

Fortune Teller · *H.D.*

MAMA WENT TO A FORTUNE-TELLER who had set up a tent near her painted-cart between the canal and the river, near Willow Eddy.

Three of them went together. They didn't tell anyone about it. Mama went with cousin Edd and one of his sisters. There was a trail of delicate lavender; little flowers grew like moss in the spring-deposit of sand on the river side. There was a shelf or island of sand beyond the bank, and Mama stood watching the river swirl round the sand-shelf or sand-island.

The bank across the river with its low bushes and shelf of pebbles and sand, was exactly like the shore of the real island further down the river where they had their summer picnics.

There was the round summer-house on the island, with the lattice-work like the one in the Seminary grounds, but the one in the Seminary grounds was covered with jasmine and honeysuckle and small yellow-roses; they were a sort of tea-rose; the girls from Charleston called them cherokee-roses. At one time, there had been many girls from the South; they ran through the halls and whispered and laughed in corners and did dance-steps behind doors, while they waited for a Mademoiselle or a Fräulein or one of the Sisters for a lesson.

In those days, Mama wore a little frock, cut *en bateau* at the shoulders and she would peep from behind a sofa or a big chair or through a crack in a door, at the swirl of lace when they had a party, and the trailing shawls. Once suddenly everything was very quiet and she heard feet moving overhead. She held her spoon in her hand; she listened; her ears were set close to her head and her high forehead contracted with the intensity of her listening. It was not just the footsteps, it was something different. There had been the ringing of church bells, but Mama had always known the bells and as she grew older, she could tell from the hymn played from the cupola on the church, what had happened; she could tell whether someone was born or someone had died and what sort of person, how old, if it was one of the old Brothers from the Brothers' House or one of the Sisters from the Sisters' House or "Aunt" Carlotta or "Aunt" Maria from the Widows' House.

It was easy to understand the hymns and carols, to interpret their particular message, if almost the first thing you could remember was the

sound of the trombone-notes from the cupola that was like a little extra open temple, placed on top of the church roof. There were the four separate clock-faces and eight pillars, something peculiar and special and their own, not like the ordinary steeple of the church across the river, where sometimes a group of the girls went, but mostly the girls wanted to go to the Old Church, as they always called it. It was not the sound of footsteps nor the fact that they had stopped, nor the bumping and scraping of trunks on the upper floor. That happened from time to time, if a letter came or even a special messenger arrived to say that Elsie or Isabella or one of the many Virginia's or Carolina's or Georgina's father was ill, or even that their mother was dead.

Of course Mama did not remember how she had listened, how suddenly the dining-room was empty. She did not remember the oval-mirror facing her, she did not look into it. It was part of her consciousness, she did not think about it. She might remember it now, if she were thinking that the bank opposite looked like the island, because she was thinking of cherokee-roses and those clamboured with the honeysuckle over the lattice of the summer-house down by the creek that, one winter or spring, had so swollen that it had flooded the gardens and the deer that someone had sent Papalie, were drowned.

Maybe, Mama did remember the mirror, if she thought the bank opposite that shelved out with its sweeping branches was like the island summer-house and that would make her think of their own summer-house and that might make her recall the oval-mirror in the sequence, because Papalie had moved it once so that it reflected the grounds or pleasure-grounds, as they called the garden, with the summer-house, and the convex Claude Lorraine glass, the deer would pass, minute, in exquisite perspective, and a girl would sweep across the lawn, in billowing white like a sail on a green sea and a child would fall down and its hoop would roll on downhill toward the shallow margin of sand that ran along the Monocacy creek, that at times seemed almost like a small river.

But the hoop would not roll in, because there was a fence of woven branches, a sort of pen so that the deer should not wade across the little river, though there was another pen built out so that they could stoop down and drink from the river, and there it was in the glass; the thick green branches, the cone-shaped down-sweep of a large evergreen; maybe a branch of white magnolia or round spots like carefully applied white-

blue paint on the bush, that would be hydrangeas or the green-white of the snow-balls, not yet snow-white or the delicate, almost imperceptible specks and flecks that would be the tiny clusters of the flowering-currant.

There would be the burning-bush and plum and apple in their season.

Would Mama remember this? She would remember it like a swirl of notes, that caught in her throat, that would proceed upward by immutable laws and down, and make a sort of graph in the air that was her heart singing. No, Mama was not singing. Really, she never sang, not even in Church with all the others. And she had almost forgotten Madame Rinaldo who had gone away because she could not do justice any more to her pupils, she said, and who had died soon after and left her a chest full of her old stage-properties.

Mama did not think of this. But maybe she did, maybe she was reminded of the box, that she seldom opened; it was hard to get at, in the big Seminary-attic with so many empty boxes; with the girls' trunks, coming and going, their own things were apt to get shoved away into inaccessible corners. The girls had always to be considered first. The older girls who had seemed to Mama like formidable young ladies, not so long ago, were only tall children now; they were her own pupils. She taught drawing and gave piano-lessons, and Miss Helen was the one always to be consulted. It was Miss Helen this, Miss Helen that, everywhere. Mama did not know what had caught her by the throat, it was a change, there was change coming about, not only in the air, because it was spring but she was getting old. Everyone thought it odd that Miss Helen who was so capable, never married.

She would be old; in a few years now she would be thirty. Laura with her rose-damask cheeks, her dark eyes and black hair, had married years ago and Agnes had married brother Will while she and Laura were still school-girls. Of course, someone had to stay with Papa.

