

CURSE OF BLACK TOR



JANE TOOMBS



The Curse of Black Tor

By

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Chapter One

The breeze blew streamers across the gray water to hang a tattered curtain of dampness between the ferry and Seattle. Martha Jamison turned and walked to the foredeck, where she stood almost alone, peering into the grayness surrounding the boat.

"It'll clear before you reach the island," the Seattle taxi driver had insisted. "They get the best of our weather over there." As though weather were a commodity the Canadians were guilty of hoarding.

Martha touched her hair nervously. Ginetha had helped her do it up in a French knot the morning before, but the mist was encouraging stray wisps to curl out of the neat arrangement. The hairdo had been an attempt to seem as "mature" as possible, to fit the ad description. Perhaps she should go back inside?

"Ever been to Victoria?"

Martha turned to face a bearded young man.

"No."

"You'll like Vancouver Island, but don't stay just in Victoria. The city's a marvel, but if you really want to--"

Martha recognized the glint in his blue eyes and decided to be blunt. "My plans are all made," she said. "Someone's meeting me." Her tone was crisp. She was not one to encourage stray admirers. She turned her back to the young man.

A shaft of sunlight had cut through the overcast and glinted on the water. A sea gull rode a small chunk of driftwood.

"There are two of us facing the future, at least," the bearded man remarked. So he hadn't left. Martha said nothing.

"I like to think of the ferry as a world microcosm. Hardly original, I'm afraid," the man went on. "By the way, I'm Branwell Lowrey—my friends call me Bran."

She didn't respond.

"Well, anyway, we brave spirits here at the bow are looking ahead. The people aft are those still caught in the past, while the few along the sides live for today."

Am I facing the future? Martha asked herself. Isn't this trip a flight from reality, as Ginetha says? She shook her head.

"You don't agree?" Bran asked.

She turned to him, ashamed of her rudeness.

"I don't know," she said. He was a good-looking man with chiseled features and would probably be equally attractive without the beard, unlike some men she'd met. His eyes smiled when he did.

"I can at least talk to him," she told herself. Ginetha's admonitions rang in her ears. "You can't wrap yourself in memories of Johann forever. His death didn't make him a saint. Let other men have a chance in your life." Martha gazed dispassionately at Branwell Lowrey.

"Where did you get all those freckles?" he asked.

"From my father." Her reply was automatic for she'd been answering that question since childhood.

"Your freckles aren't all over, are they?" Johann had asked on their wedding night. They weren't, of course. Martha clenched her teeth and tried to listen to Bran.

"I'm Irish," he said. "Only second-generation American, would you believe?"

"Scottish," she said. "A long time ago."

"What's your name?"

"Martha Jamison." After Johann had died, she'd taken her maiden name again to throw everything away. But Johann still lived in her mind—Johann and their days together.

"You're certainly not one of the dark dour Scots."

"No, I'm the sandy kind."

"Will you be staying long?" Bran asked.

"I—I'm not sure." Ginetha thought she was crazy for answering the ad in the first place, and maybe Ginetha was right.

Martha studied Bran, bearded and tanned, in his jeans and T-shirt. What would it be like to throw a few necessities in a backpack and wander wherever one chose? She'd seen the group of young people come aboard with their packs. Bran looked as if he belonged with them. She was no older than Bran, surely. Twenty-eight shouldn't be too old to—to what? To be happy?

Martha straightened her shoulders and stared out over the bow. From the way the sun had broken through the weather was obviously clearing, and the sullen water was changing to a brownish blue as more of the sky appeared. Land became visible—pine-covered hills.

"That's Vancouver Island," Bran said. "We're almost there."

A sailboat passed to their left, its white sails taut in the crisp breeze. Other small boats skirted the shoreline.

"Salmon fishing," Bran explained. "This is the season."

Gray-and-brown gulls swooped low over the ferry, seeming to eye her curiously. The island grew larger, and she could identify houses, a church spire. No, perhaps not a church at all, the rambling white building with the tower up the middle, its peaked roof resembling a spire. That was a cross at the tip but a—was it a porpoise? A whale?

Then the boat entered the harbor inlet, and she had a confused impression of piers, warehouses, the loud roar of a seaplane taking off, a train whistle, the hoot of the ferry, foreign flags flying. But of course in this place she was the foreigner—the flags were Canadian.

"You'll never get the job," Ginetha had insisted, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer spread on the rug between them, open to the help-wanted ads. Ginetha had been eager for Martha to stay, to find a job in Seattle and not return to what she termed "the nightmare of L.A."

L.A. was all right, Martha thought. It kept her hidden. But Ginetha hadn't let her alone, bombarding her with phone calls and letters and threatening to come in person if Martha didn't stop moping around in "that depressing apartment—how you can stay there after what happened...?"

But the apartment was the known, and Martha had been afraid to leave it, until Ginetha had suddenly appeared and carted her off to Seattle.

"Listen to this." Ginetha read ads for office nurses, ICU nurses, private-duty nurses. "Take your pick."

"I don't think I'm ready, Gin." Panic rose in Martha at the thought of monitoring the ICU machines, making quick decisions, reassuring frightened patients and relatives.

"Oh, don't be silly. Once a nurse, always a nurse. When we worked together at Camarillo you were better than anyone else on the floor, and you know it."

Martha had met Ginetha at Camarillo State Hospital when they'd been fresh out of training. Ginetha was from Oregon, Martha from Arizona. They'd taken their state civil-service exam for psychiatric nursing together. Then Martha had met Johann and married him.

"I haven't worked for four years," Martha reminded Ginetha.

Ginetha waved her protest away and continued to scan the paper. "Here's an impossible one"

Listen. 'Mature nurse with psychiatric experience to act as companion for young woman. Must live in.'"

"Why 'impossible'?" Martha had asked.

"Because it's on the island and that's Canada and you can't work over there without years of red tape. Anyway, who'd want to live in with a crazy?"

"Let me see the ad."

"Oh, Martha, you don't want anything like that. Either they have a retarded kid that's gotten too big to handle, or else a schiz. I'd think—" Ginetha broke off.

Martha said nothing at all, knowing that they both were thinking of Johann. But there was no use dwelling on the past. "I'm going to answer this ad," Martha said finally.

The reply to her letter had been prompt but imperious: "Please bring your luggage so there will be no delay should the interview prove to be mutually satisfactory. It was signed "Jules Garrard," and a ferry ticket for the Princess Margarita was enclosed.

Even at the moment, with the boat gliding into the dock at Victoria, Martha wasn't sure why she'd persisted in applying for the position. Wasn't Ginetha right? Living-in with any patient could be tiresome, and someone mentally ill might well prove to be impossible. Especially after Johann. Why did she think she'd be able to handle it? Or want to? Did she crave the security of having a house to live in, of having other people responsible for supplying her basic needs? No jockeying for position on a hospital staff, no in-fighting, no battling traffic to work and back. Still, she could have done private-duty in Seattle.

"That's the Empress Hotel you're staring at," Bran said.

"What?" She'd been so lost in her interior monologue that she hadn't realized what she was seeing. "Oh, you mean the building with all the towers and turrets?"

"Yes. And to the right are the legislative buildings. The middle one looks like a state capitol. Victoria is the capital of British Columbia."

