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"That's the point. It is nice. Its possibilities haven't been developed, that's all. Because of people like this Jason Pell. But I think we've got him, eh, Don?" Bridges met the other's affirmative nod with a smile of satisfaction. "Yes, sir, looks as though the Chamber of Commerce has finally hit on something that'll force him to sell. Don's family and I have been working on a plan, and we've swung the board over to it. It can't fail."

"I think I've heard those words somewhere before," Aunt Kate said quietly.

JILL PUSHED open the door to the combination general store and tobacco shop and hesitated. She was on a cigar-buying expedition for her uncle, but there seemed to be a heated discussion going on at the cigar counter between Morgan, the proprietor, and a tall young man in battered corduroy pants and a white shirt. There was something very familiar about his back. He turned suddenly and observed her with scowling grey eyes. "Ah, you," Jason Pell said.

Jill tilted her chin, ignoring him, and turned to Morgan. "A box of cigars for my uncle. You know the kind he smokes. Just charge them, please."

"Yes, miss," Morgan said.

"Aha!" Jason Pell exclaimed. "So you still do charge things! There is no new policy. It just goes for me, is that it? I see it all now."

"But Mr. Pell," Morgan protested, "after all, you have no money to pay your bills. You just can't keep on running up an account for tobacco and groceries."

"You'll get the money. You wouldn't have carried me this long if you weren't sure of that. When I sell my place you'll get every cent I owe you, and you know it."

"Well, I hear you got an offer," Morgan said. "Why don't you sell?"

Jason Pell bent forward and looked into the other's face keenly. "So that's it." He said. "Beneath it all there lies the ugly hand of intrigue. Trying to starve me out now. Well, try and do it!" He turned to Jill. "Heed this and heed this well. There's an evil unscrupulous band of men in these parts. They'll stop at nothing to gain their ends. Beware of them. They're headed by two of the worst in the lot – sly, cunning men who drive sharp bargains. The only reason I haven't been destroyed yet is that I'm not a widow. They adore cheating widows. Their real names are unknown. They go under the sinister aliases of G. Bridges and D. Stacey. You may have heard of them."

"I have," Jill said. "One is my uncle. The other's my fiancé."

She tucked the box of cigars under her arm and stalked out. Halfway down the village main street, she heard sounds of pursuit. She walked faster, but a tall young man galloped up beside her. He said, "I'm sorry." Jill kept her eyes straight ahead of her. Jason Pell said, "I'm really terribly sorry."

She stopped and turned on him, blazing. "You should be! How dare you talk that way about two fine men? Being sorry is hardly enough."

"I don't think you understand me," he said. "I'm not sorry about what I said

about them. That goes. I'm just sorry that you're mixed up with people like that. I like you. You may be a menace behind the wheel of a speedboat, but I like you anyhow. Only I don't like you being subjected to nefarious influences."

Jill looked at him. She was so full of sharp blasting things she wanted to say that nothing would come out in intelligible syllables. She spluttered, "You...you..."

"Look," he said, "I forgive you the pipe. As I said, I like you. Forgive me the skirt, and let this be the start of a beautiful friendship. How about it?"

"No!" That came out distinctly.

"That's better. Lunch with me tomorrow?"

"NO!" This time there was considerably more emphasis.

He looked regretful. "Well, I admit that the facilities of my little ménage

He beamed with pride and pointed to a path. "Made that myself."

Jill looked around her again. She murmured, "Gee, this place would make a perfect golf course!"

"What?" Jason Pell looked at her sharply.

"Nothing. Just humming."

"He scratched his head. "I could have sworn you said something about a golf course. I guess the thing's become a phobia for me now. At night the rain on the roof sounds like golf balls plunking into cups, and I have nightmares when the crickets chirping turn into hordes of maniac golfers wandering in the fields swiping at my blueberries with mashie niblicks, all shouting 'Fore!' I almost weaken sometimes -- almost, but not quite. This place is worth twice what I've been offered for it, and here I stay

until I get my price. What was that you said?"

"Just humming again."

He looked at her queerly. "It sounded something like 'Stubborn idiot.' I mean, there's no reason why you should think anything like that about me, is there?"

"Oh, no!" Jill said. "Whatever gave you that idea? By the way, my good man, wasn't something said about lunch as the ostensible reason for this visit? It really doesn't matter to me, of course, but my stomach's been wondering why it came along."

"Stupid of me," Jason Pell said. "Come on."

He led the way along the path to a small sturdy shack built just within a group of small trees. Jill followed him in. There was a cheerful checkered cloth draped over a roughly fashioned wooden table in the middle of the floor, and two rather battered chairs at each end of the table. Pell said, "Sit near the window. Nice view. I'll see about food," and disappeared into what seemed to be the kitchen. He emerged almost immediately with two heaping bowls of

blueberries and a brimming pitcher of milk. He poured. "Try them," he suggested.

Jill did. And liked them. The blueberries were big and round and delicious in the creamy milk. They diminished rapidly before her, and she was a little disappointed when there were no more. "I liked that," she said.

"Picked them myself." He gathered up the bowls and carried them into the kitchen. Then he came out and sat down opposite her.

Jill said, "Well?"

"Well what?"

"Is that going to be all?"

He nodded. "All. I had ideas about this lunch, too. They even included broiled squab."

"But -- but that can't be all! I'm still hungry! What on earth happened?"

"My credit. It's gone. I tried every place in the village this morning. They won't let me order a thing. I'm broke, you know. Haven't a dime. Indigent young lawyer suddenly inherits property from aunt and spends the remaining shreds of his patrimony getting to it. I've been living on credit since I've been here. Perfectly good. This place is collateral, and I'll repay every dime and more when I sell it. But that story doesn't appeal any more. It seems that the Chamber of Commerce has lined up everybody to starve me out if they can't make me sell any other way at their price. Well, they've reckoned without my next door neighbor, Schultz, and my blueberries. Schultz trades me a quart of milk a day for a quart of blueberries. I'll stick if I have to live on blueberries until my ears turn blue!"

"But why? Why won't you sell?"

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Love conquers all, even a capsized canoe and a bitter family feud.

are somewhat limited, but you needn't be that emphatic about it."

"Uh -- wait a minute." An idea was rapidly taking form in the back of Jill's mind. Much as she disliked the man, this might be her chance to influence him and do her uncle a bit of good. And she really shouldn't let her personal feelings in the matter stand in the way of that.

"Maybe I will."

"You what?" He blinked at her.

"Will," Jill said with more assurance. "As a matter of fact, yes, I will. Call for me at my dock at one."

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ELL SAID, "This is it," and waved a horizon-combing hand.

Jill looked around her at the swelling bush-strewn fields splashed with shade from occasional clumps of trees. A fragrant tableland of green and brown swept grandly before her to tumble over the edge of the slope in a cascade of brambles and roll down to the lake. "Mmm," she said. "Nice."

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