Maybe Mama did think of Madame Rinaldo because, standing aside to let cousin Ruth go first into the little tent, she had caught a glimpse of black eyes, long ear-rings, she had thought of a red carnation; maybe she did remember how Madame Rinaldo had been persuaded to dress up in her Carmen costume for one of their New Year's Eve parties or had, at the last minute, found two spangled veils, one white with gold, one black with silver that she said Helen and Laura could wear and be Day and Night, after they had thought it was too late to make up any costumes for Martie

Baines' party, because Martie had begged for a party as she had just heard of her sister's engagement in Saratoga.

There were so many parties then, even though Mimmie would say, "I'm afraid I don't care for this new type of girl as much as the old ones, from before the war." Mimmie would not commit herself, no, never, by hinting that for instance, Martie Baines was showy or even common; maybe it was only that things, in retrospect, had seemed gay, seemed bright.

"I am getting old," thought Mama. "What would Papa think of our coming here and we did not even tell any sort of lie, Edd said right out, 'I want to take the girls up the river, maybe even as far as Willow Eddy, the first violets are out or maybe, they will be out,' " but she had seen no violets, only these lavender-mist flowers that sometimes they called quaker-ladies, some people called them bluets, there never seemed a right name for the tiny blossoms, that grew like grass, no leaves, just flowers, *flower of the grass*, what was it? *that withereth and is cast into the fire*.

There was an enormous bonfire when the war was over, she remembered the bonfire, it was in the other part of the town, Papa had not even wanted to ring the church-bells for Victory, though the other part of the town, the new-town had run wild, with a band and speeches.

They were always apart; Papa had taken in the wounded from Gettysburg, making no distinction between the grey and blue; they had even moved out of the Seminary for a time, to leave more rooms free; the army-surgeon had taken over the big reception-room, where now she was always being called to interview parents or to say good-bye to girls who were leaving or to see old-girls who came back. The reception-room had been stripped of its plush curtains, the chandelier had been done up in linen bags and the bell-jars of wax-flower taken down from the long mahogany dresser, in the drawers of which they kept the old photograph-albums filled with pictures of the old-girls.

Many things that were so carefully put away were never brought back, or if they were brought back, they looked different, though Papa had said we must go on, Mimmie had told her afterwards, as if everything were the same; everything must be the same.

But it was never the same after that night, which she could barely remember, which indeed she could not remember, when she faced the Claude Lorraine glass, which had been brought back from the verandah

corridor and replaced on their dining-room wall. It had been the night when Papa had assembled the girls, to tell them that there really was war; Helen would not remember but Mamalie or Agnes or even Laura might have told her. Already, before he had officially informed them, one of the more hysterical girls had gone up to the attic, with a lighted candle, to find her trunk labelled Charleston, South Carolina or Richmond, Virginia.

Mama could not remember this, but she had heard the stories so many times; the old-girls, whose crinolines she had just glimpsed in passing, through a crack in a door, were nearer to her, it seemed sometimes, than these “new” Americans from up-state or from Dayton, Ohio even. But we are a small-town, we are small-town people—that was a new idea! The old-girls had said it was almost like going abroad to come to Bethlehem to the Seminary and their fathers would come for them at Christmas and stay at the Inn, and there were coaching-parties and groups of riders along the sand-path that ran beside the canal.

At one time, the town had even been a sort of summer-resort, though that seemed odd, as the summers were really very hot. But people from the South came up and brought their servants and horses, and had boating-parties, up and down the river, even shooting the rapids and exploring the water-gap and sometimes going further down the upper reaches of the Delaware; the Delaware ran into the sea, of course. Mama had never been to the sea.

The river was wide or the spring floods had given it a further dimension, and the sun caught the light and flung it back in a million little lines and dots, ta-ta-ta-ta said Mama and not humming but *thinking*, she swung over to the violins in the change-over to the *dolce* following the *adagio* of the opening movement of the Fifth Symphony.

Of course, I am getting old, thought Mama, and more girls were crowding in now; the town was taking on a new lease of life, but it was another sort of life. Another brisk, aggressive Bethlehem was growing up around the steel-mills. Those furnace-fires glowed, crimson at night, between the river and the mountains. Old Cousin Theodore had even said at vespers, the other evening, that he wondered if in time, the smoke and fumes from the mill-furnaces might not affect the trees.

“O, not the trees, surely,” said Aunt Lucia, “why, there is that elm that your grandfather, no, your great-grandfather’s father, Helen, but no, I

forget it was Agnes' father's people who brought those cuttings direct from *Herrnhut*, and that apple in your Aunt Amelia's garden, Elizabeth, I mean Helen, was grafted from one of the original cuttings that Count Zinzendorf himself brought over from his orchards at Berthelsdorf. And Brother de Schweinitz still has —" Mama remembered the conversation going on, she had heard it all so often.

Mimmie had Count Zinzendorf's desk and some bits of cloth and miniatures, but it seemed the chief things really should belong to Agnes, because Mimmie's first husband's father was a brother to a *Chevalier* in Russia, the one whose portrait Mimmie of course, gave over to the Howard boys.

Brother Will was a Howard from Maryland. Agnes had had eight children, with hardly any pause, in about ten years.

The fathers who came to take the girls home now, stayed on the other side of the river or in the new hotel they had put up for the business men who came back and forth now from Pittsburgh and New York. The line of the mills grew daily and there was a whole colony of Poles or Hungarians or Swedes. They came to work in the mill. One seldom saw them, this side of the river.

"What are you thinking, Helen?" Edd had caught up to her. He had waited outside the tent. Now he followed Helen, "I think you'd better come back, it will be your turn, soon."

"Are you going in?" said Helen.

Edd said, "No," it seemed somehow to Edd that it was unmanly to consult a fortune-teller and anyhow Edd, who was one of the younger instructors at the Divinity College, had had his first serious "call." He was not quite sure that he did actually approve of his sister coming here; it was Ruth who had heard from one of the Stenton twins that there was a fortune-teller and Edd had gone out of his way to find out where the gypsy-caravan had moved to; he had really engineered the party for this would be an occasion.

