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offending your father, as we were when your mother died," Pearl contradicted her.

John Mullet spoke for the first time. "What I can't understand is how we could have all been taken in by this man. To have him cold bloodedly plan these murders and carry them out while still behaving as a respected member of the community and our friend, is beyond me."

"I have known and disliked William since we were boys together," Jeremy said without rancor. "He was a self-centred, vindictive boy who never parted with anything he possessed or thought he possessed. Age just made him smoother, but the nasty little boy was still there."

The rattle of cups on saucers, turned their attention to the door, as Joan brought in a tray. "I thought a coffee might be in order," she said brightly, trying valiantly to dispel the gloom that had settled over everyone.

"Good idea. Nothing like a cup of coffee to get people back on track," Jeremy agreed heartily.

From her chair, Amy looked around at the gathered friends. "I knew there was something wrong. It has always been as if dad wanted me all to himself." She spoke as if giving words to her thoughts for the first time. "Even when I went to university, he was disappointed if I didn't phone him every other day, and if I didn't come home for a week-end, he would be very silent the next week-end when I did come home. He never punished me physically, but his silences and then his comments were punishment enough.... But it all seemed to change when you and he were seeing each other, Hilda. He seemed to be less dependant on me, and gave me the impression that I would be invited back for your wedding."

"He had been planning this for some time, according to his diary. As soon as you told him about the job offer out west, he began to plan a way to win your sympathy and keep you here," Jeremy explained.

"I never seemed to have done enough," Amy observed, wistfully.

"Nor could you. Nor could your mother. William insisted that he be the centre of the universe to those around him. He wanted all your attention and concern, and would not tolerate sharing. He tried to separate you from your mother so that he could keep you both completely in his power. That's when your mother decided to leave him. She couldn't stand being torn between the two of you," Jeremy met her gaze. "It was not in any way your fault. No one can control another human being as your father wanted to do."

"Do I have to go through a funeral for him? It would seem so hypocritical." Amy asked.

Rev. Mullet shook his head, "Not if you don't want to," he agreed. "But are you sure that is what you want?"

"I mourn for my father, but not for the man," the girl stated flatly.

Conversation continued on, desultorily, as they drank their coffee. The members of the group kept their words

to trivial concerns, none of them voicing the abhorrence and contempt with which they were beginning to view the life of William Thorn. Only once was the matter of a funeral mentioned again, and that was by Rev. Mullet, who said gently, "Even though we are learning that William was a thoroughly contemptible man, he was a child of God, and it is not entirely for us to judge him. I will say service for him and we will put his remains in the family vault, if you want me to."

"If you would," Amy accepted with relief. "I just don't think I can go through the public observance of a funeral, as confused about him as I feel right now."

"Then that's settled," John patted her hand. "Don't let your anger consume you. Let it go, or he will have won."

The coffee finished, the group disbursed, Edward and Amy first, then Pearl and Peter. Even after Amy had gone, none that remained put their disgust with William into words. It was as if words could not express their feelings, or perhaps the presence of the rector was the restraint. Hilda helped Joan gather up the cups and take them back to the kitchen, then she and Jeremy took their leave.

It seemed quite natural for Jeremy to accompany into her house when he drove her home. They went through to the sun room and stood looking out of the peace of the garden, with the pond at its foot and the moonlight glinting on the water. Although the colours of the flowers weren't discernable, the flower beds gave patches of light and shadow on the lawn.

"It is amazing that a man of such evil, could also be the originator of plant aids that have given us all such beautiful gardens over the years. And he truly loved beauty," Hilda remarked.

"Enough about William, although I do suppose the flowers will be tribute to him for years to come," Jeremy countered. "What about us? Will you marry me?"

Hilda turned to look at him, her face serious. She chose her words carefully. "Not just yet. I enjoy my life as it is, and even though I may even love you a little, it is not enough to make me want to give this all up. I am my own person." Jeremy made as if to speak, but she put her hand up to prevent him. "Let us get to know each other again. We have not seen much of each other in the past few years and maybe the ideal of me that you have carried all these years is not me, and perhaps the man I carry in my memory is not you either." She leaned forward and kissed his cheek. "Let us get to know each other as the people we are now."

Jeremy held her hands a moment, "Perhaps you are right. But don't think I've given up." He dropped a quick kiss on her lips. "I'll see myself out."

For several moments after Jeremy had gone, Hilda continued to gaze out the window at the scene before her. She would see him tomorrow, and that thought cheered her more than she cared to admit. Then with a shake of her head, she went back into the kitchen. She must go to

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