

I'd Die for You, F. Scott Fitzgerald

Alternative title: The Legend of Lake Lure

I

Within a cup of the Carolina mountains lay the lake, a pink glow of summer evening on its surface. In the lake was a peninsula and on this an Italianate hotel of stucco turned to many colors with the progress of the sun. In the dining room of the hotel four moving picture people sat at table.

"If they can fake Venice or the Sahara—" the girl was saying, "—then I don't see why they couldn't fake Chimney Rock without sending us all the way East."

"We're going to fake it a lot," said Roger Clark, the camera man. "We could fake Niagara Falls or the Yellowstone if it was just a question of background. But the hero of this story is the Rock."

"We can be better than reality," said Wilkie Prout, assistant director. "I was never so disillusioned as when I saw the real Versailles and thought of the one Conger built in twenty-nine—"

"But truth's the foot rule," Roger Clark continued. "That's where other directors flop—"

The girl, Atlanta Downs, was not listening. Her eyes—eyes that had an odd sort of starlight in them which actually photographed—had left the table and come to rest upon a man who had just entered. After a minute Roger's eyes followed hers. He stared.

"Who's that number?" he said. "I know I've seen him somewhere. He's somebody who's been news."

"He doesn't look so hot to me," Atlanta said.

"He's somebody, though. Blast it, I know everything about him except I don't know who he is. He's somebody it was hard to photograph—broke cameras and that sort of thing. He's not an author, not an actor—"

"Imagine an actor breaking cameras," said Prout.

"—not a tennis player, not a Mdvanni—wait a minute—we're getting warm."

"He's in hiding," suggested Atlanta. "That's it. Look, see how he's got his hand over his eyes. He's a criminal. Who's wanted now? Anybody?"

The technician, Schwartz, was trying to help Roger remember—he suddenly exclaimed in a whisper:

"It's that Delannux! Remember?"

"That's it," said Roger. "That's just who it is. 'Suicide Carley.'"

"What did he do?" Atlanta demanded. "Commit suicide?"

"Sure. That's his ghost."

"I mean did he try to?"

The people at the table had all bent slightly toward each other, though the man was too far away to hear. Roger elucidated.

"It was the other way around. His girls committed suicide—or were supposed to."

"For that man? Why he's—almost ugly."

"Oh it's probably the bunk. But some girl crashed an airplane and left a note, and some other girl—"

"Two or three," Schwartz interrupted. "It was a great story."

Atlanta considered.

"I can just barely imagine killing a man for love, but I can't imagine slaying myself."

After dinner she strolled with Roger Clark through the lakeside arcade past the little stores with the weavings and carvings of the mountaineers, and the semi-precious stones from the Great Smokies in their windows—until they came to the Post Office at the end and stood gazing at lake and mountains and sky. The scene was in full voice now, with beeches, pines, spruce and balsam fir become one massive reflector of changing light. The lake was a girl, aroused and alive with a rich blush of response to the masculine splendor of the Blue Ridge. Roger looked toward Chimney Rock, half a mile away.

"Tomorrow morning I'll try a lot of shots from the plane. I'm going to circle around that thing till it gets dizzy. So put on your pioneer's dress and be up there—I can maybe get some things by accident."

That was as good as an order, for Roger was in control of the expedition; Prout was only a figure head. Roger had learned his trade at eighteen as an aerial photographer in France—for four years he had been top man in Hollywood in his line.

Atlanta liked him better than any man she knew. And in a moment, when he asked her something in a low voice, something he had asked her before, she answered him with just that information.

"But you don't like me enough to marry me," he objected. "I am getting old, Atlanta."

"You're only thirty-six."

"That's old enough. Can't we do something about it?"

"I don't know. I've always thought—" She faced him in the full light. "You wouldn't understand, Roger, but I've worked so hard—and I always thought I wanted to have some fun first."

After a moment he said without smiling:

"That's the first and the only terrible speech I've ever heard you make."

"I'm sorry, Roger—"

But the habitually cheerful expression had come back into his face.

"Here comes Mr. Delannux, looking tired of himself. Let's pick him up and see if he'll give you a tumble."

Atlanta drew back.

"I hate professional heart-breakers."

But as if in revenge for her recent remark Roger addressed the advancing figure, asking for a match. A few minutes later the three of them were strolling back along the beach toward the hotel.

"I couldn't make out your party," said Delannux. "You didn't exactly have a vacation air about you."

"We thought maybe you were Dillinger," Atlanta answered, "or whoever it is now."

"As a matter of fact I am in hiding. Did you ever try to hide? It's awful—I'm beginning to see why they come out and give themselves up."

"Are you a criminal?"

