?' and he added, 'Why me, for heaven's sake?'

'I'm supposed to have spent the night with you,' she reminded him. 'My father's old-fashioned about things like that.'

'Why? Have the Malvern women always been chaste?' he asked mockingly.

'You're probably not willing to believe it, but they have - which is more than can be said for the Lingard women,' she could not help adding, and a twinkle of amusement entered his eyes. But he became serious again as he said quietly,

'Let's call a truce for a moment while we consider what must be done.' A curious light entered his eyes as he went on softly, 'Your father wouldn't mind if you left him altogether? - if you went to live in Greece?'

Sara gave a start of surprise. What did he mean?

'As the possibility of my going to Greece doesn't arise,' she said, 'we won't waste words discussing it.'

'You haven't answered my question. Your father wants you to marry me, you say. He must know what that means. Is he willing for you to go out of his life— perhaps never to return to this country?'

She nodded dumbly as an almost physical ache touched her heart at the recollection of her father, turning his face into the pillow, as if never wanting to see her again. And the softness in her heart was reflected in her eyes; it was one of those rare moments when she was entirely feminine, when the sweet mysteries of womanhood shaded her eyes. Ralph Lingard's own eyes began to widen as he watched her, with a new interest as though he saw some miracle unfolding up here among the sandstone ruins of the abbey. He said, both to her astonishment and his own,

'Our marriage, then, would put everything right. Your father will live?'

'Our marriage? Are you mad?'

'I'm fully aware of your aversion, but I don't intend to have your father's death put to my account. I'm offering you marriage, Sara. Accept and your father will live; refuse and he will die. His life is in your hands, not mine.' He spoke softly, and with a most serious inflection in his voice. Where, she wondered, was the harshness, the scorn and derision? He seemed a totally different person, up here on the heights above the cliffs, a very different person from the man who had so roughly thrust her into that car, and had later threatened to throw her into the sea. He was waiting for her answer, but she turned from him to stare out to where the waves flung spray high into the air before rolling forward to lash at the cliffs and bring great slabs of shale crashing down on to the shore. How wild the sea today, and how wild the beating of her heart! It seemed to be in unison with the rhythm of the sea; she felt that she could battle against those waves, should the need arise ... but she could not battle against the instinct to save her father's life. Not for one moment, when planning her revenge, had she considered the possibility of Ralph Lingard's offering her marriage. Yet, as she had thought, he did possess a conscience, and because of this he was not willing to be held responsible for her father's death. He had turned the tables on her, presenting

her, as her father had done, with an ultimatum. If her father died it was to be her fault, not his.

She swung round and the wind caught her dress, whipping it up, almost above her head. Swiftly she tried to bring it down again, and his dark eyes kindled with amusement as he watched her struggles. She was hot and flushed when at last she succeeded, and he said,

'I'd have come to your assistance, but I had a feeling you'd have suspected me of some dishonourable motive.' But he took her arm and led her, unresistingly, to a place amid the ruins which offered slightly more shelter. 'Well, Sara, have you made up your mind? Are you going to have your father's death on *your* conscience for the rest of your life?'

'You sound as if you want to marry me?' she said, perplexed by his tone.

'As I've said, I'm not being held responsible for anything that might happen to your father. I'm honest, though, and I do admit that if I marry you it will be against my better judgment, for I don't know what I'm to do with a wife who has no - er - sex appeal for me.' And then, as the thought occurred to him, 'Are you willing to enter into marriage on those conditions? Is that life going to suit you?'

'I haven't said I'll marry you.' Her voice was a whisper. She was very pale; even her lips had lost much of their colour.,

'But you will,' he returned with conviction. 'Tough as you are, you have this abiding love for your father.'

'We'll fight all the time,' she said, and instantly he agreed. She then reminded him of what he had said a few moments ago about not marrying her if she were the last woman on earth.

'I didn't know then what I know now. Much as I dislike the idea of marriage to a woman like you I'd rather that than know I'd helped to kill someone who had never harmed me.'

'It's a pity,' she had to say, 'that you didn't consider, a little more carefully, the probable consequences of your action. You wanted to hurt my father, you said you did.'

'Hurt him, yes, as my mother was hurt, but not to kill him. How was I to know he'd go to the extremes -of suicide—?'

'It's not suicide!'

Ralph merely shrugged and asked her again if she had made up her mind.

Sara rarely shed tears; it was her boast that no man would ever draw them from her, and it was with a sudden surge of anger that she felt her eyelids pricking uncomfortably and she lowered her head in case he should suspect how near she was to allowing herself that feminine form of relief.

'You can't want to marry me,' she whispered. 'You've just said I'm a wildcat.'

'I meant it, too. I don't suppose I shall ever become interested enough to want to tame you, but if I happen to get bored at any time it might be diverting to have a try.' A slight pause and then, 'You are going to marry me, aren't you, Sara?'

'I shall hate every minute of it,' she said, clenching her fists.

'Oh, I don't know. As you say, we'll have our fights, but if you behave reasonably well, I'll let you go your own way, as I shall go mine. You didn't answer my question - will that life suit you?' 'Perfectly,' she returned, still very pale. 'Under the circumstances there could be no other relationship between us.'

'I agree.' The sun was beginning to sink. The abbey ruins cast shadows, throwing his face into the shade. So dark, he looked, and rather sinister. Once again she tried to visualize his home, his life, his leisure. This brought to mind something else he had said, about liking his women to purr. Did he have women in his life? Probably, and that was why he could marry a woman for whom he had no amorous desire. Well, that suited her. Hadn't she always declared she would never be that sort of slave? Never be waiting,

submissively, to satisfy her husband's desires? 'I take it, then, that we're betrothed,' he said at last, a quiver of amusement on his lips, 'and I expect the correct thing is for me to see your father. Perhaps we'd better go now, for I think we're about to have some rain.'

The wedding was very quiet, by special licence, for Ralph had already arranged to return to Greece before the end of the week. There was no white wedding dress, no photographers, no fashionable gathering afterwards.

But, strangely, Ralph seemed acutely sensitive to what Sara had missed, and to how she was feeling, and he took her, on the evening of their wedding - which was also the evening of their departure - to the Plantation Inn, a lovely old country house that was patronized only by those people who could afford to pay for one meal what it took an average workman a couple of days to earn. It had a strong Spanish atmosphere, with sombreros on the walls and handsome bullfighters looking down from massive and ornately gilded frames. Subtly shaded lights were concealed among flowers and trailing plants; at one end of the restaurant was a glass dance floor, irregular in shape and quite small. Illuminated from beneath by a soft green light, and surrounded by rockery stones and aquatic plants, it gave the impression of an ornamental garden pool. On stands here and there were cockatoos and parrots, brilliantly plumed. The waiters were all Spanish, and had obviously been chosen for their good looks and pleasant manner of approach.

After returning from the cloakroom Sara found Ralph at the bar. He turned as she came and stood beside him, asking what she wanted to drink. He ordered, and Sara stood staring at him an odd sensation slowly creeping over her. How different he looked tonight, immaculate in dinner jacket, not a hair out of place ... but nothing could change that gleam of outlawry in his eyes. He picked up their drinks and led the way to a table by the wall.

They were both rather quiet, each absorbed in their own thoughts. Presently the waiter came for the order, and ten minutes later he conducted them to their table. It was in a corner, with one small wall light above; in fact, they were almost in darkness. From the far end of the restaurant came the soft strains of music and a young couple were moving about on the dance floor,

not attempting to dance, but just holding each other very close and obviously whispering together.

'Eat, my child,' Ralph urged. 'You haven't had a bite yet.'

She turned from the dancers and smiled faintly. She wasn't hungry, but somehow he had shown such kindness in bringing her here that she found herself trying to eat, trying to give the impression that she was enjoying the meal.

Her thoughts were chaotic, though, and would flit from the relief of her parents at her marriage, then to Roddy and their brief engagement and then to this man who was now her husband. Would she leave him, she wondered, when eventually her father did die? Or would they continue through the years, living together ... yet not together, each going their own way? And what if she met someone else? - someone she could love ... ? Love - she would never love. As she had told Valerie, love for a woman meant slavery; love meant subjugation. No, it was not for her, so there would be no complications of that nature - not unless ...? Supposing Ralph fell in love? Supposing he wanted his freedom? That would solve everything.

'What are you thinking?' he inquired, refilling her glass. 'Come, I shall make you tell me.'

Make? Sara frowned at the word. It was to be hoped he would not attempt any form of mastery, or there would be trouble right from the start. Nevertheless, she answered him, for she wanted to know his reaction to what she had to say.

'I was wondering if the day will ever come when you'll want your freedom. You could fall in love.'

'So I could,' he agreed. 'But although my marriage would then be irksome, I should have to abide by it. For I happen to be old-fashioned about some things, too. Our marriage, Sara, is for ever, so it will pay us both to practise caution and make sure we don't fall in love. There's plenty of fun to be had without it, and I shan't mind what you do, so long as you're discreet.'

Sara flushed deeply; she wondered if he had forgotten her assertion that Malvern women were traditionally chaste.

'You,' she murmured, a little huskily, 'you have - women?'

'In the plural?' His dark brows lifted and amusement curved his lips. 'I have my moments, yes, because I believe that life is for living; but I don't flit from one woman to another - surely I haven't given you that impression?'

The waiter appeared with the second course and a moment's silence fell between them.

'You have one special one?' she asked with interest, vaguely wondering what any woman could see in him. Even his kiss would be loathsome, she thought, and a shudder passed through her, though she managed successfully to hide it.

'At present, yes, I do have a special one.'

'Greek?'

'Partly. I think she has about as much Greek in her as I have.'

Sara toyed once more with her food, and again he urged her to eat.

'Is she pretty?'

'I think so.'

And she purrs, thought Sara.

'Is she fair or dark?'

'She's as dark as you are fair.'

'Don't you want to marry her?' Too late for that now, she mused, but the question was already phrased.

'Obviously not, or I'd have done so before now.'

'How old is she?'

'About twenty-eight.'

'About?'

'I believe she was twenty-eight last birthday. She's a little taller than you, and a little more - er - rounded. She has dark eyes to match her hair and the shape of her nose is, I believe, described as *retroussée*. Is there anything else you would like to know about her?'

Hot colour flooded Sara's cheeks at this sarcasm, but her chin lifted and her eyes kindled with fire.

'I'm sorry. I was merely showing polite interest. I'd no intention of being inquisitive about this woman of yours.'

'Wise girl!' His voice was rather dangerously quiet now. 'There will, naturally, be some things you'll have to learn. One of them is that I tolerate no interference whatever in my affairs. Forget that and you'll be sorry, very sorry.'

Silence descended then, for Sara felt that if he subjected her to much more of this kind of talk she would pick up something from the table and throw it at him. In a little while, however, he seemed once more to soften, and he asked her to dance, in a rather gentle tone, as if half regretting the intrusion of conflict into their relationship on this, their wedding day.

Recalling how, in that telephone kiosk, his nearness had sickened her, Sara opened her mouth to refuse, but then changed her mind. For he was already on his feet and she somehow could not bring herself to snub him, especially as the people on the next table were watching with faint interest.

But she was glad when the music stopped and they returned to their table, for she felt no differently about him, and the touch of his hand on her bare arm

was so distasteful that she had the greatest difficulty in not twisting away from him and leaving him in the middle of the dance floor.

She noticed, as they sat down, that his mouth was set in a tight line, and she wondered if he had sensed her disgust at having him touch her and her relief when, eventually, the dance was finished. If he had noticed he didn't make it apparent in any other way and for the rest of the time they chatted pleasantly, Ralph answering her questions about his home and his work. From what she could gather this latter was spasmodic, for Ralph Lingard was a wealthy man and he employed other people to do the work for him. Nevertheless, he did have an office in Athens and on occasions he would spend several days there, staying with some friends of his who owned a chalet not far from the beach at Glyfada.

He went on to tell her about his home, and as she sat there watching him, his face darker than ever in the faint glow from the shaded wall lamp, she wondered if any two people had spent the evening of their wedding day like this. Strangers, they were, politely conversing in order both to steer clear of strain and to pass the time until they should drive to the airport for their flight at half-past twelve. Their wedding night would be spent on the plane, and most likely they would again pass the time in idle conversation. A great uneasiness swept over her and she suddenly felt chilled to the bone. For ever, Ralph had said their marriage must be, even though it was founded on necessity and built on hate. What price the future with a start like this? For her own part Sara had never intended love to enter into marriage, but she was wise enough to know that she herself must be loved, otherwise how was she to mould and shape her husband? - how gain the power to have him eating from her hand? And now all her well- thought-out plans had gone awry; her formula for the perfect marriage would never even reach the experimental stage.

Eventually they left the Inn, to enter into a world of darkness, where neither stars nor moon sent forth a single ray of light. Like my life from now on, was Sara's first reaction as they made their way to the car. And then her head went up and her nostrils flared. She was a fighter, a true Malvern, and no Lingard would spoil her life. He had said she could go her own way, and this she meant to do.

And if he should ever change his mind and be so unwise as to interfere - then let him beware!

## CHAPTER FOUR

RALPH LINGARD'S house was built in an idyllic setting on one of the pine-scented slopes overlooking the boulder-strewn Kladeos river, with a magnificent view of the sacred valley where for over a thousand years the Olympic Games were held. The whole area of the countryside had an aspect of gentleness, with the wooded hills of Mount Kronion sweeping down to the sacred groves of Altis. Here a chaos of marble slabs and decaying columns were the only reminders of the glorious days when, during the holy truce, all hostilities would cease and Greek youth from every part of the Hellenic world would come to the Sanctuary to compete in the Games.

Sara's first view of her new home was in the light of early dawn, when from behind the Arcadian mountains the golden ball of the sun rose slowly, sending its quivering light to spread an added charm and softness to a landscape of cypresses and olive trees, of cotton fields and vineyards. It was early summer, and the carpets of blue irises and anemones that lay scattered about amid the willows and the laurels were fading, but already along the banks of the River Alpheus oleanders were beginning to bloom. And in the triangle formed by the confluence of the two rivers and the foothills of the mountain, gigantic pine trees towered over the ruined temples and treasuries of the ancient Sanctuary of Zeus, king of all the pagan gods of Greece. In spite of herself Sara gave a little gasp of admiration and she turned impulsively to the man who had brought her here.

'I thought it would be much wilder. Oh, it's really beautiful!'

'I did say it was gentle country,' he reminded her with a smile. 'Very different from the wild eagle crags of Delphi. You see,' he went on, not without a hint of amusement, 'this site was to serve a peaceful purpose. Olympia was inviolable, and when people came here all feuds and quarrels were forgotten; their battles were of a very different kind, with a laurel wreath for the victor.'

No mistaking his meaning, and Sara found herself returning his smile. And yet she said,

'But we don't come in peace. The feud between you and me will continue until the end.' And yet even as she spoke Sara experienced a profound awareness of peace, as if the very landscape inspired tranquillity and ... reconciliation. The ancient Greeks certainly knew how to choose a site suited to its purpose. It was even protected from both hot and cold winds by the low mountains, and only on the west, when it opened out into the coastal plain, did it receive the moist sea breeze that blew gendy up the valley of the Alpheos.

Ralph merely shrugged at her words and began helping the taxi driver with their luggage. Sara followed them through a low stone archway and found herself in the most beautiful garden she had ever seen. Vines grew as a cover, sheltering part of the garden from the sun. Paving stones were artistically used so as to enhance the flowers or bushes in their midst; fountains sent up their silver sprays to gleam and glisten in the sunlight, and flowers bloomed in profusion everywhere.

The house was a square white villa, with high airy rooms and furnished in the modern style without any thought of cost. Sara was shown up to a bedroom by Martha Pitsos who, with her husband, George, was employed by Ralph to run the house and look after the garden. They had both eyed Sara in silent amazement when Ralph told them who she was, and their glances, first at one another and then at Ralph, spoke volumes. Plainly they were wondering what Ralph's 'other woman' was going to say about this. Sara herself was curious too, but hers was only idle curiosity, for she had no real interest either in her husband or his woman friend.

'The view, it is very good, yes?' Martha showed a row of even white teeth in a smile as she indicated the window, and Sara moved over to it and stood looking down, first at the garden below, and then beyond to where the view included part of the Sanctuary and the pine-clothed heights of Mount Kronion.

'It's lovely,' she agreed, as the other girl stood expectantly waiting for her answer. 'Is there a bathroom?' she asked then, turning.

'Very nice bathroom, Mrs. Lingard. In here.'

Stepping over to the door which Martha had opened, Sara frowned. This was the first time she had been thus addressed ... and she disliked it intensely. But she would have to live with it, she thought, swearing that if ever she had the opportunity of avenging herself on her husband she would not hesitate to do so. Somehow, though, she could not imagine such an opportunity ever arising, for Ralph Lingard seemed so tough that nothing could hurt him. Would he have felt relieved had she refused to marry him? - or would he still have experienced a pang of guilt? No, he had deliberately and cleverly shifted the responsibility, and if her father had died he would have considered himself exonerated from all blame.

Martha informed her that Ralph had ordered a meal, and that her husband was at present busy preparing it. She would go and help him, she said, telling Sara it would be ready in about half an hour.

Left alone, Sara began to gaze around. A large double bed, rather plain furniture, and just the one mirror. This was above the dressing-table and Sara's eyes came to rest on the brushes on a tray there. Idly she picked one up, then, frowning, she opened a drawer to thrust it inside. She blinked uncomprehendingly as she noted the contents of the drawer.

'What—?' After a second's hesitation by the door Ralph came into the room. 'What are you doing here?' His glance fell on the small suitcase which Sara herself had carried up, and a smile of sheer amusement curved his mouth as comprehension dawned. 'The blame's mine,' he owned. 'I merely told Martha to take you upstairs, and naturally this would be the room to which she'd bring you. Sorry about that; hope you haven't been too embarrassed.' His tone was all mockery and Sara subjected him to an icy stare which, to her annoyance, did not appear to affect him at all.

'Perhaps you'll show me my room, then,' she said, picking up her case.

Her room had the same view, and a bathroom similar to that in the larger room. But the bed was only a single one and Sara smiled faintly as she wondered what Martha would think about this.

'I expect you're tired,' commented Ralph a short while later when she joined him downstairs. He was in the sitting- room, idly flicking the pages of a

magazine, and he merely lifted his head to give her a cursory glance before returning to his book. 'You can lie down after we've eaten - if you want to, of course.'

'I think I will.' She came slowly into the room, her wide eyes fixed on him as she speculated on how he meant to spend the day. Would he visit his girl-friend? Probably, she thought, seeing that he had been away for more than five weeks. How calmly he accepted the circumstances of his marriage. No anger or impatience once his decision had been made, just a sort of impassivity, with any regrets successfully hidden.

She sat down and he became absorbed in his reading. As the moments passed and he continued to ignore her Sara felt her anger slowly rising. No man had ever before ignored her presence ... men had always been far too profoundly aware of it.

'Will the meal be long?' she asked, determined to make him look up from his book.

'Hmm...?'

'I said, will the meal be long?'

'How should I know? Ask Martha.' Ralph continued his reading, and after another few minutes had elapsed Sara bit her lip and her eyes glinted as her anger increased. A Lingard, to treat her like this!

'You're not very hospitable, are you?' she snapped, and at this he did look up.

'I thought we understood one another? You're living here, and you can do what you please, but for the lord's sake don't expect me to entertain you. I've far more interesting things to do.'

'I'm used to your insults,' she said, though the colour rose to tint her cheeks. 'Before very long you're going to be sorry for yourself. Your clever plans for revenge - look where they've led you.'

'You must admit I'm a good loser.' The insult this time was much more subtle, but Sara did not miss it and her flush deepened.

'You sound as if you're sorry already—'

'Naturally I'm sorry I was forced to marry you, but had I my time to come over again I'd do exactly the same. I told you I'd no intention of carrying a weight of guilt around with me for the rest of my days.'

'I can't think why you wanted revenge.'

'A Lingard trait, you should know that.'

'Well, what have you gained by it? Tell me that?'

'A wife,' he grinned, adding, 'and what a wife!'

'All right,' she returned, trembling now with anger. 'You needn't seize every opportunity to sneer at me! I'm not to your taste, but neither are you to mine. I don't keep reminding you of it, though, and I'd be obliged if you'd keep a similar curb on *your* tongue!'

'Why, Sara,' he exclaimed in some amusement, 'I do believe you're piqued! I admit there's an excuse, for women are so vain. I expect it hurts to be told you're not attractive to men.'

'To one man,' she corrected, making a valiant effort at control but fearing she must surely fail. 'I've already been engaged twice, so I must have some appeal to men.'

'Do you call that - Roddy a man?' He closed his book and eyed her curiously. 'What sort of a life were you expecting to have with him?'

'A good life!' Sara tossed her head defiantly. 'I wanted a man I could manage.'

'You did?' His eyes roved over her, holding an odd expression in their depths. 'Why, then, did you become engaged to my brother? You'd not have managed him with any great success.'

'That's why I gave him up,' she owned, and her husband's dark eyes glinted dangerously.

'For that reason only, eh? You'd break a man's heart simply because he wouldn't be your slave?'

There was a little more to it than that, Sara recollected, but there was nothing to be gained by going into it now. In fact, she had a shrewd suspicion that her husband would derive some considerable amusement if she were to elaborate on his brother's conduct. All the Lingards were rakes, she concluded, and despite the fact that Ralph had hit on the truth when declaring her to be piqued, Sara was inwardly relieved at her complete lack of attraction for him. For there was no knowing what he might get up to, especially as, unlike his brother, he had some valid claim to her.

'If the husband isn't the slave, then the wife is,' she asserted knowledgeably, as Ralph watched her with a questioning air. There's no happy medium, no partnership in marriage. If the man's allowed to be dominant then all hope for the woman is lost, she becomes subdued and completely under her husband's authority. Can you imagine my tolerating that?' she added, the hint of a quiver about her nostrils.

'No, I can't,' he admitted. 'But do you really believe you'd be satisfied with a man you could twist around your little finger?'

'Perfectly happy.'

'Why then,' he inquired curiously, 'did you not marry this Roddy? You could have had him, you know, and the coveted title.' A small silence followed and he persisted, 'Why, Sara? Why did you allow all that to slip away? One doesn't usually cast aside such a wonderful opportunity of - er - perfect happiness.'

Still no word from Sara. She saw Roddy standing there in the doorway, gaping as he slowly comprehended the scene of night attire and dressing-gown; standing there, red-faced and spluttering ... and then extending that one white and slender hand. With an involuntary flicker of her eyes Sara took in the hand idly resting on the magazine. Slender too, and well-kept, but strong and brown; a hand that could be gentle, she felt sure, but a hand that could be cruel too, a hand that would have made someone suffer, had its owner walked in on such a scene as was enacted that morning on the *Ocean Belle*.

'I don't know why I changed my mind,' she said at last, and a small frown of censure crossed his face.

'You disappoint me, Sara. In spite of all your faults I did think you were honest.' He looked straight at her. 'I shall tell you why you suddenly discovered you didn't want him after all. It was because he didn't come up to scratch in that particular situation. He was, in other words, utterly spineless, and you can't tell me, Sara, that a girl possessing a spirit like yours would be content with a man like that.'

'Are you trying to say I want a he-man?' she inquired, amusement taking the place of her former anger.

'I'm not saying what you want, but I will say what you need—'

'Oh, what?'

'You need someone to crush a little of that arrogant spirit out of you, someone to tame you.' There was an odd significance in his tone which brought to Sara's mind his saying that, if he were ever bored, he might find diversion in attempting to tame her.

'Should that "someone" ever decide to try,' she murmured, her expression belying the gentleness of her tone, 'he might discover to his cost that he had taken on more than he could manage.'

'Indeed? Well now, Sara, that savours of a challenge. Some day it might be accepted - and then we shall see whether or not that "someone" has taken on more than he can manage.'

The time passed slowly; Sara had never been so bored in all her life, and by the middle of July she began to wonder how she could possibly go on for the rest of her days like this. Her life had hitherto been one round of pleasure, with invitations pouring in and Roddy there to satisfy her every whim. If she said they would go to a theatre, then her fiancé promptly booked the best seats, whether he were eager to see the show or not. If she wanted to attend a dance, then Roddy obediently made all the arrangements.

But now. ... Sara gave a deep sigh and turned over on the grass, exposing her back to the sun. Where was Ralph? she wondered. He had been away for a week, so she presumed he was in Athens, though he could of course be in the mountain village of Langadia where his girl-friend lived. A frown touched Sara's brow at the recollection of her meeting with Adele Bowden.