There had been other occasions; it was true that Helen was not, as they say, as young as she once was, but Philadelphia was not so far away and she could make trips back to town to see Uncle Francis and Aunt Elizabeth. He felt it would be suitable, although they were not so distantly related, that was true.

"What do you think of cousins marrying?" he said suddenly now, for he had always been a little shy of Helen though he adored her, she was like her name, what was that poem of Edgar Allan Poe? *Helen thy beauty is to me*

They had had boy-and-girl expeditions to the water-gap and here to Willow Eddy, "really this is my name," he thought, though Edward did not like people to call him Eddy, yet he thought of his mother whenever anyone did call him, even for a joke, Eddy and he had a sincere deep romantic nature.

Well, that was it. They were perhaps too near. He had been one of the family, another of "my boys" as Aunt Elizabeth would say; they had discussed this before.

"Marry?" said Mama.

She was looking at a broken branch that was floating down the river. "If that branch catches in the island of sand, not in the submerged sand," she thought, "then I will marry Edd." She did not want to marry Edd. But she thought she could help him with his work; he was a little helpless, he had had a "call" to Philadelphia. She knew that he was going to ask her for the hundredth time to marry him. Old Hundred. That was the name of the Choral that Papa liked best. She had played Old Hundred from the time she could remember, from the time they had had to find a book to put on the piano-stool and then they had taken away the piano-stool because the book was too heavy, and fitted her into an ordinary chair on top of the book; "Now Helen will play Old Hundred," Papa would say, and they would put down their coffee-cups, and even Mimmie and Aunt Lucia would lay aside their knitting or their crochet work that they kept for "company" as Mimmie would say, as if to explain away the fact that maybe it was a little frivolous to do tatting or even woollen baby-coats when there was so much plain-sewing always waiting in a heaped-up basket in the sewing-room or in Mimmie's bed-room.

"If the branch catches in the sand-island, I will marry Edd." But she knew that the branch would not catch in the little island sand-bank. It was rushing straight for the shelf of sand; there was a tuft of dead foliage that the wind would be sure to catch; the wind would be sure to waft the branch out of the current, or the branch would catch in some layer of just submerged sand. Mama could not think this in that time but that is how the thought would have gone, if she had had time to put it into words. For she knew that she would never marry Edd and she knew there was

something more than her own thinking, than her own volition, that would keep her from it.

If she thought in a formal pattern, she would be seeing the river ruled like a page of music; they were not perfectly straight lines, it is true, like a sheet of music, but the ripples did suggest music somehow; the specks of sunlight were the notes, so that there really was — what was it? *books in the running brooks*, music-books, folios like the old parchment-sheets in the choir-loft that someone said should go to some museum, in Boston or Philadelphia; they must start their own museum, they must collect the old things, people were saying now; that would mean Count Zinzendorf's desk and the portraits and the painting of Zeisberger and the Indians and maybe even those old napkins that Agnes had, with the tiny embroidered crown.

What belonged to them? What belonged to the town? They belonged to one another, since the day when Nicholas Louis, Count Zinzendorf, that first Christmas-eve, called the town Bethlehem. But the town was changing now, the girls who came to the school were different and the old-town was growing conscious of its difference to the new-town and in fact, to the rest of the world about it.

She had never been to Philadelphia. There was the new member of their German evenings that Bishop Leibert had every Friday at the Seminary. There was that Professor Charles from the university, they had teased her about. He was not a young man. Papa and Bishop Leibert talked to him about the stars. She would never marry Edd because she was thinking of the young Spaniard who was a student at the University, who had caught her in his arms, at the close of Commencement exercises when she went back to the hall after they had all left, to be sure everything was all right. They were always afraid of something catching on fire.

"What are you thinking, Helen?"

Helen is my name but the whole world is changing.

"I was wondering," she said, "what sort of branch that is."

"What branch?" said Edd.

"That one, just there, it's got stuck or it's just stopped drifting."

"O — there —" said Edd.

"Yes," said Helen.

Now the wind caught the dried tuft that was dead pine-needles or a tuft

of withered oak-leaves. Things weren't the same any more. Here, the forest was all around them. But the trees the other side of the river by the mills were burnt and blackened and old Cousin Theodore had said the other evening at vespers, that maybe all their trees, in time, would grow sick and die in the fumes from the steel-mills. Bethlehem steel. They were already shipping steel all over the country and there were new rails being laid by the old station and a new bridge was being built over the river. The old covered-bridge was still standing but that would go, someone said, soon. If she thought of a carnation, she was thinking of Madame Rinaldo and she was reminded of Madame Rinaldo, by the ear-rings and the red handkerchief knotted around the throat of a gypsy-woman who was waiting to tell her fortune.

If Edd would leave her alone now, she would see everything. She would not see it in her eyes or even at the back of her head. None of it went into her correct formal drawings and her careful copies in oils; she was a good copyist, they said.

It wasn't seeing exactly, it was something that might happen now, at any moment. With the bright glint and reflection of the afternoon sun on the ripples and whirls and eddies of the river, went some incredible horror, yet the horror and the joy were one. The dull-green cone of a pine-tree ruled (like a formal drawing-board divider) the tangle of bushes and low shrubs of the sand-bank opposite. The floating branch might have broken from one of the trees at the far end of the island-like projection, or from the heavy forest-growth, this side.