"I don't know—and I don't want to find out. I'm hiding from a civil suit and as long as they can't serve the papers on me I'm all right. For awhile I hid in a hospital but I got too well to stay there. Now you tell me why you're going to photograph this rock."

"That's easy," answered Roger. "In the picture Atlanta plays the part of a mother eagle who doesn't know where to build her nest—"

"Shut up, idiot!" To Delannux she said: "It's a pioneer picture—about the Indian wars. The heroine signals from the rock and that sort of thing."

"How long will you be here?"

"That's my clue to go in," Roger said. "I ought to be working on a broken camera. Staying out, Atlanta?"

"Do you think I'd go in unless I had to—on a night like this?"

"Well, you and Prout be up on the rock at eight o'clock—and better not try to climb it in one breath."

She sat with Delannux on the side of a beached raft while the sunset broke into pink picture puzzle pieces that solved themselves in the dark west.

"It's strange how quick everything is nowadays," said Delannux. "Here we are, suddenly sitting on the shore of a lake—"

—He's one of those quick workers, she thought.

But the detached tone of his voice disarmed her, and she looked at him more closely. Plain he was—only his eyes were large and fine. His nose was bent sideways in a fashion that gave him a humorous expression from one angle and a sardonic one from the other. His body was slender with long arms and big hands.

"—a lake without a history," he continued. "It ought to have a legend."

"But it has one," she said. "Something about an Indian maiden who drowned herself for love—" At the look in his face she stopped suddenly and finished, "—but I'm no good at stories. Did I hear you say you'd been in the hospital?"

"Yes—over in Asheville. I had the whooping cough."

"What?"

"Oh, all the absurd things happen to me." He changed the subject. "Is Atlanta really your name?"

"Yes, I was born there."

"It's a lovely name. It reminds me of a great poem, Atlanta in Calydon." He recited gravely:

When the hounds of Spring are on Winter's Traces  
The mother of months in meadow or plain

Tills the shadows and windy places  
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain—

A little later he was somehow talking about the war.

“—I hadn’t been within miles of the line and I was very bored and had nothing to write home. I wrote my mother that I’d just saved the lives of Pershing and Foch—that a bomb had fallen on them and I’d picked it up and thrown it away. And what did mother do but telephone the news about her brave boy to every paper in Philadelphia.”

She felt suddenly at home with this man yet utterly unable to imagine his causing any devastation in the feminine heart. He seemed to have none of that quality that was once called “It” about him, only an amusing frankness and a politeness that made him easy to be with.

After awhile people came out to swim, and their voices sounded strange in the dark as they experimented with the cooling water. Then there were splashing crawls, and after that their voices again, far away on the diving tower. When they came in and hurried shivering up to the hotel, the moon was showing over the mountains—just like a child’s drawing of the moon. Behind the hotel, a choir was rehearsing in a negro church but after midnight it stopped and there were only the frogs and a few restless birds and the sound of automobiles far away.

Atlanta stretched, and in doing so saw her watch.

“It’s after one! And I’m working tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry—it’s my fault. I’ve talked and talked.”

“I love to hear you talk. But I must go, really. Why don’t you have lunch with us at Chimney Rock tomorrow?”

“I’d like to.”

As they said goodbye amid the ghostly wicker of the lobby Atlanta was conscious of what a nice evening she had with him—later, before she went to sleep, she remembered a dozen indirect little compliments he had given her—the kind that one could remember with a pleasant shimmer. He made her laugh and he made her feel attractive. Had he possessed the special quality of being “thrilling” she could even imagine some girl falling for him a little.

“But not me,” she thought sleepily. “No suicide for me.”

## II

On top of Chimney Rock, which is a great monolith breaking off from the mountains like the spout of a teapot, about twenty persons can stand and look down at ten counties and a dozen rivers and valleys. This morning Atlanta looked down alone upon miles of green wheat and light blue rye and upon cotton fields and red clay and terribly swift streams capped with white foam. By noon she had looked at plenty of scenery while the airplane zoomed round and round the rock, and she was hungry when she descended the winding steps to the restaurant, and found Carley Delannux and a girl on the terrace.

“You looked nice up there,” he said. “Sort of remote and unimportant—but nice.”

She sighed; she was weary.

“Roger made me climb those steps three times running,” she said. “I think it was punishment for sitting up last night.”

He introduced his companion.

"This is Miss Isabelle Panzer—she wanted to meet you and since she saved my life I couldn't refuse her."

"Saved your life?"

"When I had whooping cough. Miss Panzer's a nurse—just barely a nurse—I was her first case."

"My second," the girl corrected him.

It was a lovely discontented face—if ever the two can go together. It was very American and rather sad, mirroring an eternal hope of being someone like Atlanta without either the talent or the self-discipline that makes strong individuals. Atlanta answered some shy questions about Hollywood.