Being prepared to dislike the girl even before they had met, Sara received quite a shock on discovering Adele to be just the opposite from what she had expected. She was sweetly feminine, with dark hair, as Ralph had said, and soft brown eyes. She possessed a certain charm of manner too, which Sara felt could be most appealing - to a man. 'I like my women to purr. ...' Yes, Adele would purr, and in the nicest way. Sara had *wanted* to dislike her. ... No, she had wanted this girl-friend of her husband's to be the type one usually dislikes, and this not being the case Sara experienced an acute sense of disappointment. She was quick to own that this was most illogical, but as she could not rid herself of this disappointment she naturally began to search for a reason for it. None was forthcoming, and she finally managed to put the matter from her. Before she did so, however, she had the odd premonition that there was in fact a very good reason for the way she felt about Adele, and that one day she would discover it.

Ralph had brought her home with him, one day when he had been to Athens, and quite calmly introduced her to his wife. Adele's manner had been cool, but by no means hostile; she seemed to accept with equanimity the fact of

her lover's marriage, and Sara knew instinctively that Ralph had told her the whole, and given her his assurance that her own position was in no way affected by the intrusion of a wife into his home, a wife who even now was still a comparative stranger to him. Hadn't Adele wanted marriage? Sara wondered. How very odd for her to display no sign of animosity. Her own position was of course very strong, for Ralph obviously thought a great deal about her. All the time they were talking his arm was resting affectionately across her shoulders, and his expression when he looked at her caused Sara to give an inward gasp of disbelief. Never would she have believed those harsh and almost cruel lips could curve so tenderly.

'Are you dining with us?' Sara asked, for a rather strained silence came down after Ralph had left them, having been called to the garage by George, who had just finished a minor repair to the car and wanted Ralph to inspect it.

'I don't think so.' Adele's manner was still cool towards Sara, and now that they were alone she adopted a rather supercilious air, giving the impression that she wanted to flaunt her superior position. Yet still Sara could not dislike her. 'Ralph will probably be taking me out for the evening.'

Ralph did take her out, and on his return Sara had, with as much tact as she could muster, requested him not to bring Adele to the house again. Ralph's eyes opened very wide at that and he had promptly reminded Sara that Adele was used to coming to the house, and that Sara's presence was not going to prevent her from doing so now.

'There's absolutely nothing between you and me, not even respect,' he reminded Sara, on a rather dangerous note. 'I married you to save your father's life; I offered you nothing—'

'I know that,' she cut in, 'but Martha and George— They must be laughing at me.'

'A new experience, eh? Well, if it will chasten you, let them laugh. You've far too high an opinion of yourself, far too much pride. I told you at first what to expect, and I also warned you I'd stand for no interference.'

'You can at least keep her away from here!'

'I haven't the slightest intention of doing so. Get that straight, Sara. You mean nothing to me and Adele does. Now I want no more attempts to interfere in my affairs, understand?'

Her eyes burning like red-hot embers, Sara looked up at him, her face pale but her expression defiant.

'What would you say if I brought my men-friends here?'

'Have you some men-friends? I wondered what you'd been doing with yourself all these weeks. Bring them by all means, but one at a time, if you please. I warned you to be discreet, and although you might be doubtful, I do have a small sense of delicacy.' He patted her cheek before she could be aware of his intention, and added, 'Bring one along this evening and we'll make a foursome.'

Seething, Sara rubbed savagely at her cheek, in an effort to erase the still present touch of his hand. Bring her man- friend, and they'd make a foursome! Sara felt she would choke with fury. He knew very well she had no men-friends - but it wouldn't have affected him in the least if she had. How different from the adulation to which she had been used! Both Alex and Roddy had been envied, for despite her reputation for shrewishness she had always been much in demand by the men in her particular set. And that was because of her beauty. Well, beauty was not much use to her here, with no eligible males around and a husband who so lacked interest that he actually asked her to bring her men-friends to the house. Not that she wanted him to notice her, she told herself over and over again. He was a loathsome and arrogant Lingard and she couldn't even bear him to touch her! But that caress which was given merely as a demonstration of his mockery remained with her long after he, left her ... and there also remained with her the most odd impression that the relationship between him and Adele was not quite what he would have his wife believe. Life is for living, he had declared, thus conveying the idea that he and Adele were lovers. But there was something faintly angelic about Adele. ... Were they lovers? They must be, and yet. ... Impatiently she shrugged. Why this interest? Her husband's relationship with Adele was none of her business and she determinedly refrained from asking herself questions which she could never hope to answer. She still

wished, though that Ralph would conduct his amours - if they were amours - away from his home.

Sara's thoughts were brought back to the present by the sound of a car pulling into the courtyard. Then Ralph came through the archway and stood looking down at her. He carried a briefcase, so she presumed he had spent the past week in Athens.

'You'll do some damage if you persist in this,' he warned. 'People here don't sit out all day in the sun.'

'What else is there to do?' she inquired with a sort of acid sweetness, sitting up and reaching for a wrap. 'It would have been a nice gesture if you'd asked me if I'd like a lift to Athens.'

'I haven't been to Athens, and if I had I wouldn't have taken you.'

'I didn't mean you to take me in that way, I meant—'

'What way?'

'As a - companion. I meant you could have given me a lift, and I could have wandered around and even found somewhere to stay. Then we could have come home together when you had finished your business.'

'Well, as I've said, I haven't been to Athens, so the question of offering you a lift doesn't arise.'

'I thought you must be in Athens,' she said, glad of the conversation, even though she derived no pleasure from his company, 'as you were away for a whole week.'

'Are you asking me where I've been?'

'Certainly not! It's nothing to do with me.'

'Quite right. None of my actions concern you. Remember that and we should get along fine.' Get along fine? They were never in each other's company. As

if aware of her thoughts, he added, 'I'm not going out again today, or this evening.' Perhaps it was his phrasing that was wrong, or it might have been the rather patronizing way in which he looked and spoke, but his words brought a flash of hauteur to Sara's eyes and her chin lifted arrogantly.

That sounds like a concession. What am I supposed to do? - offer my humble thanks for this honour of your company which you so condescendingly confer on me?'

A glint of steel in his eyes then, and his fingers tightened on the handle of his bag. His manner, however, was suave and his accents were quiet and calm when he spoke.

'I'm not offering my company. In fact, I can think of nothing more boring than an evening spent alone with you.'

'Why then depart from your routine? Why not take yourself off and spend the evening with your - your ...?'

'Yes, Sara?' he prompted dangerously. And when she did not answer, 'Be very careful what you say about Adele. I have a great affection for her.'

Sara tossed her head and reminded him that he himself had practically admitted that he and Adele were much more than friends.

'So I did, but that doesn't give you the right to pass disparaging remarks about her.' He leant against the sundial, in an attitude of boredom, regarding Sara with faint contempt. 'She happens to be a better woman than you could ever be.'

'Then why don't you go to her?' she blazed. 'You'd have a much more enjoyable evening than staying here with me.'

'Undoubtedly,' he agreed. 'But it suits me to remain at home this evening.'

'Thank heaven the house is big enough for me to avoid your company.' Rising from her air bed, Sara put the wrap around her and picked up the

book which was lying unopened on the grass. 'I shall take myself off to another room!'

'That also suits me,' he returned pleasantly, and followed her into the house.

Once in her room, Sara paced the floor, fuming, and striving to thrust his insults from her mind. But they continued to rankle, and in a way that was beginning to puzzle her. Why should she care about his opinion of her? And as for these repeated comparisons between Adele and herself - it was sheer bad manners on his part, and only what could be expected from one of the Lingard brood.

If only she could discover some way of hitting back. Had there been any possible chance of arousing even a vestige of jealousy in him she would instantly have set about finding herself a man-friend - but that could scarcely be effective when Ralph's only reaction would be to invite the fellow to his house. Not that she wanted to make her husband jealous, Sara told herself. No, that was the last thing she desired, for the situation as it was suited her admirably. No demands on her time, no interference with her actions, no enforced claims. ... In fact, complete freedom— Complete freedom? Sara stopped dead in the middle of the floor, and slowly her anger became reflected in her face as the colour faded gradually, leaving only two bright spots, high on her cheekbones, contrasting with the pale fury surrounding them. Always she had sworn to do exactly as she pleased, never to allow any husband of hers to control her actions. But by some clever manoeuvre Ralph *was* managing to control her actions, he was determining - indirectly it was true, but determining all the same - the way her life should be led. Could it possibly be planned and deliberate? She could well believe he would resort to such subtle behaviour, both to satisfy his ego and to let her see, once the fact had manifested itself to her, that even though he was not interested in her as a woman, he was her husband and his will would be imposed upon her whether she liked it or not.

With a shrug of impatience Sara went into the bathroom and ran the water. She Was allowing her imagination to run riot. Her life had been shaped by circumstances alone, and not by any predetermination of Ralph's.

Not once had he shown the slightest interest in her movements; never had he so much as inquired if she had been out, or been down to the village, or even to the Sanctuary. He lived his own life, exactly as before, coming and going as he pleased, sometimes not seeing her for days - perhaps not even caring whether she were still living in his house or not. Why, then, that absurd conclusion that he had deliberately ordered her way of living? - ordered it so that not only would she be bored to distraction, but also that she would, by sheer inability to do otherwise, be following the pattern he had set out for her? The idea was ridiculous ... and yet, though she made a determined effort to shake it off, it persisted and even gained strength. At the same time she had the odd sensation of being subjected to some cleverly calculated wearing-down process. And this led on, for no apparent reason, to the recollection of Ralph's hinting that one day he might make an attempt to tame her. Why think of that now? she wondered. It had no relevance to the present situation and she promptly dismissed it from her mind. With her fury still at its height she slipped out of her sunsuit and got into the bath. Daily routine. ... A frown appeared. Daily routine, yes, but it suddenly struck her that having a bath had become a diversion - a temporary escape from the soul-destroying boredom that now held her in its grip. That her life could be so empty that having a bath was a diversion— Never would she have believed it! Hatred against her husband increased. Whether deliberately planned or not, her destiny had certainly been shaped by him. Revenge was a Lingard trait, he had said, by way of an explanation for his action in abducting her. But would he have been so eager for revenge if he had foreseen the consequences? For he himself had paid dear, being burdened with a wife he did not want. That fact at least should have afforded her some satisfaction, but it didn't. For Ralph was totally unperturbed by the acquisition of a wife, mainly, she supposed, because he was determined that no inconvenience to himself should result from it.

To be ignored, treated with indifference by a Lingard! It was intolerable, and yet what could she do about it? Neither man nor woman had ever made her feel helpless before, and the idea that Ralph had succeeded in doing so, right from the first, so increased her fury that she began, almost viciously, to scrub at her arms and back with the loofah. The skin on one shoulder had flaked after too much exposure to the sun and Sara winced as the loofah brought off the skin. Served her right, she was honest enough to admit. Stupid to let herself become worked up like this over that hateful man. Losing her temper was always so exhausting, and she had sworn long ago to practise more

control. But this husband of hers brought out everything that was bad, even aroused primitive instincts of attack for, looking at her shoulder in the mirror by the bath, she could willingly have torn the skin off his shoulders too.

The blood began to flow and as it was useless to dress she sat for a while wrapped in the towel. Finally she decided something must be done and, hearing a soft tread on the thickly-carpeted landing almost outside her door, she opened it gingerly, expecting to see either Martha or her husband.

It was Ralph.

'Hello,' he said, his eyes kindling in faint amusement. 'Looking for me?'

'I - I wanted Martha,' she returned, too startled to think of stepping back into the room and closing the door. 'I want a dressing.'

'What for?'

'I'm skinning.'

'Sunburn?'

'Yes.'

'I warned you!'

'It was already done then.'

'I've warned you several times, but you couldn't do as you're told if your very life depended on it.'

'Do you mind fetching Martha?' she requested shortly, feeling none too happy, standing there, keeping a firm grip upon the towel.

'I've something in my room; I'll get it.'

Sara stepped back; Ralph appeared within half a minute and entered the room.

'Want me to do it for you?' he grinned. But he put a tube of cream, various dressings, and a roll of plaster on the bed. 'Where is it skinning?'

'Thank you,' she said, ignoring his question. 'I can manage now.'

'Where is it skinning?' he repeated. 'I don't mind in the least assisting - if you think you might have difficulty in getting at it...?' His grin had faded, but his eyes twinkled with amusement.

'Get out,' she said softly.

He remained, his dark eyes wandering from her feet to her head, all his humour gone. His hand opened and closed, as if itching to slap her.

'Shall I tell you something, Sara? If I wanted to dress that wound, I should do so.'

'You'd try to your cost—!' The words escaped before she realized what she had said. Vaguely she had the idea of subjecting him to the same treatment as she had given his brother - but on that occasion she had not been standing around in a bath towel.

'Is that a challenge?' he asked her in a dangerously quiet tone, and to her chagrin and dismay she felt her hand trembling as it gripped the edges of the towel. 'Well, Sara?'

Only a moment's hesitation, only the merest flash of defiance and then,

'No - it wasn't a challenge.'

'Prudent girl.' Had he noticed her trembling? she wondered, for his voice softened slightly as he asked again where the wound was.

'On my shoulder,' she returned, and could not help responding to the swift glimmer of amusement appearing in his eyes.

'How the dickens are you to dress your shoulder by yourself?' Reaching for the cream, he unscrewed the top of the tube. 'Let me see.'

'I really can manage.' His touch would be hateful, she knew from experience. 'It won't be very difficult—'

'Drop that towel and don't be so stupid.'

'I don't want your help!' Why, she fumed, did the fates always favour him? She recalled the several situations in which he had caught her unawares, enabling him to put her in a position of helplessness, a position where she was forced to succumb to his will. First there was the abduction; she could be forgiven for not expecting that. The following morning she had so conveniently left her cabin, and her clothes, so that once more the way was open for her defeat. Then there was the failure of her own plan for revenge, when Ralph had cleverly turned the tables on her by going to the lengths of offering her marriage. And now ... here she was, in this embarrassing position, making some effort to have her own way, yet knowing full well he would defeat her in the end.

'Are you going to remove that towel or shall I?' Stupid to ignore that threat, but for a few seconds Sara's control seemed about to break as a surge of angry frustration swept over her. If only she were fully dressed she would show him she could fight. But caution won, and although she flashed him a glance that should have killed him on the spot, she gave a shrug of resignation and began to ease the towel from her shoulder, turning her back on him first, and making sure to keep the towel well up at the front. Ralph wasted no time trying to manipulate, with the towel in his way. It was jerked down, almost to her waist. She felt the cream being smeared on, then a strong yet gentle hand smoothing it into the affected part. The cream was cooling, the relief wonderful. He applied a gauze dressing, fixing it in place with the plaster.

'There. Now perhaps you'll use your sense and take the sun in easy stages.' He brought the towel up on to her shoulders again, then turned her round to face him. Despite his gentleness of only a moment ago his features were hard and an icy inflection entered his voice. That tone you used when telling me to get out - don't let me hear it again, Sara. I'm warning you, you haven't seen the worst of me yet, not by any means. You were lucky,' he went on significantly, 'very lucky indeed. I might not act with such restraint another time.' And with that he was gone, leaving her standing there, staring at the

closed door, her emotions chaotic. For she was infuriated by the almost incredible knowledge that the tumult within her stemmed not from hatred against her husband, but from the sensation produced by the soothing touch of his hands upon her shoulder.

## CHAPTER FIVE

ONCE again Sara paced her room, rather in the manner of a caged tiger. Her husband was with Adele, dining at her home - enjoying himself! And here she was, left to her own devices, with no one to talk to except Martha and George.

T wish I hadn't married him!' Sara cried inwardly - but no, she could not have acted otherwise. With her father's life at stake any thought of herself would automatically have been pushed into the background.

She crossed to the window and stared out at the view, the peaceful scene of wooded hillsides, of the riverside where horses grazed, of the Sanctuary where, during those five weeks of the Games, all feuds had been forgotten.

Her gaze became fixed and rather dreamy; all anger left her as, lost in reverie, she remembered that day, just over a week ago, when Ralph had so forcefully insisted on dressing her shoulder. Despite her threat to keep away from him, she did not do so, and later they had taken tea in the garden, sparring with their tongues, but not seriously. Dinner followed later still, and Ralph's manner had been reminiscent of the evening of their wedding day and once again Sara gained the impression that he meant in some small way to compensate her for what she had missed. After dinner they went out for a walk, and Sara remembered that all tumult within her had died as they entered through one of the gates leading to the sacred precincts, following the way of the pilgrims of old, those pagans who came to offer homage to Hera the great patron of the Sanctuary. Ralph told her about the various buildings, explaining the purpose for which they were built. The Prytaneum, where were accommodated the guests of honour, and scene of the final great banquet when the victors in the Games received their awards, the Philippeion, or treasury, and the gymnasium. This, her husband explained, once had many covered galleries where the contestants practised their skills for weeks before the great event, but these galleries had long since been swept away by the relentless waters of the Kladeos when, after torrential rains, it would burst its banks. They walked among the ruins of the Temple of Hera, built almost three thousands years ago, and then they entered the archway leading to the stadium, where most of the contests were held.

They had dined early, so there was an hour of sunshine left when they reached the Sanctuary; but the sun was gradually lowering and the columns, built of a highly fossiliferous limestone, took on a rich golden hue, adding to the sense of tranquillity and peace pervading the whole of the area round the site. The air was balmy, yet fresh, and subtly perfumed from the firs and pines clustered about the holy grove of Altis. Wild flowers too gave up their scent from the sylvan glades where the murmuring tones of insects was all that stirred the vast silence. Now and then a bird rose in noiseless flight towards the tree-clad slopes of Kronion, rising above the ruins.

'The world's most famous scene of fraternity and goodwill,' Ralph commented, not without a hint of mockery. 'Does it imbue you with peace, Sara, or are you too tough for all this to take effect?'

For once no scathing retort rose to Sara's lips, for she was deeply affected by her surroundings, by the serene and tranquil setting which must surely be the most peaceful in all Greece. For a moment she thought of her life in Yorkshire, thought of the pleasures and the gay young throng, the parties which continued throughout the night. She missed all these terribly ... and yet. ... The sun was sinking rapidly now and in the golden dusk her husband's face had taken on a softness that began to have a profoundly disturbing effect upon her. They were standing amid the ruins of the Temple of Zeus, and the last rays of sunlight arrowed the broken columns as they pierced the cypresses which towered above the site. From the far distance came the silvery notes of a shepherd's pipe, and a smile quivered on Sara's lips. For the sound brought with it visions of Arcadia, with nymphs and shepherds dancing to the lilting notes of the pipes of Pan.

'Well, Sara, can't you find an answer to my question? Has this peace touched you? Or if it has, are you too proud and arrogant to own to such weakness?'

She frowned at this - and felt a strange pain somewhere near her heart. What had hurt her? Not anything Ralph had said, for nothing he could say would ever wound her.

'It is peaceful,' she admitted, and instantly raised her eyes to his. For it was as if a tiny sigh had left his lips, a sigh of satisfaction and ... triumph? What an odd impression, thought Sara, for in his eyes there dwelt only the hint of

mockery which she knew would be present, matching the mocking accents in his voice.

Darkness fell swiftly while they were still there, wandering among the temple ruins, and the soft harmonious landscape became silver-tinged as the moon rose in a purple sky. Stars also appeared, sending out their quivering points of light to give an added enchantment to the magic scene.

In silence they had strolled back to the house; it was the first time antagonism had been completely absent from their relationship.

'The sacred truce must have affected us, too,' Ralph had laughed as they reached the house. 'We haven't thrown a single brick at one another for over an hour and a half.'

An hour and a half. ... That appeared to be their limit, for long before the evening ended another slanging match had taken place between them. And ever since then Ralph had treated her with the old indifference, once again not appearing to care whether or not she were still living in his house. If he stayed in he spoke only when necessary, or to bid her good night. More often than not he was out, with Adele. Sometimes Adele would come to the house; always her manner towards Sara was cool, and if ever the two girls happened to be alone Adele's manner then became condescending and even, on occasions, deliberately rude. Sara had up till now made no move to retaliate, but her patience was fast becoming exhausted. There would be trouble between them before very long, Sara mused, deliberating for a space on whose side her husband would take.

No doubt about that; he was deeply in love with Adele...

A frown of puzzlement touched her forehead as she thought of that. If Ralph were in love with Adele why hadn't he married her before now? 'He's not the marrying sort,' Alex had once told her, but added, 'He likes his women, though.' Obviously he did, and perhaps as Alex had said, he was not the marrying sort - not until he was forced by circumstances to change his mind.

Turning from the window, Sara glanced at the dress lying on the bed. Her prettiest dress— Why should she have taken that from the wardrobe? It

wasn't as if she wanted Ralph to notice her, or anything like that. In fact, she would be dismayed if he noticed her, for this way she was safe. It would be hateful to have him interested in her; why, even a kiss would sicken her. ... With an involuntary movement of her hand she touched the shoulder which Ralph had dressed, and which was completely healed now. Her gaze came to rest again on the dress - the one she knew matched her eyes and contrasted so attractively with the peach and ivory tints of her skin. ... Biting her lip as if determined to crush the truth before it even began to dawn, Sara snatched up the dress and returned it to its hanger.

She had thought Ralph was staying in. All the afternoon he had been in the garden, taking life easy as he lay in the sun, clad only in shorts and a pair of old sandals. Sara had sat there, reading, and feeling oddly content and secure. Until after tea there had been no indication that h\* would go out. He had gone to his room, presumably to change, and Sara had followed, taking a bath first, and then beginning to dress. Then she had heard him go downstairs and a couple of minutes later the car was moving out of the courtyard. Not a word about where he was going, but Sara knew. Not a care as to how she would pass the long evening; he probably hadn't even spared a thought as to how it felt to sit there, eating food that made her choke. ... Made her choke with temper, though, she was honest enough to admit! Why did he have to choose that particular form of revenge? Had he left her alone she would have been married, happily married to Rod, who would have by now been fully trained to eat out of her hand— Happily married to Rod....

Dismissing that with rather more haste than she could account for, Sara allowed her thoughts to return to the pleasant hours she had spent earlier in the afternoon. She and Ralph had scarcely spoken at all, and yet she had been acutely aware of his presence, had felt far different from those times when she had sat out there alone. And she *had* been looking forward to an evening with him, no use to deny that. Only because his company was better than none, she began to impress upon herself, and then stopped.

Unwilling to dwell any longer on that either, she took out a pair of slacks and a shirt blouse. No sense in staying here and dining alone; she would walk while it was light, go to the Sanctuary, and perhaps stroll along the river. Yes, that should pass the time more pleasantly than sitting here, brooding and, she had to admit, feeling thoroughly sorry for herself.

There were more people about this evening, she noticed as she made her way through the gate and into the sacred grove. Odd, she thought, how one feels more lonely than ever when there are people about; she wished they would all go away and let her have the place to herself. After strolling about, feeling everyone was looking at her, Sara sat down on a broken column and became lost in thought again. Why had Ralph brought her here the other evening? It had all been so pleasant, and looking back now it would almost seem that he were allowing her to taste pleasure, allowing her a very small dose, and then leaving her to thirst for more. For after that evening he had immediately resorted to his former coolness and indifference. And then today, just a week later, he had again stayed with her, lifting her out of her boredom - then he had gone out without a word, knowing she would drop right back into a state of boredom again. Shaking her head impatiently at these musings, Sara chided herself for her stupidity. The whole idea was ridiculous. Ralph had stayed in on both occasions simply because it suited him to do so. As for his being interested enough to endeavour to relieve her boredom, that idea too was stupid. Hadn't he made it apparent right from the start that he had no interest in her whatsoever?

I wish I hadn't married him!' she said again, and again knew very well that she could not have acted differently. Unconsciously she put her hands to her face, pressing her fingers against her eyelids, for they pricked with tears and her lips trembled. Cry? No man would ever make her cry! Hadn't she sworn that long ago? But a tiny sob escaped her, and at the same time she became conscious of a woman standing close and beginning to talk in a language that Sara could not understand.

'I'm all right,' she said, surmising that the woman was concerned about her. 'I'm quite well, thank you.'

The woman shook her head, looking anxiously around.

*'Mal... mal...?'* she said awkwardly.

'I'm well, thank you,' Sara repeated, unable to comprehend, but the woman began looking about her again. A young couple were strolling up and she beckoned to them.

'Mal,' she said, pointing to Sara. 'Mal.'

'Are you ill?' asked the girl anxiously. 'Is there anything we can do?'