The branch had got bogged, it was held in some hidden sand-shelf, it would sink now. It was not important and anyway she could do what she wanted even if the branch floated again and swirled toward the little edge of sand that she had named in her thought as the component part of this game or this oracle. There could be nothing wrong about it. In the old days of the church-beginning, back in Bohemia in Europe, they had chosen the first Bishops or Church-patriarchs by drawing lots, but they had done that too, in the Bible. Or there was pulling daisy-petals, he loves me, he loves me not. What would Edd think of her if she went on gazing at the river?

"I think it's going to sink," she said.

"What?" said Edd again.

"O, that branch."

"But," said Edd, "it's made an eddy of its own, it's made its own whirlpool."

So it had, already the very texture of the river seemed to change because (above the edge of sand) opposite the cone-shaped evergreen on the bank to their right as they stood there, there was a circling of water round the drowning branch.

"It must have got rooted in some near-surface sand," said Edd, not caring but drawn into this game out of his formal sense of politeness.

"Yes," said Helen.

It would sink, it would be water-logged, it would be bogged, and the river would run past. It was not a live branch on a tree, not even a dead branch rushing down the shallow river-rapids to its predicted end. It was caught, it would sink, it was, she thought now, a branch of pine, the dried tufts of brown foliage, she thought, were evergreen; dry oak or elm or chestnut-leaves would have been water-soaked, out of all recognition. It was like an old sponge, it had absorbed all that the river had to give, uselessly, without any value, a sponge in a little saucer, to rub out sums on slates. That is what she was. She, Miss Helen. What was Edd saying? No, he must not say it.

"Helen—" he was saying.

Helen? That is my name. Brother Will always called me *la belle Hélène* when I was a tiny child and so ugly, everyone else said.

That was one of the "things," the other was that she could not sing.

When Madame Rinaldo singled her out from among all the girls, for the timbre and quality of her rich low-toned contralto voice, she thought it must be another joke; she did not really register the fact at all, that Madame Rinaldo considered her, as it were, a gift from heaven, the answer to her own frustrations and years of work and final breakdown and various yearnings towards the old days and the old ways, in this new America.

New York was indeed new to Madame Rinaldo, Bethlehem was old, and here in the core of its theological and scholastic life was this girl with a . . . face. It was pale, not like the pretty vivacious Laura nor even with the fascination of the Slav-eyed much older, Agnes. It was a little static, a little cold, thought Madame Rinaldo . . . but . . . Mama, of course, did not know that she was beautiful, so when the Spanish Student followed her

back to the assembly-hall that June day after the closing exercises and caught her in the dark after she had turned out the last little jet of light, she was not so much surprised as stricken, as if she must explain to the poor boy that he had made a mistake. As if she must say, "I know this is all wrong Mr. Fernandez, I know I have caught you by a trick, because you think it is Estelle here in your arms or Elsie, who led the singing of *Auld Lang Syne* so prettily for the old-girls at the end. Why, Mr. Fernandez," she might have said, disentangling herself from the wild embraces, "I am not even one of the old-girls, though in a sense I am. You have made a mistake," stepping back, "I am—I am the Principal's daughter, one of the teachers here, I teach here, I am Miss Helen."

She did say, "I am Miss Helen." She said now, "I am Helen." Edd gave her that security at least, she would always be what she had been, his Uncle Francis' daughter, if she stayed with Edd. But he was too much part of herself, part of the old Seminary, the wisteria over the lattices, the kitchen-end, the bell-shaped or the cup-and-saucer shaped campanulas and the dark-blue *rittenspuren* in Aunt Amelia's garden or the wild-pansies they gathered in the mountains or the mountain-laurel. *Rittenspuren*? Larkspur never somehow meant the same thing; there were certain words in German that you could not translate. *Zeige mir den Stern* for instance, in what they called Zinzendorf's hymn (Gregor's 46th Metre, it was) because he had been chanting it that first Christmas-eve, when the cattle, lowing from the adjoining room of the log-shelter, seemed to prompt him, indeed actually to tell him, "this is not only like that town, this is indeed that town, Bethlehem."

"It's all right," she said and when Edd said, "What?" again, she turned to pull at the loose bark of a paper-birch that was leaning toward the river.

If she thought of a carnation, she was not thinking of Madame Rinaldo and her Carmen costume nor the gypsy who was, Edd said, waiting for her. She did not want to go to the gypsy now. They had started out, full of excitement, and Ruth had had one of those giggling fits. They had laughed and laughed and run along the tow-path, pretending to be children again and Ruth had swung her hat over the canal and the streamer gave and the hat fell into the canal, the way hats do on these occasions, it seemed almost a ritual, and Edd got it out with a pronged branch. It was the way picnics started in the old days, and when they shouted and some-

one could not stop laughing, Mimmie would say, "Louisa (Jean or Bella), you be a little careful. *There's a black rose growing in your garden.*" That meant too much laughter, that full suspense before the laughter came, boded ill, there was sadness mixed with joy, there was something terrible waiting if you were too happy, and she turned round suddenly and said aloud, "it's gone, it's either sunk or it's swirled by itself down the river, I will never know now, but it did not catch in that little sand-bank island."

She went swiftly back the way they had come. This little zigzag path might be one of the old Indian tracks, it would lead with inevitable precision (the way this sort of path did) to a spring, to an old ford across the river, to a clearing in the woods, to a burnt-out deserted plot, where maybe there had once been a collection of farm-houses or one of the early missions, upon which the unfriendly tribes had fallen.