"You know as much about it as I do," she said, "—if you read the magazines. All I know about pictures is someone says to climb up a rock and so I climb up a rock."

They waited to order lunch, until Roger could arrive from the landing field at Asheville.

"The way I feel is all your fault," said Atlanta, looking reproachfully at Delannux. "I didn't get to sleep until four."

"Thinking about me?"

"Thinking about my mother in California. Now I need diversion."

"Well, I'll divert you," he suggested. "I know a song—do you want to hear it?"

He went inside and presently some chords drifted out with his voice.

I'd climb the highest mountains—

"Stop!" she groaned.

"All right," he agreed. "How's this one—"

—I love to climb a mountain  
And to reach the highest peak—

"Don't do it," she begged him.

Tourists were droning up from the highroad to the restaurant; Roger Clark arrived and they ordered luncheon on the terrace.

"I want to hear what Delannux is hiding from," Atlanta announced.

"So do I," Roger said, relaxing from his morning with a glass of beer.

"We come here and he picks us up—" Atlanta continued.

"You picked me up. Here I come to hide—"

"That's what we want to know about," Roger's tone was cheerful but Atlanta saw that he was regarding Delannux quizzically. "Have you got a bear after you?"

"My past is a sort of bear."

"We haven't got any pasts in pictures," said Atlanta, mollifying the turn of the conversation.

"Haven't you? It must be great to be that way. I've got enough past for three

people—you see I'm a sort of survival from the boom days—I've lived too long."

"Sort of a luxury article," suggested Roger mildly.

"That's it. Not much in demand anymore."

Underneath his light tone Atlanta detected a certain discouragement. For the first time in her life she wondered what it felt like to be discouraged. So far she had never known anything but hope and fulfillment. From the time she was fourteen there were always picture people coming into her father's drug store in Beverly Hills and promising to get her a test. And finally one of them had remembered.

Discouragement should be when you didn't have money or a job.

With Delannux on the hotel porch after dinner that night she asked him suddenly:

"What did you mean when you said you'd lived too long?"

He laughed but at her seriousness he answered:

"I fitted in to a time when people wanted excitement, and I tried to supply it."

"What did you do?"

"I spent a lot of money—I backed plays and tried to fly the Atlantic, and tried to drink all the wine in Paris—that sort of thing. It was all pointless and that's why it's so dated—it wasn't about anything."

Roger came out at ten o'clock and said somewhat gruffly:

"I think you ought to turn in early, Atlanta. We're working at eight tomorrow."

"I'm going right away."

She and Roger walked upstairs together. Outside her room he said:

"You don't know anything about this man—except that he has a bad reputation."

"What junk!" she answered impatiently. "Talking to him is like talking to a girl. Why, last night I almost went to sleep—he's harmless."

"I've heard that story before. It's a classic."

There were steps on the stairs and Carley Delannux came up. He paused on the landing a moment.

"When Miss Downs goes to bed the lights go out," he complained.

"Roger was afraid I'd got drowned last night," said Atlanta.

Then Roger said something utterly unlike himself.

"It did cross my mind that you were drowned. After all, you were out with Suicide Carley."

There was a hushed awful moment. Then Delannux made a lightning motion with his hand and Roger's head and body slapped back against the wall.

Another pause, with Roger half stunned keeping on his feet only with the aid of his back and palms against the wall and Delannux facing him, hands by his side clenched and twitching.

Atlanta gave a whispered cry:

"Stop! Stop!"

For another instant neither man moved. Then Roger pushed himself upright and shook his head in a dazed way. He was the taller and heavier of the two and Atlanta had seen him throw a drunken extra over a five foot fence. She tried to wedge herself between them but Clark's arm brushed her aside.

"It's all right," he said. "He was perfectly right. I had no business saying that."

She drew a breath of relief—this was the Clark she knew, generous and just. Delannux relaxed.

"I'm sorry I was so hasty. Good night."

He nodded to them both and turned away toward his room.

After a minute Clark said, "Good night, Atlanta," and she was standing alone in the hall.

### III

"That's the end of Roger and me," she thought next morning. "I never loved him—he was only my best friend."

But it made her sad when he did not tell her when to go to bed the next night, and it was not much fun now on location or at meals.

Two days of rain arrived and she drove with Carley Delannux back into the hills and stopped at lost shacks trading cigarettes for mountain talk and drinking iron water that tasted of fifty years ago. Everything was all right when she was with Carley. Life was gay or melancholy by turns but it was at all times what he made it. Roger rode along with life—Carley dominated it with his sophistication and humor.