'Thank you very much,' Sara returned graciously. 'But I'm quite well; I couldn't make the woman understand.'

The girl said something to the woman and she smiled, nodding as she went on her way, reassured. Sara stood up and would have moved away, but a young man strode up and, joining the couple, asked what was wrong.

'We thought this young lady was ill,' the girl informed him, smiling affectionately. 'But she's all right. Did you find what you were looking for, the aqueduct or whatever it was?'

He nodded absently, his eyes fixed admiringly on Sara.

'Are you sure you're not ill, or anything?' he said, adding that she did look rather pale.

'I just had a slight headache,' Sara lied, thinking that would explain why she had been sitting down on that column, for she felt sure he would want to know more about why the couple had stopped.

'The heat, perhaps. It's been a scorcher today. On holiday?'

'No, I live here.'

'Here, in Olympia? You're another lucky one. My sister lives here.'

Sara looked with interest at the girl, and at the man with her. He was Greek, dark and good-looking, with black hair and rather bushy black brows. He seemed a good deal older than the girl, but Sara judged him to be her husband.

'Do you live in the village?' she asked politely.

'Yes.' The girl nodded and smiled. 'Where do you live?'

'Half-way up the hill - that hill.' Sara indicated the hillside, lush and green, on which her husband's house was built. 'Are you on holiday?' she inquired of the young man, feeling she should show interest, too.

'I am, yes. I usually visit my sister and brother-in-law about twice a year.' He was stocky, but extraordinarily good-looking, and he seemed at the moment quite unable to take his eyes off Sara. 'Are you on your own? I mean, you looked sort of lonely when I came up.'

'I'm alone at present, yes.' She smiled at him and waited, feeling a little breathless.

'Have you been walking around all by yourself?' He seemed to have forgotten the couple he was with and, glancing at the girl, Sara saw her lips curve in amusement. Was her brother a flirt? wondered Sara, her glance returning to the smiling young man.

'It was a lovely evening and I just came out for a walk.' She paused and then, with a rather coquettish fluttering of her lashes, 'It isn't much fun on your own, though. I think I'll go back home.'

'Oh, don't do that,' he put in quickly. 'Not unless you want to, of course. Come along with us if you're lonely. It's all right with you two, I reckon?'

'Quite,' responded his sister drily, and Sara felt the faint colour rise in her cheeks. She hoped they didn't take *her* for a flirt!

'Will you come with us?' the young man asked. 'Do say yes. My sister and her husband are lovers after three whole years of marriage and I always feel horribly in the way.'

'Don't take a bit of notice of him,' his sister warned, laughing. 'That's just his form of approach, at the moment. He has several, as you probably have guessed.'

At last the older man spoke, his voice deep and rich, and much more serious than either that of his wife or her brother.

'If you wish to join us, we shall be delighted to have your company. We moved to Olympia only six months ago and we do not yet know many people. We are pleased to make your acquaintance.'

'Thank you,' Sara returned graciously. 'I would like to join you.'

'Good.' The young man placed himself instantly at her side as they all began to move on. Sara thrust her left hand into her pocket. A little diversion would be welcome. And it wasn't as if she were harming anyone. Her husband would not care if she had half a dozen boy-friends.

The following day Sara met Duncan and they went by car to Tripolis, starting out early for the round trip was over a hundred and sixty miles. It was an idyllic morning of brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies. Duncan had seen her home the previous evening and the arrangements for the outing had been made before, reluctantly, he left her, having promised his sister and brother-in-law that he would be back in time for dinner.

'You won't let me down?' he had said on parting. 'You really mean to come?'

'I really mean to come,' she had promised, and now, sitting beside him in his brother-in-law's car, Sara made up her mind to live for the day. Here was a heaven-sent opportunity to throw off her boredom for a while; and she had no qualms about discarding her wedding ring, for it had no real meaning anyway, not under the circumstances.

Leaving Olympia, they followed the road along the base of Mount Kronion, travelling through lovely groves and peaceful countryside. Then the climb began, through superb scenery, going higher and higher, with down below the River Ladon meandering through a sandy plain. The road became steeper, entering the heart of the Arcadian mountains, with the scenery becoming wilder and more barren. Several times they stopped to admire the view and at Langadia they parked the car and found a little roadside cafe. The tables were on the pavement and they lingered there, drinking orange juice and talking.

This is certainly a quaint town,' Duncan remarked as they took a stroll after leaving the cafe. It was frightening, Sara thought, for the buildings literally overhung a drop of hundreds of feet. But there were strong railings all along. Adele lives here, Sara mused, then instantly thrust the girl from her mind. She was out to enjoy herself, for the first time in three months, and neither her husband nor his girlfriend would be allowed to intrude into her thoughts.

'Is there anything you want to buy?' Duncan asked as they stopped to look into the windows of the tourist shops. There were the usual hand-woven cushion covers and rugs, and the familiar pottery and hand-made silverware to be found in almost every tourist shop in Greece.

'No, I don't think so,' she smiled. 'But what about you? Aren't you taking home some souvenirs?'

'Perhaps I will. You can help me? I want something for my mother, and an old aunt ... and then there's my grandmother.'

He might be a flirt, but he's nice, Sara decided, and willingly helped him make a choice, not forgetting to warn him that the prices on the tags were far higher than he need pay. Greek shopkeepers were all optimistic, but there were never any hard feelings when a would-be purchaser indulged in a little bargaining.

'They're terribly poor, though, so don't knock too much off,' she said, handing him the embroidered bag she had chosen.

They then continued their journey, passing through scenery of superb beauty, with regions of fir forests alternating with barren landscapes, but all the time the scenery became gentler. Quite often the sun was overpowering, for they went for miles and miles without any shade at all. At last they were on a straight road, vastly different from the tortuous mountain ways, and they reached Tripolis in time for lunch.

Sara would have liked to go on to Sparta, but the drive through the mountains had been tiring, and there was the return journey as well. 'I must be getting soft,' Sara said to herself, smiling faintly at the idea. Not so very long ago she wouldn't have cared a toss if her escort had been tired. If she

had wanted to go on then her request would have been made, and obeyed without argument. No doubt about it, Rod was manageable, and Alex had been easy to handle, too, she reflected. But with Alex there was something hidden. He wasn't a Lingard for nothing; and he had probably had it in his mind all along that, once he had her safely married, he would then show her who was master. A good thing, she told herself again, that she had discovered his true nature, and his intentions, in time. She had always declared that no man would ever master her - and she had meant it.

After taking lunch in a charming cafe in one of the squares, they wandered round the town, window-gazing and buying one or two presents for their relatives.

'Who are yours for?' Duncan asked curiously, but Sara cleverly changed the subject. She must not allow the subject of her family and her life to intrude into the conversation. Far too dangerous.

They liked the town and stayed for a while before setting off for the journey back through the mountains to Olympia. Reaching Langadia again, Duncan suggested they stop and have dinner somewhere.

'Might as well make a day of it,' he said. 'It'll be late when we get back, but that won't matter - at least, not to me. How are you fixed?'

'I can go in at whatever time I like,' she answered, a rather bitter smile touching her mouth. No one to care - or even miss her - if she never came home till the morning.

They stopped again, to drink *ouzo* in another roadside cafe.

'You should take the *meze*.' Duncan warned, on ordering the second drink. This stuff's a killer without it.'

'I'm not hungry.' While always knowing when to stop, Sara had followed the pattern of her friends and she felt that a couple or so drinks like this could not possibly affect her.

It was almost midnight when they reached Olympia. In the morning they had met at a prearranged place, but on entering the village Duncan asked the way to Sara's home.

'You can drop me here somewhere,' she said, and sensed his puzzlement.

'At this time? No, I must drop you at your door. What's wrong, doesn't your mother approve of your going out with strange men?' A bantering tone, yet Sara was not deaf to the purpose of his inquiry.

'I don't live with my parents, Duncan,' she informed him quietly, and then, 'You can take me home. I'll show you the way as we go along.'

The directions she gave were the only words spoken for a while, and then Duncan asked,

'Whom do you live with, then, Sara? Some other relation?'

'Yes, some other relation,' she replied with a grim smile. One would hardly call Ralph a relation!

'Whom?' he persisted, and without further prevarication she told him.

'Your husband? You're married? You can't be!'

'Yes, I'm married, Duncan. I suppose I should have told you—'

'You're not wearing a ring.' He shook his head in bewilderment. 'You can't have been married long. How old are you, for heaven's sake?'

'Almost twenty.'

'How long have you been married?'

Sara did not answer for a moment, as she indicated the road they had to take.

'Three months.'

'Three months? - and you've come out with me today? But this is crazy - three months! Isn't your husband going to say anything about this?' No answer, and Duncan added, 'Does he work away or something?'

'Go slowly, Duncan, we've almost reached the house - here, turn into this courtyard.'

But he pulled into the side of the road, stopped, and switched on the interior light.

'Does your husband work away?' he repeated, looking downcast, and yet at the same time a little censorious.

'He doesn't work away,' she submitted quietly. 'But he doesn't mind in the least if I have a man-friend. Don't look so shocked. We're very modern, my husband and I, very broadminded. He has his friends and I have mine. He wouldn't even mind if you came to the house, to dinner. In fact, you can if you like, any time.' That seemed to deprive him of words and silence fell between them as they each became absorbed in their own thoughts.

The moon shed its radiance over the valley, and for a brief space Sara was silent, lost in calm meditation. For as she looked down at the ruined temples, and then up to the gentle placid mountains, she became once more enveloped in peace. Strange, the effect this shrine and this landscape had on her. Did it affect everyone in this way? The Greeks had been most clever in their choice of site for those peaceful combats, she mused again. So different from the savage setting of Apollo at Delphi, Ralph had said. But that site had come under the influence of Apollo, most arrogant and merciless of all Greek male deities, whereas this site was essentially feminine in influence, coming under the patronage of Hera, wife of the great king Zeus. So the Greeks had chosen this gentle setting, this soft and tranquil grove. ... It demonstrated their opinion of womanhood, their idea of what it should be. This location, then, was a compliment to woman. Unaccountably Sara felt a tiny lump rise in her throat as she recalled her feelings on visiting the shrine with Ralph. She recalled too, his question, spoken with undisguised mockery. 'Has this place touched you? Or, if it has, are you too proud and arrogant to own to such weakness?' Lastly, Sara remembered the feeling of pain, as if something sharp had entered her heart.

Why had he taken her there? Was it so that she would be touched? - so that she should learn her woman's place? Had he meant her to be so affected by the atmosphere that she would put aside her own hardness of character, realizing just how conflicting her nature was with that of what true womanhood should be? Impatiently she shook off her reflections. These flights of fancy were becoming a habit. Any such design of Ralph's would have to stem from interest ... and Ralph had gone to considerable lengths to impress upon her his complete lack of interest, not only in her as a woman and a wife, but also in her movements and the way in which she conducted herself and her affairs.

'I must admit,' Duncan said, bringing an end to her reflections, 'that I thought there was something funny about you. We've been out the whole of the day, happy, I know, in each other's company, and yet you haven't told me a thing about yourself.'

'Neither have you,' she countered.

'You know about my relatives - you've guessed I live with my mother. What made you take off your wedding ring?' he asked after a slight hesitation.

'I didn't think you would take me if you knew I was married.'

'You're certainly right there,' he exclaimed hotly. 'I might be a bit of a rake, as they say, but I've always fought shy of married women!'

'We've had a wonderful day, though,' she reminded him, quite unperturbed by his indignation. 'If I hadn't left my ring behind we'd both have missed all that.'

Duncan shook his head in bewilderment and again seemed lost for words.

'But is this the truth?' he said at length. 'Your husband doesn't mind your going about with other men? What sort of a man is he?'

'I don't go about with other men,' she corrected, not without some heat. 'This is the first time, and I did it because I was bored.'

'Bored, after three months of marriage!' He eyed her suspiciously. 'Sara, I've an idea you're pulling my leg.'

'No such thing, but it's difficult for me to explain. After all, you are a stranger, and I shall probably never see you again—'

'I must see you again, Sara, in spite of all this. I was bored too - always am until I get myself a girl, for I spoke the truth when I said Hayley and Manolis are madly in love, and I do feel in the way when I'm out with them on my own. I thought we could make a foursome - no, Sara, don't say you're not going to see me again.' He waited and as she remained silent he added, 'If, as you state, your husband doesn't mind—! Oh, lord, Sara, I just can't believe it! You're so beautiful, and so sweet. I'd be mad with jealousy if you were my wife - I wouldn't stand for it! What sort of a man is this you're married to? He mustn't have much about him—' He reddened, and instantly became apologetic. 'I shouldn't have said that, for obviously you must have some feeling for him.'

'Meaning I'm not in love with him?' she queried, amused.

'You can't be, otherwise you'd never have come out with me.' He turned to her and his arm slid along the back of her seat. 'There's some mystery, isn't there?' he said, an anxious look appearing on his face. 'Did you find you'd made a mistake? Are you very unhappy?'

'I said it was difficult to explain, Duncan.' Sara spoke in tones of finality. 'I can't talk about it, the matter must be dropped. I meant what I said about your coming to dinner, and I'm quite willing to go about with you while you're here, but if you dislike the idea then we can say goodbye now.'

'No, I can't. You know I can't,' he added on a plaintive note.

A smile came to Sara's lips. Men did seem to follow the same pattern, she mused. All indignation if you deceived them, all self-righteous, and the pained expression right there on tap. Yet men were greater deceivers than women would ever know how to be. Duncan, she knew, would have her believe he was half in love with her, and that the fact of her marriage was a blow to him. Should she tell him she had read him? - that she knew he was a

flirt and when this holiday was over he would promptly forget her, as he had almost certainly forgotten a dozen or so others before her? No, there was nothing to be gained by that, and he was nice, basically, would make someone a tolerably good husband - though he would probably begin to indulge in his affairs after a time, while his wife slaved at home with the children and the hundred boring jobs about the house. When would women learn? she wondered.

'I'm an awful cynic,' she murmured, and then gave a startled little laugh as she realized she had spoken her thoughts aloud. 'Well, Duncan, what is your verdict?'

'You're so cool; you take my breath away.'

'My husband says I'm cool,' she laughed. 'Well?'

'We'll go out for these three weeks,' he decided. 'But I'm going to accept your invitation, for I'm very curious to have a look at this peculiar husband of yours.'

After arranging to meet the following morning at nine-thirty, he dropped his arm on to her shoulder and then drew her close. His head bent towards hers, and then he drew away again.

'You know, Sara, even though you're thoroughly brazen in coming out with me, I'm half afraid to kiss you. Will you slap my face, I wonder?'

Her fingers were on the handle of the door; she flicked it towards her and the next moment she was out of the car.

'You'll have to wait until tomorrow to find out,' she laughed and, closing the door, she turned and ran swiftly into the courtyard, aware of a strange lightness in her head, and a sort of dull throbbing.

Ralph was in the sitting-room and he did not even glance up as Sara entered, rather flushed and breathless. The way he ignored her brought her anger to the fore at once and she said pertly,

'I've been out.' She sat down on a chair facing the couch. Ralph did not appear to have noticed either her entry or her words. 'I've been out!' she repeated, far too loudly.

'I heard you the first time.'

'Don't you want to know where I've been?'

'I don't think so; I'm not particularly interested.' He turned a page of the newspaper and then began to fold it, slowly and with infuriating care.

'I've taken you at your word and found myself a boyfriend!'

'That should make life more pleasant for you.' After perusing the paper for a few moments he put it down.

'Are you unwell?' he asked, examining her flushed face critically.

Her eyes blazed; she choked with fury ... and frustration. Why frustration? A heavy frown settled on her brow as she asked herself that question. It wasn't as if she cared that he had no interest in her doings. She preferred it that way— Hadn't she told herself so, many times?

'No, I'm all right. I'm going out with him again tomorrow. We're - we're going off for the whole day.'

'Fine,' he applauded. 'The change will do you good.' He put up a hand to his mouth, stifling a yawn. 'I'm for bed,' he smiled, rising. 'Good night, Sara, sleep well. Er - shall I ask Martha to give you a knock in the morning - or will you be up?' As her only reaction was to cast him a glance of savage fury, he turned on his heel and left the room. Sara ran after him.

'I've asked him to the house, as you told me to—' She put out a hand to the banister rail, steadying herself, for her legs were suddenly rather weak. It must be the *ouzo*, she concluded in surprise. 'He's coming to dinner, tomorrow.'

'Good. I might bring Adele - no, wait a minute - we've made other arrangements. Never mind, ask him another evening, but give me a little more warning.' He was half way up the stairs when she shouted,

'Don't you care that I've got someone else?' Why say that? It must be the *OUZO* again.

'Care?' Turning, he stood looking down at her in amazement. 'Why should I care? You don't mean anything to me. What an odd thing to say, Sara. I thought we understood one another - and our positions. No, most certainly I don't care. You go your way and I shall go mine. I was perfectly content with my life before you came into it and I've no intention of making any changes now.'

'We're married!' She felt as if the top of her head were coming off and everything was beginning to spin. 'We're married!' She stamped her foot. 'Do you hear?' The *ouzo* certainly did not agree with her. She must be one of those people on whom it had a depressing effect, for to her utter consternation she knew she was on the verge of tears. But even as dismay flooded over her at the idea of allowing him to see her cry, she became aware of his sudden interest, of his intense scrutiny, of his waiting, almost expectantly, for something to happen. Sara blinked rapidly. Never would she let him see her weep. He had once told her he would like to make her cry. Well, he never would, never! He still waited, and Sara knew instinctively he had been waiting for her tears, waiting to gloat and sneer, to laugh in her face at his victory. How very disappointing for him; a sneer curved her own lips at the thought of his disappointment.

'Married, yes,' he said quietly at last. 'Married owing to necessity. But our marriage means nothing to either of us. I have Adele,' he went on deliberately. 'And as I've already said, she's a better woman than you will ever be.'

The impression she had just dismissed returned. For once again Ralph appeared to be waiting, this time to see what effect his heartless words would have upon her.

'I hate you,' she said, so softly that it was only a whisper. 'I shall always hate you.' She wobbled slightly, and seized the banister rail again.

His dark eyes kindled, sweeping her a look of intense disgust. Then he saw her left hand, resting on the banister rail.

'Where's your wedding ring?' he demanded.

'I took it off - it doesn't mean anything, does it?' A strange silence and then Sara repeated her question, her heart fluttering in the most odd sort of way as she watched his expression.

'No,' her husband agreed at last. 'No, Sara, you're quite right, it doesn't mean a thing.'

The next moment Sara was standing there alone, tears on her lashes, listening to the click of the latch as he closed his bedroom door behind him.

## CHAPTER SIX

ON opening her eyes the following morning Sara promptly closed them again.

'Oh, my head I' A weight seemed to be pressing down on her; she turned her face into the pillow, releasing the pressure on the back of her head, and as this brought no relief she sat up, and placed a soothing hand on her temple. *Ouzo* ... she had heard the expression before that it was a killer, but who would have thought two small drinks would do this to her?

The time? Half-past eight. She couldn't go, that was all there was to it. But how was she to get a message to Duncan?

She managed to reach the bathroom and began to bathe her head in cold water. Not much improvement, but a little. Yes, she did feel slightly better.

It was just after nine when she appeared in the dining- room. Ralph had finished his breakfast but was still sitting at the table, reading a letter. He glanced up, bade her a coolly polite 'good morning' and then returned to his letter. But as her appearance registered he glanced up again, eyeing her searchingly.

'Thick head?' he asked, in tones that clearly implied that however she felt, it served her right.

'I drank some *ouzo*.' She sat down, but made no effort to touch the grapefruit set before her.

'How many did you have?'

'Only two.'

'Two?' Sceptically, as he picked up the coffee pot and began to refill his cup. 'Do you think I was born yesterday?'

Sara glared at him.

'It would have suited me,' she flashed, 'if you'd never been born at all!'

'Don't be childish. How many did you have?'

'Two, I said! I didn't take the *meze* with them.'

'You—? Have you no more sense than to take that deadly stuff without eating at the same time? What was this young gallant of yours doing to let you?'

White-hot anger burned at his disparaging reference to Duncan, and also at his helping himself to coffee and ignoring the fact that her own cup required filling. He would have been much more attentive were it Adele who sat here opposite to him.

'He advised me to take the *meze*. Do you mind passing the coffee?'

'Certainly. My word, drink does have an effect on you! I think you'd better keep off it in future. Your temper's quite bad enough without it.' He passed her the coffee pot and watched her as she half filled her cup. 'Did I hear you say you were going out today?'

'You know very well you heard me say I was going out!'

'Be careful,' he advised, his dark eyes kindling even more warmly than hers. 'I told you about using that tone of voice to me. And I once warned you that I'd make you smart. The fact that you're now my wife doesn't give you any guarantee of safety, just the opposite, in fact.' His words had no effect - at least, they didn't have the desired effect. They did, however, bring her fury to the point where she could almost have subjected him to a physical onslaught. 'I expect you've changed your mind about going out,' he said as she remained silent. 'My advice to you is to go back to bed for an hour or two.'

'Thank you for the advice, but I'm going out.' She *had* changed her mind, but his words and his manner provoked her to act completely contrary to what he advised. 'I please myself what I do!'

'If I decided you were to stay in,' he said quietly, 'then you would stay in.'

'But you're not interested either way, are you?' A challenge, and again he turned the tables on her.

'I said you could go your own way if you were discreet,' came the soft reminder. 'Having too much to drink is scarcely acting with discretion.'

'I didn't have too much to drink!'

'Do you not remember what you said to me last night?' he inquired, eyeing her curiously. 'Try to think.'

She reddened and lowered her eyes. She had hoped he had forgotten. Reminding him that they were married; asking if he didn't care about her boy-friend. Why had she said those things? she asked herself, humiliation flooding over her as she raised her head and saw the mockery and contempt in his eyes. If only she had not touched that *ouzo!* Never would she do so again, not if it made her say things like that which she didn't mean, things that must have given her husband the mistaken idea that she wanted to make him jealous. Jealous? That was the very last thing she desired ...!

'I only had two,' she reminded him again, accepting the sugar he handed over to her.

'That was obviously more than enough,' he observed, helping himself to sugar before returning the basin to its little silver tray .on which it had stood, along with the matching cream jug. 'I'll have no wife of mine coming home in that state, so mark my words, just you take care in future.' 'Although both his phrasing and his arrogant inflection brought a crimson stain of anger to increase her already heightened colour, Sara's thoughts were concerned with something else altogether. That cool disinterest which he always adopted towards her ... where was it now? Apparent on the surface, true, but for some odd reason he looked to be seething underneath. Could it be that he did care what she did? But why should he? She had just about as much value in his life as Martha - less, probably, for Martha did at least give some service for her keep.

Returning her attention to what he had just said, Sara told him, haughtily, that she would come home in any state she liked, adding,

'You told me to go my own way, and that's exactly what I shall do!'

'I said only if you were discreet,' he told her again, and there was an unmistakable menace in his voice as he turned his piercing gaze upon her. 'I won't allow you to defy me, Sara—'

'Allow? Don't you dare use such a word to me,' she snapped. 'I'll have no man speaking to me like that! I think you know me well enough to be sure I'll tolerate no form of dictatorship from any man, husband or otherwise.'

The sudden compression of his lips warned her what to expect, and although she was ready for him, she was beginning to feel unequal to further conflict by the sudden throbbing in her temples which was starting all over again. Unconsciously she put a hand to her head, and her brow clouded as she thought of the time, and of Duncan waiting there outside the museum. Whatever her husband had been about to say was forgotten as he watched her little gesture, which savoured of dejection, and instead he advised her once again to remain at home and go back to bed for an hour or two. Stubborn and rebellious, in spite of her pain and the knowledge that it would be far more prudent to take his advice, Sara once again firmly stated that she was going out.

'All right, you've asked for it,' he returned inflexibly. 'You'll stay in today because I say you shall.'

She blinked, then stared at him, her whole body trembling with rage. He held her gaze for a long moment and then to her chagrin Sara was forced to lower her eyes.

Nevertheless she was by no means beaten and she said defiantly,

'I think not. I've made a date and I mean to keep it.'

'We shall see.' Ralph picked up his letter and glanced at it again.

'How do you propose to keep me in?' she inquired, tossing her head and then wincing with pain.

His eyes flickered up, to regard her quizzically before he said,

'By locking up your clothes— Not very original, I've done it before. But it is effective, and so very simple. I believe on another occasion I remarked about my preference for simplicity.'

'On that occasion you took me unawares.'

'And now you're forewarned? How will that help you?'