"Oh, that's right. Well..." Martha turned from the rail and started toward the cabin. She must smooth her hair before she got off the ferry. First impressions were important. "Goodbye," she called over her shoulder to Bran, then moved a little faster, hoping he wouldn't follow.

In the women's lounge she checked her appearance in the mirror, quickly tucking loose ends of her hair into place. She wore no makeup except for pale coral lip gloss. She'd been sleeping well this past week that she'd spent with Ginetha in Seattle—her eyes were clear, their color enhanced by the deep blue of her jacket.

She joined the line of disembarking passengers, her stomach knotted with nervousness. Why was she here at all? The rest of the people around her seemed to be tourists. There were some of the backpackers now, though Bran wasn't in sight. When the customs inspector asked for identification she showed her driver's license and said she wasn't sure how long she'd be staying in Victoria—perhaps just overnight.

Then she was out of the ferry shed, suitcases in hand. WELCOME TO VICTORIA was spelled out in flowers, marigolds, on the bank to her right. She took a deep breath.

"Miss Jamison?"

Martha turned and saw a middle-aged man with graying hair in a fringe around an otherwise bald head. He held a cap in his hand that matched his gray uniform.

"Yes."

He put on his hat and plucked the bags from her hands. With a nod he indicated a gray Rolls-Royce. "This is the car, miss. My name is Henry."

A chauffeur, yet, she thought after being shut into the back seat. But what else should she expect of a family wealthy enough to hire a live-in psychiatric nurse? The wages mentioned in the

letter were very generous.

—“Too generous,” Ginetha had said. “This patient must be a real nut. Why don't you reconsider and stay with me?”

Why hadn't she? Ginetha was an easy girl to be around. She didn't ask questions, although Martha felt them there, dozens of questions coiled in Ginetha's mind like poisonous snakes: “Did I really try to kill you like the papers said? Wasn't it awful when you unlocked the door and found him?”

Martha closed her eyes for a moment. Maybe that's why she hadn't stayed with Ginetha—the unasked questions. Maybe she was avoiding reality by this flight to another country. She'd let her hair grow and wore it differently; she no longer lightened it to blond, as Johann had preferred—she wasn't Marty Collier anymore, Mrs. Johann Collier. She was Martha Jamison, R.N. Who in Canada would connect the two?

They drove along a main street that had lamp posts with five round globes in a cluster like grapes. And baskets of live flowers hung from projections under the globes—geraniums, petunias and lobelia in a riot of reds and pinks and blues. The lamp posts themselves were the same delft blue as her pantsuit.

“Admiring the flowers, miss?”

“Oh, yes. They're lovely.”

“We call Victoria the Garden City. September is almost the end of the hanging baskets, though. You ought to see them in the spring.”

“Have you lived here long?”

“Ten years now, miss.”

Ten years ago I was still in Flagstaff, Martha thought. Still at home, just getting ready to go away for nurse's training.

“Did you see the house from the ferry?” Henry asked.

“The house?”

“Black Tor, the Garrard place. On your left before you enter the harbor.”

“I don't know. I might have.”

“There's a rocky point, like. Used to be able to see a black cliff in the early days, I've been told. That's where the house got its name. But the trees and bushes have grown over the black rock.”

“I saw one place I thought was a church at first,” Martha said. “It had a tower with a figure of a porpoise on a rod at the roof tip.”

“Then you did see the house, miss. Only that's a killer whale. Mr. Abel Garrard, who built Black Tor in 1880, had the whale put up there as his little joke. He was an eccentric man by all accounts.” As he spoke, Henry turned left off the main road. “The Garrards don't live in Victoria proper, or in Equimalt, either—that's this suburb we've passed through. Black Tor isn't near anything. Isolated, that's what it is.”

Martha felt his eyes on her in the rearview mirror.

“I like the country,” she said.

“Good for you, miss. Some people don't.”

Had Henry driven other applicants to Black Tor? Out and back again when the interviews weren't “mutually satisfactory”?

The car passed between stone pillars, and she caught a glimpse of open iron gates, half hidden by shrubbery.

“We're inside the grounds now,” Henry told her. “The family owns forty acres. Like a park, mostly.”

The drive meandered among old trees that overhung the road, past shrubs and flower beds and

came at last to the white house Martha had seen from the boat. Close up, it was a confusing arrangement of wings, ells and additions that had been added in what seemed a completely haphazard fashion. The building was huge, and the effect was not so much amusing as almost frightening, though a mad architect had executed an insane masterpiece.

Out of the car, Martha craned her neck to stare at the octagonal tower that rose from the center at least four stories high, its steep roof crowned with what Henry had said was a killer whale. An odd choice.

As she gazed upward there came a loud crash, as of glass breaking, and Henry caught her arm pulling her off balance as an object struck the ground beside her. Martha stifled a scream as she looked down at a cat's mangled body by her feet, slivers of glass stuck in its matted fur. Then she glanced back at the tower in horror.

“Don't be so upset, miss,” Henry said. “That's just Miss Josephine's way.”

Chapter Two

Martha pulled away from Henry and watched him stoop to gather up the cat. She saw now that there was no blood; in fact, there was sawdust like material on the ground where the cat's body had lain.

"It's only a stuffed animal, miss," Henry said. "Miss Josephine sometimes tears them up."

"Them'?"

"Black Tor has many stuffed animals. All the pets the family ever owned have been preserved this way. And then Mr. Abel was quite a sportsman, so--"

"But she threw the cat from the tower at me!" Martha exclaimed.

"Well, now, not at you exactly, miss. Near you, yes. Miss Josephine doesn't want a nurse here. I'm afraid."

Martha stared at Henry. At, near—what was the difference? She felt like getting back in the car and demanding to be driven into Victoria immediately. Why bother with—

"You must be Miss Jamison. Won't you come in?"

Martha whirled to see who'd spoken.

"We've just arrived, sir," Henry said.

The man nodded. His black hair had a white streak on the left side. He was tall, dark, handsome, and he gave her a quick smile that failed to light his eyes. "I'm Jules Garrard," he said to Martha.

"How do you do?" she answered, feeling half hypnotized by his dramatic appearance as she allowed him to show her through the open front door. "I believe your letter mentioned you had been to Canada before," Jules said.

"This is my first visit." They entered a paneled entry hall. Then the brightness of the day was shut away when Henry came in behind them and closed the door. The dark wood and the stained-glass windows suddenly changed the day into a tinted twilight. Martha's breath quickened as though the dimness deprived her of air.

Henry stepped ahead of them to open an inner door leading to a foyer with a massive copper chandelier hanging from a cathedral ceiling. Martha looked to her left and gasped, astonished at the huge black and white animal displayed on a pedestal. What was it? Then she remembered L.A. Marineland's featured killer whale and realized what she saw was a stuffed one, arranged as though leaping from the ocean. It looked inappropriately happy, seeming to grin at her as she passed. Other sea trophies were mounted along the oak-paneled walls--sailfish and salmon--but the killer whale dwarfed them to insignificance.

Henry disappeared down a hall to the left, going through yet another door. Jules indicated a passage to her right and then ushered her into a half-paneled room, its upper walls papered with a gold and green hunting scene. More trophies crowded the walls, except for one, where books filled the shelves from floor to ceiling.