This was the season of flowers and she and Carley spent a rainy day fixing up a float to represent Lake Lure for the Rhododendron Festival in Asheville that night. They decided on a sailboat with a sea of blue hydrangeas and an illuminated moon. Seamstresses worked all afternoon on old-fashioned swimming costumes; and Atlanta turned herself into a stout bathing beauty of 1890, and they telephoned the little nurse, Isabelle Panzer, to be a mermaid. Roger would drive the truck and Atlanta insisted on sitting in front beside him. She was inspired to this gesture by the vague idea, peculiar to women in love, that her presence would cheer and console the other man.

The rain had stopped and it was a fair night. In Asheville their float took its place in the assembling parade—there had already been one parade in the afternoon and the streets were littered with purple pink rhododendrons and cloudy white azaleas. Tonight was to be Carnival, wild and impudent—but it was soon apparent that to plant an old world saturnalia in the almost virgin soil of the resort was going to be difficult; the gaiety was among the participants rather than in the silent throngs from the mountains, who gathered on the sidewalks to watch the floats move by in the shaky and haphazard manner peculiar to floats, with great silent gaps, and crowdings and dead halts.

They lurched along the festooned streets between a galley manned by those vague Neros and sirens that turn up in all parades and a straggling battalion that featured the funny papers. This last provoked comment from critical youth on the sidewalks:

"You s'posed to be Andy Gump?"

"Hey, you're too fat for Tillie the Toiler!"

"I thought Moon Mullins was s'posed to be funny!"

Atlanta kept thinking that Carley would have brought the scene alive to her somehow if only with mockery—but not Roger.

"Cheer up!" she urged him, "we're supposed to be jolly."

"Is this jolly? Are we having fun?"

She agreed that they weren't but she resented his lack of effort.

"Did you expect a million dollar super-film? You've got to make things fun."

"Well, you're doing your part all right—and the crowd is going to have a circus next time you move. Then the whole top of your bathing suit is going to fall off."

"Good Lord!" She grabbed at her back, and finding nothing, simply tipped over backward into the bottom of the float, rolling through the flowers until she could get space to pull the flimsy garment together. Above her and almost beside her were two figures—Miss Panzer on a rocky throne and Carley, holding a pitch-fork trident. While Atlanta patched the rip, she tried to catch what he was saying, but only fragments floated down to her. Then as she sat upright and hunched her back to test the adjustment she heard Isabelle Panzer say:

"You didn't tell me you loved me but you made me think so."

Atlanta stiffened and sat still as still, but his reply was lost in the explosion of a distant band.

"Didn't you know what I was risking," the girl continued. "When I was still a student nurse I sat in the solarium with you night after night and if the superintendent had come up I'd have been finished."

Again Atlanta could hear only an indistinguishable murmur from him.

"I know I'm just a small town girl to you. But all I want to know is why did you make me love you so?"

Now Carley turned his head and Atlanta heard his words plainly.

"Nevertheless it's a pretty high dive from Chimney Rock."

—then Isabelle again.

"I don't care if it's five thousand miles—if you don't love me there isn't any living. I'm going to climb up there and see how quick I can get to the bottom."

"All right," Carley agreed. "Please don't leave any notes addressed to me."

IV

Back in the seat with Roger, Atlanta stared out at the receding crowd, neglecting now to wave or to be gay. There was a faint drizzle in the air again and people were putting coats and papers over their heads; autos honked imperatively from parking spaces and the bands died one by one at the corners, their instruments giving out last gleams as they were cloaked against the increasing rain.

The Lake Lure party hurried from the float to their car—Atlanta got in front beside Roger. When they dropped Isabelle at her apartment, Roger asked her: "Don't you want to sit in back?"



"No."

They drove out of the city facing a splitting windshield in silence.

"I'd like to talk to you," she said finally, "but you're so cross with me."

"Not any more," Roger said. "I couldn't get that way twice."

"Well, something's happened that seems terrible and—"

"That's too bad," he interrupted sympathetically. "But since you'll be back with your mother in just a week now, you can tell her about it."

At his coldness Atlanta instinctively began a sort of emergency primping, wiping the clown's paint from her face, removing pads from her waist, shaking her wet hair wild and combing it to an aura around her head. Then bending forward into the faint dashboard light she begged him:

"Let me ask you one thing."

"Not tonight, Atlanta. I haven't recovered from the shock."

"What shock?"

"The shock of finding that you're just another woman."

"I'm going to ask you one thing—did anybody ever really kill themselves because they loved someone too much? I mean do you think so?"

"No," he said emphatically. "Why? Are you planning to kill yourself for Mister De Luxe?"

"Don't talk so loud. But listen, there have been people who've done that, haven't there?"

"I don't know. Ask one of the script writers back home—they'll tell you. Or ask Prout. Hey, Prout—"

"Don't start a row again!"

"Then let's don't talk."