Frankly she did not know, but never would she admit it.

'Do you really believe you can keep me in ?'

'Go back to bed,' he recommended, 'before I lose my temper.'

The room was spinning and again Sara put a hand to her head. What a dreadful feeling - and on two small drinks! By now she had no intention of going out, but how was she to convince Ralph that she stayed in to please herself, and not because he had made her do so? The militant light still flashed in her eyes, and he rose from his chair threateningly. 'How you do persist in trying my patience! From the very first encounter you've been forced to do my bidding. What makes you think you can resist me now? I've said you're staying in, and that is what you shall do. Now, go back to bed before I decide to take you up there myself.'

'You'd have a difficult task!'

'No doubt,' he admitted, smiling grimly, and then, 'Do you genuinely believe your strength is a match for mine?'

No answer to this, for Sara felt almost too ill to speak. And she no longer cared that he should believe he had mastered her, for all she wanted was the bed beneath her and a sedative to take away the pain.

'I'll go up,' she murmured weakly, and left the table.

Once in bed, she looked up at Ralph, who had brought her the drug, and the glass of water.

'Will you send a message to Duncan?' she asked. 'He's waiting outside the museum.'

'I'll send George. Now try to sleep this off - and watch yourself next time.'

Strangely she took no exception to his tone, as she continued to look up at him. He was handsome, she thought, in spite of the inherent harshness of his features and the lawlessness in his eyes. A softness came to her and her voice was rather childish as she said,

'You must be - a little bit interested in me, in spite of what you say.'

'Must I? Why?' His tones were cool and crisp, but Sara spoke in the same soft and childish voice.

'You must be interested to - to—' Good lord, she almost said 'make!' '—to want me to stay in, and you thought I'd be more comfortable in bed.'

'So because of that you've reached the conclusion that I have an interest in you?' His black brows were raised; Sara knew, before he continued, that she had made a terrible and humiliating mistake. 'Sorry to disappoint you - that's if you are disappointed, of course - but I'm afraid I have no more interest in you than on the day I married you. No, Sara, I made you stay in merely to assert my authority, not for any other reason whatsoever. You ask for it all the time, for your attitude is arrogant and challenging. I'd be as spineless as your former fiance were I to allow you to override me. If you persist with these challenges, then you must expect to be taken up on them.' He shook his head, and a hint of contempt touched the corners of his mouth. 'I don't care in the least what you do, so long as you respect my authority. This you have not yet learnt to do, despite repeated lessons. Needless to say, your life will be far more pleasant once the last lesson has been learned/

Sara closed her eyes; she wanted desperately to hit back, but she lacked the strength. All she said was,

'Will you ask George to tell Duncan to come to dinner this evening? I don't feel like dining alone.'

'I'll see he gets the message,' her husband returned calmly and, going over to the window, he drew the curtains together, shutting out the sun's bright glare which had been falling on the bed. Then, silently, he left the room.

It was a blistering day, with the sun high in a cloudless sky and a temperature of a hundred and two. Ralph was lying in a deck chair, under the shade of the vines; Sara was also in a deck chair, a knitting bag lying by her side. George brought them out fruit drinks and Sara was sipping hers, listening to the chirp of the cicadas and the soft humming of the bees, busy in the borders and bushes all around.

She had just told Ralph of her intention of inviting her new friends to dinner the following evening, and he sat up, removing his sun glasses and looking at her in surprise.

'Three of them, you say?'

'Duncan and his sister and her husband. Hayley lives here, with Manolis. He's Greek and they've only recently come to live in Olympia. Duncan's on holiday, for three weeks, and we've all been going around together.'

His eyes widened.

'You've all been together? I thought it was only this young man you were with. You didn't mention the others.'

A wan smile hovered on her lips. Rarely did she have a chance to talk to him, for he was either busy in the tiny room he called his study, or he was out.

'They're very nice people,' she said, and, with a wistfulness wholly out of character. 'You'd like them, Ralph, if you - if you happened to be staying in tomorrow evening?'

He shook his head, and with a tiny sigh Sara reached for her knitting bag.

'What explanation have you given for this odd relationship of ours?' he wanted to know, his gaze fixed curiously upon her. 'They must wonder that I allow you to run around with someone else.'

'Must you use that word?' she asked, piqued, but to her surprise, not angry. 'After all, it doesn't really apply. You don't allow me to do anything. I do as I please.'

'Only by virtue of my leniency,' he said in some amusement. 'The sooner you accept the position as it really is, the sooner - the sooner you will begin to feel more content.' Why the hesitation? Sara wondered. What had he been about to say before pulling himself up in time? She could not question him, for obviously he would not enlighten her; in any case, he was already speaking again. 'You'll be wise to face up to the fact that should I decide I don't like the idea of your running around with someone else then - and I'm quite serious about this - then you definitely won't run around with someone else— You can shake your head as much as you like,' he added, 'but you know, deep down, that I shall be the one to have my own way, not you.'

Anger rising, in spite of an odd determination to remain calm, to allow no dissent to spoil this pleasant hour, Sara murmured quiveringly,

'If my father could hear you, a Lingard, speaking to me like this he would insist on my leaving you.'

From somewhere in the distance came the echo of children's laughter. They were playing on the hillside, gathering wild flowers, probably. As if the sound reminded her of something, Sara opened the bag, took out the garment she was knitting, and began to count the rows.

'That feud? Don't you think it's time it was forgotten?'

Ralph said. 'I do.'

It's a pity you didn't have that idea three months ago,' she retorted. 'We'd both have been far better off.'

'I agree; but there's nothing to be done about it now, so we'll just have to make the best of it.'

On that she made no comment, merely continuing to count the rows, holding aloft the garment as she did so.

'You won't be in, then, tomorrow evening?' she queried at last, not at all conscious of the hint of disappointment in her voice.

'I've made other arrangements.' Finality in that, she knew; nevertheless, he appeared to be watching her closely, examining her face ... searching for something. Was it her reaction to his words? Sara's head shook slightly. Always she had the impression that her husband was looking for something - but what? Would she ever know? Beginning to knit, she instantly became aware of Ralph's laughing eyes and the irrepressible quiver of his lips. She caught her breath. There was something devastatingly attractive about him.

...

'To an outsider walking in on us we must appear a most happy and domesticated couple. How deceptive appearances can be!' And he added, on an odd inflection, 'You gave me to understand you didn't believe in having babies.'

'For myself I don't,' she affirmed. 'At least, I'm not particular about them. But this is for a friend of mine, Valerie - you and I met after her wedding,' she could not help adding maliciously.

He merely grinned at that and said,

'You're a surprising girl, Sara.'

'Surprising? Why? I should have thought you'd have learned all there was to learn about me by this time.'

'I've learned very little, from what I can see. I'd never have believed you'd go to all this trouble - on the contrary, I could imagine your going to the most expensive shop, buying the most expensive present, and sending it off, adopting the easiest way, as it were.'

'For some of my friends I'd do just that,' she admitted. 'But Val wouldn't like it at all. She's so sentimental. All her baby clothes will be hand-made, if I know Val.'

'And you?' he queried. 'Would you knit for your own?' Again he watched her closely, noting the flush that rose to her cheeks.

'As there isn't now the remotest possibility of my having children, the question doesn't arise, so why talk about it?'

'No, you're quite right, the question doesn't arise.' He changed the subject, reverting to the dinner tomorrow evening, and asking if she intended doing anything herself, or was it all to be left to Martha and George. 'I can't see you soiling your hands with housewifely chores,' he ended, on the familiar note of cool sarcasm, not unmixed with contempt.

'I might arrange the flowers,' came her swift and tart rejoinder. 'And I might just decide to set the table.'

Ralph did stay in, after all, but he went out earlier in the day and returned with Adele. Sara was put out by this, wondering what her friends would think. It was not so much Duncan's reaction that troubled her, nor even his sister's, but she knew instinctively that Manolis would look askance at the idea of Ralph's inviting his girl-friend to the dinner party. But as it suddenly struck Sara that there was no reason to believe anyone would guess who Adele was, she realized her anxiety was unfounded.

Adele looked adorable in a white cotton dress, sleeveless and high at the neck. Her dark hair shone, and fell loosely on to her shoulders. She merely nodded to Sara and then she and Ralph went out to the garden and sat in a secluded corner under the trees, and Sara did not see them again until tea time.

The three of them had tea together, on a small table under the shade of the vines. Determined neither to be left out of the conversation, nor to be made to feel an intruder, Sara endeavoured to keep up a lively chatter, but her task proved too difficult, owing to her husband's giving his whole attention to Adele, and eventually Sara lapsed into silence, her fury rising slowly within her. To make matters worse, Sara could not help but be struck by the charm of manner which Adele extended towards her lover. And her conviction that this charm was wholly natural and spontaneous served only to increase Sara's anger, although search as she would, she found no tangible reason for this.

At first Adele seemed to forget to be condescending towards Sara, but after a short while her manner became cool to the point of rudeness and Sara soon found herself practically ignored as the other girl basked in the attentions of the man who so obviously adored her. Ralph's amusement and apparent satisfaction at the way Adele treated his wife only added fuel to the fire and, choosing an opportune moment, when she could leave them without appearing to have been driven away, Sara excused herself and made her escape to the house. One of these days, she fumed, she and Adele would be alone - and then she would show her!

Her friends arrived early and the moment Hayley and Adele set eyes on one another they uttered exclamations of surprise and delight. For they had been quite good friends when, before her marriage, Hayley had worked in the offices of a shipping line in Athens. Adele had also worked there, but when, a few months after meeting Manolis, Hayley had married and gone to live in Piraeus, they had lost touch, though at first they did correspond for a while.

'Oh, this is wonderful!' exclaimed Hayley, giving Adele a little hug. 'Manolis darling, you remember Adele?' She introduced her to Duncan who, it seemed, held her hand far too long and far too tightly. Then Manolis smiled at Adele and took her hand, bowing solemnly and saying how pleased he was to see her again. 'Just imagine meeting you here!' Hayley was scarcely able to contain her pleasure at this unexpected meeting with her old friend. 'Sara, how is it you've not mentioned Adele to us? You said you hadn't made any friends yet.'

She's no friend of mine, thought Sara, far from pleased at the turn of events. It looked very much as if Adele were to have the attention of the entire company. Biting her lip, Sara could not help dwelling on her life before coming to Greece. Always it had been she who had attracted attention, who had enjoyed popularity and been in great demand. She caught her husband's eye, saw the glint of satisfaction there, and felt her temper rise. But almost immediately all anger seemed to wane, outweighed by a totally different emotion. Remorse? Not exactly ... but rather an odd sort of admission that her resentment of Adele was misplaced, was something of which she should be thoroughly ashamed. Honest enough to own that her resentment of Adele had its basis only in that the older girl was Ralph's good friend, Sara was all at once staggered by the revelation that she had no *right* to resent that friendship. It had been strong long before she and Ralph had even met. Moreover, it was a friendship founded on love, while whatever relationship existed between Sara and her husband was founded on hate and contempt. Ralph had offered her marriage, to save her father's life, or rather, to prolong it. A sacrifice it must have been, marrying a woman he could never hope to love, burdening himself, giving up his freedom. 'But none of it would have happened if only he'd kept out of my affairs,' she thought, her anger starting to simmer again as she discovered that all these musings were actually beginning to have a chastening effect on her. Was she becoming soft? Not she! And yet a change was most certainly coming over her....

Standing there, Sara felt Duncan's eyes upon her and she looked at him. He transferred his gaze to Ralph, and his surprise was apparent; obviously he had expected her husband to be a rather weak-willed type of man who had no control whatsoever over his wife's movements. Sara had to smile at his expression and as she caught Ralph's eyes her smile broke into a laugh. He responded, as for once their minds were in harmony. Later he whispered,

'Did you deliberately deceive him? - tell him I was another Roddy?' And when she shook her head, rather vigorously, 'I'm not at all convinced. Perhaps I shall punish you by forbidding any further gallivanting about with him.'

'But then I might object to your - affair,' she countered tartly.

'Object by all means, if it will make you happy,' he responded cheerfully, and then, 'It's as well I know you, Sara, otherwise I'd say I detected a hint of jealousy in those words.'

Jealousy! The inevitable retort rose to Sara's lips, but before she could utter it Adele, suddenly aware that Ralph was giving his wife a little attention, promptly diverted him, claiming his attention herself, and at the same time throwing Sara a glance that plainly told her that Ralph was all hers.

Later, however, when dinner was over and they were all sitting together in the other room, Ralph became deeply involved in conversation with Manolis. They knew each other by sight, and now appeared to have a good deal in common, for Manolis's business was the production of olives, and his groves were not far from Ralph's, in the fertile vale of Messenia where, in addition to the large black olives, fruit was also grown.

Altogether the dinner party was a huge success, with neither Hayley nor her husband suspecting the truth about Ralph and Adele. Duncan, however, was watchful the whole evening, and several times Sara saw him frowning to himself. Perhaps it was because Ralph's attitude towards Adele was guarded, or it could have been that Hayley would never suspect her friend of having an affair. On their departure, however, Ralph's whole attention was instantly centred on Adele and Sara decided to go straight to bed. She bade them good night and had just reached the door when she heard Adele asking Ralph to bring in her suitcase from the car. Unable to believe her ears, Sara turned, staring at them in turn as, for a moment, she had difficulty in framing her words.

'Adele is - staying the night ?'

'Naturally,' came the crisp reply from Ralph. 'It's far too late to take her home now.'

'But. ..Sara could not take it in. She had known, naturally, what was between them, had accepted her own position as an outsider, but somehow the whole affair had seemed rather vague and unreal. And that was because she had never allowed her imagination to spread, or her thoughts to dwell too deeply on what went on between her husband and Adele. But this information that

Adele was staying the night gave the whole affair an aspect of reality. Why should she care if Adele stayed the night? Had she stayed on other occasions? She must have done, and yet once again Sara felt the presence of something she did not understand.

'Yes, Sara, you were going to say something?' Ralph slipped an arm around Adele's waist as they stood there, obviously waiting for Sara to depart so that they could slip into each other's arms.

'N-no - no, nothing --'

Adele's sweet and rippling laugh rang out as Sara left the room and echoed in her ears long into the night, as she lay there, unable to sleep.

What would Martha and George think? They had known about Adele, for Sara recalled their odd glances when Ralph had brought home a wife. Had Adele stayed here before? she asked herself again, and this time Sara found herself unable to believe that she had.

What an odd situation in which to find herself. To be lying here, and her husband in there, with. ... In the end Sara got up and went downstairs to make herself a drink. Why should she mind? It wasn't as though she wanted Ralph herself. Adele was welcome to him! No, it was the ignominy of her own position. That she should be treated like this - a Malvern! Well, she wouldn't stand for it; tomorrow she would have it out with him. He was not going to humiliate her like this!

They were having breakfast when she entered the dining- room the following morning and she felt slightly embarrassed as she took her place at the table.

'Good morning,' she said stiffly after a while, for neither appeared to know she was there.

'Good morning, Sara.' Smiling serenely, and without any evidence of shame, Adele looked at her with a wide and frank expression. 'Can I pass you anything?'

Sara ignored her, and indignation swept over her as she watched them. *They* should be feeling uncomfortable, not she; but instead they were laughing and chatting together with neither showing any sign of awkwardness at her presence. Brazen, they were - without an atom of delicacy between them! Sara felt quite sick and, unable to eat anything, she left them within two or three minutes of sitting down. A strange silence descended on them as she rose, and it did seem to Sara that Ralph was about to make some inquiry as to why she had not eaten any breakfast, but she gave him no opportunity for doing so.

On her way to her room, Sara passed the spare room; the door was open and glancing in, Sara saw Martha stripping the bed.

'What are you doing?' she asked, her eyes flickering strangely.

'Miss Adele - she go home today, so I take off the sheets.'

'Miss Adele slept in here?'

'Why, yes, madam.'

Sara swallowed hard.

'Has she stayed here before?' The question came hesitantly, for Sara had the greatest difficulty in asking it. Martha's eyes opened wide.

'No, madam, because there was no wife as - what do you say? - chaperone. Oh, no, it would not be right!'

With a deep and lingering sigh, Sara went to her room to collect her handbag and sun glasses; half an hour later she was meeting Duncan outside the museum and they began to discuss how they should spend the day.

'Manolis and Hayley want a rest,' Duncan said, 'so we're on our own. Do you mind?'

'Not at all.' They walked the short distance to where Duncan had left the car, having decided to take the road to the west and visit a couple of towns on the coast.

The road was fairly busy, for it was the height of the tourist season, but the ride was enjoyable, for they passed through some of the prettiest country in the Peloponnese. They made stops at the tiny villages and sometimes left the car to walk around, under the shade of the trees.

'Men riding their donkeys,' Sara said disparagingly and with some heat, 'and the women weighed down with those baskets on their heads. Oh, it makes me so mad! Why do they stand for it?' Two women smiled at her, then went on their way, their baskets overflowing with fruit and vegetables.

'It's their way of life,' Duncan answered mildly. 'I don't expect the women mind.'

'But men are always on about their superior strength - why then don't they carry the burdens ?'

'Well, if they can get away with it I don't altogether blame them,' Duncan grinned, steering Sara towards a little cafe. 'Shall we stop for a drink?'

'So long as it's not *ouzo*,' she returned. 'I never want to see the stuff again!'

They sat outside, under the shade of a plane tree, drinking coffee and watching the passers-by. There were the donkeys, the goats, the carts laden with fruit or straw or even twigs of some sort. Along the rough unpaved village street a black bull was tethered to a tree and in the roadway hens scratched about for food. Two geese seemed about to draw near, then changed their minds and went off to join the hens. Sitting on a doorstep across from the cafe was an old woman, dressed entirely in black. She had a pestle in her hand and she grinned toothlessly at them while at the same time pounding away at whatever substance lay in the mortar on her knee. Sara looked at her and shuddered. Then her fair head went high, just as on that day when, up by the abbey ruins of St. Hilda at Whitby, she had declared that she would have died rather than enter slavery. She would do the same again. Yes, she would rather die than be that woman over there. That slave....

'What a life!' she said, noticing that Duncan's attention was also held by the spectacle across the way. 'What has she to live for, tell me that? Her husband's in the local *taverna*, with his friends, drinking and talking. They never do anything, these Greek men, except lounge about all day.'

'You do feel strongly about it!' Duncan brought his gaze to Sara, and she saw the amusement in his eyes. 'I'll bet they are quite contented with their lot.'

'Because they've known nothing else!'

'It was like that in England once.'

'Women won't ever learn,' snapped Sara disgustedly. 'Why do they let themselves be stamped in the ground like that. Even if I'd been born a Greek I wouldn't stand for it. I'd show my husband that I could hold my own!' 'Do you show your husband that you can hold your own now?' he asked curiously and, without giving her time to answer, 'I somehow don't think you do, Sara. I had quite a surprise when I saw him. Why does he let you out like this? Is he not in love with you at all?'

'What do you mean, at all?'

'It's obvious that he isn't madly in love with you, otherwise you wouldn't be here with me.' Sara returned her gaze to the old woman and he went on after a while, 'Are you in love with him, Sara?'

'That's too personal a question,' she objected. 'I've already told you, it's difficult to explain.'

'It wasn't a normal marriage, evidently.'

'No, Duncan, it wasn't a normal marriage.'

'Adele ... where does she come in? You said you had your friends and your husband had his. Is Adele ...?'

'Is she what?'

Duncan shrugged.

'Obviously she isn't your bosom friend, otherwise you'd have mentioned her, so I presume she's a friend of your husband. And when a married woman becomes friendly with a married man, there's only one conclusion to draw.'

Slowly Sara's head came round; she stared at Duncan speechlessly for a while, as the significance of this news impressed itself upon her mind.

'Adele is married? How do you know?'

'Hayley told me. She was married very young; separated now, has been for over a year.'

So that was why they had not married! That was the reason, and not, as Sara had concluded, because Ralph did not particularly want marriage. And as the truth flashed across her mind Sara gave a quivering little sigh. Only now would she admit the truth. Somewhere away in the far recesses of her mind there had been born the hope that one day Ralph would tire of Adele, tire of her because he did not love her deeply enough to want marriage.

Now that hope would never materialize, for Ralph would not tire of Adele. His love did go deep. And Sara could see why he had not minded too much about giving up his freedom. It meant nothing to him; it was useless, for the girl he loved was not free. The tumult within her now was far different from those familiar bouts of fury; her whole body seemed engulfed in despair. But she did not love Ralph, she could not, she told herself in spite of this despair. He was one of the hated Lingard tribe; he would lord it over his wife, would bring her to the depths of subjugation. She was *not* in love with him. ... And in any case, he would never love her. He hated and despised her, he felt the utmost contempt for her. Why should she even have considered the possibility of his ceasing to care for Adele, and turning his affections to his wife? 'I don't want him to do so, anyway, so why am I bothering my head with it?'

As it was not too late when they arrived back, Sara invited Duncan in for a drink. George served them, glancing covertly at him and, no doubt, wondering what sort of people these were for whom he worked.

'He doesn't approve,' Duncan grinned, taking up his glass. 'But I expect it's all right for the master of the house to indulge in his affairs with the opposite sex.'

'I don't know why you should think Ralph is having an affair with Adele,' she returned, on a faintly indignant note.

'Your pride's hurt? But you do know, don't you, Sara, just exactly what's going on? You've been married three months, you say. Did he know her before then?'

Sara nodded, and a very strange sensation crept over her. Would she have married Ralph if she had known about Adele in the first place? Could it possibly be that, subconsciously, she had expected to be the only woman in his life? But no, for had not Alex said that Ralph was fond of his women? What senseless thoughts! She had no desire whatever to be the only woman in Ralph's life, never had. His statement that she could go her way and that he would go his had met with her entire approval. Hadn't she always wanted a marriage where she would answer to no one but herself? Hadn't she always declared she would be at no man's beck and call?

'Yes,' she murmured at length, holding her glass daintily between her fingers, 'they were friends before he met me.'

'Why did you marry him?'

The question took her by surprise, and yet she had been half expecting it all day.

'I can't answer that.'

'Are you going on like this for the rest of your life?' he asked, eyeing her curiously. 'You're so sweet, Sara, and it seems all so wrong that you're not happy.'

Sweet ... ? Not the way Ralph would describe her, just the reverse. What was her real nature? She was hard and rebellious, always had been. A fighter, like all the Malverns, a fighter able to hold her own in any combat- Hold her own? Not with Ralph, though. Her resolutions had gone seriously awry in her tussles with him, for he had spoken the truth when he had said that right from the first he had forced her to submission, even though several ruses had been employed in the process. Anger threatened to flare up, and she spoke quickly, thrusting this emotion away.

'I'm not unhappy,' she denied, and lifted her glass to her lips.

'Why did you agree to this flirtation?'

'It's not a flirtation!'

A laugh, then, and a slight shrug.

'Call it what you will, but it's been a diversion for you, a bit of excitement to brighten up a dull and boring life.'

'You're very astute.' She drank again, this time deeply.

'One doesn't require much intelligence to make a guess like that.' He moved from his chair and took possession of the place beside her on the couch. 'Why can't that diversion go a little further?' he murmured softly, slipping an arm around her. 'Must it stop at kissing?'

'Tell me,' she said, in a calm and even tone, 'what does it profit one to indulge in that kind of diversion?'

'Nothing's lost. The time is lived.'

'Men puzzle me. That would be only temporary. It would then become a memory - a not particularly pleasant memory.'

'You're not very flattering, I must say! How do you know it won't be a pleasant memory?'

She had to laugh, although her thoughts were serious. Men did puzzle her - with these temporary diversions, as they called them. To Sara there was nothing to be gained, for one had to live with guilt. Men, though, knew no guilt. The moment was lived, as Duncan said, and then it was forgotten.

'I still can't see any sense in it.'

'Sense? Of course there's no sense in it. Who wants to think of sense at a time like that!' She laughed again and felt his arm tighten as it slipped from her shoulder to her arm. 'You're an enigma, Sara. So modern and independent in many ways, and yet so old-fashioned. And that husband of yours - there must be a most odd insensibility in him not to want to discover more about you. You, too, seem quite immune to his attractions - for there is something attractive about him. Don't you ever get the desire to make him notice you? Aren't you ever jealous of this Adele?'

She hadn't that much interest, she told herself, but to her annoyance she became aware of a feeling of melancholy, and when, on taking her glass and placing it on the table, Duncan drew her into his arms, she offered no resistance. He kissed her, with increasing fervour, and she responded after a while and he became exultant.