"Grandfather Abel was more of a sportsman than a reader," Jules said. "This was his library. I find that too much exposure to this room gives me claustrophobia." He spread his hands and smiled.

Martha smiled, too, sharing the same feeling and already liking Jules Garrard with his black

and white hair and his oddly sad eyes.

—“Did your grandfather harpoon the killer whale I saw?”

“No. Actually, the family legend is that he tried to save the whale, which had been wounded somehow. But it died, and so he had it hauled to the taxidermist. Grandpa saw himself and the orca as blood brothers.”

“Orca?”

“Scientific name. I've done some research on killer whales—a family interest, you might say.”

Martha thought of the mounted animal in the foyer. Black and white, a striking contrast, like Jules's hair. Jules was young—not over forty, certainly. She remembered white streaks in the hair and being hereditary. Had Abel Garrard had the trait, as well? Is that why the orca had fascinated him?

Jules offered her a lyre back chair near a rosewood desk. He then sat behind the desk, and she was reminded that this was an interview. For a few moments Jules had made her forget that he was her prospective employer.

“May I call you Martha?” he asked.

“Please.”

“You certainly seem to have every qualification to be Josephine's companion,” he said.

“I haven't worked in four years,” she said. “I—”

He waved his hand. “I'm pleased to have someone closer to her age applying. Aunt Natalie composed the advertisement, hoping, no doubt, for another of the elderly retirees we've had lately. I've tried to tell Natalie she's wrong—” Jules broke off and shrugged.

“The ad did say 'mature,’” Martha began. “But as I am twenty-eight, I thought—”

“I have no doubt you're sufficiently mature,” Jules told her, smiling. For the first time his eyes seemed to lighten.

Does he find me attractive? Martha wondered. She was very aware of his gaze. She was also aware of him as a man. Surprised and disconcerted at her response to him, she looked down at her hands.

“It's only fair that you meet Josephine before you decide to stay with us,” Jules said.

The repetition of Josephine's name brought back the crash of breaking glass and the stuffed cat landing at her feet. Martha straightened and met Jules's eyes. “Why do you need a psychiatric nurse as her companion?” she asked bluntly.

“Josephine is...unusual,” Jules said slowly. “I prefer to have you meet her before I say more.” He glanced at his watch. “Have you had lunch?”

“I ate on the boat.”

He nodded and got up. As Martha started to rise to her feet, he motioned for her to stay seated. Then he went to the door and opened it.

A tall slender girl stood there, her curly dark hair falling past her shoulders. She had no streaks of white. As she came into the room, Martha saw that her eyes were sherry yellow. She wore jeans and a gray sweat shirt. Except that she was prettier, she looked much like the backpackers Martha had seen on the ferry.

“This is Josephine,” Jules said. “She's fond of listening outside closed doors.”

The girl made a face at him. Then her eyes flicked back to Martha.

“This is Martha Jamison, Josephine,” Jules said. “As you can see, you were quite wrong about throwing the cat from the tower to frighten her.”

“I thought you'd be old,” Josephine told Martha. “You're little, so I thought you were one of the tiny wizened kind, and they're even worse than the fat jolly ones.”

“How old are you, Josephine?” Martha asked, deciding to ignore the tower episode.

"I'll be twenty-three next month," Josephine replied. "Then I get half—don't I, Jules?"

~~"Not until your father dies," a man's voice interjected. As he spoke, he came into the room and bowed slightly toward Martha. "Good afternoon, Miss Jamison," he said, then turned to Josephine. "If you'd wear your glasses, you'd know a pretty woman from an old lady, Josie my girl."~~

"I don't need glasses," Josephine said. "And don't call me 'Josie.' I was at the top of the tower looking down. How could I tell? Besides, nobody young ever came before." She smiled at Martha, and her smile was engaging. "If I have to have someone stay with me, I'd just as soon it was you."

"This intruder is our cousin, Charn Wexler," Jules said.

Both Josephine and Jules had disregarded Charn's entering words. Had he meant them as a joke? If so, it was a joke in very bad taste.

"Hello," Martha said. If Charn was "our" cousin, were Jules and Josephine brother and sister? She glanced from one to the other.

"Josephine is my half sister," Jules said, as if reading her mind.

"Daddy wore out two wives," Josephine explained.

Martha blinked, trying to assimilate all the information. Her quick assessment of Josephine revealed no evidence of mental illness. Still, such evidence was often concealed, only to emerge when least expected.

"Why don't you two get out so Martha and I can discuss her staying here," Jules suggested.

"I'll bet you were scared, weren't you?" Josephine said to Martha. "You didn't scream or faint or anything, but—"

"I was startled," Martha admitted. "And horrified, since I thought the cat was alive."

"Oh, I wouldn't hurt a real cat," Josephine said, instantly sounding shocked.

"Come on, Josephine," Charn Wexler began, shepherding her toward the door. "You'll frighten Martha off yet."

"We've a rather informal household," Jules commented when the door was shut once more. "Except for Aunt Natalie, of course. She disapproves of us all, including father."

"Your cousin doesn't resemble you or Josephine," Martha noted.

"Charn belongs to the Wexler branch--heavy on Teutonic fairness, with no suggestion of Indian blood such as the Garrards carry. You'd never think Charn was one-sixteenth Indian. As for you, Martha, based on your name and your strawberry-blond hair—"

He broke off, and she thought for a moment he was going to finger a curl that had drifted out of her chignon. Martha quivered as though he had actually touched her. "I'd say you were a Scot," Jules finished.

She nodded. His irises were so dark a brown they appeared black. She could hardly see the pupils. She wondered irrelevantly if the orca had black eyes.

"Victoria will like that," Jules went on. "Most of the original settlers here were Scots. Martha took Indian wives, as did my ancestor, who happened to be French. I'll show you the old graveyard sometime. The names are interesting."

Martha closed her eyes momentarily and turned away from Jules. She'd tried to have Johann cremated, but that had precipitated even more publicity, and at last she'd given up his body to the others, as she should have given up Johann earlier. The funeral had been a public horror.

"You do intend to stay?" Jules asked. "Obviously Josephine accepts you. She liked none of the others."

"Others?"

Jules sighed. "I'm afraid there's been a parade of companions and would-be companions in and out of the house for the past few years. Aunt Natalie would insist on older women, and Josephine—well, you heard her."

“You've never had a younger woman apply?”

—Jules hesitated. “You see, Natalie did the interviewing until her illness. She... eliminate anyone under fifty.”

“You haven't told me why Josephine needs a companion.”

“She's made three suicide attempts in the past year. Then there's the occult fixation, of course. But she's not a psychotic. Her behavior is sometimes—bizarre, though usually rational in terms of her beliefs.”

Martha didn't say anything. Any psychotic behavior could be called normal if judged on the basis of the insane individual's beliefs.

“Josephine leads a rather restricted life at present. She needs someone who understands her, someone versed in psychiatry. And, I've felt, someone near her in age. I do hope you'll stay with her.”

What was there to return to if she didn't stay? Martha asked herself. Whatever abnormality Josephine might later display, on the surface she seemed only a somewhat immature young woman. Why not remain here at Black Tor and try to help her? “What about Josephine's medical care?” she inquired. “You do have a doctor seeing her?”

