

I'll make it easy for you. Let me speak to Drucilla. I'll do it tactfully. (*Then, pleading*) Frances, don't let your pride stand in the way here. You won't object if I talk to her, will you? Please. (*Fran turns away, saying nothing, and Cantry accepts this as Fran's agreement.*) Thank you, my dear. You may go if you want—you needn't see her if it'll be embarrassing for you.

FRAN. If I'm going to eat crow, I'll be here to do it. (*A knock on U. C. door.*)

CANTRY. Come in. (*Dru enters U. C. She is poised and silent.*) Drucilla, I've heard that you lost some money. I'm sure it must have upset you dreadfully, otherwise I could find no excuse for your going on with the Vidge.

DRU. (*Innocently.*) It's not only the money, Miss Cantry. It's the whole idea of a thief—here—at Brook Valley. If people were to find out about it—

CANTRY. I know—I know— (*Pause. Then, smoothly.*) Drucilla—when I was told you were restricted to the campus, I entirely approved. I want to make it clear that I still approve. However, Miss Morrith herself—in thinking it over—feels that your punishment is too severe. So we have compromised. You will be put on eight o'clock call for two weeks. (*Dru smiles inwardly. But she will not accept her triumph without getting direct satisfaction from Fran. With an air of great friendliness.*)

IDRU. Is that satisfactory to Miss Morrith?

FRAN. Yes. . . .

DRU. (*Weighing her words. To Cantry.*) I want to thank both of you. I only wish you and Miss Morrith had had your discussion sooner. . . . before the damage was done.

CANTRY. Has there been any damage?

DRU. Yes. I was supposed to go to Princeton.

CANTRY. You can still go, Drucilla.

DRU. (*Parading her injury.*) But I can't! I've called it off. All the girls I invited—they've gone without me—I felt like such a fool!

CANTRY. Dru, why don't you leave right away—you're all dressed and—

DRU. But I've missed my train connections!

CANTRY. Dru, I'm sorry it happened.

DRU. Oh, I'm not blaming you! (*Then, with indignant concern.*) Miss Cantry, I'm so worried! Things are so different in the school

this year. Last year everything was swell. Everybody got along with everybody else. There was real school spirit—

CANTRY. I don't notice any difference at all, Dru.

DRU. But the girls notice it! Half the school is against the other half! And the thefts—one right after another! Something's terribly wrong here!

FRAN. (*She can stand Dru's subtleties no longer. Evenly.*) Dru, stop it! In your opinion, I'm what's wrong—is that it?

CANTRY. Please, Frances—! Drucilla, the subject is closed!

DRU. Very well, Miss Cantry. (*Darting.*) Now I'd like to open a new subject.

CANTRY. Please—not now! Just go to your room.

DRU. I wish you'd listen to what I have to say!

CANTRY. (*Angry.*) You've said enough! (*Long silence. Dru speaks quietly.*)

DRU. All right. I don't mind waiting. It'll keep. (*Cantry gives Dru a puzzled and startled glance as latter departs U. C.*)

CANTRY. Oh, that noxious girl! And her threatening manner! What do you suppose she's up to?

FRAN. That's a question for an alienist. (*Phone rings, loud and imperious. Fran answers it.*) Hello. (*Then, with a trace of alarm.*) Yes, put it through. (*To Cantry.*) Eldridge, Pennsylvania, is calling.

CANTRY. Eldridge! So that's what she was driving at!—she telephoned her father!

FRAN. (*Into phone.*) Yes, this is Brook Valley.

CANTRY. (*Unnerved.*) He'll want to know about Dru's money—about the thefts! What'll I tell him?

FRAN. Hello!

CANTRY. (*Tense.*) Say I'm not in! I've got to have time! Tell him I'm not in!

FRAN. (*Into phone.*) I'm sorry, she's not in. . . . I couldn't say. . . . Very well. (*She hangs up.*) He'll call again.

CANTRY. And then what'll I say?

FRAN. We've got to tell him exactly what happened.

