

PART FOUR

CHAPTER ONE

“Have you cleaned yourself up properly, Jonathan? Let me look at you and see if you are presentable. Come here. Oh, and you had better have some more cough mixture before we go. Here! Now, stand still otherwise you’ll get it all down you. Open wide! There, now remember what I told you. You are to stay with me at all times and not to run off. You understand?”

“Yes, Mother,” said the boy quietly, letting his head drop. There was a pause before he asked, “does this all mean that I won’t be able to have my model railway in the garage?”

“Oh Jonathan!” exclaimed Eileen. “What a question to ask at a time like this.”

“But Dad promised.”

“I know,” she said softly. “Your father made a lot of promises, none of which he will be able to keep, not now he has gone away.”

“Like the electric light upstairs?”

“Yes. Like the electricity upstairs. I will have a number of things to sort out and then we will see about getting that done.”

“And the model railway?”

“I don’t know about that,” said Eileen, her eyes falling on the kitchen clock.

“Oh, Mum!”

“We will have to wait and see.”

“And Dad won’t be coming back?”

“No Jonathan. He won’t be coming back. Now, no more questions, please.”

“Won’t we ever see him again?”

“No, Jonathan.”

“He went away once before. He came back that time,” said the boy, coughing.

“This time it is different.”

“So, we won’t see him ever again?”

“We might,” she murmured, “in Heaven, one day.”

“Will you get a new dad in the meantime?”

“Oh, Jonathan! All these questions. You have far too many inside you for me to cope with. Now, run along upstairs and wash your hands.”

“But, I’ve only just done them!” he complained.

“Well, go and do them again, just to make sure. And try not to cough.” There was that look, a look she had seen on his father’s face, a look of frustration when asked to do something her did not want to. But he was a good boy, really. She drove him into the hall and almost unconsciously went into the rear room. She heard him stomping on the stairs and sighed. It was only a matter of time before a fresh avalanche of questions swept down upon her again and she had so many questions of her own unanswered!

What should they do now? Where would they go? How would they live? All were questions that she had put off addressing until after the funeral in deference to her husband’s memory, but they would all require an answer in time. Most of the questions flowed from two brackish springs. There was the house, that house! And there was that woman! Her eyes fell on the photograph standing on the top of her piano. Everything screamed at her to take it and throw it straight in the dustbin, but she did not. However, it was too much to contemplate at the present time, so she turned it to face the wall. No, she would not part with it. It was her wedding. Perhaps in time she could take it to a professional photographers and have the bridesmaid removed. They could do things like that. It would be as if she had never been there, as if she had never existed.

It was the two of them, the house and the woman. They were linked, entwined in the rope that had formed her husband’s noose. She, that woman had encouraged him to buy it and persuaded her to live in it. She must have known what the consequences would be. There was

no doubt that the bitch had calculated it all as part of some Machiavellian plan she had devised to ruin their marriage and their lives. And the worst of it, the plan had succeeded. Her she was, alone, widowed, and ruined! Everything had been contrived by that woman. It must have been her that had suggested to Owen that she should be the bridesmaid at their wedding. And that visit to her flat, ensuring that she arrived in the middle of a storm, soaked to the skin! What could she have done other than take pity? And all the time, this creature was milking her sympathy and neutralising her natural fear and hostility. If only she had not been taken in by that woman, but had stuck to her original conception of just what she was like. Her first impression was bad, and first impressions were always right! Subsequent events had demonstrated that beyond all doubt. She had been deceived, misled and betrayed.

And what of Owen? Where did he stand in all this? Oh, there was no doubt in her mind that he had been deceived, tricked and misled just as had she. It was just a game for that woman. He had been snared, bewitched, and seduced. He had been slowly enticed away from her side. It had started before they were married. It had started that day in the park when she had seen the two of them walking together. It had started then, before they were engaged, By the time they married it was already too late.

Eileen could see it all with so much greater clarity now. Whilst Owen was alive, whilst they were arguing and rowing, whilst she was defending her home and life and protecting her son, the issues were blurred. It was now all so different. Owen had been weak, but men were always weak. Her mother had told her that on more than one occasion when they were alone together, although she had not really understood the significance of the words at the time. And that woman was different. She had yet to hear of a man, any man, who did not fall under her spell. Owen had just been another victim. If only she had realised it at the time, but she was a victim, too. They had been just two of those who must have suffered as a result of that woman's scheming and wickedness. And the worst of it was she would escape without punishment!

"What are you doing, Jonathan?" she called from the bottom of the stairs. "The cars should be here soon." There was no doubt that he was playing with the trains. He would have fitted some track together on the small table in his bedroom and would be pushing a couple of carriages backwards and forwards. Now she could hear him coughing, and shook her head. If it did not clear up soon she would have to take him back to see the doctor. Back in the kitchen she stared at the clock again, uncertain that the hands had moved, then turned her attention to the snow which was climbing up from the window sill. What if the hearse was having difficulty or became stuck somewhere? It was that woman's doing. She clearly had control over the weather as well!

They should never have bought the house. Did she say "they"? He should never have bought the house and she should never have agreed to move in. It was another example of the correctness of first impressions, but she allowed herself to be talked around. Perhaps they should not have moved in as soon as they married, but where would they have lived? Not in her flat because that was far too small, and there was always the question of expense. No, once Owen had committed himself to buying the house they had no option to moving in and attempting to live there. She was very clever, that woman! She had it all worked out! She had calculated how much there was to do, and there was so much, so very much!

"What is it, Jonathan?" she asked. He was standing in the doorway with another of Owen's expressions on his face. Something was up. "Let me see your hands." Slowly he took his hands from behind his back, looked at his palms, then held them up to her. There was a blackish stain across one.

"It's only oil," he explained.

"Only oil?" she cried. "Don't put your hands anywhere near your clothes or on anything! Come along. Let's get you sorted out."

Oh, he did look like his father at times! He had many of his expressions and some of his mannerisms. He had many of the little things that had endeared him to her, and they were things that woman could not take from her, her son and her memories.