“A psychiatrist, Dr. Louis Marston. Naturally you'll be talking to him later on.”

Martha nodded. “I'd like to stay.”

Jules touched her arm lightly. “I know you'll be good for Josephine.”

Again Martha was terribly aware of his nearness. “Do—are you—who else lives here?” she asked, hating herself for the awkwardness of the question. If he had a wife, what would she do—turn off her reaction? Turn off a reaction she had no control over? She remembered her total response to Johann, and the memory frightened her. Is that the only way she could react to a man—all or nothing? She eyed Jules warily.

“Matthew—he's Natalie's husband. She's my father's sister, now Natalie Drew. My father's a invalid. He'd enjoy having you around if he felt better—he always had an eye for a pretty girl. Charlene, of course, and another cousin, an elderly one from my mother's family—Louella Gallion. And Charlene's sister, Cathleen. She's over in the States at present, but she'll be returning. An artist of sorts, or so Cathleen says. Very mod.”

No wife.

“Do you have a family nearby?” Jules asked.

“No. And that reminds me—I do have a friend in Seattle. You wrote me at her address. She seemed to think I'd have a problem working in Canada. Is there anything special I should do?”

“There's nothing you need do. As a private citizen I can hire anyone I choose. I don't know how it would be if you wanted to work as a nurse at a hospital here—perhaps your friend is right. But in this case...” He shrugged. “I'll see to any problems relating to your continued stay in Canada.”

All at once she felt far from home. Home? she asked herself. You have no home. Why not in Canada?

“Your parents aren't living?” Jules wanted to know.

Martha shook her head. She'd been a late-in-life only child, her father had passed away when she was in high school and her mother, thank God, had died before the horror of Johann's death.

“You will, of course, be dining with us,” Jules said.

She stared at him in surprise before she realized there'd be servants in a house this size and she wasn't to eat with them. Not only Henry, but a cook, maids and likely a housekeeper, since Jules wasn't married. Unless Natalie acted as such. Martha felt alien. She'd had plenty of money, she and Johann, but they'd lived simply in a condominium apartment with a cleaning woman two days a week. This rambling house had stood there since 1880 and must require a small army of servants to keep up.

“I'll ask Ruth to show you to your room.” Jules touched a small panel on the wall and after

moment spoke into it. "She'll meet you in the foyer," he finished.

~~Ruth was a middle-aged woman who wore a gray uniform with a white apron.~~ Martha, astonished, followed her up the curving staircase. She'd had no idea maids still wore uniforms.

"The aquamarine room will be yours, miss," Ruth told her, indicating an open door off the second-floor hallway.

Martha was relieved to find that the only stuffed animal in the bedroom was a yellow canary in a gilt cage. The room was furnished with heavy oak pieces and decorated in aquamarine. The effect was quite charming, with the delicate color giving a lift to the furniture. Tall narrow windows overlooked a formal garden, and Martha decided she faced out onto what might be called the front yard in a less pretentious home.

"Shall I unpack for you, miss?" Ruth asked, and Martha noticed that her suitcases were at the foot of the bed.

"Thank you, I'll take care of that."

Ruth turned to leave, hesitated, then said, "Mrs. Drew won't like your pants at the dinner table, miss."

"What? Oh—thanks for telling me, Ruth." As the maid went out, Martha frantically reviewed her wardrobe. She had a long dress that would do, she thought, but she hesitated to wear it the first night at Black Tor. Otherwise, she'd packed almost all casual clothes—pants, jeans, one uniform—just in case—and a dress that might be all right for shopping but might not do for the dinner table. Evidently at Black Tor one dressed for dinner, despite Jules's claim that the household was informal.

Martha unpacked, then glanced at her watch in dismay. Only three o'clock. What was she to do until dinner was served? Should she try to find Josephine? Thinking of the rambling house, she concluded that she probably couldn't find her. She sighed and sat on the bed, then finally stretched out on top of the coverlet.

Had she acted impulsively? Was her attraction to Jules what had influenced her to take the job despite its inauspicious beginning with the stuffed cat? She shook her head. Stuffed animals. The killer whale in the foyer, the black-and-white motif of the Garrards'—

Martha drifted. There was the sullen sea, not quite an ocean though the water was salt. Gray. Then the face, bearded, a black beard, curly, arrogant. No one she knew, and yet a haunting familiarity. A slash of white through the beard, like the streak in Jules's hair. Fear gripped Martha. She was unable to breathe, to speak. A weight sat on her chest.

"Hello."

She couldn't respond.

"Are you asleep?"

Martha opened her eyes and gazed into a childish face inches from her own. Hazel eyes stared into hers. She shook her head in confusion and tried to sit up.

Chapter Three

“You’re not an old lady,” the little girl said.

Martha managed to shift the child's weight off her chest and sit up. She looked at the girl and was startled. A white wing of hair streaked the otherwise black curls.

“My name's Sarah. Yours is Martha, isn't it?”

Martha nodded, still examining the girl with interest. Whose child was she? Jules had mentioned her. Obviously she was a Garrard. “How old are you, Sarah?” she inquired.

“I'm six.” The hazel eyes regarded Martha thoughtfully. “I'm not supposed to ask you. Aunt Natalie says it's rude after you get grown up. _”

“Well, I don't mind telling you—I'm twenty-eight.”

“Will I have to call you 'miss'? When Miss Eccles was here, she got mad if I didn't. Her first name was Clara, but hardly anyone could call her that.”

“You may call me 'Martha.'”

Sarah smiled. “Miss Eccles was real old and her knees used to hurt and she couldn't climb up the stairs very good and Jo and me used to laugh but Aunt Natalie said that wasn't nice.”

“Josephine?”

“I call her Jo, but no one else can. She says that's her special name. I'm the only one who can ever call her that now.”

“So you and Josephine are friends?”

“Sometimes. When she isn't mad at me. She gets mad easy. Are you going to get dressed up for dinner?”

Martha glanced at her watch. “Yes, I'd better change.”

Sarah trailed her to the closet and watched while she extracted a simple blue sheath, the only street-length dress she'd brought. “I like blue,” Sarah said. “Your eyes are pretty.”

“Thank you. I think you're pretty, too. Ragged jeans and all.”

Sarah grinned, her eyes lighting up. For a second Martha caught a fleeting resemblance to whom? The cousin she'd met downstairs? But she couldn't pin it down, and then the feeling was gone.

“I don't get to eat in the dining room yet because Uncle Jules says children aren't civilized until they're twelve or older.”

“He's your uncle?”

Sarah shrugged. “Aunt Natalie makes me call everyone 'aunt' or 'uncle.' She gets real mad if I forget. But I still say Jo when Aunt Natalie isn't there. She'll probably make me call you miss.”

‘Miss’ because I'm not family, just a servant, Martha thought. No ‘Aunt Martha,’ for a servant. “It's 'Miss Jamison,' in case you have to,” Martha told Sarah.

“You're nice. Will you be my friend?”

“I'd like to be friends.” Who was this little girl who apparently didn't have a father or mother within the family here at Black Tor?