CANTRY. Tell him the school is infested with thieves? Tell him we punished his daughter because she tried to get back money that was stolen from her?

FRAN. That's Dru's story—not ours!

CANTRY. Her story is the only one that matters! He dotes on

that girl! (*Giving vent to her fright.*) Oh, Frances, why did you start all this? If you hadn't campused her she would have made no trouble! Why can't you curb these high-flown principles of yours!

FRAN. (*Ruefully.*) Give me time . . . I'm new here.

CANTRY. (*Under her breath—like an oath.*) Heaven protect me from new brooms!

FRAN. Miss Cantry, why are you berating me? Who is at fault?—Dru or I? If I am, tell me how—what have I done?

CANTRY. You've set a vicious trouble-maker on us, that's what you've done! She'll use those thefts against us—with her father, with everybody! (*Taking a spasmodic breath.*) Well, here it is!

Always I've had an answer for them—but what do I say this time!

FRAN. Miss Cantry—if you'll try to be reasonable——! Things can't be so desperate that——

CANTRY. Oh, can't they! Everybody on that board has a special ax to grind. But Eldridge keeps them in line. I tell you, if I lose Eldridge, I'll lose the school!

FRAN. Please—we'll work everything out—if we can only stay calm!

CANTRY. It's easy for you to be calm! The school's just a job to you. But it's all I've got! (*She suddenly rins herself in.*) Frances, we must do something. When Mr. Eldridge calls again, I've got to tell him we've found the thief! And you've got to help me find her!

FRAN. I'll do whatever you say.

CANTRY. Find her—ferret her out——!

FRAN. Shall I call the police?

CANTRY. Of course not! This is all in your hands, Frances—and on your head! (*Abruptly.*) Wait! Just a moment! (*Suddenly she goes very still, thinking intently. Fran watches her, then abstractedly takes up large paper clamp. Absently, she snaps clamp open and shut a few times. The clicking noise irritates Cantry.*) Please—don't do that. (*Fran puts clamp on desk. Cantry's idea is beginning to crystallize.*) If I were to . . . No . . .

But what else is there? (*Abruptly she makes her decision. She goes to desk and sits. She opens a drawer and extracts her personal checkbook. Starts writing in it.*)

FRAN. (*Apprehensively.*) Miss Cantry, what are you doing?

CANTRY. Please call the switchboard and ask them to get the girls together—whoever is left on campus.

FRAN. (*She goes to phone and speaks as Cantry writes.*) Would you telephone all the halls and ask the girls to come to the office, please. (*She hangs up.*)

CANTRY. (*Without looking up.*) Thank you, Frances. . . . I can handle this alone now. (*This is meant as Fran's dismissal from the room.*)

FRAN. (*Without heeding it.*) What are you going to do?

CANTRY. I won't involve you any further, Frances.

FRAN. What is it you're sparing me? Why did you write out that check?

CANTRY. Never mind.

FRAN. Please tell me.

CANTRY. If you're completely lacking in resourcefulness, I'm not . . . Frances—at whatever cost—I must protect my place here.

FRAN. (*Edgily.*) Miss Cantry—who gets that check?

CANTRY. (*Pulling herself together.*) Emmy Foster.

FRAN. Why?

CANTRY. Don't worry. I won't get her in trouble.

FRAN. (*With sudden realization.*) You're going to discharge her——?

CANTRY. Yes! But not for stealing, understand—I wouldn't do that. Merely for inefficiency—and heaven knows we have grounds enough to do so. That wouldn't prevent my telling the girls I had discharged her for stealing. I could say Emmy confessed——

FRAN. (*Revolted.*) Miss Cantry, you won't do this——

CANTRY. I've got to do it. I have no alternative. (*She rings bell for Emmy.*)

FRAN. Miss Cantry, you're distraught. I tell you—it's wicked—it's——

CANTRY. I would have discharged her anyway!

FRAN. But to discharge her like this——! You're persecuting an innocent woman!

CANTRY. I'm persecuting nobody. She won't even know we're accusing her of anything.