No one remembered those times, of course, but there was something in the air, at the turn of the season, there was a trap-door under her feet sometimes when she was happiest; there was a certain corner or a certain turn, a certain slope of the bricks in the side-walk past the old bell-house, that would invariably be associated with that feeling and she would run as a child, across the harmless stretch of bricks or irregular paving-stones as if one particular square of bricks or one particular paving-stone might give suddenly, like a spring-trap set for an animal in the forest, a wolf—were there once wolves here? There were deer, certainly; she would fall down, and the trap would snap shut over her head and she would fall and fall. So it was now, so it was on this path; she must walk very quickly or just there, where the fronds of last year's dried fern made a little mat across the surface of the path, she would step on a hidden spring, even here in the woods, maybe here especially in the woods, the danger lurked. It might have been hearing the older boys talk about *The Pathfinder* or *The Last of the Mohicans* when she was too little to understand that the Indians had long since left this valley.

She did not herself anyway, at any time care for Fenimore Cooper, though they had a sort of proprietary interest in *The Last of the Mohicans*, for there was his grave actually in their church-yard and there were the other Moravian Indians in rows with their names.

They had a list of their tribal marks, a turtle, a lizard, a fox or a weasel, along with their baptismal names, Anton, Daniel, Amos or Michael, written in the church-chronicles, where all their own family names were writ-

ten, with the dates when they had left Europe or England, and the time of their arrival in America from the church-boat.

Some of them had gone from *Herrnhut* to Rotterdam, to London and then across to Charleston or direct to New York. If she thought of New York, she thought of Madame Rinaldo and the stories she told of the New York Opera House, and now she thought of the box of red carnations that had arrived after Mr. Fernandez had gone.

She must settle this thing, she must step on the mat of dried fern, she must not swerve this side of the path, she must not turn quite out of her way, round the cluster of young larches that blocked escape from her right, as she neared the patch of fern.

Once and for all, she must step right on to the thing that threatened; was she a little crazy? There was Crazy Peter who had run after them, all along the inner side of the new cemetery fence; Nisky Hill would always be associated now with the spectacle of Crazy Peter and even death itself masqueraded as this poor wretch who shouted, "Look, look," while she did her best to look away and did at last look away and ran and ran between the rows of grave-stones toward the precipitate far edge, where trees made a natural barricade, yet it was unnatural too, to stand on solid ground and look over the tops of the trees as they went down the embankment to the railway tracks below, to the tow-path, to the river, to the mills that lined the far side of the river.

Even in the day, great sudden bursts of flame would be clear against the sky and there was the terror, the thing pursuing them, "But why did you run away?" said Emily Engel catching her up, "He couldn't get through the fence." She was amazed at the question. Why had she run away? Why had Emily *not* run away? And now they were in a dilemma as they picked their way along the embankment edge. There was the excitement of that danger, too, but even if one slipped off the edge, Emily said, one wouldn't fall far, for the trees grew thick, and their trunks (if you leaned over) showed almost upside-down like tree-reflections in water.

The trees grew flat against the straight wall of rock and stone. But the grass was thick at the top, one could clutch that if one fell, and they wandered along, almost it seemed walking on the tops of those trees, looking for the sparse clusters of green-white flowers that grew in little bunches, wax-white with the wax-green markings and the stem, slightly hollow.

They sat on the grass picking the tangled stalks from their hats and fitting them together in neat bunches and Emily said, "We ought to tell." How could they? What would they say? Who would they tell? And then Emily Engel said, "But if we do tell, they will lock him up again." Should they tell, shouldn't they? "Someone else will see him," said Emily, "someone else will tell." The flowers were called Stars-of-Bethlehem.

"Helen, Helen, where are you going," said Edd, "that is not the way."

"I know," said Mama, "I know."

She had suddenly stepped aside after saying to herself that she would, this time, put her feet firmly on what she suspected was a trap. She knew it was not a trap. They flung a baby to wolves in an old steel-engraving in the hall outside Aunt Carlotta's rooms at the Widows' House. Or didn't they? The wolves were chasing the sledge, it was a Russian scene. Or was that a story she and Laura had made up? They made up stories about the pictures. There was the engraving, *Zeisberger Preaching to the Indians*. There was *Washington at Mount Vernon*.

There were various prints of the old town and scenes of the Indians. There was the story of Count Zinzendorf and the puff-adders; she could not remember if she had seen an engraving of it, there should have been one. She saw Count Zinzendorf sitting in the tent and she felt Martin Mack's terror as he perceived the two adders making their way under the flap of the tent and Martin Mack called out as his palms slapped down on the earth and moss and dead leaves and jagged stones.

Mama could almost feel her hands now, scarred with the edge of a rock, as if she were Martin Mack.

When Martin Mack lifted the flap of the tent, he saw that the puff-adders were sliding like phantoms or ghost-adders (so light, making so little noise) actually over Count Zinzendorf's scattered papers.

She looked at her hands. They were the hands of Martin Mack; the puff-adders had slipped away, the strong firm fingers were metal-jointed, that was from felling trees, no, why no, that was from practising Czerny and scales with the special pupils. Scales? Scales fall from one's eyes, scales weigh out sugar and cherries, one pound of sugar one pound of cherries, scales are laid in geometrical precision along the puff-adder's back, its puff is filled with venom. Gift? *Gift?* That was the German for poison.

She had been too old to cry, it seemed, from the beginning. Madame Rinaldo had been right when she had thought the features a little cold, frozen even.

She was authoritative, even dictatorial, some of the younger teachers said. Miss Helen was “bossy” even. But she was acting a part. She was Miss Helen, the Principal’s daughter, someone had to do these things, arrange lectures, see the old-girls and their parents or even their children when they brought them back to enter the school. She was mechanical; even her playing, they said sometimes, was mechanical. Her drawings were perfect, “I was,” Mama used to say, “everyone said, a very good copyist.” She was copying something, the original of which was made clear to her, had been made clear to her, from the beginning. I, Helen, am a good copyist. I am copying Miss Helen, the accomplished daughter, the one who stayed at home after the others married, the one who took over part-management of the old school when Papa began to give up a little, in order to make time for him, so that he could finish up the plate-drawings for his *Diatomaceae of North America*.