'I knew I'd break you down,' he asserted. 'Sara, you're so beautiful.'

Quite abruptly, Sara dragged herself from his embrace and, rising, stood looking down at him, feeling, strangely for her, rather sorry for him. Had she led him on? However, he accepted defeat and laughed as he rose and once again drew her into his arms.

'Good night, Sara,' and then, 'I still think you're a great girl. Your husband must be crazy.'

## CHAPTER SEVEN

SHE did not offer to see him out, and she was still standing in the middle of the room when her husband walked in. Sara blinked at him, wondering what was wrong. She had seen him in some nasty moods, but never before had she seen an expression such as this on his face.

'What the devil do you mean by letting that fellow make love to you?' he demanded, his dark eyes blazing as he advanced swiftly upon her. 'And here, in front of the window, in view of everyone!'

Sara stepped back, but his hand shot out and gripped her wrist.

'Let go of me!' She began to struggle, but as his grip tightened, slowly and cruelly, she desisted, though her eyes blazed and she lifted her other hand as if to strike him. He knocked it down and her fury increased. 'What business is it of yours what I do? I please myself, that was the arrangement—' Her glance shifted from his face to the window. It was open slightly, but not the hint of a breeze entered the room. The curtains had not been drawn across, but outside all was blackness except for the deep purple of the sky. 'As for anyone seeing - who is there to see, tell me that!'

'I saw you! And listened!'

'Listened? There was nothing said that I need be ashamed of.'

His thin lips curled.

'Because you're shameless. I expect his persuasions weren't at the right time. You were expecting me at any moment.'

At that her hand did come up, and a red mark began to fuse with the darker crimson already in his cheeks. For a space he stared down at her incredulously, unable to take in what had happened. And then a snarl touched his lips and all the savagery of the Lingards seemed to be let loose as, grasping her other arm, he shook her until he himself became breathless.

'Just you ever dare to do that again,' he threatened darkly, still grasping her arms. 'And just you dare to see that fellow again - and by God you'll not forget it!'

'I shall see him!' The defiance was still in evidence, but Sara was trembling from head to foot. Never had she expected a reaction like that. But with a flash of memory she once again saw his face, and heard the menace in his voice as he told her what he would have done had he walked in upon that scene aboard the *Ocean Belle*. Yes, he would assuredly have killed her, without thought of the consequences. A shudder mingled with her trembling and he said, in a harsh and hateful tone,

'Frightened you at last, have I? Take warning; you'll get more than this the next time—'

'Frightened me?' she interrupted, loath to give him the satisfaction of knowing that he had in fact scared her a little. 'You could never frighten me! I'm not afraid of any man!' And her fair head lifted; she forgot her trembling and the pain of her wrist as she faced him, her nostrils flared. 'No man will ever make me afraid, or tell me what to do. I shall please myself, and I'll see Duncan just whenever I like!'

'Not while I'm your husband you won't.' His voice was quieter, more controlled and, strangely, more menacing. 'It's my wish that you don't see him again, and you'll observe my wish.'

Sara managed to twist herself free, speechless with fury as she saw the marks he had left on her arms and wrist. A Lingard to do that! If her father could know. She would only have to write and tell him, and he would insist on her coming home again. Home ... away from this detestable throwback from that villainous tribe of Lingards. She could only stare at him, for her anger was still choking her, preventing speech.

And then two things impressed themselves upon her mind. His attitude of waiting, as on other occasions when he had appeared to wait ... waiting for what? she asked herself again. And secondly, and by far the more important, he had reminded her, for the very first time, that he was her husband. Never before had the word left his lips. Because it was unimportant? - because it

had meant nothing to him? Why mention it now? And why should he be so furiously angry at seeing her in Duncan's arms? Why reveal any emotion at all when it was he himself who had declared, most emphatically, that they should go their separate ways? Was there any connection between this anger and the reminder that he was her husband?

She shed her fury completely, and as she did so her trembling increased, for no apparent reason that she could see. Her lip trembled, too, and a strange peace entered into her. She no longer felt like Sara Malvern. She felt, to her utter astonishment, just what she was - Ralph Lingard's wife. Her lovely eyes were glowing with a new and tender light as she continued to look up at him, Adele was forgotten, his dastardly act in abducting her was forgotten, and all their conflicts lost substance as she said, a huskiness replacing the familiar hard metallic tones of her voice, 'Ralph ... if I promise not to see him again—' 'You'll throw out no ultimatums to me,' he cut in wrathfully. 'You'll keep away from him because I order you to do so!'

Order. ... In spite of her new and tender feelings anger threatened to choke her again. But by some remarkable effort of will she controlled herself and said,

'I don't know why you should be so angry - when you said I could go my own way. Is it because - because ...?' How could she phrase the question? Supposing she were wrong? Before she had time to think any more about it, however, he was speaking, in the same dictatorial tones, his dark eyes hard and cold as steel.

'Must I keep reminding you that although I did say you could go your own way, it was only on the condition that you were discreet? You haven't been discreet—'

'Is that the only reason for your anger? - because you don't think I've been discreet?' There was a plea in her voice, of which she herself was scarcely aware; it went unnoticed by her husband.

'What other reason could there be? Certainly I'm angry because of your lack of discretion - and I'm forbidding you to see that fellow again.'

That was too much. She would not tolerate that sort of dictatorship. Any disappointment she felt at his reply to her question was submerged by the fury rising within her. Why, for one moment, had she even given a thought to the possibility of an understanding between them? Even had he wanted it, she would be out of her mind to agree, for it was evident that he would never be satisfied unless he had her completely subdued. The Lingards could not help themselves; they were all the same. And what sense was there in throwing over one brother for his dictatorial tendencies and taking on another who was even worse? Yes, she would certainly be out of her mind to contemplate such folly as that.

'If you can go about with Adele then I can go about with Duncan, and I shall, for just as long as he's here!' Her head was high, her eyes sparkling defiantly. 'You can do your worst, but I shall still go my own way!'

'Then it will be to your cost,' he said between his teeth. 'I warned you you hadn't seen the worst of me - but you will, if you disregard my wishes over this, so watch your step. As for Adele, I'll thank you to keep her name out of it!' And before she could think of anything to say he was gone.

Although on the surface Ralph appeared to have confidence in the effectiveness of his threats, he must have expected some attempt at defiance, for he remained at home the following day, and when, dressed and ready to go out, Sara came downstairs, he was waiting for her. Naturally a battle ensued, but Sara had no option but to capitulate when Ralph threatened to use force if she made the slightest move to leave the house. She was furious, saying that the moment he went out she would do the same. He did not go out, and when, later, Duncan called to see what was wrong he was met at the door by Ralph and sent away, being told politely but firmly not to call again. Although fuming over this Sara refrained from causing a scene, mainly because she saw only defeat for herself on becoming involved in another battle of wills with her husband, and also, as she was now on friendly terms with Hayley, she was naturally reluctant to do anything that would be likely to injure that friendship. So she let Duncan go, without making any further arrangements to see him. However, Ralph arranged another dinner party the evening before Duncan left Olympia, and again it was a most pleasant affair. This time Ralph took Adele home, even though the party broke up later than on the previous occasion.

During the evening Duncan managed to have a whispered word with Sara, asking her what went wrong.

'Ralph saw us through the window, and heard us.'

'Lord, did he? Was there an unholy row?'

'There was a row, certainly,' she admitted with a faint shiver at the memory.

'And he forbade you to see me again?'

'Yes.'

'You should thank me, then, for making him jealous.'

'He wasn't jealous, just mad because I left the curtains open.'

'No, Sara, he was jealous.' A pause and then, 'Shall I tell you something?' Sara looked inquiringly at him and waited for him to continue. 'Hayley won't have it that there's anything between Ralph and Adele.'

'You told her there was?' she exclaimed frowningly. 'You shouldn't have done that, Duncan. She'd never have guessed, because she concluded that Adele was my friend, and I've said nothing to the contrary— Oh, I wish you hadn't!'

'I'd no option. She wanted to know how it was you were able to go about with me all the time. I just hinted at what you'd said - about having your friends and your husband having his. Then after the dinner party I said something about it looking as if Adele was his special friend and Hayley jumped down my throat, saying Adele wasn't a girl like that at all.' He paused as he caught Ralph watching him, but continued after a moment or two. 'There's some mystery about the whole business, but you can't ever get anything out of Hayley. If anyone tells her anything in confidence then it's locked away for ever.'

'She hasn't told you anything at all, except that Adele's married?'

'Nothing.' He grinned faintly at her. 'And you're a clam, too, about your reason for marrying Ralph, so I'm in a hotbed of mystery, chewing my nails with frustration. Women! And I always thought they wallowed in gossip.'

'Perhaps Hayley will tell me about Adele,' Sara murmured, not having taken much notice of Duncan's last words.

'Not on your life! I've told you, with my sister a confidence is a confidence; she's always been like that.'

Adele had suggested they had some music and now she and Ralph were pushing the furniture against the walls, with Hayley helping them. Then Hayley and Manolis were in the centre of the floor, moving in a rather indolent fashion, their cheeks touching.

'You know,' said Duncan with a frown, 'it's sickening when a couple are as much in love as they are.' But Sara was watching Ralph, who was smiling at Adele, and Sara waited for him to take her in his arms. But suddenly he became aware of his wife's interest and with a quick word to Adele he walked over to her.

'Shall we dance, Sara?' Without waiting for an answer he reached for her hand and pulled her to her feet. As she rose she caught Duncan's eye, saw the lid come down in a slow and deliberate wink before she was swung away and her feet began to move in time to the music.

Picking up her knife, Sara slit the envelope. The letter was from Valerie, who would be describing the delights of marriage, the new house, the nursery with the toadstool and fairy wallpaper, the cot that her husband was making with his own strong hands. 'We couldn't have one of those mass-produced things,' Valerie had said in her last letter. 'Not for *our* baby.' Sara had smiled, but knew she was glad for Valerie. She was happy and that was all that mattered. It was of no matter that to Sara herself such a life would be intolerably dull.

The present letter was almost a duplicate of the last, but for some unaccountable reason Sara read it with much more interest, and an odd sense of loss seemed to be creeping slowly tiber her. She put the letter down at last, but remained lost in thought as, reaching for the toast, she put a piece on her plate and began to butter it. Her thoughts were now with Hayley, and she saw her, glowing with health and happiness, as they had stood, high on Mount Kronion, after climbing up there together one morning last week.

It was almost a fortnight since Duncan's departure and Sara had for the most part drifted back into the bored routine she had endured before he came, briefly, into her life. But now she had Hayley, who was fast becoming her good friend. Sara called about twice a week and they would take a walk together, and on a couple of occasions they had lunched at a small cafe in the village. A simple diversion, and yet Sara knew that it was real pleasure she experienced, and not relief from boredom. No doubt about it, a change was coming over her. Was it Greece, and Olympia in particular that was responsible for the change? Never would she have believed the simple life would satisfy her. But it did. And having Hayley was a delight in itself, for she had begun to think she would never even have the opportunity of making a friend. As for Manolis he was always polite, but by nature grave and deep-thinking; his disapproval of Sara's ways was evident. He was disgusted that she should go about as she did with Duncan. Had she been married to a Greek, he once said in a voice of stern admonition, this would never have been allowed. This had caused Sara to give more attention to her friend, to examine Hayley with a new interest. As Duncan had said, she and her husband were very deeply in love. Did Hayley not mind being kept under, then? Kept under ...? Sara frowned. If Manolis did dominate his wife it was not noticeable. Perhaps he was one of those subtle men, she thought, her eyes narrowing. But in any case, Hayley sparkled, she basked in her husband's adoration, and gave freely in return. Was this the perfect marriage? Hayley was deliriously happy, no doubt of that.

Sara glanced up as her husband came in and sat down opposite to her.

'Good morning, Sara. Sleep well?'

She nodded and frowned. Could he not think of something else to say in the morning? This had been going on for weeks.

'Will you let me know when you'll be in?' she said stiffly. 'I want to ask Hayley and Manolis to dinner.'

'Make your arrangements,' he returned amicably. 'I can always bring Adele here. Give me a couple of days' warning, though, so I can let Adele know.'

'Must you bring Adele?'

'I must.' He raised his brows regarding her searchingly. 'Don't you like Adele?'

A small silence and then,

'I don't dislike her,' she owned, looking at him rather unhappily. 'But it isn't right for you to keep bringing her here. What - what will Martha and George think?'

'I'm not particularly interested in their thoughts,' he returned with faint hauteur. 'So you don't dislike Adele. How very odd.'

'You've known for some time that I don't dislike her,' she told him. 'There was a time when I meant to - well, let her have it, as you might say, but—'

'Indeed? And what do you think my reaction would have been?'

'You would naturally have taken her part. But I meant to wait until I had her alone.'

'And. ... Not use violence on her, I hope? Surely even the Malverns have become a little more civilized than that.'

Her colour rose, but she controlled her temper. Why did he have to throw out these sneering comments about her family? Was it simply to rile her, and then gloat over his success in bringing about this loss of control? It seemed very much like it.

'I can't understand why you persist in these taunts. Your wish is obviously to make me lose my temper; what enjoyment you derive from that I fail to see,

but you do enjoy it.' Her voice was low, contrasting with the angry sparkle in her eyes. Why, she wondered, this reluctance to quarrel with him? It had been with her, almost imperceptibly, for some time now, though it was often ineffective, for Ralph's sneers and quips were deliberate and calculated, and Sara found it quite impossible to ignore them.

'Enjoy that vile temper of yours?' he commented wryly. 'On the contrary, I find it far from pleasant to witness such loss of control in a woman.' She lowered her eyes at that and said it was only he who had that effect on her. 'Why me?' he queried, and his amused expression was answer in itself. Sara gave a deep sigh of exasperation.

'The fact that you're to blame for the whole position seems to have escaped you.'

'The blame lies with you,' came the quiet rejoinder. 'For some quite inexplicable reason my brother fell in love with you. After agreeing to marry him you heartlessly throw him over a fortnight before the wedding. Not a thought for his feelings, for his broken heart—'

'Rubbish! No man suffers from a broken heart. I told you, he had someone else.'

'You threw him over simply because he was a man,' Ralph continued, deaf to the interruption.

'He meant to tyrannize over me. I wouldn't take that, not from any man, and certainly not from a Lingard!' Colour spread, bringing out the firm contours and highlighting the strong bone structure of her face. Her blue eyes took on that darker shade, enhancing their beauty, yet the darkness in their depths suggested a warning and as her husband caught and held her gaze his own eyes warned, and challenged. He said softly,

'I'm a Lingard, Sara, and if I were to tyrannize over you, as you term it, then you would have no choice but to take it.'

She laughed, harshly, her desire for goodwill dissolved by his refusal to co-operate.

'Do you honestly believe I'd take it - without a fight?'

'No, indeed,' came the swift and grim response. 'Not without a fight. .. but you'd take it, all the same.' He picked up his coffee cup, but made no attempt to put it to his lips. 'I've a darned good mind to accept that challenge, and tame you.'

'I don't know why I listen,' she said impatiently, 'or why I let you lead me on like this, knowing you're only waiting for me to lose my temper.'

'You think so?' An odd smile touched his lips. 'No, Sara, you're quite mistaken; that is not what I'm waiting for.'

She stared at him bewilderedly.

'Then what...?'

'Remember what I once said? I told you I'd like to make you cry - and I still would.'

'Ah, yes, I do remember. And I said it would take a strong-willed man to do so.'

'And my reply to that?' He took a drink and returned the cup to its saucer, then he leant back in his chair, regarding her in some amusement as she fell silent, plainly trying to think up some scathing retort. 'You have by now discovered I'm a strong-willed person—'

'But you haven't made me cry, and you never will.'

'We shall see,' and then, 'I could do it any time I liked - now, if the inclination took me.'

'Really?' A sneer in the question and Ralph's eyes narrowed as he said,

'Use your imagination, girl!'

'If you tortured me I wouldn't cry.'

'So you admit I could torture you?'

'I'd fight you - and I can fight.'

'You didn't put up much of a show when I shoved you into that car.'

'I was taken unawares.'

'Or when I forced you to telephone, or took you aboard the boat.'

'You threatened to throw me in the sea,' she flashed indignantly. 'That was a cowardly threat for a man to make to a woman. ..He was laughing triumphantly, and it was suddenly borne upon her that the conversation had taken on a distinctly humorous aspect. He enjoyed reminding her of her slip as he said,

'So for once you own to being a woman, to being the weaker sex? You admit to having been forced to succumb to my threats.' He came forward on his chair, and to her great astonishment his hand reached across the table and covered hers, rather gently. 'For that you shall have a reward. We're calling a truce, for I'm taking you out for the day.'

'But—' No thought of refusal as her heart fluttered at his expression. What had she said to bring about this change? And why should his laugh contain that element of triumph? Did he really want to take her out? - to be with her, for a whole day? 'I - you—'

'And if you so much as open your mouth to argue or protest I shall let you have a sample of that worst side of me which I've spoken about.' But no threat lay in his voice, on the contrary, it held a note of gentleness, matching the pressure of his touch upon her hand.

'You shall choose where we go,' Ralph said half an hour later when they were crossing the courtyard to the car. 'Do you prefer the coast, or the mountains?'

'I'd like to go to Sparta, but perhaps it's too far for you to drive?' Never before, she recollected, not without a touch of shame, had she so much as

considered whether or not her escort would become tired by a journey. With Rod she told him where she wanted to go and that was where they went. 'It's rather a long way, isn't it?'

'We'll go, nevertheless. The scenery's enjoyable, and we can stop along the way.'

Ralph took the same road as Duncan, and they made one stop on the way to Tripolis, but not at Langadia. Then from Tripolis to Sparta the scenery was entirely new to Sara. First they were driving through a wide plain, but on leaving this the road became almost treacherous as it twisted and snaked upwards into the hills. Then they were in the mountains and Ralph stopped the car and they stood for a while admiring the superb view over the plain now far below.

'We come to much wilder scenery now,' Ralph told her as they began their climb again. And he was right. The mountains were savage, the rocks cutting the skyline with their fearsome, jagged summits. Far below could now be seen Sparta, sheltered and protected by the heights of Taygetus and Parnon. And, glistening in the sunshine, the Eurotas meandered through the plain, its fertile banks sprinkled with olive groves and orange trees. They descended, through the foothills to the plain, and on to the ancient city, passing the notices, 'Welcome to Sparta' which, somehow, had a disillusioning effect on Sara and she felt she was in for a disappointment. This proved to be true, for the vision of great warriors and glorious feats of strength was completely lost as they entered the city and sped along the wide dual carriageway. There was a vista of traffic, modern hotels and wide pavements.

Never would she have believed her disappointment could have affected her so strongly, as, after a while, Ralph found somewhere to park and they left the car to find a hotel where they could have lunch.

'I didn't imagine it to be a bit like this,' she told him flatly, as they waited at their tables for the first course to be brought to them.

'What did you expect?' His glance flickered strangely, and Sara wondered what sort of mood was this, whether it was a permanent part of his make up - and whether this were the side of him normally reserved for Adele.

'I don't know, quite, but certainly not this.'

'You feel the journey has been wasted?' He seemed inordinately interested in what her answer would be.

'I've enjoyed every moment of it.' There was an added beauty on her face, born of content and a new awareness of herself as a person. Although she was only a few months older than when she came to Greece, she was a great deal wiser. 'But you ... you knew if would be like this; why didn't you tell me?'

'You wouldn't have wanted to come.'

'Naturally I wouldn't. We could have gone somewhere else.' Vaguely, and not without a sense of shock, Sara knew she had wanted this day to be perfect, a day to remember.

'Which would have been a pity.' He stopped speaking as the waiter appeared and placed their soup before them. 'I have a treat in store for you,' he told her then, adding, 'If it's ruins you want, that is.'

'Oh, where are we going?' Her eagerness was apparent and Ralph smiled with an odd sort of satisfaction.

'To Mistra; it's not far, about three or four miles from here. No one lives there any more.'

'A deserted town? That sounds marvellous!' Again her eagerness and new spontaneity brought a smile to his lips and for a while he talked of the old city of Mistra, telling her of its history, and of its most beautiful location on a spur of Taygetus.

After strolling round Sparta for half an hour or so they returned to the car and drove leisurely along the sandy, tree-shaded road leading to the ancient

city of Mistra. They passed the inevitable donkeys, ambling along with the menfolk on their backs. Sometimes the women were alone, without their husbands; they would then occupy the backs of the donkeys, and often they would actually be spinning as they went along.

'They never waste a minute - the women, I mean,' Sara said, fascinated that this spinning could be done in this way.

'Very hardworking, the Greek woman is,' Ralph agreed, and couldn't help adding, with a hint of humour, 'and very downtrodden by her husband.'

Strangely this did not have the effect for which he seemed to be waiting. Sara merely said that probably the Greeks would soon become enlightened and there would be more equality between the sexes.

'Shouldn't think so. In fact, foreigners who have settled here have been known to pattern their lives on those of the Greek peasants.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, if, say, an American couple settled here, and the husband was seen to be doing a chore, like washing up, for instance, he'd be treated with contempt by the natives; they wouldn't accept him. So, if he has any manhood at all, he adapts himself and follows their customs.'

'I don't believe you!'

'Quite true—' He swerved to avoid a goat that had strayed into the road, then straightened up again. 'Sorry about that. Did it shake you?' He seemed concerned, she thought, and a warmth touched her and then spread over her whole being,

'No, I'm all right.' She gave her attention to the scenery around her, and they drove in silence for the next mile or so. It was a scorching hot day with the sun blazing from a sky flecked here and there by long wisps of fair-weather cirrus cloud, gleaming silver streaks against the clear expanse of blue around them.

On either side of the road graceful eucalyptus trees masked the sun's heat, and beyond them millions of silver leaves from the olive groves contrasted sharply with the dark and sombre cypresses. As they climbed higher the view became breathtaking, and as Sara gasped she felt the brakes slowly applied and the car was brought to a standstill.

'Want to get out and take a look?' Ralph was already opening his door and stepping out of the car. 'It's a rather wonderful sight from here.'

They stood together, looking down to the valley below, with its great expanse of orange and lemon groves, its olives and vineyards, watered by the Eurotus, which was itself fed by the melting snows of Mount Taygetus. The heights of Parnon, too, sheltered the fertile valley, enhancing a scene of already surpassing beauty.

They returned to the car and were soon entering the deserted city which, so long ago, had been the centre of Byzantine civilization in Greece. It clung to the mountainside, its ancient buildings crumbling and overgrown, its streets grass-covered with here and there wild flowers giving out both colour and perfume which seemed only to add to the impression of unreality. Creepers appeared at the gaping windows; trees raised their heads through the roofless buildings.

'It's fantastic, but wonderful,' Sara breathed. 'Just imagine what it must have been like!'

'Rather difficult to do that, I'm afraid. It's rather sad, don't you think, to see it like this?'

'Yes. Why is it so deserted? I mean, don't the tourists come here?' There were some people strolling about, but not the crowds she would have expected.

'They do, yes, but not in their hordes as at Olympia.' He took her arm, an unexpected gesture, and Sara felt again that warmth within her, and that feeling of contentment and peace. But strange that she could derive such pleasure from an outing like this when she had always enjoyed the gay life,

the adulation and the deference to her every whim. 'Shall we go over to the church?'

For the whole of the afternoon they wandered among the ruins, among deserted palaces and mansions, churches and convents. Several times, as people left, they would find themselves the lone occupants of the site, before more travellers drove up. On those occasions the only other living creatures would be the lizards basking on a crumbling doorstep, their green bodies merging with the vegetation growing there.

But although most of the buildings were in this ruinous state, the churches were often well preserved, and in the monastery of Perivleptos, hollowed out of the rock itself, pinks and blues and golds of the frescoes were clearly discernible in the shadowed light.

That these paintings should have endured ...' Sara spoke with wonder, and a sense of awe enveloped her as she stood there in the church, trying to visualize it in all its glory, the people coming to worship, the splendour of the city as a whole.

'Makes you feel rather small and insignificant?' It was a question and Ralph, still holding Sara's arm, looked down at her, his dark eyes serious as he awaited an answer.

'It makes me feel *very* small and insignificant,' she murmured, and a sudden pressure on her arm convinced her that this was the answer he required.

They then climbed the steep and rocky path up to the church of the Pantanassa. Here was life, for the nuns of the convent were in residence, the only inhabitants of this ghostlike city of staring windows and roofless walls.

