

CHAPTER 15

There were voices. Had they buried her alive? She tried to protest, cry out, but no sound would come. There was only the ceiling of her casket, the funny designs there like running rivers. And Josh's voice and Rosanna's and Mrs. Shorter's.

"Child, child."

"Hadley now, speak to us," came Josh's pleading.

"She's acting."

"No," said Josh. "I think---"

And from the sewing room came a television voice, a man's. He seemed to be weeping:

"...Nobody'll ever write a book, probably, about my mother. Well, I guess all of you would say this

about your mother. My mother was a saint....Yes, she will have no books written about her. But she's a saint...."

"God," came Rosanna's voice. "Nixon. Poor man. The entire world's gone mad."

"Please speak to us, Hadley."

But Hadley was seeing another vision. She was seeing the small Episcopal Church in Greenleaf. There was a young minister standing in the pulpit. He was wearing his vestments and his arms looked like soaring seagulls as he raised his hands. How frenzied and agitated he was. Because the strange thing was there was no one in the church. There was no one listening at all. Pity that no one listened because the young man appeared so earnest, even desperate.

And then there was silence. Hours and hours of silence, afternoons of silence. But by and by there came a stranger's voice, an older man's voice not known to her. It was a deceptively friendly voice, probing.

"Now, Hadley, what seems to be your trouble? Won't you speak? Tell us why you won't speak. Won't you?"

She didn't believe she could ever tell anyone what had happened even if she had a voice. She simply did not know.

The man left. Silent days. And then she was being lifted, taken away from her casket. Borne away. She would have liked to say good-bye, to what she didn't know exactly but to something, but there was no voice except Josh's:

"You will like it there, Hadley. We will come to see you often. The grounds remind me of this place. Green and lovely, even in the winter."

But didn't she hear a baby crying? Why was there a baby in Josh's house? If only she could think. But it was a pleasant sound, one newly born, loving and unhurt. Why didn't everyone hear that sound? But a door closed, and she didn't hear it anymore.

It was a fine and pleasant summer afternoon with white clouds in the sky that looked like heaped up baskets of cotton.

THE END