She did not stand apart from herself and see herself, she did not even see herself as Edd might see her as he stood, a little puzzled on the zigzag path from which she had stepped.

If she saw herself, it would be because of a temporary embarrassment only, which might make her wonder why she had allowed her skirts to get caught in this bramble, or she might wonder if she could stoop, without Edd lunging precipitately forward to kneel and embarrass her with tugging at the caught fringe of her petticoat. She had always been embarrassed when he offered in the old days, to fasten her skates.

She did not analyse any of her feelings. She did not look back, except in vague generalisations . . . she did not stand apart from herself and see herself with her silver spoon lifted like a baton, instinctively to beat time, ever so delicately to the inflected rise and fall of a voice above her head. Even if her mind had stood apart and seen herself with the criss-cross plaid frock, cut with square bodice like a doll’s dress and the full long skirt, she would only so far have seen herself, old enough to tie her own petticoat-tapes, old enough to fasten the two buttons on her cross-strap heelless slippers.

She would not allow herself to see herself like reflections in double-mirrors, getting smaller and smaller. Even, if possibly she had seen all this, she would have said to herself, “I couldn’t possibly have remembered.

What was it Mimmie had said? 'They were crying because Fanny died, but they couldn't possibly, either of them, have remembered Fanny.' "

Now the forest was quite still. How could there be Indians prowling in it, how could there be the flash of a tomahawk? There was nothing of the kind. Just beyond the clump of larches around which the path curved, was the tent where Ruth would be waiting for her. They had not been very far, it was only a short walk really to the river. Yet Mama had been very far. Mama would never know, not with her mind, how far she had been. She put out her hand and she knew that she would draw it back again because of the sharp sting of the edge of the stone which would cut across her hand when she fell forward. But that was Martin Mack's hand, that was Martin Mack in an old engraving, no not in an engraving, in a sort of series of pictures like the pictures that showed in the slats of the gyroscope, that round box like a hat-box that turned like a top on its pivot. You folded the strips of coloured sheets inside it. A dog jumped over a barrel, a lady leapt through a hoop, a pony jumped over a gate, something of that kind. The colours were bright, crude magenta, blue, vermilion, smudged black shadows. It made her eyes blur as a child, when she had lain on the floor and watched the boy roll his hoop or watched the girl in the bright yellow skirt and tight jacket, jump the rope. She had watched the flash of the pictures which became almost continuous as the whirling gained momentum and there was no longer the interruption of the brown squares of pasteboard between the slats in the box, that was like a hat-box with slats cut in it like a shutter.

She knew it was a branch of larch now, not a real Christmas-tree that she was touching and she knew that she had only for a second thought of Martin Mack because of the gypsy-tent, set up the other side of the larches, off the main road, that they had had a little trouble finding.

She could not possibly have felt the sharp edge of a stone as Martin Mack slapped his palms, hard on the ground to smack the adders to death, to smack possibly himself to death with that gesture. They were crawling over Count Zinzendorf's papers.

The Indians said he had a charmed life, they were an unfriendly tribe, far up the valley, surely much further than this, but they let Martin Mack and the Disciple go back again and even helped them with corn for their provisions.

They said the Great Spirit had taken Brother Johanan under His protection because, sly and sinister and expectant, the Indians had allowed Martin to choose that very spot to set up the tent though they knew the place was an old burying-ground, hallowed or bewitched by their sorceries and that the soft earth-mound at the back (which they had, with such diabolic cunning led Martin to, foreseeing that he would, in this waste of tangle and green, look upon the flattened ground and the mound behind it, in the light of a little clearing) was a well-known hide-away of a colony of adders.

Brother Johanan who was in God's hand, did not himself question the decision of Martin to set the tent there; the bank at the back would afford shelter against the wind, and leave an extra fold for enlarging the tent or for extra protection against rain.

The Disciple's hand was poised with its quill-pen. We can not know what the Disciple was thinking. Was he comparing some hunting-expedition or outing of his childhood with this scene around him or was he remembering in this desolation, the halls of the great, even whispering a passing blessing on his wife Erdmuth Dorothea's ancestor who, as King of Bohemia, more than two and a half centuries before, had been "the first lordly patron of the Brethren." Or was he pondering one of his poetic strophes as he still poised his pen in his hand, not putting word to paper?

The serpents passed over the paper and his hand held steady.

"Did you see a snake?" said Edd.

"Snake—no—why—" said Mama, startled back now to the actual present, to the sun slanting across the down-sweeping branches of the dogwood trees that made a background for Edd's round face, to the sassafras saplings that ran along the path beyond the dogwood.

She felt that Edd had been reading her thoughts; although her thoughts had been in a sense, vague, sweeping, yet she had been thinking of that incident that Cousin Theodore was speaking of again the other evening at vespers, which Martin Mack had recorded in his diary. Mama was proverbially afraid of snakes and the boys would laugh at her and tease her, "Look out, Helen, there's a rattle-snake," they would say and watch her jump.

"No," she said and she stepped out of the patch of bramble, giving a decisive jerk to her skirts.

Her skirts brushed free of the blackberry tangle and she stood on the path again.

"No," she said, "but actually I was thinking of that story of Count Zinzendorf and the puff-adders, you remember."

Edd remembered.

"Why were you thinking of that?" said Edd. "They're only little grass-snakes in this part of the valley, I'm always telling you."

Mama said, "Well, I don't know, I was watching that branch, it looked like a snake's head looming out of the river."

"O, that branch," said Edd.