FRAN. She'll leave here in shame. People who knew her with affection——

CANTRY. Nonsense. She's hardly known here at all. She's been here only two weeks.

FRAN. But she'll leave as a thief. She'll never be able to get a job—

CANTRY. She'll leave with a very good reference. A far better reference than I would have given her otherwise. And I'll make her a present of a whole month's severance pay rather than the regular two weeks. How can she lose by it?

FRAN. Even if she doesn't lose, you will! Miss Cantry, it'll plague you—

CANTRY. (*In an outburst.*) Of course it'll plague me! Then why do I do these things?!

FRAN. (*Quickly.*) I know it's not for yourself alone—it's for the school! But is it worth it?

CANTRY. (*Passionately.*) The kind of school I've worked for—yes, it's worth it! A school that sends out into the world such women as you are—it's worth any expedient!

FRAN. No matter how ugly—

CANTRY. Expedients are always ugly!

FRAN. But where will you draw the line? If you sacrifice a blameless woman—

CANTRY. I've sacrificed myself for this school. Do I count for less than Emmy? (*A knock on L. door.*) Come in.

EMMY. (*Entering.*) You rang, Miss Cantry?

CANTRY. Yes. . . . Emmy, we're making a rearrangement of the servants—and we find we can get along with fewer of them. So we're doing without the services of those we hired most recently.

EMMY. . . . You mean you're lettin' me go?

CANTRY. Yes, but it has nothing to do with you personally. I'll see that you get a very fine reference. And I'm giving you more than the two weeks salary—here is a whole month. (*Extending check.*) Your check, Emmy.

EMMY. (*Anxiously, hesitating.*) . . . Thank you, Miss Cantry.

CANTRY. Well, that'll be all, Emmy. (*As Emmy goes out L. she glances in Fran's direction, but latter turns away, unable to face her. Pause. Cantry collapses in a chair.*)

FRAN. (*Turting.*) As easy as that. . . . (*Cantry says nothing.*) Miss Cantry, you're not going to tell the girls that Emmy's a thief. (*Silence. Then, pleading.*) I beg you—don't do it!

CANTRY. I have to, Frances.

FRAN. If you do, I'll tell them you're lying! Every bit of it—I'll tell them!

CANTRY. (*Rising.*) Frances, listen to me—and listen selfishly. You want to stay on in this school, don't you? Very well, I want to keep you here. But how can I? If you put me in a painful position—how can I?

FRAN. I'll not be a party to this—I don't care if you fire me! CANTRY. How about Patricia and her education? If you won't think of yourself, in heaven's name think of your sister!

FRAN. I am thinking of my sister! What do I say to her about this? How do I explain it! (*Crying out.*) My God, how can you do it!

CANTRY. And how can you be so self-righteous! Don't you see I've been driven back and back until every move I make is decided for me!

FRAN. But you doing this!

CANTRY. Show me how to keep my school without doing it! Show me how to stay alive! (*She is overwrought.*) When I founded this school, I was as spotless as you are! I thought high—as high as those poplars I planted—nobody could touch me! But when I started to lose the school, I made a concession here and another there—I've mortgaged my soul to save my life!

FRAN. Well, I won't mortgage mine!

CANTRY. Just wait—watch and wait! If you live in the marketplace, you'll do as I've done!

FRAN. I won't! I won't let it happen!

CANTRY. (*Quietly.*) . . . You're going to tell them?

FRAN. (*Entering.*) What else can I do?

CANTRY. (*Quietly.*) In the space of an hour, the whole world seems to have altered between you and me. An hour ago I said that if I had a daughter—

FRAN. Don't talk about that now!

CANTRY. I meant it an hour ago. I remembered that while you were in school this was your home, I remembered that you wept when you left the school—and so did I!

FRAN. All right!—you're closer to me than my parents were! But how can you take advantage of that?!

CANTRY. And how can you refuse the advantage? I'd not refuse it to you! Why, Frances? For whom? For a woman you'll never see again—a chance creature—?

