

enlarged sense of justice, which had been one of the first passions that drew them together. The snip and snap of talk with Susan, their political mustard plasters for the world if they could have had their way; Lord, how he missed that, and her laugh which started somewhere down in the Scotch gravel of her family footing, and the abandon with which she performed the comical burning of her corset in the fireplace of that Edinburgh hotel room to prove to him she could be modern in that way too, and her cinnamon eyes that put you in your place and made you like it--in the midst of their love-making those eyes had stayed open, reflective even then--and the always intriguing extent of Susan, down to her industrious fingers which, it amazed him to find during some early clasp of love, were appreciably longer than his. The right length, by rare luck of nature, to caress music from piano keys or to coax it from the air when she sang. The heaven-given lilt of her voice he missed most of all, even when she was furious with him, as now. Everything was there to be missed, as he contemplated Susan across the frozen distance between bed and desk.

“Wes?” She put down her pen as if pinning something beneath it. “Do I get to know why you’re here?”

more
dialogue -
NY season
You make me
sound like
a migrating
bird

"I'm working on that." Reluctantly giving up his inspection of her, he let his eyes slide over the motley keepsakes in attendance around her, the brass paperweight shaped like a treble clef, the tiny mock strongbox which held pen nibs, the soldier photograph with its tint going drab, the silver letter-opener with the French maiden of liberty, one breast bare and glinting, in bas relief on its handle. His gaze lit on the open pages in front of Susan. "A woman armed with a diary. Not the best company for me to be keeping, I suppose."

Susan just looked at him across the small white field of paper. When you have cost a man a governorship, what further scandal does he think you are apt to inflict on him?

The silence stretched. At last Wes brought out:

"You know I couldn't."

"I know you wouldn't," she said as if correcting his spelling. They had been through this and through this. A proven hero who could not or would not undergo a tug-of-war with his church. "*Wes, the Pope has no need of the divorce law. But you do.*" Who had broken his vows six ways from Sunday in half the countries of Europe and in this very room and then would not break his

misbegotten marriage. *"She's not a well woman, Susan. I can't face leaving her when she's like this, it's against everything in me."*

Susan, from a family that had the stamina of wolfhounds, held no patience for the delicate constitution and strategic indispositions of Wes's wife. She couldn't resist asking:

"How is the tender Merrinell?"

For a start, his wife was under the impression he was in Minneapolis at this moment, buying grain consignments. Wes shifted a bit on the bed and reeled off that she was holding her own, up at the Lake George place now for Easter break with the gold-dust twins, although they weren't especially twins any more, only grudgingly even sisters... Susan half-listened, fascinated as of old with the change of atmosphere Wes brought into a room with him. In the period before him one of her beaux at musical evenings, a tippler, smelled of cloves. She could swear Wes always smelled of silk.

He broke off what he was saying and again regarded Susan as though taking the opportunity to stock up on her. "How is the Lord's gift to the musically inclined?"

wife in
NY
A that's fine as
still in NY
season

Hudson
R
if the wife +
(season), she
supposed he wd
have other
places.

“Enough how’s, the two of us are starting to sound like a powwow, for heaven’s sake. This isn’t like you, Wes. At least your word was always good. When we stopped throwing ourselves at each other--”

“--When you dropped me like a bushel of hot peppers--”

“--When we were this close to being the flavor on every gossip’s tongue and I said I’d have no more of it if I couldn’t have you, we agreed that was that.”

Actually, he recalled, she had handed him his walking papers with words more stinging than those. *“If I’m going to be alone in life, Wes, it might as well be with myself.”*

“You’re not doing either of us any good by barging in here in the middle of the night, are you,” Susan was at now. “If I know anything about it, you were always quite concerned with ‘appearances.’”

Wes waved that off. “No one much is up at this hour. I had Monty leave me off at the capitol grounds and came up around the back blocks. Here, come see the new Doozy.” With the aimed quickness which had always reminded her of a catapult going off, he launched up on his good leg and was over to the gable.

In spite of herself, curiosity drew her over to the window by him. In the diffused glow of the strings of bulbs on the capitol dome, the butter-yellow

Dusenburg could be seen parked down the hill from dozing Highland Street.

Wes's Negro chauffeur, Monty, was caressing the hood of the automobile with a polishing rag. The lanky form leaned into the already burnished surface as if magnetized to the machine. "Monty would sleep in it if I'd let him," Wes was saying.

