

"Go upstairs and change my bed at once."

Mary thumped up the stairs. Before Bedelia returned to the table Charlie had opportunity to see what she had taken from the wrapping paper. It was a wedge of Gorgonzola cheese, its surface green with mold. Bedelia reached for her robe again and pulled out a small box.

She moved a few inches, and her movements with the box and the cheese were shut away from Charlie's sight. He noted the tension and stealth with which she worked. It was like a nightmare. Bedelia returned the little box to her bosom. She wrapped the cheese in the paper and tied it up again. With the parcel in her hand she moved toward the shed.

Charlie withdrew out of sight.

BEDELIA entered the shed and blinked. It was dark, and her eyes were accustomed to the electric light of the kitchen. She had not the slightest idea that Charlie was there. Bending over the filled bushel basket, she rearranged boxes and parcels and placed her package under a cloth bag filled with salt. As she straightened, she sniffed at her fingertips.

Charlie had been stunned at first, had looked away, because he had not wanted his eyes to behold this fresh evil. Yet he knew that he could no longer close his eyes, deafen his ears, remain mute, or comfort himself with miracles. Cunningly his wife had planned the murder of two men. Charlie saw now why she had been so amiable in accepting his decision to stay and fight it out. She meant to stay, but to avoid the fight.

Circumstances had provided her with weapons for getting rid of troublesome enemies. Ben's fondness for cheese had served her like Herman Bender's taste for mushrooms, McKelvey's enjoyment of fish. The taste of Gorgonzola is so strong that the most delicate palate might not perceive the flavor of poison. Bedelia's enemies would not die in her house or after eating at her table. She would have no connection with their deaths, but would hear of the tragedy like the rest of the town, through a telephone call or an item in the newspaper.

"Bedelia!" She whirled. Charlie went into the shed. "Oh, I didn't know you were here. You startled me." Small intervals marked by heavy breathing separated the words. Hastily she added: "That silly clerk of Montagnino's made a mistake. Putting some of Ben's groceries with ours. It's lucky I came down to check our order."

The ease of her falsehood sickened Charlie. He had swallowed other lies because he loved her; but now that he had seen her cruel and deliberate preparations for a new crime, he abhorred the memory of that love.

"I'm sorry I broke my promise, Charlie, but you mustn't be angry. My cough is so much better it seemed silly to stay in bed." A soft woman she was, yielding, gentle, shrinking before him.

His fingers dug into her shoulders. He jerked her toward him. The neck of her robe was cut in a V, and above it her throat was like porcelain. His hand curled around it.

"Charlie—dear!"

He reached into the neck of the robe,

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