FRAN. Can I have her on my conscience?
 CANTRY. (*In a great outburst.*) Then have me on your conscience! Go on—tell the girls I'm lying—and I'll lose my school. I'll have nothing left—nothing! Have me on your conscience! (*Then, in a paroxysm of weeping.*) Oh, Frances—Frances—FRAN. Please—
 CANTRY. You won't tell them, will you? You'll do what I ask, won't you? Please—
 FRAN. (*The words tearing out of her.*) Yes—yes—let me alone!
 CANTRY. (*In a flood of gratitude.*) You'll never be sorry—never. (*There is a sound of girls gathering in hallway. Hearing them, Cantry wipes her eyes and collects herself. Fran stands looking out window, her back to room.*) I'll call them in now. It'll be over quickly—very quickly. (*She takes a deep breath, then opens u. c. door. With difficulty she musters up her old charm.*) Come in, girls. (*Four or five girls, including Selma, enter room u. c.*) Aren't there more of you?
 BOOTS. Most of the girls are away for the week-end.
 CANTRY. (*Calling.*) Come in, Mill—Helen. (*DrU comes in with others, her hands behind her back. She is carrying stationery box surreptitiously. Nobody, not even the audience, sees box. Lee, her face haggard, is near DrU. Patty comes into room alone. She spies Lee and starts toward her, but Lee takes a distant seat, avoiding her.*) Sit down, girls. I hope you will all spread the good word—and it is a good word. The school thief has been apprehended. She has confessed and has been discharged. It was one of the servants—one of the newer servants—Emmy Foster. (*There is a stir. Whispers.*) Now, we haven't been able to recover the property. But perhaps in the next few days—
 DRU. Excuse me, Miss Cantry. Are you sure it was Emmy?
 CANTRY. (*An almost imperceptible fluttery movement, then.*) My dear, if her confession isn't assurance enough.
 DRU. It just seems strange, that's all. Miss Cantry, I tried to tell you before but you wouldn't let me. I know who stole those things. But she's not a servant—she's one of the students. And she's tight in this room!
 CANTRY. Drucilla, please—let me handle this—
 DRU. But I have evidence to prove it. Here! Look in this box! Abby's pin—Selma's fountain pen—my hundred dollars!
 CANTRY. (*Rapidly.*) I—I don't understand it! There must be

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some mistake! Why, Miss Morrill and I—we were both in the room when Emmy—
 DRU. I don't doubt that Miss Morrill had something to do with Emmy's confession! Do you know whose box this is? (*She whirls and faces girls.*) Perhaps she won't own up! (*Patty moves forward quickly. Her knees are unsteady, her face pinched.*)
 PATTY. It looks like mine.
 DRU. It is yours!
 PATTY. (*In a small voice.*) Where did you get it? I don't understand—?
 FRAN. (*To DrU.*) Just a minute! Are you accusing Patty—?
 DRU. Yes! I accuse Patty Morrill of being a thief!
 FRAN. You're a liar!
 CANTRY. Patricia, do you know anything about this?
 FRAN. Of course she doesn't!
 CANTRY. Patricia, I'm talking to you!
 PATTY. I never even saw those things! I don't know how they got there!
 FRAN. Of course you don't! (*To DrU.*) You've gone too far, DrU!
 DRU. (*Swaggering into the challenge.*) What if I tell you I didn't discover the box! What if I tell you Patty was seen this morning with that fountain pen in her hand!
 CANTRY. Patricia, is that true?
 PATTY. I never saw it, I tell you!
 DRU. So you say! But let's find out! Nancy! Nancy! Nancy! (*Nancy, frightened, steps forward.*) Did you see Patty with that pen?
 NANCY. Yes.
 DRU. (*Throwing questions fast.*) When?
 NANCY. This morning.
 DRU. Where?
 NANCY. In her room.
 DRU. Where in her room?
 NANCY. By the bureau.
 DRU. (*Turning to others, triumphantly.*) There! You see! (*As Nancy starts moving away, Fran takes her by the shoulders.*)
 FRAN. Nancy, you're mistaken—aren't you? You didn't see Patty with that pen, did you?

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