The car passed Chimney Rock and pulled up at the hotel in a dripping quiet. They had been on the road an hour but it seemed only a minute to Atlanta since she had heard Isabelle Panzer's voice on the float. She was not angry—her feeling was one of overwhelming grief—and in the midst she felt perversely sorry for Delannux.

But when he asked in the lobby if everyone was absolutely determined to go to bed—a question obviously aimed to her—she said hastily:

"I'm for the tub. I've never felt so uncomfortable."

But she could not sleep. For the first time in her life, for better or worse, she was emotionally wide awake, trying by turns to analyze her passion for the man, to argue him from her mind, to think what should be done. Had Roger not been concerned she would have gone to him and asked him—but now there was no one. Toward morning she dozed—to awake with a start before seven. One glance at a somber window told her there would be no work for a few hours anyhow, and her maid confirmed the fact on her arrival. Atlanta got listlessly into her bathing suit and went down to the lake for a dip, swimming on an unreal surface that existed between a world of water like mist and a drizzling firmament of air. She went up to the hotel and breakfasted and dressed, and then it was almost nine o'clock.

Downstairs she read a letter from her mother, and for a moment stood with Prout on the verandah.

"Roger's in a bad humor," he announced. "He's got camera parts laid all over his bed."

"Maybe he's lucky to have something to do on a rainy day."

Presently she went into the lobby and asked the number of Mr. Delannux's room. When she knocked at his door and when he answered "Yes?" she called:

"Why don't you ever get up? Do you hide all day? Are you an owl?"

"Come in."

Inside the door she stopped. The room was full of luggage in disarray and Carley was in the process of helping a boy belt down a suitcase.

"I thought you'd be resting," he said. "I thought on a rainy day—"

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Doing?" He looked a little guilty. "Oh, as a matter of fact I'm leaving. You see, Atlanta, I'm safe now and I can go back to the great world."

"You said it'd be a week more."

"You must have misunderstood." She stood stock still in the middle of the floor as he went on talking. "You know when you knocked I jumped. You might have been the process server after all."

"You said you had a week more," she repeated stubbornly.

The negro boy shut the bag with a click. His eyes turned interrogatively toward Delannux—

"Come back in fifteen minutes," Carley said.

The boy closed the door behind him.

"Why are you going?" Atlanta demanded, "—without saying anything to anybody? I come in and find you with your bags all packed." She shook her head helplessly. "Of course it's none of my business what you do."

"Sit down."

"I will not sit down." She was almost crying now. "It even looks as if you did your packing in ten minutes—look at all those shoes. What do you think you're going to do with them?"

He glanced at the forgotten shoes on the wardrobe floor—then back at Atlanta's face.

"You were going without saying goodbye," she accused him.

"I was going to say goodbye."

"Yes—after you had all your bags in the car, and there was nothing to be done about it."

"I was afraid I'd fall in love with you," he said lightly. "Or you'd fall in love with me."

"You needn't worry about that."

He looked at her with a flash of amusement.

"Come here close," he said.

A small voice inside told her that he was trying some power of his on her, that he was just perversely playing. Then another and, it seemed, a stronger voice forgave him for that, made her interpret his command as a desperate cry of need.

He repeated:

"Come here."

—and she took a step forward.

"Come closer."

She was touching him and suddenly her face was reaching up to his. Then at the end of the kiss he kept her close with the pressure of his hands along her inside arms...

"So you see I think I'd better go away."

"It's absurd!" Atlanta cried. "I want you to stay! I'm not in love with you—honestly! But if you go I'll always think I drove you away."

She was so transparent now that she was not even ashamed—meaning him to see the truth underneath. "I'm not jealous of Miss Panzer. How could I be? I don't care what you've done—"

"I can understand Isabelle thinking she liked me—because she hasn't got anything. But you've got everything. Why should you be interested in a battered old wreck?"

"I'm not—yes, I guess I am." She had a burst of unusual eloquence. "I don't know just why—but all of a sudden you're just all the men in the world to me."

He sat down—his face was tired and drawn.

"You're young." He sighed, "—and you're beautiful. You've got your work—and you've got any man you want for the asking. Do you remember when I told you that I belonged to another age?"

"It isn't true," she wailed.

"I wish it weren't. But since it is, anything between you and me would be all dated—sort of mouldy." He stood up restlessly. "You think I could live in your nice fresh world of work and love. Well, I couldn't. We'd last about a month and then you'd be all bitter and dented—and maybe I'd care. And that might be tough for me."

He looked up and faced her helpless love.

"Can't you imagine somebody who'd had the best experiences in the world not wanting any more—not wanting love to be real love? Can you imagine that? I even resent your beauty because now I'm old—but once I had what it takes to love a girl like you—"

There was a knock at the door. Prout was there, his eyes darting from one to the other.