The church door was open and a black-habited nun approached them and said something in Greek. Ralph replied, telling Sara they would be shown around and, if they wished, they could also partake of some refreshment. Sara was enchanted with this idea, and they followed the nun, entering spotless cells with their whitewashed walls and their hand-embroidered covers on the chairs and beds. They marvelled at the famous fresco, the Raising of Lazarus, with its most wonderful blending of colours which was

not at all usual in medieval religious paintings. From the terrace they looked down on the valley while they sipped the coffee brought to them by the nun.

'Shall we go?' Eventually Ralph's soft voice cut into Sara's thoughts, bringing her out of her reverie. She nodded, but felt reluctant to leave, for something about this peaceful place had spread its influence. She and Ralph had by some strange force been brought close, and Sara knew that no matter how they might quarrel in the future, they would remember the harmony of this day, and be influenced by it.

They took the way down at a leisurely pace, passing again through the city of two thousand dead houses, the city invaded by wild vegetation where bells no longer tolled from its crumbling basilicas, where only ghosts trod the narrow rock-paved lanes and smothered squares.

On reaching the modern city of Mistra, through which they had passed on their way up, Ralph stopped so that they could wander round for a while before returning to Sparta for dinner. They sat in a *taverna*., drinking iced orange and watching the busy life going on around them.

'Enjoyed it?' Ralph wanted to know, bringing his gaze from the little boy in the road who was trying to round up some hens that were fluttering about all over the place.

'It's been wonderful. Thank you, Ralph,' she added simply and with a smile. 'I'm glad I chose Sparta, after all.'

'I knew you'd be disappointed in it, but no one could ever be disappointed with Mistra - at least, I don't think so.'

'Nor do I; it was a wonderful experience.' She glanced back as she spoke. The first hint of sunset touched the sky, and the weathered arches and walls were lightly sprayed with a soft pink ochre, causing them to blend with the mountain and appear to be carved out of its very sides. 'I hope we can come again some day,' Sara added, with a hesi-tancy that was entirely new to her.

'We'll come again, Sara,' he promised, and as they rose to go he took her hand. 'Our truce has proved a great success, we must call another one quite soon.'

## CHAPTER EIGHT

THEY were in the garden, sitting in the shade of the little vine-covered arbour. Sara held a notebook and was idly tapping a pencil on her lip as she turned her attention to Ralph, basking contentedly in a chair close by.

'Must I cater for five?' Her voice was faintly persuasive, and held a tone of meekness quite out of character. Her husband raised his brows at her question.

'There are five of us, aren't there?'

'Must you bring Adele?' she asked, again with a hint of meekness in her voice.

'I thought you said you liked Adele.'

'I said I didn't dislike her,' she corrected. 'But that's no reason why she should keep coming here.'

'She comes here because I want her to come.'

'What will people think?' She had not expected any great change to occur after that day at Mistra, but somehow she had not expected an immediate reversion to his former attitude of indifference towards her. Yet that was what had happened.

'People?'

'Well ... Hayley and Manolis; they might think you're having an affair.'

'What do you mean, might think? I expect they have average intelligence.'

A long pause and then, drawing a deep breath,

'Are you having an affair with her?' she asked baldly; and his eyes fixed hers. A hint of triumph again? Or was it merely imagination?

'I expect you too have average intelligence,' was all he said in reply to her question, but he went on to say he was not having Adele discussed in this way, either now or at any other time.

'I don't understand you,' Sara murmured, a little flatly. 'We had such a lovely day.'

'Most enjoyable,' he readily agreed, but then appeared puzzled, for a frown settled on his brow. 'I don't quite understand, Sara; you're not attaching any importance to our day out? As I've said, it was most pleasant and we must do something of the sort again, but you mustn't attach any special significance to any outings we might have together.'

Sara looked down at her pad and lapsed into silence, too humiliated to carry the conversation further. But her brow puckered in thought. What exactly was this man trying to do to her? As before, she had the impression that he had meant to let her taste pleasure and then remove it from her reach. For after a wonderful day together he had, immediately on entering the house, treated her almost coldly, and even yawning occasionally as if he were now bored with her company, and although she had hinted that she would like to stay up and talk for a while he had expressed his intention of going to bed and had left her with no more than a curt 'Good night'. Nothing more than that. Nothing? What had she expected? More important, what had she wanted? She had stood there, she recalled, feeling very happy, and her lips had been parted in a smile when, for some reason, he had come close to her. And then it was that he had spoken so curtly and left her in such an abrupt fashion. She had stood there for a long while after he had gone, and again she asked herself what she had wanted. This caused a faint flush to tint her lovely face and at the same time brought her thoughts round to Adele again. Ralph must be having an affair with her, there was no doubt of that, for he had as good as admitted it. He loved her, had loved her long before his hasty marriage to Sara - and hadn't he told her right at the beginning, on their wedding day, in fact, that Adele was the most important person in his life? He had said he considered her pretty, while his wife he considered totally unattractive. And Adele was a better woman than Sara would ever be, he had asserted on more than one occasion. The fury she had been determinedly trying to suppress welled up and the hand holding the pencil shook visibly. But this time her anger was more against herself than her husband, for she

felt thoroughly disgusted that she should have given him a second thought - in that way. It was definitely *not* what she wanted - to be enslaved and overridden, to be forced into bondage for the rest of her life. No, that was not for her! Perhaps she had wavered for a brief while, but Ralph's attitude had saved her, thank heaven! Little did he know how grateful she was for his indifference, for the knowledge that she held not the slightest attraction for him, either physically or in any other way. Yes, she was truly grateful for that.

She began to write down the menu for the following evening and for a time she succeeded in concentrating on her task, but gradually other thoughts intruded and soon her whole mind was occupied with her husband and that wonderful day they had spent together. She recalled her own envelopment in peace and quiet happiness; she remembered that she had been wholly convinced they would both be influenced by the harmony that had entered into their relationship that day. Perhaps it was just that she was being fanciful, imagining something which had not existed. It was apparent that that day meant nothing to Ralph, for as early as the following morning they were sparring, and not in that half-bantering way which sometimes characterized their arguments, but with antagonism, and even hatred simmering beneath the surface.

She glanced at him again; so cold his features now, and harsh. A true Lingard, branded with lawlessness, one of the hated tribe. Yes, the position as it was suited her fine; she hoped the time would never come when her husband would find her attractive.

His eyes were closed; she watched the faint rise and fall of his chest, could almost hear the soft, even breathing. A brown chest it was, and strong ... and his shoulders, wide and square. ... The sort of shoulders some women might like to cry on, she thought derisively.

As if her gaze burned into him he opened his eyes in a glance of interrogation not unmixed with hauteur, and for some reason her blood began to boil. The arrogance of him, to treat her like this! Suddenly the pencil snapped in two between her fingers; his eyes widened as they moved from the broken pencil to her face, but although he made no remark Sara

knew instinctively that her feelings had been made bare to him by that action.

'I don't think I'll invite them after all,' she quivered, flinging the note pad on the ground beside her chair. 'I'll tell them something's cropped up - make any excuse!'

'Why?' in mild and even tones. 'Because I insisted on bringing Adele?' Sitting up, he leant towards Sara and went on deliberately, 'Look here, the sooner you stop this nonsense regarding Adele the better. I'm telling you for the last time that I live my life as I want to live it, as I lived it before you intruded into it. No woman is going to tell me what to do, so I advise you to get that firmly fixed in your mind. I did you a favour by marrying you—'

'A favour! You did it to save your own conscience.'

'Partly, perhaps,' he conceded, 'but I still maintain I did you a favour. And, that being the position, I'll have none of your interference. As for these tantrums, I'm becoming heartily sick of them, and if you're not very careful I shall begin to do something about them. You're a shrew, Sara, and the sooner you admit to being that the sooner you might decide to try and improve.'

Despite her seething temper Sara decided to ignore those words.

'Whatever the reason for our marriage, I am your wife,' she said, her voice still quivering but not unduly loud. 'You often forget that fact.' Why say that? Not in any sense was she his wife, at least, not in any sense that mattered.

'Don't let's go into all that again,' he returned, exasperated. 'What are you trying to do, fling yourself at me?'

'You— You—' Sara could scarcely control herself; nothing would have given her greater satisfaction than to strike him, but she had done that once, she reflected. ... 'Throw myself at you? I'd be hard up! You're the one who has an opinion of yourself. Throw myself at you? Why, I - I d-detest you!' Tears of rage filled her eyes and she was aware of his whole attention as he

watched her, with an odd expectation as she swallowed, trying to dislodge the hard little ball of fury in her throat. He was gloating again, gloating because he had driven her to this show of emotion, of temper. It took a superhuman effort to suppress those tears, but she succeeded, and triumph took their place as, after holding her gaze for another moment or two, Ralph seemed suddenly to relax and, leaning back in his chair, he closed his eyes, and for the rest of the afternoon her presence was ignored.

And his manner remained that way for the next few weeks, except for another 'truce' when they had a lovely day visiting several little villages along the coast. During these weeks Sara's friendship for Hayley grew, and it became a regular custom to call upon her two mornings a week, when they would take a walk, or visit the shrine or the museum. As time went on Sara began to toy with the idea of asking Hayley about Adele, but Hayley was by nature reserved and Sara felt that Duncan had spoken the truth when he asserted his sister would never indulge in gossip. Another deterrent as far as Sara herself was concerned was her own reluctance to accept the fact of there being an affair between her husband and Adele. The reason for this was a puzzle, for it mattered nothing to her whether they were engaged in an affair or not. Hayley rarely spoke of Duncan, though one day she did say he had mentioned his intention of writing to Sara.

'I've told him he mustn't,' Hayley said, adding, 'Duncan flirts outrageously; I don't know if he'll ever settle down, but I shouldn't care to have anyone like him for a husband.'

Nor I, mused Sara, and her thoughts flashed back, first to Alex, then to Roddy. What exactly had she seen in either of them? With Roddy it was his tractability that appealed; he was exactly the sort of man she had wanted. Life would have been so simple and uncomplicated if only Ralph had not taken it upon himself to intrude. A simple, uncomplicated life. ... Was that what she wanted? Sara's eyes took on a rather dreamy expression as she gazed through the window of Hayley's sitting-room to the garden with its abundance of colour, and then to the green and gentle slopes of Kronion, where on the sunlit foothills the goats grazed while the peasant women watched. All around lay the gentle peaceful vista of green and brown, evidence of the genius of the ancient Greeks in their choice of setting for the Games. She had imagined Greece to be a country of wild and savage

landscapes, of towering mountains, barren and ragged. But here in Olympia was found gentleness and warmth. Impossible to live in such an environment and not become imbued with the softness and the peace that hovered over the green and undulating countryside.

A tiny sigh left her lips as she reflected on the change within herself. She knew deep down that Alex had meant nothing, and certainly Rod and his crowd had meant nothing. All she had lost was the dross, and here she could have found a realm of gold. She sighed again and rose to go, her eyes still on the scene outside. If only her husband could be gentler ... if only he had not met and loved Adele!

The hand holding the letter trembled; Ralph looked up from his own mail and asked anxiously,

'Something wrong? Bad news?'

'Not exactly, but Father's had another attack.' A long and difficult pause and then, 'Apparently he's suddenly got it into his head that he was - was unjust to me, in insisting I marry you.'

'You mean he's become filled with remorse?' said Ralph dryly. 'A bit late for that, surely?'

'Mother says he's really fretting over it.'

'Well, he'll just have to fret, for there's nothing we can do about it now. You and I are well and truly married, and it will just have to stay that way.'

His manner and his tone diverted her.

'You don't seem to mind very much about our marriage.'

'Don't be ridiculous, of course I mind. What man wants to be tied to a woman he doesn't love? - a woman who fails completely to attract him?'

'It isn't gentlemanly of you to keep on saying things like that,' she retorted, though surprisingly without any show of temper.

He ignored that and returned to the letter in her hand.

'What else has your mother to say?'

'She says we - we could reassure him if we went home, on a visit—' Sara looked across at him, the letter still fluttering in her hand.

'Go to your home and play the role of lovers?' he said in some amusement. 'Any visit of ours would only serve to make things worse.'

'I suppose it would.' Sara's face was pale and rather drawn. Her mother had made some effort to keep back the seriousness of her husband's condition, but Sara had no difficulty in picking up what had been left out. 'I don't suppose we could... pretend?'

Ralph's brows shot up, and his amusement grew.

'Frankly, Sara, I can't see you as the loving, obedient wife.'

'Need you use the word obedient?'

'All right then - the loving wife.' He shook his head and added emphatically, 'It wouldn't work.'

'We need only stay a week.'

'A week? And we can't stop arguing for a day?'

'We have done,' she reminded him quietly.

'When we've been out?' He gazed across at her quizzically. 'If your character weren't an open book to me I'd suspect you of harbouring some feelings of sentimentality over those days we had out together.' A pause and then, questioningly, 'You're not sentimental, though, are you, my dear, not in any way at all?'

Sara shook her head, though it was an automatic gesture, as if to give him the answer he were expecting from her.

'About my father,' she began again. 'Ralph, couldn't we - I mean, surely we could convince him, if we tried.'

'Sara, do use your sense! If your father sees how we really are, that we thoroughly detest one another, then his feeling of guilt is going to increase tenfold.'

'You haven't even thought about it, haven't considered whether or not it would be possible to deceive him,' she protested. 'As I've said, we could both try.'

'What, would I be supposed to do? - take you in my arms and kiss you in front of him? You can think again about that!'

Hot colour fused her face, but this time she was quite determined not to lose her temper, and so she rose, intending to leave the table, her breakfast untouched. She had reached the door when he spoke her name, and she turned, unaware of the brightness of her eyes or the sudden trembling of her mouth.

'You love your father, don't you, Sara?'

'You know I do.' She blinked rapidly now, but the tears filled her eyes, threatening to escape on to her cheeks. Swiftly she flicked a finger across her lashes and turned away again, opening the door.

'Come and get your breakfast.'

She stopped then, but shook her head. He asked her again to have her breakfast and she twisted round to face him.

'I'm not hungry.'

'I don't know why I bear with you, Sara! Sit down and get your breakfast!' To her own amazement Sara did as she was told. It must be owing to the way

she was feeling about her father, she concluded when, a moment later, she was asking herself why she had taken an order from Ralph. He watched her eat in silence for a while, and then he said quietly,

'When do you want us to visit your home?'

She looked up, unable to believe her ears.

'You'll do it?' she breathed, relief flooding over her. 'You'll try to make him believe we're happy?'

'*We'll* try to make him believe we're happy,' he corrected gravely.

Having made up his mind, Ralph wasted no time and they were in England two days later, arriving at Sara's home in time for the evening meal. Her father was up, but looking grey and much thinner than when Sara had last seen him. He was delighted to see her, and a most strange expression settled on Ralph's face as he watched their reunion. The old man hugged his daughter, and she in turn reached up to touch his face with tender gentle fingers; and then she kissed him before turning to her mother. Mrs. Malvern was not demonstrative, obviously, for it was her cheek which she presented to Sara, who touched it with her lips and quickly returned her attention to her father.

'What made you decide to come home like this?' he wanted to know. 'I've been so anxious about you, wondering if you were happy, but I see now that I needn't have worried. Married life agrees with you, my dear. Now, sit down and tell me all about your new home - here, my love, close to me.'

'Let them tidy up first,' Mrs. Malvern put in practically. 'They've come a long way, you know.' And to Sara, 'I would have put you in your old room, but we've closed up all that part of the house. It's no use, with there being only the three of us, having all that cleaning, so you're in the room above this. Your suitcases have already been taken up.' Sara's nerves began to tingle even before her mother went on, 'Perhaps you'll take Ralph up, dear, while I

see to the meal. It's ready, but there's the finishing touches to do to it. I'll call you when I've had it brought in.'

Not daring to look at Ralph, for she was convinced the fluttering of her heart must surely be evident to him, Sara just stood there, staring at her mother. So great had been her anxiety that she had never given the matter a single thought - and even if she had done so, there would have been the picture of her own large apartment, with the dressing-room off, in which there was a wide and comfortable ottoman.

'Is anything wrong?' her father asked, glancing at her in puzzlement from the chair into which he had settled himself. 'You look rather pale.'

'No,-there's nothing wrong,' she replied, shaking off her dismay as best she could. 'Er - Ralph, are you coming?'

Still she avoided his gaze, but she could guess at his expression, for all that. The amusement in his eyes, the rather dry expectancy of the way in which she meant to deal with this situation. Had he thought about it? she wondered. Probably, and yet he had not so much as mentioned it to her.

She led the way, in a rather dazed fashion, up the wide staircase to the room above the drawing-room. And only when they were inside did she turn to her husband.

There was a glint of sardonic amusement in his eyes, and his lips twitched slightly as he looked down at her, waiting for her to speak.

'I never thought - that is, what can we do?' Although she sounded a trifle helpless Sara was cudgelling her brain to find some way out of this situation. All the rest of the bedrooms closed. ... That meant dust covers and unaired beds, so there could be no creeping away at dead of night to take possession of another room. 'What are we to do?' she said again. 'Have you any suggestions?'

'Well, I have...' he grinned, 'but as they wouldn't appeal to either of us I'll keep them to myself.'

A deep flush spread before, swiftly collecting herself together, Sara hastily told him that she could get some extra blankets.

'They're in the airing cupboard on the top landing, so it won't be difficult at all.'

'What good will blankets do?' he queried, puzzled. 'Blankets aren't much use without a bed to put them on.'

'I could make you a bed up on the floor,' she suggested brightly.

'You expect me to sleep on the floor? Hospitality appears to be another characteristic lacking in the Malverns.'

'You'll have to. It isn't anything to do with hospitality - it's necessity.'

But Ralph was shaking his head, and the compression of his lips suggested a difficult task in store for Sara.

'What sort of a man do you take me for? I'm not your Roddy. No, Sara, if one of us is to sleep on the floor then it will have to be you.'

'You'd let me?' she cried incredulously. 'You'd take this while I sleep on the floor?'

'Certainly.' He picked up his suitcase and, putting it on the bed, he unlocked it and lifted the lid. 'Don't look for chivalry from a Lingard; I'll swear you know them better than that.' Calmly he began to unpack his case, casting her a glance of amusement as he tossed his pyjamas on to the bed. 'Fetch the blankets by all means, but the bed is for me.'

Seething, but helpless, Sara went up to the next floor and brought down the blankets, placing them on the end of the bed. Should her mother happen to come into the room, and mention them, Sara could always say she was afraid of suffering from the cold, after becoming used to the heat of Greece.

During the meal Ralph was all attention, right from the moment when, pulling out Sara's chair for her, he bent to touch her cheek with his lips. A

soft flush rose to enhance the loveliness of her face and her father smiled and nodded approvingly. By the end of the meal he seemed to have cast ten years off his age.

'Can I fill your glass, darling?' Ralph's lips quivered as he held the bottle aloft. 'Come, you're very slow, my love.'

Her mouth tightened; did he have to go as far as this? She glanced at her father; he was completely at ease about the situation and smiled contentedly as he watched her husband filling her glass.

'I've wanted to see you together,' he said, 'and this is a wonderful surprise for me. I'd begun to worry, you know, wondering if I'd forced you into an unhappy marriage. But obviously you have a loving husband. And you, young man,' he added, addressing himself to Ralph, 'you should be proud of my little girl; she's about the greatest beauty in all Yorkshire, don't you agree?'

Ralph nodded, his eyes flickering surreptitiously to catch his wife's gaze. Her cheeks coloured more deeply, this time with embarrassment. She could not help wondering what her father would think if he knew that, for her husband, she possessed no beauty at all.

'I must go to bed, for it's been an exciting day, right from the moment your mother told me you were coming. And you, children, don't stay up too late, you've had a tiring journey - coming all this way.' Sara kissed him, saying she would come to his room later. Then they chatted for a while with Sara's mother, but soon she too made a move to go to bed.

As promised, Sara went in to her father, and stayed with him for a while, telling him about Olympia, and answering all his questions.

'I know you've sent us letters regularly, darling, but one doesn't get the picture the same as listening. You appear to have settled down wonderfully well, and I'm content now I've seen you and know you're happy.'

Ralph was in the bathroom when she entered their bedroom, and Sara began making her bed up on the floor, fuming as she spread the blankets. To be

made to sleep on the floor, and in her own home, while one of the despised Lingards occupied the bed! It was too humiliating! But what could she do about it? She thought for a moment of creeping downstairs and spending the night on the couch, but not only was there her brother to think about - for it would be the early hours before he returned from the party he was attending - but there were also the servants. She would look ridiculous in the extreme were she to be found sleeping on the couch in the drawing-room. Besides, the matter would most assuredly come to her father's ears. No, there was nothing for it but to sleep on the floor. She was on her knees, spreading the blankets, when she became aware of Ralph standing there, looking down at her, a most humorous expression on his dark countenance. He was in pyjamas and dressing-gown and he smelled of a nice, manly sort of shaving-cream; his hair had been washed and one damp lock fell on to his forehead.

'I hope you'll be comfortable,' he said, and going over to the small bookcase in the corner, he began to examine the titles. Having finished her task, Sara took her nightdress and dressing-gown into the bathroom and closed the door. On her return Ralph was in bed, leaning up on one elbow, reading.

Sara stood in the doorway, slender and straight, in an attractive filmy thing tied with a bow at the neck but flowing open down the front to reveal an ankle-length nightgown of softest nylon and ruching, with tiny rosebuds scattered round the hem. Her fair hair spilled on to her shoulders and her lovely eyes had darkened to that deepest blue that contrasted so sharply with the peach and ivory bloom of her skin. Her lips were slightly parted as if ready to smile whenever her husband should look up. She caught sight of herself in the long mirror on the wall, and immediately looked away again. She was not vain enough to dwell on the lovely picture she made, standing there, framed in the open doorway.

Suddenly becoming aware of her presence, Ralph brought his eyes from his book; a swift and flickering glance was all she received before he returned to his reading. Sara remained there, biting her lip and glancing from the empty space beside him to the blankets on the floor. Ralph looked up again, puzzled that she should be standing there, and said affably,

'Anything wrong?'

Why that should annoy her Sara could not say, but it more than annoyed her, it infuriated her and, with a vicious movement, she snapped off the light beside his bed, discarded her dressing-gown, and slipped down between the blankets.

'May I have the lamp on now?' he inquired after a moment or two.

'I expect you'll please yourself!'

The room was flooded with light again.

'Have I done something to upset you?'

No answer. Turning her face into the pillow, Sara pulled the blanket right over her head and tried to settle down to sleep. But the floor was hard and she tossed and turned all night. A week of this and she would be bruised from head to foot! But she knew that it was not the hard floor or the thought of a sleepless night that infuriated her; it was the humiliating knowledge that, even in the intimacy of a bedroom, she had no appeal whatsoever for her husband. Not that she had wanted him to notice her, and she would most certainly have fought him like the wildcat he had branded her, had the necessity arisen ... but it was a bitter blow to her pride to know a fight would not be necessary.

And it did nothing to improve her feelings when, on opening his eyes the following morning, and seeing her sitting on a chair, washed and dressed, Ralph said in feigned surprise:

'You're up early. Couldn't you sleep?' He was watching her hands, and his lips twitched as he saw them slowly close until they were two tight little fists, with the knuckles shining through the skin.

'We're going to take it in turns,' she said with admirable control. 'I'm having the bed tonight.'

'I haven't said you may.'

'This is my home,' she reminded him. 'I don't have to ask you if I can have the bed.'

'Not only have you to ask, but you have to ask nicely.' He got up and put on his dressing-gown. 'And even if you do ask nicely, I'm not sure that I shall let you have your own way.'

Sara still held her temper in check, although her one burning instinct was to throw something at him.

'I shall not ask you, Ralph. I shall merely come up early and take possession of the bed. I'm not sleeping on that floor for a week.'

'Take possession, will you?' He came close and stood by her chair. 'Had you asked me, I would have given your request my consideration; as it is, you may take possession of the bed if you like - but I shall not sleep on the floor.' He smiled pleasantly at her and went into the bathroom, leaving her sitting there, her fists still tightly clenched as she tried desperately to quell the fury rising within her.

Three days later Ralph suggested they pay a visit to his home, but his parents were dead and as Sara had already discovered she had nothing in common either with his brothers or their wives she refused to accompany him.

'One Lingard's enough at a time,' she said, and although his eyes kindled darkly at her unnecessary rudeness, Ralph merely bowed his head slightly in acceptance and made a polite inquiry as to how she intended to spend her day.

'I'm visiting Valerie, and one or two other friends.'

'Others? Male or female?'

'That's my affair.' Did he care? she wondered, a strange quiver touching her heart.