They went on along the zigzag path and this time Mama stepped firmly on the patch of dead fern and no trap-door opened and the wood was full of fragrance and she stooped to some flat evergreen *hypatica* leaves, wondering if she would find the first buds to take home to Papa.

She did find the buds, just tipped with blue; a cluster of that particular blue, there was really no word for it, one of the New Orleans girls had once called it *pervanche*, but that was myrtle, what they called periwinkle, and that wouldn't be out until the dogwood was in flower.

"I must take this home," she said; she was kneeling on the path now regardless of the double flounce of her puce-coloured over-skirt and the *moirée* facings of the petticoat beneath it. She was kneeling on the ground and her hand, cupped over the evergreen leaves of last year's growth, was the same hand that had lifted a silver spoon, that had kept time instinctively to a rhythm that rose and fell above her head, as she stood in her doll-dress by the empty dining-room table, facing the Claude Lorraine glass that was fastened above the wide sofa, exactly in the middle of the wall.

There was the hand that year after year as the season came round, bore the flame of the beeswax-candle that was given her at the special service.

If they got the candle home and put it on their tree, or got it as far as the tree or as far, some said, as the room the tree stood in, or as far even as the front door, then . . . then . . . she did not remember that there was any special formula for this carrying of the light-of-heaven back through the Church, across Church Street to their own front door. It was a feeling, *Stimmung*, sentiment, it was again something not quite defined.

But this was another sort of fire though the cluster of leaves growing close to the ground was not unlike the frill of paper that was cut every year

by the Sisters as Christmas drew near, to wrap round the base of the bees-wax-candles, to keep the wax from dripping. It was a candle, not yet lighted, the tiny points of woollen buds almost hid the clear blue of the flowers that would come out, Mama calculated, in a few days' time, now, if Papa put them in the flat dish with the maidenhair fern that he kept in the little window-space that they called his conservatory, in the alcove where his work-table stood.

Sometimes he had the aquarium full of specimens that he was watching, sometimes the square glass-tank was empty.

Now Mama visualised the tuft of buds as already flowering in the sun through the double windows of Papa's study-alcove.

"Get a stick," she said to Edd, "or something, I want to grub up this root."

Edd knelt beside her and tugged gently at the leaves while she unfolded the clean handkerchief that she had tucked into the opening of her dress between two of the many little cut-steel buttons, that relieved the severity of the straight-seamed bodice, that decorated and "gave body" as Sister Giering had said when they planned this dress together.

Mama folded the square of her clean handkerchief around the roots of the blue hypatica.

Now she saw Ruth wandering across the field looking lost.

"We're late," Mama said; she knew they were late and that Ruth was reproving them or else she would have come this way to meet them, as they had told her they would stop just out of ear-shot, down the path in the direction of the river.

"You're late," Ruth called across the stretch of grass when Edd halloed at her.

Now Ruth was trailing toward them and Mama said, "I'll be quick, then," and dodged into the tent.

She found herself seated on the folding-stool that was placed to the right of the tent-opening. She saw the white handkerchief. Now she put it down on her lap and opened her palm as the woman told her to, and bent forward with the handkerchief and the root in her lap. She had not wanted to come here really, Ruth didn't want to come alone, she had come with Ruth. Now Mama wished she had waited to hear what the gypsy had told Ruth; something seemed to have annoyed Ruth; it might have been what the woman told her.

Now she wished she had waited outside, the tent was stuffy and small and the woman was too large. "Now the other hand," said the woman.

There was a dark square or patch, said the gypsy, but Mama didn't care. She had decided that this was simply fortune-telling like the games they played, hallowe'en. They scooped out the kernels from walnut-shells and lighted tiny candle-ends and set candles on the shells afloat on the water of the tub, in which the boys had been bobbing for apples. No, it wasn't anything important.

The gypsy said again, "There is a dark patch," she drew with her finger, a square on the table as if she saw the patch there, "and a rose," she said. Mama thought, "That is what Mimmie says when we laugh or scream suddenly with some joke, a special sort of laughing that gets out of hand." Mama simply thought, "It's as if she could read my mind, not actually what I am thinking at this moment, but the things I may have been thinking while I was waiting by the river and by the paper-birch and in the blackberry-brambles by the clump of larches."

Mimmie would say, *There's a black rose growing in your garden* and that is what this was, the black patch that the woman drew and the rose inside it.

The gypsy still poised her finger, she said, "A star." There was a black rose and a star but Mama thought, "Really, I was thinking of Nisky Hill and how I ran, I couldn't have been more than six, I remember because it was the first year I actually went to school and Emily was one of the day-girls and they had a house near Nisky Hill and they moved soon after, across the river but Emily still came to the Seminary to school. This gypsy is remembering what I remembered," thought Mama who would not have run back in her mind to these thoughts, if the woman had not, as it were, recalled them for her.

"Carnations," said the gypsy and she made a great sweep of her arms above what Mama presumed was a heap of carnations on the table. This was thought-reading too, thought Mama, though that didn't really explain anything. She was not trying to explain this, really, it was only that the woman's images and ideas seemed to pick up the thread of what she had been thinking, though even so, Mama would not have re-constructed her thoughts if the images of the gypsy had not recalled them to her.

The carnations were there piled up and the gypsy swayed in her low chair, her chin tilted back, her eyes closed. She breathed out suddenly, a full deep breath, as if the deep bliss of the inhaled fragrance could not be

endured any longer, and then she sank forward again.

Mama did not catch any scent of carnations but she supposed the gypsy was indicating their fragrance by her gesture.

The woman was acting something, or did she really see the carnations? They would be red of course, and why carnations?