"It's clearing off outside," he said. "Roger told me to find you right away."

Atlanta pulled herself together. In the doorway she paused and told Carley:

"I'll be back in a minute. You won't go till I see you. You promise?"

"Of course."

"Then I'll be right back. You can drive me over to Chimney Rock."

A moment later, down in Roger's room, she was listening to his instructions like a woman in a dream. The minute he was finished she dashed back up the stairs and, with a quick knock, entered Carley's room. But it was empty.

V

She hurried down to the desk, to be told that Delannux had paid his bill and gone out to the garage—perhaps had driven off by now. Breathlessly she sped out the door, down the drive through a light rain. She was outraged, furious with herself and him. She turned a corner...

—and there he was, talking to a mechanic in front of the garage.

She leaned against the damp rain on the garage door, gasping with her emotion.

"You said you wouldn't go."

"Seems I can't."

"You told me you'd wait."

"I have to. One of the washers took my car out for a joy ride, and broke a wheel. It'll take two days to get another."

Roger Clark's car was being driven out of the garage—Atlanta still had many things to say, but there was no time. All she could think of was:

"Women must come easy for you if you can do this. I don't think you like women—you pretend to, but you don't. That's why you can do what you want with them."

She heard Prout's "Halloo!" from in front of the hotel. That was her signal and she went quickly.

All day, as they worked, she planned and planned. But it was like a condemned criminal planning to escape, but always distracted from his schemes by the sound of keys turning in locks around him—or by the hope that reprieve would come from outside, with no effort on his part.

Plans are difficult at such moments—Atlanta could only wait for an opportunity. Nevertheless, clouds of fragmentary possibilities were around her head. Perhaps Carley didn't have much money—maybe he would be glad of a chance in Hollywood. He had been a rich jack-of-all-trades—perhaps he could be placed as a specialist in an advisory capacity.

Or, failing this, she could go East and try for a big part on the stage, train with a famous teacher—there she would at least be in touch with Carley.

Her reasoning came to wreck upon the single rock that he did not love her.

But the full force of this didn't come home to her until she got back to the hotel in the evening—and found he was not there. Before the end of dinner she went to her room, and cried on her bed. After half an hour her throat hurt and no tears started unless she forced them; then she turned on her back and said to herself:

"This is what's called infatuation. I used to hear about it, how it was just love without any sense to it, and the thing to do was to get over it... But just let them try it..."

She was tired; she called her maid to rub her head.

"Don't you want to take one of these pills?" the maid suggested. "The ones that made you sleep when you had the fractured arm."

No. Better to suffer, to feel the full poignancy of the knife in her heart.

"How many times did you knock at Mr. Delannux's door?" Atlanta asked restlessly.

"Three or four times—then I asked downstairs and he hadn't come in."

—He's with Isabelle Panzer, she thought. She's telling him how she's going to die for love of him. Then he'll be sorry for her and think I'm just trivial—a little Hollywood pet.

The thought was intolerable. She sat bolt upright in the bed.

"Give me some of the sleeping stuff after all," she said. "Give me a lot of it—all that's left."

"You were only supposed to take one at a time."

They compromised on two and Atlanta sank into a doze, but waking now and then in the night, she was haunted by a dream—of Isabelle dead, and of Delannux hearing the news and saying:

"She loved me enough—so much that the world wasn't good enough for her afterwards."

Next morning found her with a hangover from the sedative—she had no energy for her usual dip. Dressing in a state of lethargy she rode to location without a thought, realizing that the others were looking at her with the concern reserved for people who are "upset."

She hated that, and contrived a more cheerful front through the morning hours, laughing at everything, though it seemed as if all of her was dead except her heart, and that was pumping her bloodstream around at a hundred miles per hour.

About four they went down to the restaurant for a sandwich. Atlanta was raising hers to her mouth when Prout made his unfortunate remark.

"Delannux got the wheel for his car," he said. "I saw it arrive when I went for the carpenter."

In a moment she was on her feet.

"Tell Roger I'm sick! Tell him I can't work to-day! Tell him I've borrowed his car!"

She dropped down the corkscrew to the main road at the speed of a roller coaster, and drew up at the hotel three minutes later—almost beside the bus from Asheville. And there, disembarking, dusty and hot and tired, was Isabelle Panzer. Atlanta caught up with her on the hotel steps.

"Can I speak to you a minute?"

Miss Panzer seemed taken back by the encounter.

"Why, yes, Miss Downs, I suppose so. I came to see Mr. Delannux."

"What does a minute more or less matter now?"

The two women sat facing each other on the verandah.

"You love him, don't you?" said Atlanta.

Isabelle broke suddenly.