'Then we'll meet this evening, at dinner,' was all he said to that, and they went their separate ways.

Valerie was delighted to see her; she looked radiant, even though the washing-machine was in the middle of the kitchen floor and the washing was spread in various little piles, waiting their turn to go into the machine.

'I'll make some coffee. Sit down - if you can find somewhere.' So calm, so content with all this. 'Tell me everything. Is Ralph all right with you? I mean, for you to marry a Lingard, after all, when you always swore you'd have a man you could manage - and Ralph - well, you spoke of him as being the worst of the lot. And when you sent word you were being married, so quietly, it was such a surprise - a shock, even— Just a minute while I fetch the milk.' She went to the door and brought in three bottles of milk from the step. 'Now, what was I saying? - oh, yes, about the wedding, in such a hurry, and then Roddy, saying that awful thing. I didn't believe a word of it,' she said staunchly, but added, 'You haven't said much at all in your letters - only about the place and this new friend you've made.' She poured the milk into the pan and put it on the stove. 'Can't you find anywhere to sit? Wait, I'll move these ... there. Now you can begin.'

'I don't know where to begin,' laughed Sara, taking the chair her friend had cleared for her. 'You ask so many questions at once.'

'I know, but I'm so excited at seeing you. I never thought you'd go so far away. Perhaps we'll come and see you when the children get older.'

'Children?' Sara blinked at her.

'We want two or three, and I'm not having great spaces between them, so we'll have to wait a few years before we can go on any holidays of that sort. But we will come one day.' She reached for the bottle of coffee and stood with it in her hand. 'Are you happy, Sara?' she asked anxiously. 'Are you ... in love?'

'I said I'd never marry for love,' Sara reminded her.

'You also said you'd never have a man you couldn't get all your own way with - no, Sara, don't try to tell me you're managing Ralph, for I just wouldn't believe it.'

'You don't know him - you've never met him.'

'I know the Lingard reputation, and as I've said, you yourself declared him to be the most formidable of all the Lingard boys. Did you marry him for love?'

'No.'

'Then why ...?'

Should she tell Valerie the truth? She might pass it on to Graham, but Sara knew it would not go any farther than that. And so she told her friend of the abduction, having to laugh now and then at her astonishment and disbelief.

'But - but these days,' she exclaimed at last, 'that sort of thing just doesn't happen!'

'Well, it did, and with darned unpleasant consequences for me - and for Ralph, for he hates being married to me.' Sara hadn't mentioned Adele; somehow she could not bring herself to do so, even to Valerie.

'You could still have married Rod, though. Why didn't you?' Valerie asked, eyeing Sara with a curious expression in her dark eyes. 'Rod was exactly the type you've always wanted.'

'He ... well, he let me down,' Sara admitted. 'I felt thoroughly ashamed of him.'

'Because he didn't - er - wring your neck, or something?'

Sara grinned. The slow change that had come to her in Greece was not lessened because she was away from that country.

'Shall we say, because he made no attempt to wring my neck.' And she added quite without thinking, 'Ralph would have killed me, there on the spot.'

A strange light entered her friend's eyes, but she made no comment, for the milk was ready and for the next few minutes—she was busy with the coffee.

They were sitting together, at the kitchen table, when Valerie eventually said, an odd inflection in her voice,

'That's certainly an admission, coming from you.'

'Admission?' Sara had forgotten what she said.

'Saying Ralph would have killed you. Not so very long ago you'd have flared to the sky at the very idea. You most definitely wouldn't have owned that he could have so much as laid a finger on you.' She poured the coffee and passed a cup to Sara. 'You've changed,' she ventured. 'You're not the same at all.'

'In what way have I changed?' Sara knew, of course, but she was curious to discover what her friend would say.

'You're a different person.' A pause and then, 'Is it Ralph?' And when Sara did not reply at once, 'You've just said he doesn't like being married to you.'

'That's correct; he doesn't. And he hasn't the slightest interest in me.'

'It wouldn't be the first time a man's indifference has piqued a woman—'

'I'm not piqued!'

'—or that, later, she's discovered it isn't pique at all that's troubling her - but love.'

'Are you implying I'm in love with Ralph?' A laugh broke from Sara's lips. 'He's the last man I'd fall in love with!'

'Do you really believe that?' inquired Valerie im- perturbably.

'It would be disastrous. He'd enslave me.'

'Your talk of enslavement and the rest!' scoffed Valerie. 'Just words, words that don't apply when you're in love. Everything's a pleasure—' She spread her hands indicating the chaos around her. 'Even this is all part of it. And you don't mind because it's cleaned up and finished with in no time at all - and then you have all the wonderful things.' She glowed, thought Sara, and to her amazement a tinge of envy spread through her. She thought of Adele and her eyes shadowed.

'You don't understand,' she said rather flatly. 'Ralph would never look twice at me.'

'Then I don't know why,' her friend retorted hotly. 'I think you're beautiful, and so does Graham.'

A deep flush rose and Sara shook her head.

'You're much more beautiful, Valerie.'

'Nonsense. I'm plain in comparison.'

'I mean - inside.' She sipped her coffee in silence for a moment, staring at her friend over the top of the cup. 'It's what's inside that matters ... and I'm not nice inside, Val.'

'You are! I've always known it, in spite of the way you were. And you're not like that now. It was all on the surface anyway.' She stopped, undecided, and then, softly, 'Would you be happy if Ralph fell in love with you?'

'Yes, Val, I'd - I'd be happy.' She was faintly surprised by her own admission, but her friend merely gave a wise little smile. 'He never will, though—' Sara took a drink, and wondered why she had such difficulty in swallowing. 'No, he never will.'

## CHAPTER NINE

AFTER leaving Valerie, Sara called on another friend and stayed to lunch. Then she made a couple more visits and as it was not yet four o'clock she decided to go up to the abbey ruins. The isolation there, the impression of wild-ness one had by the height and the wind, these all suited her mood today, for since that admission to Valerie, her mind had been in a turmoil. She had been aware of the truth for some time, but had fought against it. Now at last she had admitted it, for it could no longer be denied.

The wind was more boisterous than ever, and her hair and her clothes were continually whipped into the air, but she was all alone, wandering among the ruins for a while before, fighting against the wind, she managed to get fairly close to the cliff edge. What a drop! It did not frighten her to look over the edge, to hear the waves thundering in, battering away at the loose and decaying shale, bringing it down by the ton to crash upon the shore below. Nevertheless, she soon moved away, for the wind there was icy, and piercing. Sara drew her coat around her and sat down on a piece of fallen masonry, a brooding expression on her face. Why had Ralph Lingard thrust himself into her life? And, having done so, why did he have to love someone else? A frown settled on her forehead. What sort of a life would it have been anyway? she mused, thinking of the hard floor upon which she was still sleeping. What misery if he were really her husband. So selfish and heartless, so domineering - and there was no combating him, she had to admit. Even now she was by no means her own master, so what would it be like were their marriage ever to become normal? But it could never be normal, so she was lucky, really. . . .The sun was beginning to sink as she came down the steps - thousands of them it seemed today, as her feet dragged, as if hampered by leaden weights. But at last she reached the bottom and, just as she was making her way towards the cross, she saw Roddy. He seemed completely to forget the manner of their parting as he greeted her enthusiastically, grabbing hold of her hands and holding them all the while he talked.

'Sara, is it really you? But how did you get here? What are you doing? Are you on a visit? - but of course you must be.' He glanced all around. 'How is it that you're on your own?' He paused a second. 'You've left him? You're home again, with your parents?'

Sara freed her hands, but gave Roddy a smile. After all, he could not help his weaknesses, it was the way he happened to be made.

'No, Rod, I haven't left Ralph. We're here on a visit, only until Monday, though.'

'But you're all alone ...?' Again he glanced around, puzzlement in his eyes.

'Ralph's visiting his people, and I wanted to see Val and a few more friends, so we separated for the day.'

'For the day?'

'I'm going home now. I said I'd be back in time for dinner.' Even down here the wind was cutting and Sara shivered as she drew her coat more closely around her. Roddy noticed, and said eagerly,

'Have some tea with me, Sara. It isn't anywhere near dinner time yet. I have the car on the park, so I can run you home afterwards.'

'Well, I don't think—'

'We'll go to our favourite place. Come on, Sara, a cup of tea's what you need; you're perished.'

'I am cold, I must admit.'

'Then you'll come?' All the old adoration was in his glance, and as he took her arm his fingers moved round it caressingly. Sara had no enthusiasm for his company, and yet she accepted, for his eagerness to be with her lightened her dejection; it was also balm to her injured pride. Roddy appreciated her, even though her husband maintained she had no charm at all.

The cafe was a small black and white place, softly illuminated, and intimate, and, basking in Roddy's worshipful gaze and flattering comments, Sara found the time slipping back and her life in Greece became almost unreal. Another couple they knew joined them and soon they were all laughing

together - as in the old days, thought Sara, the carefree days before Ralph entered into her life to bring complications ... and heartache.

Bitter resentment filled her. What right had he to take it upon himself to be revenged on her in that way? She had been perfectly within her rights to throw his brother over, yes; some day she might tell Ralph the whole story, and then he would know she hadn't deserved revenge, and perhaps, he would be filled with remorse. Remorse, she mused bitterly. He wouldn't know the meaning of the word.

'Do say yes, Sara; surely your husband won't mind, for once.'

'What?' Sara glanced from one to the other questioningly.

'Wake up!' Roddy teased. 'You've been daydreaming. We're all going to the Plantation Inn for dinner - a great crowd of us, you know, like we used to, and we want you to come with us.'

'I can't,' she began. 'I've promised to be in - no, I can't. My father would be disappointed.'

'I thought it was your husband you'd promised,' Roddy put in, watching her closely.

'It is. No, Roddy, I can't go. I'm sorry, but it's quite impossible.' The Plantation Inn. Ralph had taken her there on their wedding day, and she had enjoyed it, she recalled, for although they had sparred a little, there had been unity between them, too. A frown suddenly appeared between her eyes as she recalled that other part of the conversation, when he had told her about his 'other woman' whom he had said was pretty. No, there was nothing to be sentimental about regarding that evening at the Plantation Inn.

'Oh, just for this once,' one of the others was saying. 'We used to have such fun, and it'll be quite like old times having you with us again.'

She was wanted, genuinely wanted.

'I don't know,' she said, thinking of her father. Even were he not to mind, he would consider it very strange if she were to spend the evening away from her husband. 'It's rather difficult—'

'Nothing is ever difficult for you,' Roddy said, taking her hand and squeezing it under the table. 'I'll take you home now, and call back for you later, when you've changed. All right?'

Still she hesitated, but the others added their persuasions and again Sara was warmed by the knowledge that she was wanted. Not since the day of her marriage had she been wanted.

'I won't promise, but I'll see what my father's reaction is. If he seems in any way disappointed then I can't come.'

'Fair enough.' Roddy's glance was curious as he went on, 'Your husband won't mind?'

'No, he won't mind in the least.'

Roddy.-took her home, promising to call back for her later.

'I'll not make a definite promise; I must see how Father feels about it first. However, I'll ring you if I can't come.'

Sara broached the matter carefully to her father who, much to her surprise, did not appear to see anything wrong with her having an evening out with some of her old friends.

'You haven't seen them for some time,' he went on, 'so it will be a nice change for you. And Ralph - well, as you say, he wouldn't want to go, not knowing any of them. I guess they're not his type, anyway; he seems far too serious for most of your friends, and he's older, of course.'

'You're quite sure you won't be disappointed at my not being in for dinner?'

'Quite, my dear. You go and enjoy yourself; you don't know how long it will be before you see them again.'

To her surprise Sara found herself looking forward to the dinner, and she took out one of the dresses she had left behind when going to Greece. It was very low cut and seductive. Not at all the kind of thing of which Ralph would approve, she reflected as, putting it on, she wondered if he would be home before she went out. Roddy was early, however, and Ralph had not returned when, a coat over her shoulders, Sara got into the car and they drove away.

Half-way through the evening someone suggested they make a night of it, going back to Roddy's house to continue the party. This was received with enthusiasm and Sara went to telephone her father, saying she would not be home until the early hours of the morning.

'Well, dear, it's quite all right by me, always has been, as you know, but what about Ralph? Won't he mind?'

It was on the tip of her tongue to say she did not care whether he minded or not, but she remembered in time and said,

'I don't think so. He's awfully sweet, and wouldn't want to spoil my pleasure. He'll not mind if I stay out all night.'

'Very well, then, we'll see you at breakfast, I suppose?'

'Yes,' and after a slight pause, 'Where is Ralph?'

'He's playing billiards, with Barry. We dined early and they're having a game, just to pass an hour away.'

'Oh ...' Why this relief that her husband was up at the top of the house, out of the way? 'Good night, then, take care.'

'And you too, dear. Good night.'

As the evening progressed, however, Sara realized it had completely failed to come up to her expectations; the time dragged and eventually she asked Roddy to take her home, as she had changed her mind about going with the others to his house.

'Home, at this time?' he exclaimed. 'Good heavens, Sara, what's come over you that you'll miss a party?' They were dancing; the air by this time was hot, and a faint smoke haze drifted about, adding to the stuffiness of the room. Sara thought of the clear atmosphere of Olympia, pine-scented and heady. She should never have come; this was not her life. She hadn't needed a taste of the old pleasures to tell her they were no longer what she desired. She had known for some time what she wanted, though she had stubbornly refused to admit it. She swallowed, for a dryness had caught her throat. The life she wanted would never be hers.

'I must go home, Rod,' she insisted. 'I'm much too tired to go on to your place.'

'Tiredness didn't ever trouble you in the old days,' he complained in a sulky, peevish tone. He made to draw her close, but, frowningly, she kept him at a distance. What had she ever seen in him? she wondered, glancing up to examine his pale features. The weak chin and rather drooping mouth; the light insipid colour of his eyes. How could she ever have contemplated spending her life with a man like this? The very idea caused a chill to creep over her. Dominant she would have been, in their partnership, but at what a price! And suddenly she knew that whatever the eventual outcome of her marriage to Ralph she would always be -grateful for his rescuing her from a future like that. Rescuing her? Sara had to smile at the thought, remembering how she had seethed at the humiliation of being abducted and at the time nothing would have given her greater pleasure and satisfaction than to have been able to thwart her captor. Little did she know then that the day would come when she would actually be thankful for his action in forcing her to spend the night on that boat.

'Take me home, Roddy.' She stopped dead in the middle of the floor, refusing to take another step. 'I've had quite enough of this.'

'Oh, all right - Lord, what does he want?' Roddy's jaw literally dropped as they turned, and Sara glanced up - to meet the dark and smouldering countenance of her husband. He was standing on the edge of the little dance space, and for one incredulous moment the idea flashed through her mind that, had she not already been leaving the floor, he would have stepped forward and dragged her off! The impression instantly gave place to fear and

Sara took a few faltering steps towards him, Roddy and the rest of the crowd forgotten.

'Father ... something's happened to him?' Her face had lost its colour and her heart was thumping madly. 'Is he—?'

'Get your coat!'

'Father—?'

'Is in his bed, sleeping, as far as I know. Get your coat!' The words came from between his teeth and there was no doubt whatever in Sara's mind now. Her husband was in a white-hot fury. But why? Certainly not because she was here, for her movements were a matter of indifference to him; he had never once wanted to know where she was or what she was doing.

'Then why have you come?' To her surprise and annoyance her voice still trembled, but for a very different reason from when she had inquired about her father.

'Are you fetching your coat or do I take you home without it?' His voice was quiet, but tinged with a vibrancy that sent a tingle down Sara's spine. This feeling she had was akin to that fear she used to experience in those far-off days when she had passed him on the shore. It was a sickening fear, she recalled, that made her quake; and always she would vow to be calm, and not run, but as he drew near her legs would take off and she would be fleeing from him, not stopping until a great distance had been put between them, and then she would turn around to measure that distance, and her wide blue eyes would stare for a moment at his tall, retreating figure. Sometimes she wondered what he thought about the frightened little girl who had passed him, and she would gain the impression that he was greatly amused by her fears.

There was nothing in his demeanour now to suggest amusement - and there was no running from him either. But Sara's innate self-assertion conquered her fear and she held his gaze defiantly, for, as there was nothing wrong with her father, this intrusion was unnecessary. Why he should take it into his head to subject her to a demonstration of his authority she did not know, but

she would not have it. She would show him - coming here with the sole intention of humiliating her before her friends!

'I'm not coming yet. We're all going to Roddy's house. I don't know what time I'll be home!' She was aware of the interest of the people nearby; one or two of her own crowd had stopped dancing and were standing there, interested spectators of the little scene that had also brought forth one of the waiters, a rather burly fellow who appeared ready to make an attempt at ejecting Ralph, should that become necessary.

'Are you coming?' he said smoulderingly, 'or am I to drag you out?' He meant it too, and as Sara glanced around she knew that once again he had her beaten. For she could not bring herself to cause a scene here, not merely because of any unwillingness to provide the expectant onlookers with some amusement, but mainly because she knew without a vestige of doubt that her humiliation would increase with every moment she resisted him. But fury burned right up to her throat, choking her words as, turning to Roddy, she bade him a brief 'good night' adding that she might see him again some time. To the others she said nothing, for Ralph appeared to be losing control of his patience and she very much feared he would soon make a move to carry out his threat.

He had borrowed her brother's car, and once they were away from the hotel she turned on him.

'What do you mean by all this? - showing me up in front of my friends!' she blazed. 'I please myself what I do. What right have you to interfere with my pleasure?'

'Every right. I'm your husband.'

'I don't interfere in your life,' she quivered, 'and I'm not having you interfering in mine! You said yourself I should be free to go my own way—'

'I've changed my mind.' He turned off the main road into a narrow country lane and then, finding a wide verge, he pulled on to it and stopped the car. 'Now,' he said smoulderingly, 'we'll have our row here, seeing as we can't very well waken up the household by having it at your house.'

'I've no intention of quarrelling with you, but I'd certainly like to know why you should take it upon yourself to go there tonight with the sole purpose of humiliating me!'

'And I should like to know why you told your father I wouldn't mind if you stayed out all night?'

'You wouldn't, normally.'

'Perhaps not, normally.'

'But what difference—' Sara's anger subsided as the most incredible idea occurred to her. Could it be that Ralph's interference was not merely the result of high-handedness, of his desire to assert his authority? Come to think of it, such conduct would be alien to his nature. He would never take the trouble - were he completely indifferent to her movements. Did this mean, then, that he was not completely indifferent, that he did have some interest in what she did? Impulsively she turned to him in the darkness.

'Ralph, why did you come tonight?' Her voice was unsteady, as if reflecting the trembling sensation at her heart. 'It wasn't just to humiliate me, was it?'

Somewhere close by an owl hooted, and from the far distance came the answer, echoing through the silence of the night. Ralph seemed to be listening and Sara wondered if he had heard her questions, for she knew her words were uttered in little more than a whisper.

But at last he spoke, and although the fury had gone from his voice the harshness remained.

'I would scarcely waste my time indulging in what can only be described as spiteful behaviour. I came to fetch you because I had no intention of appearing a second Roddy. What sort of a man would I be to allow my wife to stay out all night? I'll have no Malvern smugly believing his daughter has me under her thumb.'

'So it was only for appearances, to save your own face?' Sara turned away again and leant back against the upholstery of the set. Why did she allow

these stupid thoughts to intrude? - to lift her hopes when she knew deep down that not only did her husband lack interest in her, but he also disliked her intensely. She had shown him a side of her which he believed reflected her true nature, a side which she herself had firmly believed to be her real self. And now, no matter how she tried, she could never undo the harm she had done. 'Why am I worrying about it anyway?' she asked herself impatiently, for apart from anything else, there was Adele. Even if the time should ever come when Ralph did begin to like her, he would still be in love with Adele.

'To save my face?' Sara sensed the raising of his brows before he added, 'I don't need to save my face. I can show the Malverns - and anyone else for that matter - that I'm more than capable of managing my wife.' And he added softly, but in inexorable tones which Sara knew she would never dare to ignore, 'And that means that for the rest of our stay you will observe my wishes. If you go out it will be with me; if I decide to stay in then you will stay in too.'

'How did you go on last night? I expected to hear screams for help.'

'What do you mean?' Sara looked up from the newspaper she was scanning to frown at her brother.

'Ralph - he was in the devil of a rage when he left here. I went to bed; didn't fancy witnessing the row that was brewing. What did he say?'

Sara coloured and shrugged, then asked a question of her own.

'Why was it so late when he came to fetch me? I rang Father much earlier.'

'We stayed up there playing billiards for quite a while. When we came down the old folks were just going to bed. Father said not to expect you in before the early hours as you were going to Rod's - to a party. Lord, you should have seen the expression on your husband's face! I honestly believed I'd be called out of bed to protect you.'

'Would you have done?' she asked, for a moment diverted.

'You bet! Wouldn't let a Lingard beat up my sister!'

She had to laugh at that.

'He wouldn't beat me up, Barry, you needn't have worried.'

'I'm not too sure, not the way he was. Perhaps he'd cooled down some by the time he got to the hotel. What was worrying me was if you'd already gone. There'd have been some fun if Ralph had been forced to go to Rod's - can't you imagine it, the irate husband dragging his wife away from the home of her ex-fiancé? He grinned at her. 'You haven't told me yet what he did.'

With a little sigh of resignation Sara described what had happened, whereupon Barry glanced at her curiously and asked how often she had to suffer these outbursts of jealousy from her husband.

'Not that it's surprising,' he added. 'You being so beautiful - and him being a Lingard. They're a wild lot and no mistake.'

'They're no worse than we are. Do you really believe he's jealous?'

'Not much doubt of that. Were I in your shoes, I'd practise a little more caution. No sense in deliberately riling a man like that. He might lose control one day and then you'll be sorry for yourself.'

But Sara did not hear; she was thinking again of her own fleeting impression that her husband was jealous, that he really did care a little, enough at any rate to prevent her from going to Roddy's party. And now here was Barry emphatically maintaining that Ralph was jealous. ...

'He hasn't ever been jealous before,' she murmured, speaking her thoughts aloud.

'First time, eh? Perhaps you've never given him cause before - and if you take my advice you won't give him cause again. As I've said, he could just lose control and let you have it.'

'I'd give a good account of myself if he did!' she suddenly flared, unable to take that with apparent meekness.

'With anyone else I'd agree,' he chuckled, and added, 'but not with Ralph Lingard. They're all tough, but he has something so damned inflexible about him - don't know how you got yourself mixed up with him. You always said you'd never have a man you couldn't get all your own way with.' He paused, and then, after a long hesitation, 'How did you get mixed\* up with him, Sara?'

'You know - how - it happened,' she whispered, lowering her head.

'You stayed the night with him, yes, but how did you meet him in the first place?'

She looked up, and the soft colour had tinted her cheeks, turning the ivory to the most delicate pink. Her husband was standing in the doorway. How long had he been there? she wondered. Aware of her fixed gaze, Barry turned and he too wondered how long Ralph had been there, for faint colour tinted his face at the idea of his brother-in-law listening to their conversation.

Ralph advanced into the room, his eyes holding those of his wife. He spoke quietly.

'Will you leave us, Sara? I want to speak to Barry alone.'

'Yes, of course.' She rose at once from her chair, though she did give her husband a wondering glance as she passed him on her way to the door.

Later Ralph informed her that he had told Barry the truth.

'You told Barry about the abduction? Oh, but you shouldn't have! He'll tell Father.'

'I intend telling your father myself. I think it's time they knew the truth.'

She shook her head bewilderedly.

'But why?'

'Because I don't want your family to think that of you,' he returned quietly.

'You ... care what they think about me?' Her lovely eyes were wide, and questioning, her lips quivering slightly. 'You really care that they should know I didn't - didn't do that awful thing?'

'Yes, Sara, I do care.'

'How did Barry take it? I mean, wasn't he mad or anything?'

Ralph laughed humorously.

'I half expected him to call me out. It's a good thing we're living in these enlightened times,' he added ruefully, 'or I'm afraid you'd have lost both your brother and your husband.'

'You'd have fought to the death over me?' She glanced at him covertly, and something made her add, 'I'd no idea I was worth it.'

His glance flickered over her in mock contempt.

'Asking for compliments?' he said, and a bleak little smile touched her lips.

'You're the last person to whom I'd look for compliments.' And she thought, her eyes shading unhappily, 'He should be the first - and the only one - to whom I should look for compliments.'

He did not speak for a while and then, in tones that held a gentleness she had never heard before,

'Perhaps, Sara, the day will come when I shall surprise you.'