Martha found her necklace of silver and unpolished coral to wear with her blue sheath. That was as much as she could manage toward dressing up.

“Jo's coming,” Sarah said.

Several minutes passed before there was a token knock at the door and Josephine pushed it open. Sarah must have unusually keen hearing.

"I see you've met Sarah," Josephine said. She looked at the little girl. "You'd better scoot. Sarah went out without another word."

"She can be a nuisance," Josephine said. "But she's lonely."

"Doesn't she go to school?"

"No." Josephine frowned. "Cousin Louella acts as Sarah's tutor because she was a teacher before she came to live at Black Tor. But Louella's another old woman. This house reeks of age and death. Sometimes I can hardly stand it." She hit the gilt cage, and the canary swung back and forth crazily.

Martha said nothing.

"Look—about the tower. I—I really didn't know you weren't another of them—those grim old wardens Aunt Natalie's been foisting on me. I glanced out and saw Henry help you from the car and just—well, I had to do something or burst. Did you ever feel you were coming to pieces, fragments showering around and about so that you'd never find them all and be whole again?"

"Yes," Martha said.

Josephine had been facing away from her, gazing out the window, but she swung around and faced Martha.

"You mean that, don't you?" She sighed. "Maybe you can understand, then." She moved closer to Martha. "Did Jules tell you about me? Did he tell you I was crazy because I believe in signs and omens? Did he tell you I tried to kill myself?"

"Well—not exactly like that."

Josephine turned her head and saw the silver-and-coral necklace on the dressing table. Picking it up, she ran the necklace through her fingers, "Coral is of the sea, and the sea is lucky for you," she intoned, her dark eyes fixed on Martha's. "But not for me. Death waits for me there somehow someday."

Martha swallowed, willing herself not to show any emotion, though the words made her spine tingle.

"This necklace will act as an amulet for you because of your affinity for the sea," Josephine went on, "and also because a friend gave it to you. A gift is always more potent than what we buy for ourselves."

Ginetha gave me the coral necklace last Christmas, Martha thought. She's the only real friend I've ever had. A good guess on Josephine's part—but only a guess, of course.

"I like to wear the necklace," she began, "but..."

"But you don't believe any of the rest of it—you think I'm crazy!"

"Because I don't believe anything you say to me doesn't make you crazy," Martha said. "I'm not—not versed in the occult and can't accept what you're telling me. Nothing more."

"Jules told you to watch me, I know he did. But I didn't try to kill myself. Sometimes I feel there's no use in living, but I'll wait for my death, not leap to meet it. I did almost die three times the past year, that much is true."

"I—he merely told me I was to be your companion."

Josephine stared at her, not moving.

Martha tentatively extended a hand. "I wouldn't know how to be a—a warden, Josephine. It's presumptuous to say I'll be a friend, but I'll try to be a friendly companion."

When Josephine still made no move, Martha touched her arm gently, then withdrew her hand.

After a moment Josephine said, "I have to change for dinner." She nodded at Martha's bed where the blue dress lay. "I see someone filled you in about Aunt Natalie."

"I'm afraid I didn't think of dressing for dinner when I packed," Martha said.

"Who does anymore? At least not all the time. But at Black Tor we might as well be back in

the nineteenth century, as far as Natalie's notions go. You'll see." Josephine started for the door.

—"Will you come back and show me where we're to dine? I'm not too sure of where I am in the house yet."

Josephine half-smiled. "You never will be, either. "I'm not and I've lived here most of my life. But I'll show you where the dining room is, anyway. My bedroom is next to yours." she gestured.

A half-hour later, Josephine reappeared, wearing an ecru muslin dress that fell to the floor. Handmade lace frothed across the bodice and decorated the sleeves. Very simple, but Martha's practiced eye told her the dress was expensive.

She regretted that she hadn't chosen her own long dress, and thought wistfully of the clothes she'd rammed into boxes and put in storage with her other belongings when Ginetha descended on her in L.A. and insisted on helping her move out of the apartment and the lease money be damned. She could use some of those clothes at Black Tor.

As Martha and Josephine went into the corridor they passed a small white dog, and Martha almost bent to pet it, before she realized it was another stuffed pet.

"These halls are so gloomy," Josephine said. "All this dark paneling. The Victorians certainly loved wood—the darker the better."

Martha ran her fingers along the polished satiny panels. "But beautiful."

"I suppose so." Josephine didn't sound convinced. "I'll take you up to the tower tomorrow. Grandpa went wild with windows there, and it's like being in a different place, another house entirely."

Martha wondered dryly if the window Josephine had shattered would be repaired by then. Still, Josephine had apologized. But such a violent reaction! And she could have hurt someone.

As they descended the wide curving staircase, Martha thought the bold black and white of the killer whale was no less eye-catching from this angle. What a job to mount such a huge display!

"You're looking at *Orcinus orca*." Josephine's hand touched her temple. "I don't have the man— it's usually the men who do."

Martha realized that Josephine was talking about the white streak in the Garrards' hair. "Sarah has one," she said.

"Oh, Sarah...."

"She's a Garrard isn't she?"

"I'm told so. Everyone is quite mysterious, trying to make you think that asking is in bad taste. Someone's by-blow, I suppose."

Martha frowned. Was Josephine telling her she didn't know where Sarah came from?

"Your brother has never married?"

"Jules?" Josephine glanced at Martha. "Oh, yes, years ago. She...died. I've often thought Sarah might be Jules's bastard. But he never lets on." Josephine spoke casually, as though the subject were not very interesting. But, of course, if Sarah was six years old, everyone in the house must be used to her.

"Brace yourself," Josephine said as they crossed the foyer and entered a short hall. "Sheridan with Aunt Natalie is out of another world."

Was this once the drawing room? Martha wondered as they came into a room with wainscoting lightened by pale yellow paper with a textured design. A Siamese cat crouched on the fireplace mantel, but Martha knew by now it wouldn't be a live cat.

Josephine led her to the sofa, where a large woman sat alone. Clearly in her sixties, she was clad in regal purple. "This is Martha Jamison, Aunt Natalie," Josephine said.

For a moment Martha was overwhelmed by the woman's size and the piercing glare of the veiled dark eyes that looked into hers.

"Well, Miss Jamison. And do you consider yourself capable?"

Martha straightened her shoulders. Natalie Drew could be no more formidable than some of the charge nurses she'd encountered in the past. "How do you do, Mrs. Drew?" she replied. "I'm sure Mr. Garrard has discussed my credentials with you."

Natalie pressed her lips together. "Pieces of paper mean nothing."

"What I've done to earn those pieces of paper are my credentials, Mrs. Drew."

"Perhaps. We'll see."

"Would you care for some sherry?" Charn stood at her elbow, proffering a wineglass.

"Thank you." Martha took the thin-stemmed glass.

"Don't monopolize the girl, Aunt Nat," Charn said. "First nurse we've ever gotten in here under a hundred."

To Martha's surprise, Natalie gave Charn a wintry smile.

"Very well. Miss Jamison and I will speak another time."

Martha moved away with alacrity, evading ~~Charn~~ Charn's attempt to pin her in a small alcove to the left of the beige marble fireplace. A gray-haired woman, tall and thin, wearing pince-nez, appeared in the doorway. She blinked at Martha in surprise.