"O God, how can you ask me that—when it's you he loves now—it's you he left me for—"

Atlanta shook her head.

"No. He doesn't love me either."

"Neither of you mean anything when you talk about love."

To be spoken to like that by a child—a girl who had endured less in all her nursing course than Atlanta had sometimes endured in a day.

"I don't know what love means?" she exclaimed incredulously.

She felt a sound in front of her eyes, like a miner's lamp exploding. Something must be done about the whole matter immediately—

And then Atlanta knew what to do: she must make words real at last, put into action all she had ever thought, dreamed, pretended, been ordered to do or tempted to do, justify all that was superficial or trivial in her life, find the way to supreme consecration and consummation at last. It was plain as plain.

Deliberately she went over to the other girl and kissed her on the forehead. Then she went down the steps, climbed into Roger's car, and drove off.

Chimney Rock restaurant was empty after the session of the day's traffic—and, as she had hoped, there was no sign of the picture outfit.

She left the key in the car and started to leave a note but she did not know any longer exactly what she had wanted to say—anyhow she had left her purse at home with the pen in it.

Her feet and legs were stiff from the day's climbing—well, she would leave her shoes behind like the evil queen in the Wizard of Oz who had been all burned up except her shoes. She kicked them to one side and put her foot experimentally on the first step—it was cool to her foot—it had seemed warm in the afternoon even through her soles.

As she began to climb she became increasingly conscious of the rock looming above. But maybe it would be like jumping into a basket of many colored skies.

VI

Roger came up on the porch less than five minutes after Atlanta had left. Isabelle was sitting there.

"Good evening," he said. "Waiting to see Delannux off?"

"Something like that."

—Why didn't she say anything? he wondered. Why did she sit like that? Was there a pistol in her handbag?

There was a bustle of departure in the lobby—in a moment Carley Delannux and baggage came out on the porch.

"Goodbye, Delannux," Roger said, without offering to shake hands.

"Goodbye, Clark." He seemed scarcely to notice Isabelle—a car stopped at the door and he went forward to meet the mechanic.

"How's the wheel?"

He broke off. "Excuse me, I thought it was someone else."

"This is Delannux," cried Isabelle suddenly.

There was a moment of confusion. Then the man who had come up the steps reached forward, tucked a white sheet in Carley's pocket and said:

"This paper is for Mr. Delannux. Don't bother to read it. I can tell you what it is. It's a Capias ad Respondum. That means I've got to take you North with me on a little matter of director's responsibility.

Carley say down suddenly.

"So you got me," he said. "And in about four more hours you couldn't have served that paper."

"No sir—not after midnight to-night. The Statute of Limitations—"

"How did you find me? How did you even know I was in North Carolina?"

But suddenly Carley stopped, knowing very well how the process server had found him—and Roger realized too. Isabelle gave a broken little cry and covered her eyes with her hand.

Carley threw her an expressionless look, without even contempt in it.

"I'd like to see you alone," he said to the process server. "Shall we go up to my room?"

"All right by me, but I warn you I'm not for sale."

"It's just to arrange certain things about leaving."

When they had gone Isabelle wept on silently.

"Why did you do it?" Roger asked mildly. "It'll ruin him, won't it?"

"Yes. I guess so."

"Why did you want to do that?"

"Oh, because he was so bad to me, and I hated him so."

"Aren't you a little sorry?"

"I don't know."

He thought for a moment.

"You certainly must have loved him a lot to have hated him that much."

"I did."

He was terribly sorry for her.

"Don't you want to go and lie down in Atlanta's room for awhile?"

"I'd rather lie on the beach, thank you."

After he watched her depart he still sat there. She turned and called back to him.

"You'd better look after your own girl," she said. "She's not in the hotel."

VII

Roger sat alone rocking and thinking. He loved Atlanta, no matter how little she had given him to love lately.

-She's not here, he said to himself.

He sat there thinking and thinking; with a mind accustomed only to technical problems.

-She's a fool. All right then-I love a fool.

-Then I ought to go and find her because I think I know where she is. Or shall I sit on this porch rocking?

-I'm the only living human being that can take care of her.

"Let her go!"

"I can't-" He spoke aloud at last, saying what most men have said about a woman one day-and most women about a man: "I happen to love her..."

He got up and ordered a hotel car, hurrying a little as he got in with the sense that it might be too late. He drove quickly to Chimney Rock and up the mountain to the restaurant, as far as the car could go. As he began the climb a thought dogged his steps.

-Up toward nothing or perhaps toward a life of future misery and unhappiness, of other Carleys.

He stopped at a turning, and looked at the starlight, and started on again counting Eighty-one, Eighty-two, Eighty-three. After that he stopped counting.