What did he mean? she asked herself breathlessly, staring up into his lean dark face with a question in her lovely eyes. But his expression was set, and she saw him again as he had been last night. Furiously angry, ordering her,

in that peremptory tone, to get her coat, threatening to drag her from the hotel if she did not instantly obey his command.

What was wrong with her that she should want him to care? Life would be far from pleasant were they to enter into the normal relationship of marriage. To be his wife... He would be arbitrary and overbearing; he would dominate her at every turn; he would be demanding... All that she had declared never to tolerate in her husband.

Yes, something must be wrong with her that she should want him to care, to take her as his wife. What had caused , this change in her? Was it Greece? No, it was Ralph himself who had brought about the change - and all unknowingly! Had he deliberately set out to change her, to crush all her arrogance, to break her, he couldn't have met with greater success. What would he say, she wondered, were he to know what he had achieved? Perhaps he would gloat - yes, most likely he would gloat.

How had he done it? Sara's brow furrowed as she began to think back, to bring to mind some of the occurrences which could have been instrumental in effecting this change in her character. There had been those interludes of pleasure so sparingly meted out to her; they might in fact have been deliberately handed to her as samples of a rather wonderful companionship that could have been hers permanently had their marriage been normal. Conversely, there were the numerous occasions when he had gone to surprising lengths to create a situation in which she would have no option but to defer to his wishes; he had seemed at those times to be quite determined to bend her to his will - and he had succeeded in spite of her own efforts at resistance. There were those instances of his contempt, of his downright rudeness when referring to her appeal as a woman, and what of his almost exaggerated indifference? An incredible idea flashed through Sara's mind. Could it be that her husband had deliberately set out to break her? He was clever, in the most subtly effective way. This was proved by the manner in which he had conducted the whole drama of his so-called revenge; it was also manifested in the method of his turning the tables on her when she herself had sought a way of getting even with him.

The old anger threatened to rise, but she curbed it. Nevertheless, her indignation could not be suppressed and she found herself saying, quiveringly,

'If I thought for one moment that you - you—?' And then she checked herself, reluctant to put into words the idea that had occurred to her.

'Yes?' Ralph prompted interestedly, and Sara could find no means now of avoiding an answer.

'I believe you've plotted to make me - to try and change my character!'

'Change your character?' he returned innocently. 'What are you talking about?'

'You've been doing it all the time - oh, I hate you!'

'My dear Sara, don't subject me to another show of temper, not now, when I've decided there's a marked improvement in you—'

'Improvement! - yes, that's what I mean. You've been deliberately trying to improve me, as you call it!' She paused, and saw her husband's expression become fixed as he waited for her to continue. 'I can see it all; right from the first you've concentrated on - humbling me.'

'Do you mind explaining all this?' he requested wearily. 'Try to be calm and give me a rational explanation. Tell me more about this - plot I'm supposed to have hatched in order to humble you.'

'It was carefully designed to - to tame me— That's the word you love to use, isn't it?' Her voice still trembled, but she contrived to keep her anger in check. 'It was so well thought out, and the means used so cleverly hidden. Oh, how could I ever have been so stupid!'

'You actually believe I'd waste my time on you? Are you suggesting I've been making an endeavour to improve you? - to curb your wild ways?' The very idea seemed to astound him, for he stared at her incredulously. 'How vain you must be to think for one moment that I'd waste my time trying to

make a nice girl of you!' A laugh touched his lips and he watched her colour rise, then fade again, before he continued, in a cool, deliberate tone, 'No, my dear Sara, I never take on an impossible task.'

Her eyes were suddenly far too bright as she looked at him, all her indignation crushed by his wounding remarks. How could he be so callous when, only a moment ago, he had spoken gently to her, saying - when she had talked about compliments - that he might surprise her one day? She continued to stare at him, and after a little while she saw his expression change. Did she imagine it, or was there really a hint of remorse about his eyes? He extended a hand, and seemed about to say something, but to her dismay Sara felt the tears well up and threaten to escape on to her cheeks. Swiftly she turned and left him, brushing the tears away as she went upstairs. What had he been about to say? Could it be that he had meant to apologize? A bitter smile touched her lips as she cast away that ridiculous idea. More likely to be another taunt or insult. Certainly it would not have been anything pleasant he had to say to her.

## CHAPTER TEN

DARKNESS had descended when they arrived back in Olympia on the Monday evening, but it was still quite early and Sara asked Ralph to walk with her down to the shrine. But he refused, saying he had work to do, and as soon as they had eaten he disappeared and Sara did not see him again that night. The following morning she repeated her request; this time he had said he was going to Langadia to see Adele.

'Get Hayley to walk with you,' he suggested as, a thick folder under his arm, he bade her a rather curt good morning. Why did he always have great wads of papers when he went out? she wondered. She felt sure they were something to do with his work and, therefore, it was most odd that he should take them with him every time he went to visit Adele.

Immediately after his departure Sara went out, descending the hill and walking slowly so as to take in the beauty around her. It was a wonderful morning of brilliant sunshine and clear intoxicating air. This was her home and she wanted no other, for although she had enjoyed being with her father there had been present the whole time a profound yearning for the place she had so soon come to love. Autumn tints were spreading through the lush vegetation and soon the heights around would be covered with snow. But the meadows were green still, with the rivers flowing slowly through them. These rivers would be raging torrents in the spring, she mused, glancing up to the heights of the wild Arcadiart mountains from where the melting snows of winter would feed and swell the gentle valley streams.

She entered the shrine, where only a few people wandered, for it was still too early for the tourists. These had, in any case, been dwindling for a week or two and soon there would be scarcely any strangers there at all.

For a long while she sauntered about, in that sacred grove where for a thousand years the Games were held. The ruins seemed to add a softness to the landscape, lying as they did amid the clustering pines and cypresses, with the densely-wooded slopes rising above them, and the rivers meandering their way through the valley.

Sitting down on part of a broken statue base, Sara felt again the deep sense of peace she had experienced on other occasions when she had come to the shrine. What was it like in those far-off days when for ten months prior to the Games the athletes would live here, practising their skills in readiness for the time when each one would compete, before a vast audience, for the honours which were not for himself, but for his state and his parents? The supreme victor would be more or less canonized and his statue would stand among those of the gods and other heroes who, like himself, had been victorious in previous Panhellenic Games. Slaves and barbarians were not permitted either to partake in the Games or to watch the spectacle. This ruling applied also to women, Sara reflected with a wry smile, wondering if the status of women was at that time no higher than that of the slaves and barbarians.

Her eyes began to wander over the ruins. The Doric Temple of Zeus, its great columns brought down by an earthquake, stood roughly in the centre of the sacred Altis. It was massive, and in the days of its glory two great golden vases adorned the roof, one at each end, and high on the pediments was a statue of Nike, winged Victory descending from the sky, carrying an olive wreath to crown the victor of the Games. Many wonderful sculptures adorned the metopes and pediments, while inside the Temple was the colossal statue of Zeus by Phidias, made of gold and ivory and encrusted with thousands of precious gems.

On a lower level stood the Temple of Hera, one of the oldest temples to be found in the whole of Greece. Here used to stand that most breathtakingly beautiful statue of Hermes and the baby Dionysus, found lying by a pedestal bearing the name of the famous sculptor, Praxiteles. To the west of the Temple were many important buildings like the gymnasium and the Palaestra, and the immense workshop of Phidias, the famous Greek sculptor responsible for most of the statues adorning the Sanctuary.

At last Sara rose, deciding to go into the village and call on Hayley.

After greeting her with undisguised pleasure Hayley asked if Sara had enjoyed her visit to England. She was in the garden, weeding, but stopped work at once, and the two girls sat down under the shade of the trees.

'I enjoyed seeing my father, but I'm glad to be back.'

'That's how I feel when I go home to see my parents. I adore it here.'

'How did you come to be in Greece?' Sara asked curiously, remembering that Hayley had said she had worked for a shipping company in Athens before her marriage to Manolis.

'I came over just for a change, for adventure, if you like. One or two of my friends had found jobs abroad and I thought it was a good way of seeing a bit of the world before I settled down.' She grinned ruefully. 'My idea was to work in Athens for a while and then move on somewhere else, but I didn't get the chance. I met Manolis in less than a year.'

'And Adele ... she worked in the same office, you said?'

Hayley seemed suddenly to be interested in the sundial, standing on a little paved circle in the centre of the garden, and Sara began to regret having mentioned Adele, for it was clear that Hayley had no wish to discuss her. But at last Hayley said, eyeing her friend strangely:

'Hasn't Adele ever talked about herself to you? She is your friend, I take it?'

That latter was a subtle question, Sara knew, recalling Duncan's saying he had hinted to his sister that between Adele and Ralph there existed something far stronger than mere friendship. Therefore, Hayley would not expect Sara to be on friendly terms with Adele, just the reverse in fact. Yes, it was a subtle question and, knowing of Hayley's loyalty to Adele, Sara found great difficulty in answering it. But although her friend gave no indication that she was now willing to talk about Adele, she was waiting interestedly for Sara's reply.

'No, Adele never talks much about herself,' Sara said, deciding to ignore the second question altogether.

Hayley must have noticed the deliberate avoidance of her question, but she gave no indication of doing so as she said, that odd expression still present in her eyes,

'Adele is reticent by nature. She never did say very much about herself ... but Ralph must surely have told you something about her?'

Another subtle question. Hayley might hate gossip, and with her confidence might be a confidence, as her brother had asserted; nevertheless she was now revealing a certain curiosity, even as Duncan had done, about the strange triangle of Sara, Adele and Ralph. Had she changed her opinion of Adele's character? Did she now wonder whether those hints of Duncan's could have had some foundation?

'Ralph doesn't say much about Adele either,' Sara frankly admitted, and then, feeling that she was in no way testing Hayley's loyalty to her friend, she asked how Adele came to be living in Langadia. 'She has some Greek in her, so Ralph says?' she added.

'I believe she has a bit - from one of her grandparents, I think. She lives here because her father was left the house in Langadia many years ago. Adele's parents are quite old, and they'd always said they would retire to the house they'd been left. They're not short of money and, as you know, Adele works for Ralph.'

Sara's eyes opened wide; could this be the explanation for all those papers her husband took with him when he went to visit Adele?

'I - never know quite what she does for Ralph,' ventured Sara, giving a forced little laugh. 'I'm afraid Ralph refuses to talk about his work once he's left it behind.'

'Adele does some book-keeping for him at home, just for pocket money. I didn't know of course until she told me that evening when we met at your place.' A slight pause and then, 'Your husband never discusses his work with you? How strange. Manolis loves to tell me what he's been doing all day - and I like to know about his work. I—' She checked herself, hesitating undecidedly before she went on, 'I'd feel shut out, somehow, if Manolis wouldn't talk to me about what he does. Besides, I like to know what he's doing all day. You see, it's all part of it - of being married, I mean.'

Yes, it was all part of it, Sara agreed, silently, part of the intimacy of marriage; you had to be close in every way. How different from what she herself had so confidently declared to be the formula for the perfect marriage. How could she ever have believed that life with a man like Roddy would satisfy her?

Yes, whatever the outcome of her marriage to Ralph, she owed him a great debt of gratitude for rescuing her from the consequences of what would have been her own folly.

Hayley was glancing away to the high dark shape of the smooth-topped hills, and Sara studied her in profile. She looked so attractive, with a slant of sunlight escaping through the trees to ripple like gold through her hair, and a look of sweet contentment on her face. She turned as if forced to do so by Sara's interest, and she smiled enchantingly at her. Her grey eyes were wide and rather dreamy and Sara knew that, for a few moments, her own presence had been forgotten.

So this was what love did to you; it made you glow and dream and filled you to the brim with happiness. How lucky Hayley was, and Valerie, too. 'I might have found the right one, had I not had such stupid ideas,' Sara thought... but no. She had the right one. It was Ralph she wanted - so desperately now, she owned, a terrible ache of despair in her heart. It was her husband she wanted - but he didn't want her.

'People are different,' Hayley said with a hint of apology as she saw her friend's expression. And she laughed rather self-consciously before adding, 'Manolis and I - well, perhaps we're too sentimental. Duncan certainly thinks so; he's no patience at all with either of us.'

'I don't think you're too sentimental—' Sara swallowed a little lump in her throat and a few seconds elapsed before she was able to go on. 'It must be wonderful to be in love like that.' Too late she realized what those words revealed. Her friend looked startled and when she spoke her voice was hesitant and guarded.

'How - how long have you been married, Sara?'

'Five months.'

A small silence followed. Hayley was deep in thought and Sara began to sense that interest again, that curiosity her friend had seemed to reveal earlier about the place which Adele occupied in the lives of Sara and her husband.

'Are you ...? Perhaps I shouldn't say this, Sara, because we haven't known each other very long at all, but - well, you're not worried about Adele?' She paused uncomfortably, half hoping Sara would help her out, but Sara could find nothing to say, and presently Hayley went on to tell her that Duncan had seemed to think there was something between Ralph and Adele. 'There isn't, Sara, if that's what's troubling you. I feel almost sure of it.'

'Almost?' Again she spoke without thinking, but Sara felt there was nothing to be gained by pretence when she had as much as admitted that her husband did not love her.

'No—' Hayley shook her head. 'I shouldn't have said that. I'm sure, very sure, that Adele wouldn't do anything wrong.' She stared in front of her, and when she spoke Sara knew it was with difficulty, but with sudden resolution too. 'Adele and her husband - he's English - parted about a year ago. I'd lost touch with her> but I heard about it from another friend who worked with us in Athens. This friend made me promise I wouldn't breathe a word of what she told me, but I think, under these circumstances, I can - and should - tell you about it.' And Sara listened as her friend related the story that had been told to her regarding the breaking up of Adele's marriage. Apparently it had been ideally happy until Michael, her husband, fell in love - or appeared to fall in love - with someone else. She worked with him, this other girl, and it seems she's been jilted and this particular day she was in tears. Michael, in sympathy, I expect, took her out to lunch; then it became a regular thing. Then he started taking her out in the evenings and - well, it seems that the girl began to have ideas about Michael; she was obviously unscrupulous because she knew from the first he was married. However, some sort of an affair did develop and Adele found out about it and they parted. The tragedy of it all is that Michael threw this girl over almost at once, but, according to this friend of mine, he won't come back to Adele because he's too ashamed.'

'Does - she still care for him, do you think?' Sara's voice trembled, and the hand resting on her knee was not very steady either.

'I'm sure she does - I'm sure they're both just as devoted as ever, but what can Adele do if Michael won't come back to her?'

Sara shook her head dazedly. How ridiculous for them to be apart if this were true, if they still loved one another.

'But Ralph,' she said, her brow creasing in a frown. 'Why does he pay her so much attention?' The words came automatically and Sara was scarcely aware of having spoken them, for she was thinking of Adele, and the way she adopted that proprietorial manner with Ralph, treating her, Sara, with condescension which at times had amounted almost to rudeness. This was not the attitude of someone whose sole interest in Ralph was that of an employee. And what of Ralph himself? He had practically admitted on several occasions that he and Adele were having an affair. No, Hayley must be wrong, she must be. 'I don't understand - how did Ralph and Adele come to meet?'

'That is something I can't tell you because, as I've said, I'd lost touch with Adele until meeting her again at your house. I've invited her here, but she hasn't come yet.'

Nothing more was said on the subject and as Manolis was coming home for lunch, Sara left so that Hayley could get on with preparing the meal.

She made her way home slowly, thinking of the conversation that had just taken place. Hayley must be wrong, for it was obvious that there was something between Ralph and Adele ... and yet hadn't she herself had doubts? Supposing it were true, and Adele did still love her husband? Supposing there was nothing more than friendship— 'What good would it do me?' she quivered, as despair flooded over her. Had not Ralph made it abundantly clear that not only did he detest her as a person, but he also found her completely unattractive as a woman ?

It was a month since her father died; Sara had stayed with her mother for a fortnight and then returned to Olympia. The autumn was becoming well advanced and Sara spent most of her time reading by the fire, wondering if this were all she could ever expect from life. Since her father's death Ralph had been markedly kinder to her; he stayed in more but usually took himself off to his little study for the greater part of the day.

Now that her father was gone she was free to leave him, and at first Sara had put the idea from her, but as time went on she became convinced that it was not possible for her to go on living in the same house with Ralph, for the rest of her life, with nothing between them. To make a break seemed the only sensible thing to do and at last she decided to cut away altogether and return to England. Their marriage was to be for ever, Ralph had said, and Sara was prepared to accept that, for she knew there would never be anyone else in her life.

The idea of leaving her husband grew stronger as the days and weeks passed, and it reached a climax one evening when, about to enter the sitting-room where Ralph and Adele were talking, she halted outside the door on hearing her name mentioned. But she had missed what was said about her and the next thing she heard was:

'It isn't fair, Ralph; you're heartless.'

'All's fair in love, my dear.'

'Are you terribly in love?' came the wistful question from Adele, and Sara felt ice at her heart as he replied,

'About as much in love as anyone can be. When a man realizes he could give his life for a woman then he's reached the pinnacle of loving.'

A little laugh broke from Adele and a small silence followed. Were they in each other's arms? Was there no sound because they were kissing each other?

'I wonder if your love is as strong as mine,' said Adele at last.

'Can one compare? - or measure? Besides, women are different.'

'Their love goes deeper ...?'

'No, I will never admit that. Women are more demonstrative, they lay bare their hearts more easily, but a man can be as deeply affected by emotions as a woman, and he can be as easily hurt. So take care, Adele, be kind to your lover.'

'I intend to be kind, always,' she returned fervently. And she added, on a note of deep anxiety, 'Will you be kind to yours, Ralph, always?'

'That is my intention—'

Sara turned away and went back upstairs. She could not go in to them, they were happy in each other's company; they would not welcome an intruder at a time like this.

Methodically she made arrangements for her return to England, arranging the flight, writing to her mother as tactfully as she could, yet warning her that the separation was to be permanent.

The day before her departure she went to see Hayley, and told her of what she had overheard.

'I must go, and leave them together - the way they were before I came,' she said. 'I haven't told you everything, Hayley, but I rather think Duncan has given you an idea that our marriage was not normal from the beginning.'

Hayley nodded, a very thoughtful expression on her face.

'I can't believe it, even though you overheard this conversation between them. Adele and Michael were terribly in love - I just can't see her caring for anyone else.'

Sara did not trouble to comment on that. There could be no mistake, she had heard them both declaring their love, promising to be kind to each other always. She said goodbye to Hayley and after promising to write Sara left

her friend and spent the rest of the afternoon down at the shrine. The following morning she had her breakfast with Ralph - the last meal together, she thought, savouring every single moment, and hoping no cross words would intrude to spoil the memory.

Her packing was almost finished when her husband walked into her room and she looked up, guiltily, for she had dropped not the slightest hint of her intention.

'I th-thought you were going out this morning,' she faltered. 'You always go out on Wednesdays.'

Ralph ignored that; his eyes were on the suitcase on the bed, packed almost to the top. A paleness had touched the corners of his mouth and a muscle seemed to be throbbing in the side of his neck.

'Where do you think you're going?' he demanded, coming slowly into the room.

She gave a deep and trembling sigh.

'I'm going back to England - leaving you, f-for good.'

'Do you mind giving me a reason?'

She shook her head, reluctant to mention his affair with Adele.

'I think it's the best thing. I wouldn't have done it while Father was alive, because of hurting him, but now it doesn't matter. It will leave you free, the way you were before I came.' Absently folding a skirt, she put it on top of the rest of her things and closed the lid of the suitcase. 'I haven't much time, Ralph, the taxi will be here in a few minutes.'

'The taxi's been and gone.'

She blinked at him uncomprehendingly.

'You've sent it away?'

'You're not leaving me, Sara,' he said, and it seemed that all the old authority and hardness entered into him. 'You're my wife, and I told you it was for ever.'

'You can't keep me here - I've made up my mind, I'm not living a life like this any longer. You can just go down and ring for another taxi.' Why did he want her to stay? Simply to save his face? - to prevent people from saying his marriage was a failure?

'Are you giving me an order?' he inquired dangerously, and a sudden pain touched Sara's heart. She had wanted to go quietly, after the friendly meal they had just had. And now it seemed their last moments together were to be ones of quarrelling and strife.

'I just want you to get the taxi for me, please.' To her dismay the tears started to her eyes and she brushed them away, almost angrily. 'I don't want to quarrel with you at this time, Ralph, and indeed there's no need for us to do so. If you'll get me another taxi - otherwise I shall miss the plane.' Tremblingly she tried to put on her coat. Gently it was taken from her; she turned and held out an arm, expecting to be helped into her coat, but it was flung on the bed, on top of her suitcase, and Ralph turned her round to face him, his hands gentle on her arms.

'Why this sudden decision to leave me, Sara?' he asked, and for a moment she was unable to answer. This was not the Ralph she knew; this tenderness could not possibly be for her.

'It isn't sudden. I've been thinking about it for some time, but I made up my mind definitely after I had heard you and Adele—' She stopped, flushing at her admission, and yet she knew she must go on, for there was something she did not understand. 'I heard you talking about... love, and saying you meant to be kind to - to one another.'

'To one another?' A frown of concentration touched his brow. 'You never heard a thing like that.'

'I was outside the door,' she admitted, her flush deepening. 'I didn't really mean to listen, but I did hear you and Adele ...' What exactly had they said? 'I remember, now, you said you would be kind to your - to your lover.'

'And you thought Adele was this lover, to whom I promised to be kind?' And before she could collect her bewildered thoughts sufficiently to answer him, 'It's understandable, I must confess, but, Sara, it was not Adele.'

'Not Adele?' she trembled. 'But she too promised - oh, it must be Adele!'

'Adele's husband had written asking her to have him back, and I imagine that by this time they're together.'

'Then who - who—?' It can't be me, she thought, her whole body beginning to shake. 'Ralph. ...' The tears were close, too close, and she blinked rapidly in an effort to hold them back.

'I'm hoping, my darling, that you will be the lover to whom I vowed to be kind.'

'Me ... but you don't like me ...' How ridiculous when he had just uttered that endearment, when he was looking at her like this, with love in his eyes and the most tender smile upon his lips. 'Is it true? I can't believe it—' She stared at him through a mist of tears, looking up to see a hint of satisfaction, of triumph in his eyes to which, strangely, she took not the slightest exception. And then she was in his arms, weeping against his breast; and when a little while later he had lifted her face and gently dried her eyes, he bent to kiss her tenderly, possessively, on her mouth, and her cheeks, and then his lips caressed her hair.

'My lovely Sara, how I've wanted you. You'll never know the struggles I've had—' He held her away from him and for a brief space his eyes were stern. 'What a dance you've led me! I thought I'd never - never—' He broke off, but his dark eyes laughed now and he knew somehow that she herself would finish the sentence.

'—tame me?'

'Darling, I just wanted you to be a woman.'

'A woman who purrs?' She nestled against him, feeling the rapid beating of his heart, so close to her own.

'Just all woman,' he said simply. 'That was what I wanted, my darling, only that.' He kissed her again and because she was in fact now all woman, she just had to say, with a hint of reproach,

'You wanted me? But you always said I - I wasn't attractive. You never paid me a single compliment.'

'I also said I'd surprise you one day, remember?' and as she nodded, 'You're beautiful, Sara,' he whispered hoarsely. 'So beautiful that I wanted you right from the first. But I desired something far more precious than surface beauty. You possessed it, I knew, and I just had to bring it out. Forgive me, sweetheart?'

'There's nothing to forgive,' she whispered lovingly, nestling close again, 'so long as I'm the sort of woman you can love.'

After a little while Ralph explained about Adele. She had worked in the office of a friend of his, from whom he had learned about her broken marriage. She had wanted some part-time work and Ralph had given it to her.

'We did go out together,' he admitted, 'but there was never anything serious between us. But I had to make you believe there was, and Adele co-operated - though she was most reluctant to do so because she liked you from the start. Often she told me I was heartless.'

'You were,' Sara couldn't help saying. 'You made me sleep on the floor, for one thing.'

'The hardest thing I ever did,' he confessed ruefully. 'When you stood at that door—' He kissed her passionately, and only then did Sara realize what it had cost him to ignore her on that particular night.

Presently Sara told him why she had jilted Alex, and Ralph's face shadowed with remorse.

'Why didn't you tell me? Heavens, child, I'd not have abducted you had I known the truth! - at least, I'd not have made you stay on the boat with me.'

'Wouldn't you?' And, as she looked at him with tender humour in her eyes.

'Good lord, what am I saying? Yes, of course I would!'