"This is our new nurse, Louella," Charn said. "The wheel's finally turned up a winner."

Louella smiled nervously and darted past them before Martha could properly introduce herself. There was no sign of Jules or of Matthew Drew. Josephine had disappeared. Martha sipped at her sherry.

"Your freckles are charming," Charn said. "They give you a golden look. _" _"

Martha smiled politely. When she raised her eyes to meet his gaze, she was surprised to find him staring over her head. She turned and saw a short muscular man who glanced at her as he left the room. A servant?

Jules came in.

A bell tinkled and Natalie rose. Charn immediately left Martha to give his arm to her. Jules nodded at Martha but didn't offer his arm. She followed him across the short hall to the dining room.

Warm wood paneled the room entirely—floors, walls and ceiling. A cream-colored Oriental rug covered part of the parquet flooring, and portraits ringed the walls. The table was designed to seat at least fourteen and was now draped in immaculate white linen. Crystal water goblets sparkled in the light from an ornate chandelier of brass and cut glass.

Jules seated Martha, then moved quickly to help Louella into her chair. Charn was doing the same for Natalie when Josephine slipped into the room, her cheeks flushed. She slid into her chair and smoothed her hair with a quick motion. Everyone was seated when a white-haired man joined them.

He looks like the pictures I've seen of Harry Truman, Martha thought, same size and everything. She glanced from him to Natalie. Was this Matthew Drew? Younger and smaller than his wife, if so.

Jules sat at the head of the table, Natalie to his right, Matthew Drew to his left. Martha was next, then Josephine. Charn sat by Natalie, then came Louella.

Martha found herself directly across the table from Charn. He grinned at her and winked, and she smiled, then looked away, up at the portraits. She certainly didn't want Charn to think she was interested in him. The last thing she wanted was to become involved with a man in a household where she was a paid employee. It hadn't been appropriate in the age when the house had been built, and it wasn't appropriate now.

She found herself gazing at the face she'd seen in her dreams—a painting of a man's face, his black, arrogantly tilted beard streaked with white, his dark hair showing the Garrard mark. She stared, fascinated.

"What?" She'd alerted Charn, who turned in his chair to see what she was looking at. "O

that's old Abel. Quite a lad.”

—But how could she have dreamed of a man she'd never met, a man who'd been dead for years? Once more she seemed to see the gray sea in back of the face.

Then Natalie spoke, and the illusion faded. “We do not serve wine with our meals, Miss Jamison. I make this apologia should you be surprised at the omission. We are not teetotalers, but wine has never been served at a Garrard table.”

Martha saw that she was not expected to comment.

The meal was excellent and deftly served by Ruth and an elderly manservant, whom Jules called Francis. Martha enjoyed the poached salmon despite the fact that she'd been gorging herself on salmon ever since she'd gotten to Seattle. She hadn't realized that fresh-caught fish could be so delicious. In Flagstaff, the only salmon she'd ever had was canned. And Southern California wasn't a great salmon country, either.

Martha turned to Josephine. “I really like your salmon.”

Josephine seemed dazed, and she'd hardly eaten anything. “What? Oh, salmon.”

What was the matter with her? She'd been alert and talkative earlier. Where had she gone after introducing Martha to Aunt Natalie? Unease prickled along Martha's nerves. She was supposed to be looking after Josephine. She thought of Josephine's flushed face. Was she taking some drug? Was that at the root of her problems? Was drug over dosage what had brought her close to death those three times?

The eyes of the portrait seemed to stare at Martha. Abel Garrard's eyes. Hastily she looked away and met the nearly identical gaze of his grandson, Jules. If Jules grew a beard, would it be white-streaked?

Unnerved, she turned her face toward Josephine again. The girl's head was bent to look at something in her lap. Martha glanced down and caught a glimpse of bold green handwriting. “Dear Jo,” she read, before Josephine crumpled the letter in her hand and shifted her position in the chair.

“Jo”? Sarah's words came back to her: “Her special name. I'm the only one who can ever call her that now.”

What did the letter mean, then—someone from the past? What was Josephine's past?

The manservant, Francis, came into the dining room and spoke into Jules's ear. Martha saw Jules frown, then look her way. She tensed.

“You have a phone call, Martha,” he said.

Chapter Four

The telephone was shut away in what amounted to a deluxe closet near the foyer.

“Martha?”

Not Ginetha's voice—a man's, vaguely familiar.

“I this—this isn't Bran?”

“You sound shocked.”

“But I—how did you know where I was?”

“I saw you get into that Rolls with the chauffeur and I asked a local, who told me who the car belonged to.”

“Oh.”

“I suppose you're wondering why I called.”

“Yes. I was at dinner.”

“I thought that maybe since you're staying on in Victoria—you are, aren't you?—you might like to sightsee with me sometime.”

I didn't encourage him—I know I didn't, she told herself.

“And another thing,” Bran went on. “I'll be coming to the house tomorrow. I—”

“Oh, no, I don't think you should do that. I've just—”

“Wait. I have business with Mr. Garrard. It's quite a coincidence that you're staying there, and so I thought I'd call tonight—otherwise I probably wouldn't see you when I came.”

“You won't, anyway,” Martha said. “I'm—I work here. I'm not a guest.”

“You work there?”

“Yes. I'm a nurse. Now, Bran, please, I must get back to the table. What will my employer think of—”

“A nurse!” Bran exclaimed, cutting her short.

“What's the matter with that?”

“Why, nothing. Only—I always think of nurses as granite blocks of authority. You're far too pretty to—”

“Don't be a chauvinist. Really, Bran, I can't—”

“You must be taking care of old Mr. Garrard.”

“No, as a matter of fact I'm not. Goodbye, Bran.”

“Wait. I really would like to see you again.”

He was persistent, so he'd probably phone again. She didn't even know how Jules felt about her receiving personal calls on his time.

“Why don't you write me a note to let me know where you're staying,” she said. “I could arrange to call you then if I have some free time. I really must hang up now, Bran. Goodbye.” She slammed down the phone despite his protest.

Martha saw Natalie climbing the stairs as she came out of the alcove. Jules crossed the foyer passing her. Obviously the family was no longer at dinner.

“Everything all right?” Jules asked.

“The call was personal, not necessary,” she said. “I'm sorry. I'll try to see it doesn't happen again.”

“Francis mentioned it was a local call,” Jules said. “I didn't realize you knew anyone in Victoria.”

“I don't—not really. But—well, there was someone on the ferry, and he found out where I was going.” Damn Bran for his persistence!

“Oh—a young man.

She might as well tell Jules everything Bran had said; after all, he'd be there in person the following day, and she wouldn't put it past him to ask to see her. “I didn't expect him to call,” she said. “But he—his name is Branwell Lowrey, and apparently he'll be seeing you on business tomorrow.”

Jules frowned, then nodded. “Oh, yes. The museum, of course.”

“He didn't realize I was here as an employee. I—we only had an impersonal conversation on the boat. I don't know why—” She paused, annoyed and embarrassed at her position.

Jules smiled at her. “Don't be too hard on Dr. Lowrey, Martha. You're a most attractive young woman, and I certainly don't expect you to shut yourself away with Josephine seven days a week. We'll do something about arranging your free time tomorrow.” He moved away.