When he reached the top at last he was frantic with worry. All his self-control, all his restraint, all that made him a forceful person had left him as he mounted those last steps and came out into the open sky. What he had expected to see he could not have said.

What he saw was a girl eating a sandwich.

She was sitting with her back against one of the iron posts that supported the rail.

"Is this Roger?" she demanded. "Or do my eyes deceive me?"

He leaned against the rail, panting.

"What are you doing up here?" he asked.

"Enjoying the stars. I've decided to become an eccentric-you know-like Garbo. Only my stuff will be mountain tops. When we finish this picture I'm going to Mount Everest and climb-"

"Make sense!" he interrupted. "What did you come up here for?"

"To throw myself over, of course."



"Why?"

"For love, I guess. But I happened to have this sandwich with me—and I was hungry. So I thought I'd eat first."

He sat down across from her.

"Are you interested in anything that's happening down below in the mere world?" he enquired. "If you are, you might as well know that they got Carley."

"Who did?"

"The process server—the one that had been looking for him. It was a tough break. If he'd kept hid till midnight he couldn't have been served—Statute of Limitations, or something."

"That's too bad. How did it happen? How did they find where he was?"

"Guess."

"I can't—it wasn't you."

"Good God, no! It was the Panzer girl."

She thought a minute.

"Oh, so that's what she was waiting for."

There was silence for a moment on top of the rock.

"Why on earth did you think I'd do a thing like that?"

"I didn't after I thought. Excuse me, Roger."

"But I did have Mr. de Luxe looked up."

"What did you find out?" Her query was detached, impersonal.

"Nothing much—except there wasn't any girl who killed herself about him. A certain Josephine Jason he was engaged to found she had pleuro-cancer—that means the lining of the lungs are gone—and she crashed on purpose. You can't blame Carley."

"Oh, I'm so tired of Carley, Roger. Couldn't we let him alone for awhile?"

He smiled to himself in the darkness.

"What changed your mind—the sandwich?"

"No, I guess it was the rock."

"Too high for you?"

"No—it seemed somehow like you. After I got up on top it seemed as if I was standing on your shoulders. And I was so happy doing that, I didn't want to leave."

"I see," he said ironically.

"I somehow knew you wouldn't let me. I wasn't a bit surprised when you came up the steps."

He grabbed her hands and pulled her to her feet.

"All right," he said. "Come on. We'll go back to the hotel—I'm worried about the little Panzer—let's see where she is."

She followed him down the steps; at the bottom, as he dismissed the hotel car and they got into his, Atlanta said:

"No, it doesn't seem to matter about him any more."

"It matters about everybody."

"He can probably take care of himself, I mean."

When they reached the hotel and found what had happened—that Carley Delannux had somehow locked the process server in his room in a state of bruised coma and driven off, Atlanta said:

"You see? He'll be all right. Maybe they won't catch him this time."

"Won't catch him—they've caught him. If you're served with one of these writs and don't show up, you're a fugitive from justice. Anyhow, let Rasputin solve his own problems. I'm worried about what he left behind him—this girl. We didn't pass a car or a person between here and Chimney Rock—and there's no bus."

Atlanta guessed suddenly.

"She's on the lake. I chose Chimney Rock so she chose—"

But he was already running toward the boathouse.

They found her an hour later, drifting very quietly in the moonlight of a small cove. Her face upturned, seemed placid and reconciled, almost as if surprised at their presence—in her hand, like Sesame of the Lilies, was clutched a bunch of mountain flowers—much as Atlanta's hand had clutched a sandwich half an hour ago.

"How did you find me?" she called from her canoe.

As the launch sailed alongside, Roger said:

"We wouldn't have—if I hadn't had some portable flares with me. You'd be drifting still."

"I decided I didn't want to go overboard. After all, I've got my certificate now."

Long after Roger had gotten her a taxi, and pressed on her the money to go back to her people in Tennessee for awhile—long after he and Atlanta became one of the many untold legends of Lake Lure, the best kind, and he had left her outside her door—he walked down through the arcade past the little shops of the mountaineers and up to the post office, where there was nothing beyond save the bottomless black pools that were rumored to hold black secrets of reconstruction days.

There he stopped. He had heard in the lobby what he had not wanted Atlanta to hear tonight—that what was left of Carley Delannux had been picked up at the foot of Chimney Rock an hour ago.

It was sad that the season of Roger's greatest happiness was ushered in by this tragedy of another man, but there must have been something in Carley Delannux that made it necessary for him to die—something sinister, something that had lived too long, or had been too long dead on its feet, and left corruption in its wake.

Roger was sorry for him; he was a slow-thinking man but he knew that what was useful and valuable must not be sacrificed to that. It was good to think of Atlanta, who meant starlight to so many people, sleeping safely in a room a hundred yards away.