Susan stood there transfixed. The Williamsons. Their wealth and their fortunes, which were two different things. She closed her eyes for an instant, overcome by the fresh weight of memory. But when she opened them again it was all still there: the penny-colored dome that should have been Wes's by civic right, her reflected outline on the pane of night beside his, the chauffeur stroking the flanks of the costly plaything.

Wes turned from the window, a smile of a different sort lingering on him. Susan created more distance between them. She did wonder why she hadn't changed that door lock.

He surveyed the room's furnishings again. "I'm glad I wasn't the one to heft all this up those stairs. Susan, do you know what I think?"

"Not without a Ouija board."

“You’re treed, up here. No, let me finish. You’ve treed yourself. Chased the Susan Duff that was, right up into this upholstered perch.” He walked back the length of the room to seat himself on the edge of the bed again, letting drop a phrase at a time as he came. “I see makework. I see pastimes. I believe I see the unfinished musical masterpiece. I see the man-eating diary. What I don’t see is you taking the world on as you always did.” When she made no answer, he shifted to the affectionate mock burr he had never been able to master: “Tis a waste of a bonny woman.”

“It’s late, is what it is,” she left it at, making a show of checking the clock.

“Wes, please. Have your say and take yourself home.”

“I have the pupil of a lifetime for you.”

“I don’t lack for pupils, they’re coming out my ears.” Which was not as true as it once would have been.

“This one, I want you to devote all your time to, for however long it takes. I’ll pay double for everything--your hours, whatever you need to arrange in the way of accompaniment, all the sheet music you can stand, name it.” Watching to see how she was taking this, he immediately upped the ante: “All right then, triple.”

“Where does this come from all of a sudden? I have never wanted your--”

“There’s no charity to this, Susan. You’ll earn your keep with this pupil, don’t ever worry about that. It’s a voice I’d say is--different. Unformed, of course, but intriguing in its way. You’d take it on, if it fell on you from a clear blue sky, I’m sure you would.”

His cadences of persuasion tested the walls of the room, as if this familiar floor were a speaking platform over the night-held capital city. Wes himself had a voice the size of a dictionary. Susan knew by heart every gruff note and passionate coax he was capable of, and how effectively the mixture worked. “*The copper kings of this state think they are immune to fair taxation,*” she had heard him send crowds into a rising roar as he uncoiled his campaign tagline, “*I promise them an epidemic of it!*” No other politician in the state had stung back as fiercely at the KKK as it crept west and its flaming crosses began to flare on the bald hills above Catholic towns and railheads bringing immigrants to Montana land: “*This cuckoo Klan, they seem to be scared the Pope will descend on them in their beds, else why do they go around wearing their nighties over their heads?*” In his other great campaign, in the bloody mud of France, Wes’s words were

known to have made the difference between life and death. Susan carefully chose her way around his entreaty now:

“For a singing teacher, hearing is believing. All I ever ask is to be amazed.”

So I remember, his expression said. Then he went right on. “Opera, vaudeville, I don’t know what we’re talking, with this. I honestly don’t, Susan. That will be for you to decide. I’m like the fellow who only knew two tunes: ‘One is *It’s a Long Way to Tipperary*, and the other isn’t, I think.’ But you, New York and Europe and all, you’ve heard the best and you’ll know where this voice can be made to fit. Oh, and we’ll need to do this at the ranch, not here. It’s a shame, but we can’t--well, you’ll see...” He frowned. “I’ll work the idea into Whit’s skull, but we may need to make arrangements around him.”

Susan shook her head no and then some.

“Your old place, then,” he regrouped. Not for nothing, he reminded himself, was this prideful woman the daughter of Ninian Duff. Ninian the Calvinian. “You could stay there, why not? I’ll see that it’s outfitted for you, groceries, bedding, cat and canary if you want.” He paused as if to make sure

each of his words was registering. "I'm asking you to do everything you know how for this pupil. The works."

"Wes?" Honest bewilderment broke through in her voice. "Wes, who in this world means that much to you?"

He appeared stunned at hearing it put that way. Sitting there glazed, pale as porcelain.

When Wes at last rose from the bed edge, was it her imagination or did he lurch more than a misbehaving knee would account for? She watched him stiffly navigate the length of the room, biting her tongue against calling out to him. Let him march down her stairs and out of her carefully compartmented existence (*Treed!*), let him leave that key in the door, let that be the natural end of it.

But he paused at the gable window and stood there facing out into the night. Over his shoulder he told her: "Monty."