“Dr.” Lowrey? she mused as she started up the stairs. Bran, a doctor? Of what? Jules had mentioned a museum. Here she'd thought Bran was a carefree backpacker...

And Jules considered her attractive. She smiled to herself.

Martha hesitated in the corridor outside her room. Should she tap at Josephine's door? How close a supervision did Jules expect? She really must insist on talking to Josephine's doctor soon because apparently no one there was going to tell her the exact nature of the girl's problem. She rapped lightly. “Josephine?”

There was a click. Had the door been locked? Was a lock wise with someone who may have tried to kill herself? Then the door opened. Josephine's face was pale and her eyes were haunted.

“Do you feel ill?” Martha asked.

“Martha—” Josephine stepped back and motioned her in, closing and, yes, locking the door behind her. “Oh, Martha, I wish I could trust you.”

“Trust me?”

“But you'll tell Jules, won't you? Like those others reported everything to Aunt Natalie. And Jules is against me like all the rest.”

“I might not have to tell Jules. However, I am going to talk to your doctor, and I don't think you should keep anything from him.”

To her surprise, Josephine gave a sigh of relief. “Oh, Dr. Marston. I don't think you'd need to tell him, not at all. It's not—not about the time I was so—so sick. This is from before. But I'm afraid you don't understand and there's no one I can trust. Except—” Her large yellow eyes stared at Martha. “They told you, didn't they? That I was somewhere else when I was seventeen. And eighteen. I was there two years. And I—just don't remember about that time. The two years are all blurred, fogged over.”

“But that's not what frightens you now?”

Josephine shook her head. “You saw that note at the table, didn't you? Did you tell?”

Martha remembered the green writing. “Dear Jo,” she said aloud. “No, I didn't say anything about it. Why should I?”

“You're here as a spy, you know. Didn't Jules tell you?”

“I'm here as a companion. I'm a nurse, not a spy, Josephine.”

“The note is from someone. Oh, Martha, he's dead. How can he write me a letter? Am I going mad, really mad? I'm so afraid.”

“Where did the note come from? The mail?”

“I never get mail—they'd open it if I did. No, Sarah motioned me out of the parlor before

dinner and slipped the note into my hand. I asked her where she got it, and she said that Bill Wong—he's one of the gardeners—gave the envelope to her when she was playing outside and told her it was for Miss Josephine.”

“It's not from this—Bill Wong?”

“Oh, no.”

“Would you let me read it?”

Josephine opened a book lying on her bedside stand and extracted a crumpled piece of paper.

“Dear Jo,” Martha read in the bold green handwriting. “I haven't forgotten. Love, Diego.”

“Diego?” she asked Josephine.

“I called him that. He called me 'Jo.' I never knew his name. He didn't know mine.” Josephine sat on her bed, staring down at the paper Martha had returned to her. “I was sixteen, but he didn't know that, either, because I told him I was older. We truly loved each other, but he died—he drowned when the boat foundered. How can he write me now?”

“He drowned when you were sixteen?”

Tears filled Josephine's eyes. “Yes. I went to the docks to see him, and I found out his boat—he worked on a salmon boat.” She began to cry.

Martha sat beside her and put an arm around her shoulders. Johann's dead, too, she thought, but my tears are all shed... they were shed long before his death.

“You don't know,” Josephine sobbed. “No one knows.”

“My—my husband died,” Martha told her softly. “I can understand.” She handed tissues to Josephine.

Josephine mopped at her face and sat up straighter. Martha dropped her arm but continued to sit next to her.

“I didn't know you'd been married.”

“Now you have a secret to keep,” Martha said. “I didn't tell your brother. I use my maiden name now, so I didn't think it mattered.”

“I only knew Diego three days,” Josephine said.

“Here in Victoria?”

“Oh, no. Aunt Natalie was too strict. I—there was a friend from school whose family moved to Seattle, and she invited three of her girlfriends from Victoria to a weekend birthday party. I was one of the girls. We went over on the evening ferry and were to come back by plane. Her parents were meeting us at the dock.” Josephine smiled faintly. “I was very excited, because I had so many restrictions that a trip unchaperoned was an event. Not alone, really, but girls my age didn't count.”

“This was when you were sixteen?”

Josephine nodded. “The other two girls were what we called best friends, and I was the third wheel, rather. So I went onto the deck even though it was foggy and cold. Wanting to savor my freedom, I imagine. And—he was there. Diego.”

“Was he Spanish?”

“I don't know. We met in the fog and we didn't talk about who we were. I found out he worked on the salmon boats out of Seattle and had been to the island for a day of sightseeing. He liked Victoria. He found out I was going to visit a friend in Seattle. I lied and said I was through school because I thought he might think I was just a kid otherwise. We knew there was something between us and he kissed me, and nothing like that had ever happened to me before.” Josephine gently touched the note that lay beside her on the bed. “Nothing has since.”

“You never saw him again?”

“Only twice more. His boat was in because of the nets—something wrong with the nets. He was from San Diego. He'd worked on the tuna seiners down there. I remember every word he ever said.”

to me.”

—“He met me in a park near the house where I was staying. He told me what time he'd be there and I sneaked out and met him. We fell in love. He said he'd come and see me in Victoria, but wouldn't tell him who I was—I couldn't. He'd find out I was sixteen, and anyway, Aunt Natalie would never let us be together. He was older—he said he was twenty-one—and he worked on the boats. She would have been horrified.”

Josephine looked at Martha. “I didn't know what to do and I couldn't stand it. So that night I waited until everyone was asleep and I crept out of the house and took a bus to the docks. I knew Diego was staying on the boat, so I went to find him. But other men were there with him, and they were having a party and drinking wine, and they laughed when I came by and they teased Diego, and I had some of the wine because it was foggy and cold—” Josephine looked away from Martha and gripped her hands in her lap.

“Did your friend's parents find you were missing?”

“No. But the next morning I was too sick to fly home and a doctor had to come to their house and give me shots for three days. Then he said maybe I should take the ferry back with a stateroom and rest instead of flying, because of the danger of middle-ear infection.

“So I managed to get to the dock once more, and that's when I heard about Diego's boat sinking. I ran away from the—from my friend's parents—and I found where I'd been the night with Diego, and one of the men from the party was there working on another boat, and when he saw me he came down and told me Diego had been drowned. I guess he must've taken me back to the ferry, only I don't remember. Because I did get back to Victoria, but I had a relapse and had to go to St. Joe's with pneumonia. I know I came home from the hospital, but after that things go dimmer and dimmer until I don't remember anything.”

“And you never told anyone about Diego?”

“No.”

“Not even Dr. Marston?”

“It wasn't his business. He wouldn't understand.”

Martha looked at Josephine's bent head. She felt an ache in her throat for the teenage romance that had somehow led the girl into a mental breakdown. Had she been unstable prior to meeting Diego? Diego, who evidently wasn't dead. Why had it taken him so long to get in touch?

“Is the note in his handwriting?” she asked Josephine.

“I—I don't know. I never saw his handwriting. But who else would know?”

“If the letter's from Diego, obviously he's alive, Josephine. The dead don't write notes.”