“Of course,” Mama thought, “yes, I was thinking of Madame Rinaldo, I don’t know why, yes, because I thought of Carmen when I first saw the gypsy and how we persuaded Madame Rinaldo to dress up in her Carmen costume for a party and she gave me and Laura long veils and we were Night and Day. And the star—it might be that I was thinking of the veils and how Laura’s had the moon sewn on it, lots of little silver crescents, and my gold trimmings looked like stars but we said it would do for the sun.”

Then she knew that was not the reason the carnations were heaped on the table, not real carnations of course, but . . . of course, Mama did not in the least consider that carnations were there. That would be superstitious, irreligious. But there was some sort of hidden meaning in all this. This was more than a stray tent set up on the edge of the woods by the clump of larches. This woman belonged to the superstitions and magic of the old Indian legends. She belonged, did she, to the old, old wisdom, that had led the very Magi to a star? Star? That is what she had said, there was a black patch, a rose, there was a star. Or else, she indicated by her curious gesture of abandon as she slumped forward in her chair with her eyes half closed, there was completion in another dimension, or shall we say in one dimension. Mama did not work this out, it is not easy to work it out for her, but it seems as if the rose in the dark square was one dimension, the star another. The carnations were of themselves complete and prophesied rich, magnificent life.

Carnations? Now she saw it. No wonder poor Ruth was angry. What had this gypsy done to Ruth? “Where is my purse,” thought Mama, “I must put the money on the table, I left my purse with Edd, he stuffed it in his pocket. Now I must get out and get Edd. This is just a silly game and maybe not right, maybe sorcery, maybe witchcraft. It is like the games we played hallowe’en. We threw an apple-peeling over our left shoulder, standing before a mirror, a lighted candle in one hand. *A candle on a candle-stick. The light of the world.* The apple-peeling might or might not make a

letter, S as likely as not, or nothing. It was just for fun.

I will not have her talking about carnations. It was all over, what there was of it, there was nothing of it. I, Miss Helen, met Mr. Fernandez in the summer-house after dark, I, Miss Helen, who had charge of the girls and Papa was always so very careful and even once almost expelled one of the Lovatt girls from New York, because she lowered a little basket out of her window and one of the University boys put letters in it, for her and from other boys to other girls and I am Miss Helen and I met Mr. Fernandez in the summer-house.

"The summer-house was veiled in flowering jasmine and it was dark and we were together, enclosed and there was a wreath of jasmine in his hand, which he had been making and he wanted to put it on my head. I, Miss Helen, and he was younger and I only went to the summer-house because he said he would make a scene, he would stop me on the street, he would go straight to Papa, he would simply take me away, how could he do that?

"—and then—and then—it was terrible, because I was melted away, why something dreadful might have happened. His kisses were—but I must not think of his kisses because I thought it all out and I got him to go away and he sent me red carnations, but I wrote and told him if he would promise not to send me any more flowers, I would think it over, I would let him know, though I had told him he must go away and I could not think about it.

"Why, he was from South America and he was a Catholic, I knew because he said I was like their Lady of the Carnations, he said, then he said it in Spanish, carnations; it might have been roses, but he said carnations. He said they had a festival when all the girls carried carnations to the Madonna, but carnations in Spanish scenes, are the flowers girls in lace mantillas wear in their hair, and their lovers serenade them and that is all ridiculous like Nita Juanita, a silly song, a castle in Spain.

"Why," thought Mama, "no wonder Ruth was angry."

She thought now only about getting away. She heard Edd and Ruth moving around outside, there was a voice and then feet scuffling a little as if someone were kicking dead leaves. The thought of dead leaves reminded her of the matted fern on the path and the thought of a trap-door; it was happening now, under her feet as if the folding-stool she sat on, like the

stools they carried on their sketching-trips, might simply drop through a hole in the floor, a hole in the earth, like that Greek myth in the *Tanglewood Tales* that they used now as a reader in some of the special classes; there was a girl who was raped away—raped, yes, the word somehow sounded like something out of the Bible—by the darkness, by Dis, by Death.

That was the feeling; suddenly, she knew it, she recognised it, it was the black-rose that Mimmie would speak of, that black-rose of despair when one was happiest (that was it); if one were happy, swept quite, quite away, melted away so that even your name was forgotten . . . when someone sounded words from a deep-sea shell, in another language that sounded like the sound of the sea when you first heard it—Mama had never been to the sea—in a deep sea-shell. So far away, she had gone, the summer-house was wreathed in fragrant sea-weed and the jasmine-flowers were froth and pearls from the sea, and she was a mermaid, ageless, timeless, with a whole set of poetical and biological emotions that there were no names for, that were things having to do with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and that were not right.

How much did one give this old-witch? That is what she was. She was talking about a gift. Ruth had explained that one did not pay her but crossed her palm with silver. She had not asked to have the palm crossed, and now Mama clenched her hands in her lap, ah, here was the handkerchief, here was the little plant.

Papa was given a great pot of calla-lilies, by some of the old-girls who came back for the Easter service. He had planted the tall stalks already among the rocks by the edge of the creek where he had his rock-garden. He would plant the blue flower there. How much did one give? This gift. But this was another gift, here was a gift, the Gift would come to a child who would be born under a Star.

A child born under a star? But that didn't mean anything. Why, every child was born under a star. Hadn't Bishop Leibert said at little Fred's christening—she could remember as if it were yesterday—that every child was born under the Star of our Redemption.

There was a star, there was a black patch, there was a gift, there was a great swath of carnations . . .

But the carnations were gone now and Mama was standing with the blue flowers pressed against her heart. She opened the flap of the tent and

she stepped out. Everything was just as she had left it. Nothing had changed. She had not fallen through the earth, she had not been raped away by darkness. “Edd,” she said, “Edd, will you put fifty cents (there is a half-dollar in my purse) on the gypsy’s table.”