“I know, but I'm afraid.” Josephine glanced wildly around the room, and Martha thought of a caged bird suddenly offered a way out but too frightened to leave the well-known cage.

“If this isn't a hoax, he'll get in touch with you again. You were right to share the note with me.”

“You won't tell. You promised me.”

“Well, for now, no. But we don't know enough yet, not even if this really is from Diego.” Cautious of what he wants after all these years if it is, Martha finished, but she didn't say it aloud. Another thought crept in: could Josephine have written the note to herself? I'll have to talk to Sarah, Martha decided, and this Bill Wong.

Later, in her own bed, Martha went over what Josephine had told her. The note seemed quite odd. If this was the long-lost Diego who had finally found his love, why wouldn't he march up to the door and ask for Josephine?

Martha drifted into sleep, her mind a confused jumble of thoughts. She awakened with a start, opening her eyes to darkness. Had someone called her name? Did Josephine need her?

She had started to swing her legs over the edge of the bed when someone sat down next to her. "Josephine?" she asked.

To her horror, a hand slid across her breast, caught at her shoulder and pushed her back down on the bed. She struggled to free herself, knowing this was a man, for she felt a man's strength in the hands.

"Let me go!" she managed, before a mouth came down on hers, stopping her words, her breath. She moaned in fright and desperation.

Chapter Five

“I know who you are, Marty Collier. Don't fight, no use to fight.” The man spoke in a husky whisper directly into her ear. “Don't pretend with me,” he said.

Martha froze. Then, as his hand slid the length of her body, she jerked her head away and screamed. His grip loosened, and she sat upright to reach for the bedside lamp, but even as she did her door opened and closed so swiftly she barely saw a dark outline. She switched on the light. Her room was empty.

She stared at the closed door. She hadn't imagined it. There'd been a man in her room who called her Marty Collier and tried to--expected her to--

The doorknob turned and Martha gasped, shrinking back on the bed. The door opened slowly and Josephine's face appeared. “Did you call me?”

“Oh, Josephine, someone was in here!”

Josephine came into the room and shut the door. “Who?”

Belatedly Martha wondered at the wisdom of telling her.

“Who was in your room?” Josephine repeated.

“I—I don't know. A man. He—threatened me.”

“What did he do?”

Was Josephine's glance too knowing, her eyes too bright?

“Did he try to rape you?” Josephine demanded. “Is that why you screamed? I heard you, but I wasn't sure. I thought maybe I'd been the one to call out, like I do when I have nightmares, but it didn't seem as if I had.”

“I screamed,” Martha acknowledged. “He—frightened me.”

“Who was it?”

“I told you—I don't know. A man.”

Josephine came over and sat on the edge of the bed. “Well, then it was either Charn or Jules. Unless it was one of the servants. But I can't see Henry or Francis — ” She giggled. “And Simon stays with daddy all the time.”

“Could some stranger have gotten into the house?” Martha asked, remembering the whisper that told her he knew she was Marty... no use to pretend. Who knew of her past?

Josephine shrugged. “I don't know who you might have following you around,” she said. “In fact, I don't know anything about you.” Her tone was accusing. “I told you all about me, but you hardly said one word about yourself.”

“No one's following me,” Martha said. But would Charn or Jules come into her room as the man had?

“Have you been a nurse all your life?” Josephine asked. “You're pretty....”

Martha had no intention of talking about her past. “It's late,” she said. “Thanks for coming in, but I was frightened, but I'll lock the door now. I should have before, but I didn't think....”

“I always do,” Josephine said. “You'd better too, in this house.”

Martha locked the door after letting Josephine out. She lay awake afterward, thinking of Johann Collier. There'd been headlines in the California papers. After all, Johann was famous in his own way. He'd written the script for and then directed *The Unmasking of Hell*, which had turned out to be the most controversial film of that year. “Genius or madman?” the papers had asked afterward. Neither, she thought sadly. A man driven beyond his own limits by circumstance and by his own

frightening urges. Marty Collier. She'd been in the headlines at the end. Who in Victoria knew that Martha Jamison was Marty Collier?

She wasn't the woman Johann had pictured so vividly in the movie script and who had been played so sensuously by Maria Canyon, unknown before her starring role as Nida in *The Unmasking of Hell*. Johann had come to confuse Maria with his creation, and Maria was anything but a woman driven to sexual excess by her own neuroses. Maria was, instead, a capable actress.

Poor Johann. For she, his wife, hadn't been Nida, either. No woman could have been. After he'd seen his creation take flesh, so to speak, in the movie, he'd been forced past his limits into the trackless realm that lies beyond. Not really insanity—just uncharted space that frightened him into destruction.

Latent schizophrenia, the doctor had said. She remembered Johann laughing when he told her about The psychiatrist, Dr. Towers, the very eminent Frederic Towers. Shrink, Johann had called him. Headshrinker—no better than a witch doctor, Johann had insisted. Was it because Johann was afraid of discovering what dwelt in his own mind? Of course the newspapers quoted Dr. Towers at great length afterward.

If only there'd been a way to buy time for Johann. A place where there was no pressure. Her love had shifted from passion to fierce protectiveness. She'd tried to mother him and he'd hated it. But she'd felt responsible; no one else seemed to understand his fragility. Until the end she hadn't realized that no one can take responsibility for another adult.

And now someone at Black Tor knew her as the Marty Collier the papers had pictured—a Nida insatiable, hopelessly neurotic. She wasn't--she never had been. Any more than Maria Canyon was Nida.

"I don't know how you managed," Maria told her the one time they'd met after Johann's death. "He was a man obsessed. I could hide from him when I had to. But you—" Maria paused and stared hard at Marty. "You were forced to play Nida."

Marty shook her head. "No. Never that."

"Forced to be Nida, then, if only in his mind," Maria had insisted. "Johann was mad, of course. Quite mad."

Marty couldn't answer, recalling the last ugly scene. She'd fled from Johann by locking herself in the bathroom, where there was an inner bolt, put there at Johann's order to protect himself from anyone entering while he was caring for his body. At the last, the bolt had protected her from Johann. Would he have killed her as he'd threatened?

She'd seen him use the knife hundreds of times to open letters—a Thai dagger, actually, with an alien god carved into the handle. But this time he'd used it on her, cutting her arm and breast before she gained the sanctuary of the bathroom. She'd huddled naked inside the bathroom, blood dripping on the pink tile, too distraught to do more than listen to Johann screaming curses in the bedroom. He'd splintered the bottom of the door by repeated kicking, before the phone distracted him. Ringing on and on, a shrill accompaniment to his ravings.

Finally he answered the phone—she knew because that's where she found him when the long silence gave her courage to wrap a towel around herself and venture out of the bathroom. Johann lay sprawled by the bed, phone still clutched in his hand, the dagger plunged into his chest.

The papers had played up the death for all it was worth, drawing parallels between Johann's death and *The Unmasking of Hell* with its overtones of the occult. Even the phone call was referred to as "mysterious," since no one admitted to having called Johann. Dr. Towers was quoted out of context to bolster the articles. Only Dr. Towers' testimony had kept her from being accused of murder. The papers had liked that, too. Nida was a woman who drove men mad—drove them to destruction.

But she wasn't Nida.

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